

University Assessment Handbook

FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY

University Assessment Committee

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University Assessment Committee

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Assessment: Introduction

Ferris State University (FSU) is accredited through the Higher Learning Commission, which requires institutions to demonstrate “responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments, and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness for student learning through processes designed to promote continuous improvement.” Specifically, institutions must engage “in ongoing assessment of student learning as part of its commitment to the educational outcomes of its students.”¹

At FSU, the planning, implementation, and review of assessment is overseen by the University Assessment Committee (UAC), University Curriculum Committee (UCC), and Academic Program Review Committee (APRC).

This section will document the policy for assessment best practices, which includes: the collection and review of program assessment plans, course assessment plans, and course mapping plans.

Assessment Best Practices

Foundational to the process of assessment of student learning in higher education is the development of student learning outcomes. Assessment of student learning is a university-wide requirement. Learning outcomes are student-centered and define the goals of learning experiences; they specify what a student should be able to know, do, or value after participating in one or more activities, courses, or academic programs.

The assessment of student learning in the curricular setting aims to measure and understand the processes and degree to which students are prepared for successful careers, responsible citizenship, and lifelong learning.

The focus of student learning, in the curricular setting, is around program and course learning outcomes, and a key component to effective assessment is documenting how information will be collected, and how that information was utilized to influence future decisions. Through assessment and utilization, we can document what activities are meeting our needs and equally important, which are not, as the University closes the assessment loop through data-driven decisions.

Program Learning Outcomes versus Course Learning Outcomes

Terminology used in FSU assessment procedures are consistent with the University Assessment System except program and course outcomes are simply referred to as “outcomes.” Therefore, to provide clarity in this document, the terms Program Learning Outcome (PLO) and Course Learning Outcome (CLO) are used to differentiate between course-level outcomes and program-level outcomes. While there may be additional outcomes desired in a program or course such as enrollment, the Program Learning Outcomes defined in the Program Assessment Plan are focused on student learning.

¹ Higher Learning Commission. (2020, September 1). *Criteria for Accreditation*.
<https://www.hlcommission.org/Policies/criteria-and-core-components.html>

University Assessment System

The current assessment information for the existing program and/or courses should be entered into the University Assessment System. Four reports can be run from the University Assessment System to review program/course assessment data:

- **Program Assessment Unit Planning:** contains the program mission, learning outcomes, assessment methods, criteria for success, and course mapping to the PLOs as well as the results.
- **Program Four Column:** contains the PLOs, assessment methods, criteria for success, results, and actions/follow-ups.
- **Curriculum Mapping:** contains a simple table showing how courses map to PLOs.
- **Course Four Column:** contains the CLOs, assessment methods, criteria for success, results, and actions/follow-ups.

Curriculum Maps

The program assessment map is documented using the Curriculum Mapping document within the University Assessment System. Curriculum mapping is used to communicate how student learning outcomes are mastered throughout the program.

All courses and learning experiences required for the program are mapped to at least one program learning outcome in the University Assessment System. When mapping required courses/experiences to program outcomes, the level of learning experience and the manner in which learning progresses throughout the program should be documented.

This course list does not include General Education Courses not in the major, as those are already assessed through the General Education process.

Level of Learning Experience - The curriculum mapping indicates the level of how the course or learning experience contributes to each of the learning outcomes. The Curriculum Mapping in the University Assessment System identifies these as I - *Introduced*, R – *Reinforced*, or M – *Mastered*. In most programs, assessment will occur at the mastery level.

Learning Progression - A balance of the portion of courses that introduce, reinforce, and demonstrate mastery of outcomes is encouraged across courses so that one course is not used to introduce all outcomes and one course to master all outcomes. Mapping student learning progression should also be distributed across courses throughout the program.

Assessment Planning

Assessment plans are required for all degrees including associate, bachelor, masters, professional, doctorate, certificate, and minors. At a minimum, all programs should enter the below information into the University Assessment System:

- Program Assessment Plan, Results, and Actions
- Course Assessment Plan, Results, and Actions
- Curriculum Mapping Plan

Assessment plans consist of, at minimum, specific, measurable, and achievable learning outcomes, assessment methods, and criterion for success that align to the learning outcomes. These Assessment Plan requirements exist for both Course Assessment Plans and Program Assessment Plans.

The curriculum mapping indicates which course(s) are used for the collection and reporting of program assessment data for each program outcome. Integration of assessment data from multiple courses and/or learning experiences for program assessment is encouraged and can be used to triangulate assessment results.

Each student in all sections of the course should be assessed using the assessment methods defined in the program assessment plan and documented in the University Assessment System. Programs may choose one or more assessment methods to measure the learning outcomes per established criterion for success that are consistent and documented in the learning plan.

Program Assessment Plan

Program assessment starts when a program is proposed to the UCC and is evaluated during program review under the APRC. A Program Assessment Plan is required to maintain assessment for all actively offered programs, including majors, minors, and certificates, at the time a program is proposed and during program review. Programs that have yet to develop assessment plans may contact the UAC for guidance. Program assessment planning should include reference to any additional external accreditation requirements applicable to the degree being granted to students.

All Program Assessment Plans are required to have program learning outcomes, with corresponding assessment methods, criterion for success, and assessment schedules. Below is a description of the required parts of a Program Assessment Plan:

- ***Program Learning Outcomes:*** Program learning outcomes should be specific, measurable, and achievable. Program learning outcomes should be clearly stated and written from the student's perspective without unnecessary technical jargon. Program learning outcomes should be relevant and in line with program, school, college, or University mission, goals and/or objectives.
- ***Assessment Methods:*** Assessment methods should be specific and appropriate to measure each program learning outcome. Each program learning outcome should identify at least one direct method of assessment.
- ***Criterion for Success:*** Criterion for success should identify the expectations for student performance. There should be clearly defined criterion and thresholds for each assessment method and program learning outcome. The criterion should be achievable and appropriate for each program learning outcome. The threshold levels for each criterion should be purposeful and meaningful where general terms used to describe the results (such as high, medium, low) are defined.
- ***Assessment Schedule:*** The assessment schedule should identify the timeline when each program learning outcomes is assessed. It is recommended to provide a schedule for when the program learning outcomes will be assessed. The recommended rotational schedule for documenting the program learning outcomes is within three years.

Programs and departments have diverse needs and requirements and can set assessment practices that the program or department implement across courses.

Program Assessment Results

Systematic assessment is periodic and regular. Program assessment should begin a continuous process of review after the program is approved and first offered. Programs submit the program assessment data to the APRC during the program review process. The UAC will also conduct periodic reviews of program assessment, focusing on the program assessment plan, results, and student learning. Program assessment data should be collected according to the schedule defined in the program assessment plan and documented within the University Assessment System. Programs should continue the process of program assessment with the focus of continuous improvement.

All programs should document the results, actions, and follow-up for each program learning outcome on a regular basis according to the Assessment Schedule listed in the Assessment Plan. Below is a description of the required information to be documented in the University Assessment System:

- **Results:** The result from the assessment should be fully documented in the University Assessment System including the percentage or number of students meeting the outcome and the total number of students assessed. The criterion for success should be identified as “Met” or “Unmet” in the University Assessment System. The program learning outcomes should be assessed and documented in a timely manner, according to the assessment schedule documented in the program assessment plan.
- **Action:** Based on the assessment results, the program should indicate if action is required for continuous improvement. No action is needed if the program learning outcome is met. If the outcome is not met, the action to be taken should be described. In addition, the following should be documented: describe or identify the specific factors and issues that may have led to not meeting the criterion for success; identify the person(s) responsible for this action, when this action will be taken, and when the program learning outcome is to be reassessed. .
- **Follow-Up:** Programs should document the specific action that was taken or if the action was not taken. If the action was not taken, document the reasons or alternative actions that were taken. Programs should also document the impact the action had on the program learning outcome when it was reassessed. If additional action is to be taken, identify the action, the person(s) responsible for this action, when this action will be taken, and when the program learning outcome is to be reassessed.

Course Assessment Plan

All actively offered courses, including internships, special topics, and experimental courses should have a course assessment plan. At a minimum, all courses should enter the following information into the University Assessment System. Note that new courses will not have data available for the results, action, and follow-up until after the courses have been active.

The Course Assessment Plan consists of:

- **Course Learning Outcomes:** Course learning outcomes should be specific, measurable, and achievable. Course learning outcomes should be clearly stated and written from the student's perspective without unnecessary technical jargon.
- **Assessment Methods:** The assessment methods should be aligned with the learning outcomes. The assessment methods should be specific and appropriate to measure the learning outcomes, and they should identify at least two assessment methods used to assess the outcome. Each course learning outcome should identify at least one "direct" method of assessment.
- **Criterion for Success:** Criterion for success should identify the expectations for student performance. There should be clearly defined criterion and thresholds for each assessment method and outcome. The criterion should be achievable and appropriate for each course learning outcome. The threshold levels for each criterion should be purposeful and meaningful where general terms used to describe the results (such as high, medium, low) are defined. **Assessment Schedule:** The assessment schedule should identify the timeline when each course learning outcomes will be assessed. It is recommended to provide a schedule for when the entire set of course outcomes will be assessed. The recommended rotational schedule for fully documenting the course outcomes is within 2 – 3 years.

Course Assessment Results

All courses document the results, action, and follow-up for each course learning outcome on a regular basis according to the Assessment Schedule listed in the Assessment Plan. After a course is offered, the course assessment data is collected, and the following steps occur. Below is a description of the required information to be documented in the University Assessment System:

- **Results:** The result from the assessment should be fully documented in the University Assessment System including the percentage or number of students meeting the outcome and the total number of students assessed. The criterion for success should be identified as "Met" or "Unmet" in the University Assessment System. The course should be assessed and documented in a timely manner, according to the schedule in the course assessment plan.
- **Action:** Based on the assessment results, the program should indicate if action is required for continuous improvement. No action is needed if the course learning outcome is met. If the outcome is not met, the action to be taken should be described. In addition, the following should be documented: describe or identify the specific factors and issues that may have led to not meeting the criterion for success; identify the person(s) responsible for this action, when this action will be taken, and when the course learning outcome is to be reassessed.
- **Follow-up:** Programs should document the specific action that was taken or if the action was not taken. If the action was not taken, document the reasons or alternative actions that were taken. Programs should also document the impact the action had on the program learning outcome when it was reassessed. If additional action is to be taken, identify the action, the person(s) responsible for this action, when this action will be taken, and when the course learning outcome is to be reassessed.

Assessment: University Curriculum Committee

The UCC requires any proposal creating a new program or course offering to complete a detailed assessment plan with program and/or course learning outcomes, assessment methods, criterion for success, and assessment schedule, which will be reviewed by the UAC.

The UAC reviews and advises regarding the Assessment Plan, including program and course learning outcomes, assessment methods, criteria for success (including thresholds), and an assessment. All new or modified programs and new or modified courses must have an Assessment Plan defined.

Assessment: Academic Program Review Committee

The APRC requires programs to demonstrate continuous improvement designed to enhance students' learning and success per the requirement from the Higher Learning Commission.

Although *program assessment review* occurs during a full program review by the APRC, the UAC will also conduct periodic reviews of program assessment, focusing on the curriculum mapping, program and course assessment plans, program and course assessment results, and overall student learning.

The UAC will review programs that are going up for APR in three years, and they will provide feedback on Course Mapping, Program Assessment Unit Planning, and Program and Course 4-column reports. Programs are encouraged to download these reports themselves on a regular basis to ensure completeness. As with the review during the UCC process, both the APRC and the UAC are concerned with PLOs/CLOs, assessment methods, criterion for success, and the assessment schedule; however, during review, there is also a focus on the results, actions, and follow-up necessary for quality assessment.

Programs should use the feedback from the UAC to drive continuous improvement and data-driven decision making (i.e., updates and improvements to assessment plans, to the program itself, and/or to individual courses within the program).

Assessment: University Assessment Committee

The UAC is available to help programs with their assessment plans. Programs can request assistance and/or feedback with their assessment plans prior to submission to the UCC, as they are getting ready for APR, or upon obtaining the results of their APR. Programs should contact FSUAssessment@Ferris.edu for a consultation. Please indicate in the subject line: Program Assessment Consultation.

Please provide your information:

- Program Chair/Contact Person
- Assessment Faculty (If there is one assigned)
- Date of next APR
- Description of assistance needed

Assessment Summation

In the spirit of continuous improvement and data-informed decision making, FSU aims to design and implement a framework that is responsive to the university community's needs and incorporates effective approaches and best practices where applicable.

FSU takes the following approaches and best practices:

- Integration of an assessment system that drives continuous improvement,
- Planning of regular assessment that includes the identification of priority goals and objectives and the establishment of meaningful measures and indicators,
- Examination of assessment and accountability systems and data for effectiveness, innovative approaches, adherence to best practices, and technical accuracy, and the
- Development of recommendations in support of the proposed assessment designs.