



## **Creating a Comprehensive Plan for Assessing Program-Level Student Learning Outcomes**

Assessment of a program's student learning outcomes is an ongoing process for examining and improving student learning. While students are graded in individual courses each term, each student is enrolled in a degree, with a carefully designed curriculum that represents something larger than the simple aggregation of individual classes. Assessment of program learning outcomes is NOT an evaluation of individual instructors, individual students, or individual courses. Instead, this process helps faculty examine how students develop knowledge and skills and transfer them to new contexts over multiple semesters, and to determine whether students as a whole successfully learn what the program intends to teach them.

First and foremost, assessment is a tool for faculty to use in order to answer questions about student learning. It is also a requirement of U.S. accreditors like Middle States that all academic programs have student learning outcomes, assess student achievement of these outcomes, and use the information gathered to improve student learning. While FIT faculty engage in many forms of assessment already, it is necessary for the College to document assessment practices, as well as how programs make use of assessment findings for improvement, in order to meet Middle States expectations.

Development of a comprehensive assessment plan helps ensure that assessment of student learning is useful to the program, manageable for faculty, and documented for accreditation purposes. When assessment is not planned, it may be conducted at the last minute, using whatever information is easiest to gather, in order to satisfy administrative demands. This type of assessment is rarely useful to faculty.

### ***What is a Comprehensive Assessment Plan?***

A comprehensive assessment plan outlines the methods a program will use over a multi-year period to assess all program learning outcomes. A successful comprehensive assessment plan will:

- Examine student learning using multiple methods. Student learning is complex and multi-faceted and is difficult to adequately capture using a single method.
- Gather most of the evidence about student learning from faculty examination of student work produced in the program

- Student work that is optional or extra-credit may not provide reliable information about learning (e.g. due to lacks of representativeness of student volunteers or motivational issues)
- “Indirect” methods such as student self-reporting or job placement provide useful assessment information when used in combination with an examination of student work, but are not sufficient in themselves
- Focus on the program (e.g., the major) and program learning outcomes rather than individual courses
- Be collaboratively created with input and discussion by the entire department

*Adapted from University of Hawaii—Manoa, <https://manoa.hawaii.edu/assessment/howto/plan.htm>*

### ***Making Assessment Manageable***

Planning ahead helps programs make assessment efficient and more manageable in terms of faculty time. Here are some ways to design a manageable process:

- Use existing student assignments/projects and academic milestones whenever possible, since these are embedded in the curriculum.
  - Programs can use curriculum maps to identify courses where student work at a particular level can be collected for assessment.
- Use existing program processes for evaluating students as assessment methods, such as annual student performance review, department meetings that discuss student learning, and cluster reviews. Programs may need to make some changes to these practices to adapt them for thinking about a group of students (instead of individuals) or to document them differently.
- Bundle the assessment of learning outcomes where it makes sense. Students may demonstrate multiple learning outcomes in the same assignment or project, and these can be assessed together. Capstone projects in particular usually require students to demonstrate several learning outcomes at once, integrating their learning into a single product.
- Sample student work *when it makes sense*. Sampling must be done cautiously in order to ensure that the student work is representative of the program and provides reliable information to faculty.
- Manage assessment so that the grading practices instructors already employ can be used as a source of assessment evidence. For example, faculty may complete rubrics to grade students, and these rubrics can be aggregated to provide assessment information.

## **Evidence of Student Learning**

There are many ways to demonstrate student achievement of learning outcomes. Listed below are methods that are likely to be used by FIT programs. Many of these methods are already used at FIT, although they may not be documented.

All FIT programs should ensure that at least some of the methods selected to assess student learning are "direct evidence." A combination of direct and indirect methods, both qualitative and quantitative, often provides a clear picture of student learning, but note that it is NOT necessary for a program to select ANY quantitative methods if they do not find them useful.

### **Direct (Clear and Compelling) Evidence of What Students Are Learning**

- "Capstone" experiences such as research projects, presentations, theses, dissertations, oral defenses, exhibitions (evaluated using a rubric or other scoring guide)
- Portfolios of student work (evaluated using a rubric or other scoring guide)
- Student assignments or projects from required courses (evaluated using a rubric or other scoring guide)
- Faculty "cluster review" or discussion of student work (when related to program learning outcomes)
- Observations of student behavior (e.g., presentations, group discussions), undertaken and with notes recorded systematically
- Summaries/analyses of electronic discussion threads
- Scores on multiple choice and/or essay tests in key courses, accompanied by test "blueprints" that match exam questions to student learning outcomes
- Scores and pass rates on appropriate licensure/ certification exams or other published tests (e.g., Major Field Tests) that assess key learning outcomes
- Ratings of student skills (that are also learning outcomes) by field experience/internship supervisors or employers
- Student reflections on their values, attitudes and beliefs, if developing those are intended outcomes of the program

### **Indirect Evidence of Student Learning (Signs that Students Are Probably Learning, But Exactly What or How Much They Are Learning is Less Clear)**

- Assignment grades, if not accompanied by a rubric or scoring guide
- Student ratings of their knowledge and skills
- Student/alumni satisfaction with their learning, collected through surveys, senior exit interviews, or focus groups
- Placement rates of graduates into appropriate career positions and starting salaries
- For four-year programs, admission rates into graduate programs and graduation rates from those programs
- Alumni perceptions of their career responsibilities and satisfaction
- Student participation rates in faculty research, publications and conference presentations
- Honors, awards, and scholarships earned by students and alumni

*Adapted from: Linda Suskie, Middle States Commission on Higher Education*

## Program Assessment Planning Worksheets

These two exercises are designed to assist programs in brainstorming possible methods for assessing student learning. Assessment works best when it addresses real questions faculty have about student learning, to gather information in order to make programmatic decisions. The first grid guides faculty in connecting their questions about learning to assessment methods. Since program learning outcomes list what program faculty members think is most important for students to learn, assessing student learning should focus upon these areas. The second exercise is to foster brainstorming of possible methods for assessing learning outcomes. Both of these exercises will help program faculty design the comprehensive assessment plan.

### 1. Program Questions about Student Learning

| <b>Questions About Student Learning:</b> List questions that faculty have about student learning in their programs   | <b>Why?</b> Is there a reason for asking this question? What will the program do with this information?   | <b>How?</b> Brainstorm possible methods that the program could use to answer this question  |
|--|---|---|
| <i><b>Example:</b> Faculty want to know whether course FIT250, taken in the 1<sup>st</sup> semester of the Bachelor's program, is adequate preparation for FIT550, taken in the 4<sup>th</sup> semester.</i> | <i><b>Example:</b> Some faculty teaching FIT550 feel that students are unprepared in two areas (program learning outcomes 4 and 5). They aren't sure whether FIT 250 hasn't prepared students or whether students have forgotten the skills by FIT 550. The program is considering revising FIT250.</i> | <i><b>Example:</b> Faculty teaching FIT250 and FIT550 could create a rubric, apply to student work in FIT250, and analyze results together; Faculty could use a curriculum map to analyze where program learning outcomes 4 and 5 are reinforced in semesters 2 and 3; etc.</i> |
|  |   |   |
|  |   |   |
|  |   |   |

### 2. Methods for Assessing Program Learning Outcomes

In the first column, list program learning outcomes. In the next column, "Learning Opportunities," note the courses and, when possible, assignments in which students have opportunities to learn and practice the outcome. The information in this column can assist

faculty in thinking about the possible assessment methods to list in the third column, for methods the program currently uses or could use for collecting information as to how students are mastering the learning outcomes. Refer to the *Evidence of Student Learning* resource for a list of possible methods.

| <b>Program Learning Outcomes</b>     | <b>Learning Opportunities (Courses/ Projects)</b>  | <b>Potential Assessment Methods</b>  |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|
| List program learning outcomes below | In what course(s) do students learn, practice and reinforce the outcome? Where in the curriculum (or external activity) do they best demonstrate it? (it is useful to refer to the curriculum map) | What evidence could faculty collect to determine whether students have mastered the outcome? Does this evidence already exist as part of students' regular coursework or other activities? |
|                                      |  |  |
|                                      |  |  |
|                                      |  |  |
|                                      |  |  |
|                                      |  |  |
|                                      |  |  |
|                                      |  |  |

Insert Rows as Needed

## FIT: Comprehensive Plan for Assessing Program-level Student Learning Outcomes

Degree: \_\_\_\_\_ Program Chair or Assessment Coordinator: \_\_\_\_\_

List the assessment methods the program will use to gain a comprehensive review of student achievement of all student learning outcomes within a three to four year period.

| <b>Assessment Method</b>                               | <b>Learning Outcomes</b><br>What learning outcomes are assessed through this method? | <b>Timeframe</b><br>When will this method be used? With what frequency?     | <b>Assessment Planning and Faculty Review</b><br>Note planning details for assessment method here. For example, the program may need to gather certain information or archive student work each year. In addition, note when/how faculty will review the findings. |
|--|--|---|--|
| <b>Example:</b> Review of capstone project with rubric | PLOs 1-3   | Every three years; collection of student work and rubrics to begin in Sp 17 | Because the program only graduates 10 students each year, student work will be archived each year, along with the rubrics used to grade the students. Faculty will compile results for three cohorts and review every three years, at a meeting in fall term.      |
| <b>Example:</b> Senior exit survey                     | All PLOs   | Exit survey will be given to all graduating seniors each spring.            | Survey will be given each March in all required capstone classes to ensure high response rate. Faculty will discuss each year at May meeting.  |
|  |  |   |  |
|  |  |   |  |
|  |  |   |  |

|  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |

Add additional rows if needed