

Basics of Assessing the Programmatic Assessment Process

As opposed to assessing student learning, evaluating the process of assessing requires us to think about *how* we are assessing student learning. It requires us to pause, take a step back, and reflect which is sometimes a difficult thing to do given the demands already placed on faculty time and energy. To assist, the Academic Assessment Office has created this beginning guide for the basics of assessing the assessment process. It is meant to be used as a tool for assessment coordinators, faculty committee members, department chairs, or anyone else that assists in the assessment process at the departmental level. While there are far more nuanced and advanced ways to examine specific details of an assessment process, this list is the gold standard is “getting it right.”

❖ **Step One- Examine the Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) for a program’s majors.**

- Everything in a program should stem from the SLOs for a given major/concentration etc. for a student’s education, so this is always the first place to start. The SLOs might be exactly what they need to be, in which case, re-affirm them in your department and celebrate. However, don’t forget to give yourself/department credit for having this very important conversation by noting it in the assessment report. (There is a section at the bottom of the report template that asks about assessing the assessment process.)

- How does one examine SLOs? What does that mean? Below are some questions to start that process. Program-level SLOs are broad in scope, but specific to the major/minor/concentration. They demonstrate what makes your program special and why students should be interested in it. The SLOs state what students will be able to do by the end of the entire program.

- Do the SLOs reflect what is actually being taught in the program? Or have you already moved past them and just never updated them?

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- Do the SLOs reflect industry/discipline best practices? Are students being expected to learn something that was good in the field a decade ago, but is no longer relevant?
- Is there anything important or key that the program has added to the curriculum that should be reflected in the SLOs? For instance, has the program switched gears to include more focus on students getting into graduate school and now includes serious research papers/projects?
- Do you have too many SLOs? A program/major/concentration should not have more than 4-6 SLOs usually. (There are exceptions to this, usually specified by an outside accrediting body.) Don't create too much work for your department.
- Are the SLOs written appropriate to the learning level? For instance, at the end of a program, students are not just "identifying the business implications of financial statement information," but rather they are likely "interpreting or analyzing the business implications of financial statement information." Give yourself credit for the higher-order learning and thinking that is happening by your seniors. (There are lots of pedagogy tools to help with this idea, but I like Bloom's Taxonomy when brainstorming.)
- Are the SLOs written in student-centered language? There is a basic formula that is where you want to start. "Graduates of the program of XXX will be able to (or) By the end of their program, students will be able to..." plus (action verb + learning thing). **Example 1:** Upon completion of the Bachelor of Fine Arts in Fashion Design, students will be able to create global design products utilizing their advanced knowledge of new technology and traditional craft.¹ **Example 2:** All graduates of the History Department will be able to analyze and demonstrate knowledge of this history, or change over time, of different regions of the world.²
- Are the SLOs specific enough they can be assessed or measured? Do they avoid vague phrases or things that cannot be assessed without cultural bias? **Example of a vague phrase:** Should be able to appreciate/know. **Examples of things that cannot be measured without cultural bias:** passion or excitement.

¹ FIT State University of New York Fine Arts in Fashion Design program.

² HOFSTRA University History Department.

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- ❖ **Step two- Use a curriculum map to examine if students are being given enough opportunities to learn and demonstrate the SLOs.**
 - A curriculum map is nothing more than a grid that lines up your SLOs with your required classes to show where each student learning outcome in the program/major is being taught/developed/demonstrated. However, it is a valuable tool for making the invisible visible. It allows a department to easily see holes in their program or even inconsistencies in learning progressions/pathways. In some cases, it can identify missing parts of a program or old classes that are no longer needed. (Use the template provided on the Marist Academic Assessment and Improvement/Resources webpage to make this easy.)

- ❖ **Step three- Examine how each SLO is being evaluated.**
 - A curriculum map shows where and when SLOs are being taught and learned. Now think about how they are being assessed. Is it in a capping class? What assignments/methods are being used to assess? When are they being assessed in the pathway? Are there multiple check points? Does the department have any benchmarks that they establish early-on in a student's program? Are there consistent rubrics or other tools being utilized to judge the SLOs for all students? (See resources on rubrics for more)

- ❖ **Step four- Analyze the definitions for success that are being utilized.**
 - How does your department determine if an SLO has been met? How do you define success? Is this written anywhere or just in people's heads? Discuss this as a department. Should you be using national benchmarks or comparative sister organizations' data? Maybe historical data from within your own program? Is the assumption that a 70% or C- is what is expected to meet the SLO? Is everyone on the same page in expectations? Can you defend your position on why you measure success the way you do? **Example:** A medical program likely cannot defend a success rate of 70% or C- for students in a phlebotomy program. Do you want to go to the doctor to have blood drawn with someone who gets it right 70% of the time?

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❖ Step five- Judge whether the current cycle is sustainable or if it needs to be changed.

- How often is your department assessing each SLO? Are you doing too much work? Assessment should be quality over quantity. Instead of assessing 6 SLOs every year, perhaps look at doing 2 every year on an alternating 3-year cycle for example.
- Who is doing the assessment and when? Is it too much work for one person? Does the department need to modify the logistics of which people are involved and how?
- Is your department overworked with getting 100% of the data from 100% of the classes from 100% of the students? Perhaps consider how to reduce that data to a meaningful random sample size or reducing the number of classes that are being used for formal assessment. Consider reducing the types of evidence being used. Consider all the possibilities because overworked quantity assessment isn't sustainable.

❖ Step six- Determine how assessment results are being communicated and used within the department, school, and college.

- Who is involved in the department assessment efforts? How do the results get communicated and used within the department? Within the school? Are your SLOs and results posted on your website?

**This is not an all-inclusive list, but a starting place. Hopefully it will assist you in brainstorming and talking about how your department does assessment. The Marist College Academic Assessment and Improvement webpage has additional resources and training available. Templates for reports and curriculum maps are available. Don't reinvent the wheel. When all else fails, Google it. Somebody has done this before and it's online. For more, contact Dr. Stephanie Seketa, Director of Academic Affairs or your school faculty representative on the faculty Assessment Committee.