# Top 12 Considerations for Writing the Annual Assessment Report

## 1. Complete all required fields.

These sections include the outcome, name of person(s) completing the report, assessment year beginning and end (AY Start / AY End), term data collected, direct assessments and methods, assessment results and analysis, action(s) taken category(ies), actions taken, next scheduled assessment analysis term and year, progress and program level.

## 2. Make your student learning outcomes S.M.A.R.T.[1]

As a basic rule, faculty should strive to assess at least three student learning outcomes (SLOs) for a program each year. For new programs or programs with enrollments below 20 students, the number of outcomes assessed can be smaller. It is recommended that departments do not assess more than five SLOs per year to keep the reporting process manageable. The following are the characteristics of strong SLOs:

- ☐ **S**pecific: Do the outcomes focus on particular skillsets?
- ☐ **M**easurable: Words such as "know," "understand," and "learn" should be avoided.
- ☐ **A**chievable (and Improvable): Can these be met within a reasonable timeframe? Is there room for improvement?
- ☐ **R**elevant: Are you measuring skillsets that give you information about student learning in the discipline?
- ☐ **T**ime-framed: When were these outcomes assessed? When will they be assessed again?

## 3. Include at least ONE direct assessment for each outcome assessed.

- ☐ Each SLO should be assessed by at least one direct assessment that is used to determine the level of student learning achieved against established learning outcomes. Some examples of direct assessment: Exams, quizzes, oral presentations, dissertations, theses, essays and portfolios.

- ☐ Indirect assessment is used to evaluate the quality of student learning experiences. Some examples of indirect assessments: Self-efficacy surveys, end of course evaluations, focus groups and questionnaires for alumni regarding program effectiveness and retention.

## 4. Include all supporting documentation.

If possible, attach a copy of any assessment tools you use. This helps to document the process for gathering the data, and allows reviewers to better understand the criteria for student work. Some examples of assessment tools include but are not limited to rubrics, scoring sheets, criteria sheets, course assignments, test questions or student surveys.

## 5. Remove the names or other identifiers of individual students.

Remove the names of students from student work and spreadsheets containing grades. Also, change any files with students' names in them. Leaving identifiers on student work is a violation of student privacy and, therefore, violates FERPA policy.

## 6. Include a thorough presentation of results.

It is commonplace for reports to include overall results without a breakdown by rubric dimension, scoring sheet item or question: "Thirty students' work was assessed. The average across the five questions relating to this outcome was 77%. This meets our benchmark of 75%." A thorough analysis might also include a further breakdown of the average that reveals room for improvement: "Question #3 – 85%, Question #5 – 64%, Question #8 – 72%, Question #11 – 90%."[2]

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[1]The SMART acronym originates from Doran, G. T. (1981). There's a S.M.A.R.T way to write management's goals and objectives. Management Review, 70(11), pp. 35-36.

[2]This example is taken from the Assessment Steering Committee (2017, April). "Top Ten Tips for Improving the Annual Assessment Report." Retrieved from: http://sacs.utk.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/59/2017/05/Top-Ten-Tips-v3.pdf

## 7. Analyze results completely.

A good analysis of data does not just present the results and state whether the benchmark was met. Rather, it communicates to the reviewer that the program faculty are using all the data collected (from past and present), and that they are thinking about the factors that may have contributed to the results. A good report also informs the reader that faculty are also taking steps to plan actions based on student performance.

## 8. Review multi-year results and analyses where appropriate.

This depends on several factors, including the newness of the program, whether the student learning outcomes have changed, and/or whether the program leadership has changed. That said, when assessing learning outcomes over time, it is important to look at multiple years of data to identify trends in terms of growth and/or areas of needed improvement. The process of comparing and contrasting data can better assist in informing decisions about the program.

## 9. Provide a complete discussion of actions taken.

When writing the "Actions Taken" section of the assessment report, provide a rich description of what faculty did or are doing to address the findings from the assessments completed. Consider the following questions when thinking about how to document this information:

- ☐ What accounted for the results and how will this issue be addressed?
- ☐ Who will be responsible for implementing this plan?
- ☐ What is the timeline for implementing this plan?
- ☐ How will the plan be measured for its effectiveness over time?

## 10. Provide an explanation for extended cycle.

Putting an outcome on extended cycle happens when the program faculty decide to assess an outcome later or over a longer period. Some common justifications for extended cycle may include having no or too few students to assess, restructuring a program, changes in faculty that might influence course offerings or a change in the requirements from an outside accreditor. If an outcome is placed on extended cycle, a justification must be provided in the Notes section of the report, and "extended cycle" must be selected from the dropdown menu on the "Program Status" of the report. This allows the Institution to track how many programs are on extended cycle.

## 11. Relate assessment methods and/or actions taken to the outcome.

For instance, if the outcome is that students will analyze literary texts in light of their historical, social and cultural contexts, the assessment for that outcome should be student work in which there is literary analysis. This is true for both direct and indirect assessments. In addition, if the same assignment is used to assess multiple outcomes, an explanation should be provided as to how that assessment aligns with each outcome. Actions taken should be consistent with the results presented. For instance, if a student learning outcome is not met, it is not appropriate for program faculty to do nothing to address the situation.

## 12. Explain student conference presentations & publications.

In general, conference presentations and publications are considered indirect measures of assessment because instructional faculty in the department or program do not typically assess them. While the number of conference presentations and publications may speak to the prestige of a program, it does not speak to the quality of the works themselves. Internal review of the presentation or publication using a set of standards established by instructional faculty in the department or program can serve as a direct assessment of student learning.