

Assessment Plan Reporting Structure and Evaluative Criteria Appropriate for Use with Departmental Reviews

Conceptual Framework

In departmental reviews, departments generally include information about how they monitor program effectiveness or how they hope to improve the educational experience of their students. However, reporting practices vary widely across departments and schools. The variation in how departments report their assessment information makes it difficult to glean a clear picture of assessment activities across the institution.

During the SACS self-study, the SACS institutional effectiveness committee performed an important service by establishing a standard format in which departments could report assessment activities for each degree program. The responses provided in that format have been organized into an academic assessment database located on the UNCG website at <http://sacs.uncg.edu/work/academic/assessinterface.asp>. This database will serve as a useful tool if it is kept current.

The SACS assessment database currently includes sections at the department level (assessment results and use of assessment data) and at the program level (objectives and assessment methods). The structure of this reporting is not ideal and will evolve. Optimally, each department will have a complete response for each distinct program. If programs are distinct, they should be examined separately. Departmental reviews in the 2002-2003 year will be used to conduct the pilot implementation of a new assessment reporting framework. During this pilot year, the structure of the existing SACS assessment database will be updated, and the process of evaluating assessment plans will be refined.

2002-2003 Pilot

The new assessment plan reporting structure will be piloted with the departments already scheduled for fifth-year review in the 2002-2003 academic year. These departments are: Anthropology, English, Library Science, Social Work, Exercise and Sport Science, Music, and Nursing.

The information for these departments will be taken directly from the database already compiled for the SACS self-study.

In this pilot year, the University's Academic Assessment Specialist will provide feedback to departments regarding the assessment report section of the fifth-year review. Making improvements to the plans in a timely manner will be addressed in the Memorandum of Understanding at the end of the Assessment process. The Academic Assessment Specialist will act as a consultant to departments, helping them improve their academic assessment and reporting. Control of assessment will remain within the individual departments. Only guidance regarding the improvement of systems for monitoring effectiveness will be provided.

Assessment Report Structure

There are 4 areas that should be covered by an assessment report:

1. Learning Outcome Objectives
2. Assessment Methods
3. Results
4. Use of Assessments

Each distinct degree program should have an assessment report covering these 4 areas. Departments will facilitate review of their assessment plans if they provide clear information on each of these areas. The criteria by which the assessment plans will be evaluated are provided on the following pages. The criteria address each of these 4 reporting areas. An examination of the criteria should help clarify what information is expected in an assessment report.

Review of Assessment Plans

The goal of reviewing assessment plans is to provide useful formative feedback to departments. As such, providing guidance to departments to improve their assessment plans is more important than assigning an overall evaluation. By providing feedback with a simple checklist, we can both track the current state of assessment across the university (e.g., how many departments are using direct assessments) and provide individual departments with indications of areas in which they can improve (e.g., assessments should be linked to specific objectives).

While the primary purpose of evaluating departmental assessment plans is not to give overall evaluations, there is utility in being able to identify programs that are exemplars of best practice. In the checklists provided on the following pages, notation is provided that will allow for the identification of responses worthy of commendation.

Reporting “Student Learning Objectives”

General Reporting Suggestions

To avoid confusion, student learning objectives should be reported separately from other departmental objectives (e.g., research goals). Student outcomes should always be considered as serving a separate function from other departmental goals.

Evaluative Criteria

All objectives:

- Are student oriented
- Are outcome/behaviorally oriented (that is, objectives focus on what students will be able to do rather than what students were taught)
- Are sufficiently specific to convey the expectations for student success
- Provide the distinctions between each degree program and degree level
- Indicate conditions under which behaviors are observable in a student*
- Indicate criteria for student success*

* Departments meeting these criteria should receive commendations.

Reporting “Assessment Methods”

General Reporting Suggestions

Assessment methods should be both listed and described. There is too much variability in how methods can be employed for a simple listing of methods to provide a clear picture of how a department is assessing student learning. Full reporting in this area is important for putting the later reporting of results into a proper context.

Non-learning measures of departmental activity (e.g., enrollment statistics, credit hour production, faculty research/development) are not considered informative for the purposes of academic assessment. Indirect measures do provide useful information and are included on the checklist below. However, an assessment plan relying solely on indirect methods would be incomplete.

Evaluative Criteria

Assessment methods:

- Include indirect measures (student evaluations, surveys, cumulative GPA, external reviews)
- Include some direct measures
- Are described or examples are made available
- Include a description of the intended student sample*
 - When (e.g., during a capstone class)
 - What students (e.g., graduating students)
- Are explicitly linked to specific learning objectives*
- Are given on a set schedule*

* Departments meeting these criteria should receive commendations.

Reporting “Results”

General Reporting Suggestions

A complete reporting of assessment results should include both the specific assessment results (e.g., portfolio ratings) and the interpretation. While the criteria listed below may seem to require a lot of documentation, a department actively engaged in assessment should already be keeping these records.

Evaluative Criteria

Reporting of assessment results:

- Are specific (the results from each assessment method are provided)
- Are interpreted in relation to the assessment itself
- Are interpreted in relation to a program of study
- Are interpreted in relation to specific program objectives*
- Includes full summaries (e.g., reports to or minutes from appropriate departmental meeting are made available)*

* Departments meeting these criteria should receive commendations.

Reporting “Use of Assessment”

General Reporting Suggestions

This section is the culmination of the previous three. Departments should refer back to the previous three sections as appropriate. Full documentation of the use of assessment should not be limited to changes based on assessment results. Positive assessment results that suggest changes are not needed should be included in this section.

Evaluative Criteria

Reports on the use of assessment should include:

- Decisions (e.g., to change or not change programs/courses) based on assessment
- Explanations of how assessment results informed decisions (some direct assessment results should be provided)
- Decisions are linked to specific assessment results
- Clear distinctions between department level and degree program level decisions*
- An explanation of which specific learning objectives are affected by decisions*

* Departments meeting these criteria should receive commendations.