

Assessment Policies

ADOPTED BY THE UNIVERSITY ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE

Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes Participants:

A. Educational Programs -

- F. Educational Support Services – The Office of Institutional Research (IR) maintains the official USM Organization Chart annually submitted to IHL. To be in compliance with SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation, all professionally staffed units with primary educational support fun

Participation in the University-Wide Assessment Process

The purpose of the University Assessment Committee (UAC) is to support the process of continual self-evaluation and improvement across all academic and administrative units at The University of Southern Mississippi. Assessment involves the articulation of desired student learning outcomes, the design of measures to assess student learning in relationship to those outcomes, and the systematic collection of findings to determine if, and to what extent, student learning is occurring. Student learning outcomes assessment data are reported and preserved in WEAVEonline, the program adopted by the UAC as the university-wide assessment database.

Each year, a report of program and academic unit assessment participation is made to the deans, provost and president of The University of Southern Mississippi. The UAC will include in that report a list of any academic programs that did not submit plans and reports required within the university-wide assessment process. The UAC will continue (1) its recognition of academic programs judged to provide adequate and commendable support to SACSCOC Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1; (2) to hold the annual Assessment Showcase that recognizes academic programs judged to provide commendable support to SACSCOC Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1; and (3) to provide focused guidance and assistance to those programs that do not achieve at least an adequate rating in a given year. Programs not achieving at least an adequate rating will follow up with a plan of improvement to the respective Dean and the Office of Institutional Effectiveness.

The UAC finds it unacceptable that some academic programs consistently do not participate in the university-wide assessment process and documentation of such in WEAVEonline. Such lack of participation undermines the university-wide efforts in assessment and jeopardizes the university response to SACSCOC Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1. The UAC supports academic programs' participation in discipline-specific accreditation processes; however, this participation does not exempt a program from participation in the university-wide assessment process.

UAC Approved 04.19.11; Modified 03.19.14

Items for future consideration:

UAC recommendations for the future are that (1) University Assessment Committee processes be incorporated into the program prioritization processes, and (2) successful completion of assessment documentation be incorporated in performance evaluations of those department chairs and program coordinators responsible and of their respective deans. It is essential to the continued success of the university that assessment data are collected and the results be acted upon for improvement of student learning.

UAC Approved 04.19.11; UAC Modified 03.19.14

Certificate Program Assessment Plan and Report Guidelines

All certificate programs must identify a minimum of two student learning outcomes. Each student learning outcome must be assessed with at least one direct measure.

Certificate programs must assess annually, following program-level calendars. The following components are required for a complete assessment report:

1. Findings (separated by site/mode if applicable)
2. Action Plans
3. 2-part Analysis to include Closing the Loop as applicable

Stand-alone Minor Assessment Plan and Report Guidelines

All stand-alone minors must identify a minimum of two student learning outcomes. Each student learning outcome must be assessed with at least one direct measure.

Stand-Alone Minors must assess annually, following program-level calendars. Stand-Alone Minors shall follow certificate reporting guidelines.

Assessment Process Overview

SPRING 2015

2014-2015/2015-2016 Academic Program Assessment Plans are in place.

An assessment plan includes:

- a) Program Mission/Purpose
- b) Student Learning Outcomes
- c) Measures and Targets

A complete 2014-2015 Academic Program Assessment Report includes:

- d) Findings (due May 31)
- e) Action Plans (due June 30) - *Action Plans are not required in Year 1 of assessment cycle*
- f) Analysis (due June 30)
- g) Annual Report (due June 30) - *alternative calendar programs have a due date of September 30*

University Assessment Calendar for degree programs can be found on the Institutional Effectiveness Web site:
<http://www.usm.edu/institutional-effectiveness/academic-program-assessment>

The University Assessment Committee (UAC) directs the assessment process at the University of Southern Mississippi. Southern Miss follows a two-year planning and annual reporting cycle. With this cycle, assessment plans are in place for two years, action plans are developed every two years, and assessment reports are annual.

In the spring semester of the second year of the cycle, departments are asked to submit their assessment reports by the end of the semester.

2015 Showcase

PUBLIC RELATIONS MS

Student Learning Outcomes

SLO 1: Mass Communication and Public Relations Theories
Students will demonstrate knowledge in mass communication

Measures

A measure identifies evidence and methods used to determine achievement of expected outcomes. Targets show criteria for success for each student learning outcome. The findings that result from these measures should be used to demonstrate student learning and provide direction for improving learning.

Measures and Targets should show progressive distinction between degree levels (BA, MA, PhD) in the same academic unit. Simple rates, frequencies, or percentages of activities are not true measures of student learning outcomes.

Direct Measures

The best measures for student learning are direct measures in which students demonstrate that they know or can do the specified learning outcome. Direct measures directly evaluate student work. Examples of direct measures include portfolios, exams, papers, projects, presentations, performances, standardized tests, licensure exams, comprehensives, and internship evaluations.

An overall course grade is NOT an acceptable direct measure. And in various cases, an overall exam, project, or paper grade is not an appropriate measure. However, the grading process can be used for assessment, if the classroom exam or assignment actually measures the learning outcome and the criteria

2015 Showcase

CHILD AND FAMILY STUDIES BS*
Program-level Direct Measure

M 2: Family Science

PSYCHOLOGY PHD
Program-level Direct Measure

M 2: Annual Evaluations

Students will receive a rating of in the area of professional development on their annual evaluations of student performance and progress toward the doctoral degree.

Target: 80% of students will receive a rating of at least satisfactory progress in the area of professional development on their annual evaluations of student performance and progress toward the doctoral degree.

Findings (2013-2014) - Target: Met

82 of 84 students (97%) were evaluated and rated as at least satisfactory in the area of professional development.

POLYMER SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING PHD

Program-level Direct Measure

M 5: Research Prospectus

Students will present their prospectus of research in written form and defend it publicly to the entire department, to the satisfaction of their advisory committee.

Target: 80% of students will be able to defend their Prospectus to the department and their committee members regarding their research on their first attempt. Successful defense incorporates 1) a document that clearly and concisely describes the proposed research and its relevance; 2) an oral presentation that clearly demonstrates knowledge of the field of research and has clear goals and objectives for the proposed research; and 3) the ability to answer questions posed by faculty and students in a professional manner.

Findings (2013-2014) - Target: Met

Fall 2013--100% (4 of 4) of student presenting a prospectus of research successfully defended their prospectus.

Spring 2014--100% (3 of 3) of student presenting a prospectus of research successfully defended their prospectus of research. Successful is judged by the PhD committee and based on a clearly written document, an oral presentation to the faculty, students, and staff of the University of Southern Mississippi, and the ability to answer questions and lead a discussion of the topic among those attending the oral presentation.

COMMUNICATION STUDIES BA/BS

Program-level Indirect Measure

M 5: Student self-assessments of learning

Students in the capstone class will complete a self-report measure asking them to assess how their courses have enhanced their abilities to communicate effectively in dyadic, small group, and public contexts, as well as to advocate ideas and adapt messages. This questionnaire consists of 4 or 5 items for each measure, each with a 5-point response continuum ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Source of Evidence: Student satisfaction survey at end of the program

Target: The mean score on the 5-item scale will be 4.25 or greater. This is equivalent to 85% of the students agreeing strongly with statements describing how courses in their major have enhanced their abilities to advocate ideas.

Findings (2013-2014) - Target: Met

4.79/5 (96%) for 29 students (criterion met). Summer 2013. The questionnaire was not administered. Fall 2013. 18 students taking the capstone class (CMS 450 + CMS 493) completed this questionnaire and produced a 4.72 average (94%) on items related to advocating ideas. Spring 2014. 14 students completed capstone requirements (CMS 440+ CMS 493) in the spring semester. 11 students completed the questionnaire and produced a mean of 4.85 out of 5 (97.1%) on items related to advocacy. 7 of 11 strongly agreed with all of the advocacy items.

College of Business Student Achievement Objectives

ACCOUNTING MPA

Student Achievement Objective and Measure

O/O 6: Microsoft Excel Certification

MPA students will achieve Microsoft Certification in Excel prior to graduation.

M 12: Microsoft Excel Certification

This certification is highly desirable by all business employers, but especially by accounting firms. Excel certification sends a strong signal to potential employers of the quality of preparedness for the profession by our students. The

College of Education and Psychology Student Achievement Objectives

SCHOOL COUNSELING AND GUIDANCE SERVICES MED

Student Achievement Objective and Measure

O/O 2: Licensure

Cohort members will demonstrate competence in preparation for licensure requirements as outlined by the state department of education. This includes successful scoring on the Praxis exam and completing the program requirements outlined by the School Counseling and Guidance Services program.

M 3: Praxis Exam

School counseling candidates whose states require the Praxis will complete the Praxis exam with the required minimal score. Mississippi requires 156 for a pass.

Target: 60% of USM's school counseling Praxis participants will pass the exam on the first attempt.

Findings (2013-2014) - Target: Met

The Praxis scores are reported for all current and prior students who took the exam during the reporting cycle 2013-2014. 100% (N=14) earned a passing score as required by the state of Mississippi during the reporting cycle.

LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE BA

Student Achievement Objective and Measure

O/O 5: Retention and Graduation

Students majoring in library and information science will progress through the program and graduate.

M 11: Retention

Students choosing Library and Information Science as a major will be retained in the program. Retention in the program will be measured by data from Institutional Research and/or PeopleSoft data.

Target: 70 percent of the students choosing Library and Information Science as a major will be retained in the program as indicated by data furnished by Institutional Research and/or internal data.

Findings (2013-2014) - Target: Not Met

69 percent (61/88) of the students choosing Library and Information Science as a major will be retained in the program as indicated by data furnished by Institutional Research and/or PeopleSoft data. This percentage was calculated by taking students admitted to the major since fall of 2008 and combining numbers of those who graduated and those who are still active in the program.

College of Health Student Achievement Objectives

NUTRITION AND FOOD SYSTEMS MS
Student Achievement Objective and Measure

O/O 6: Career progress/job placement
Program graduates will progress professionally by obtaining employment in their chose

College of Nursing Student Achievement Objectives

College of Science and Technology Student Achievement Objectives

FORENSICS BS

Student Achievement Objective and Measure

O/O 6: Student Retention

The School of Criminal Justice will demonstrate reasonable success in retaining its undergraduate majors in forensic science.

M 9: Student Retention

The School of Criminal Justice will demonstrate reasonable success in retaining its undergraduate majors in forensic science. The retention rate will be computed based on the following formula: $\text{No. of students returned} / \text{Total No. of students} - \text{No. of degrees awarded}$

Target: The retention rate for undergraduate majors in forensic science will be 70%. (Note: IR does not make data

2015 Showcase

CHILD AND FAMILY STUDIES MS** Action Plan

FAM 605 Action Plan

Although the required targets were met for FAM 605 in the Spring 2014, it has been determined that this is an advanced course that should build upon previous coursework. It is currently offered in the spring of the 1st year before students have established sufficient theoretical foundations and skills to truly benefit from this course. By moving the course to the second year of study students will be better prepared to effectively engage in the advocacy process. It has also been determined that the advocacy project paper should be broken into smaller increments so that a draft of each section is completed separately and feedback is provided before the final paper is due.

Established in Cycle: 2013-2014

Implementation Status: Planned

Priority: Medium

Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):

Measure: Research Policy Project (FAM 605) | Outcome/Objective: CFS MS-SLO 3: Advocacy

Implementation Description: Dr. Williams will make needed changes in project requirements before course is offered again. Course sequencing will take effect in the next academic year.

Projected Completion Date: 05/29/2015

Responsible Person/Group: Department chair, program director, and CFS MS workgroup.

SPORT COACHING EDUCATION BS* Action Plan

Standard Syllabi

Standard syllabi for all SCE courses will be developed to ensure consistency in course delivery across instructors and campuses.

Established in Cycle: 2013-2014

Implementation Status: In-Progress

Priority: High

Responsible Person/Group: SCE faculty

INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES BIS* Analysis Answers

What specifically did your assessments show regarding proven strengths or progress you made on outcomes/objectives?

We are pleased with what our programmatic assessments show with regard to students' performance in our program: all of the targets that we have established were met in the past year, although we clearly have more work to do (see below). While our assessment of students in our Writing Intensive course show that early in our program, students lack the writing and research skills they need, we are pleased to see that by the time they get to the final project in the capstone class (the source of our direct measures at this point), they have highly developed skills and an understanding of the nature of interdisciplinary writing and research. We are also pleased to see that students believe the program prepares them well as writers and researchers and paves the way for them to enter the workforce or a graduate and professional program.

What specifically did your assessments show regarding any outcomes/objectives that will require continued attention?

While our students performed well overall and while our assessment measures are tied specifically to principles of and best practices in interdisciplinary learning, research, and writing, we are committed to digging more deeply into both our assessment measures and our ways of gauging achievement. Only in the 14-15 academic year will we have an instructional corps that is large enough to manage both the size of the student body in IDS (hovering around 250 students) and the assessment responsibilities. In short, we believe that our assessment mechanisms could be more developed and responsive, and that at last the program has a large enough faculty to begin to undertake such development. We are committed to adding more direct measures to our assessment tools, because we recognize that relying primarily on one assignment (the capstone research paper) and an exit survey, we are gauging performance too narrowly. Additional, more distinct, and more specific measures will allow us to determine more precisely our program's strengths and weaknesses.

MARINE SCIENCE MS**

Analysis Answers

What specifically did your assessments show regarding proven strengths or progress you made on outcomes/objectives?

We are pleased with the learning outcomes demonstrated by the written and defended prospectus, written and defended thesis, and oral presentation of research (talk or poster) at scientific meetings. Students demonstrate command of their subject and facility in weaving in relevant, multidisciplinary threads into their work. They "get" how their questions usually require knowledge of both the biological and physical environments of the ocean. The students have learned basic field and laboratory techniques for their thesis, they know how to organize presentations and papers in the scientific style, and they are well on their way to finding that fertile, scientific frontier that generates useful, scientific hypotheses. We are gratified that our students are finding employment in science after graduation or are continuing in a Ph.D. program. This tells us that others value our students' accomplishments.

What specifically did your assessments show regarding any outcomes/objectives that will require continued attention?

Aspects of our master's program in Marine Science need further attention. We have struggled with the method of evaluation of the core courses and commit herein to find a solution. The core courses provide the basis for a broad, multidisciplinary knowledge of the ocean environment that we view as fundamental to ocean science. We need a satisfactory method for evaluating the learning outcomes of our students so we can improve the core courses as needed. By discussions with the core of instruction we will choose a path: 1) improve the Qualifying Exam and improve preparation for the exam so student pass on the first try, or 2) institute rubrics to evaluate learning outcomes directly from the core courses, or 3) perhaps institute another strategy that the core of instruction can suggest. Solving this issue will affect other perceived problems; it will help reduce time to an approved prospectus, completion of courses, and completion of a thesis.

We would like to find better ways to directly evaluate the field and laboratory experience of master's students. All students are getting this training, and their success in writing/presenting a thesis suggests that they have attained their learning objectives, but it would be useful to directly measure learning outcomes at the time they are doing the field and lab work and to do so in a consistent way, based on consensus among the thesis advisors.

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With regards to objective 1, our students not only meet essential competencies in their courses relevant to the core areas of the counseling psychology field (SLO #1), but they also pass our comprehensive exam assessing these areas at one time at the end of their program (SLO #2). Additionally, our students have a long history of scoring well above the national average on the National Counselor Exam (SLO #3). This shows the training in our program and the student's learning translates outside of what competencies are emphasized in our program and to the profession nationally.

We see that our students' critical thinking in scientific research (Objective 4) is increasing due to the programmatic changes around boosting this competency. Much of this is accomplished through our research teams. With students' participation on faculty research teams, this method of mentorship helps to boost their performance across many areas, including professionalism, research, and coursework. Most goals in these areas were met this year and our research team affiliation for each student provides us with a mechanism by which to continue to support students in their development, implement increased efforts such as conference awareness, as well as individually remediate students with areas for growth in these domains. More specifically 100% of our students are participating on research teams (SLO # 14) and during portfolio review all had met their negotiated research goals during the year (SLO # 12). Our students are also consistently performing well on a class-based research project (SLO #13). Because of the success our students are experiencing in research, the faculty believe we are even ready to increase the rigor by which we assess this domain. We will implement the assessment of conference presentations and professional publications over the next year.

What specifically did your assessments show regarding any outcomes/objectives that will require continued attention?

Overall, we see our program as strong and our graduates as being especially well prepared for the mental health field and continued graduate study. Yet, our assessment did highlight some areas we could focus some continued attention.

On an ongoing basis, we seek to improve the research training and experience of our Counseling Psychology MS students. As discussed in our action plans, we had a dip in our students' conference attendance (SLO #6), which we see as an important activity to build their professional identity. Yet, conference participation also allows for development of research competencies. We will boost our emphasis on conference attendance and better inform our students of conference availability as an improvement initiative related to their professional identity. Yet, our assessment also revealed that the majority of students that did attend conferences this year also presented their research at these conferences. Presenting research at a conference likely better develops our students' professional identity (Objective 2) and additionally serves to increase their research experience (Objective 4). In the next year, we plan to assess not only conference attendance but presentations at conferences as a method by which we can assess the increased research competency of our students. Currently, one of methods of assessing research competency is through a project they complete in a research class. As an increasing number of our students are producing research, we feel we can increase the rigor of our assessment in this area and assess publications and presentations next year rather than a class project that may not lead to increasing number5

HIGHER EDUCATION (STUDENT AFFAIRS ADMINISTRATION) MED

Analysis Answers

What specifically did your assessments show regarding proven strengths or progress you made on outcomes/objectives?

Program assessments have shown that the program has been successful in matching students with professional opportunities upon graduation. More students than in the past attended and presented at NASPA and ACPA, the student affairs professional conferences. More students also attended the professional job fairs offered as a part of these conferences and were offered on-campus interviews and, in some cases, eventual job offers as a result. We were also successful at improving relationships with student affairs departments which resulted in a more seamless match between our students and graduate assistantship opportunities. We have focused on students' development of the ACPA/NASPA professional competencies in both the coursework and practicum requirements and tracked that carefully in the professional portfolios they produce as a requirement in the practicum course. Because the M.Ed. in Higher Education with emphasis in Student Affairs Administration program focuses on preparing students for entry and mid-level professional positions in student affairs practice, these opportunities to develop professional competencies, professional networks and job experience are very important.

What specifically did your assessments show regarding any outcomes/objectives that will require continued attention?

Program benchmarking has demonstrated that changes are needed in our curriculum that will allow it to become more congruent with national standards and professional competencies outlined for student affairs programs. Specifically, the program will become compatible with minimum requirements recommended by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS), a national model of professional standards and guidelines for effective student affairs programming and services including graduate preparation in student affairs. In the absence of a formal accrediting body, CAS provides the framework with which Student Affairs graduate programs nationwide seek to align themselves. Professional competencies for student affairs practitioners are outlined by the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), the two national professional organizations for the field of student affairs. The professional competencies, revised in 2010, outline the foundational knowledge areas needed for practice as a student affairs professional. Together with the CAS standards, the ACPA/NASPA professional competencies constitute the standards by which student affairs graduate preparation programs assess their congruence with national expectations.

Our review of the CAS standards and ACPA/NASPA Professional Competencies reveals that changes in our curriculum are needed. This includes an increase in required program hours from 33 to 45 that is congruent with the CAS recommendation that student affairs graduate preparation programs be a minimum of 40 hours. Changes in the curriculum that will better prepare our students to develop the skills and knowledge needed for a successful career in Student Affairs Administration and were approved by Graduate Council effective Fall 2014 include: the addition of 4 new courses, modification of 1 course, conversion of 2 courses from requirements to electives, the program will better prepare our students to develop the skills and knowledge needed for a successful career in Student Affairs Administration. We will continue to support students who enrolled when the old curriculum was active. We will need to work with these students to be sure they are able to obtain the courses they need for graduation. This requires careful attention to course scheduling and offering a few independent study courses in which students will learn the course content in a one-to-one relationship with a faculty member of small group instruction. While this may be expensive in terms of faculty time and program resources, it is our obligation to be sure that students are able to graduate. Another need is be sure that faculty on the Admissions

Annual Reporting

Annual Reporting Fields

The Assessment Report includes the following Annual Reporting data elements:

PROGRAM SUMMARY

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVES (ADDITIONAL ACTION PLANS)

CLOSING THE LOOP (ACTION PLAN TRACKING)

PROGRAM SUMMARY

Programs are asked to summarize highlights of the past year for that particular academic program. The summary field is needed to provide context to an outside reviewer. Program contributions, activities, and accomplishments should be included in this field. Any data collected outside of the student learning outcome measures could be showcased in this field as well.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVES (ADDITIONAL ACTION PLANS)

Any department-level or program-level action plans for improvement that are not necessarily tied to a specific student learning outcome should be described in this field.

CLOSING THE LOOP (ACTION PLAN TRACKING)

Programs are asked to summarize the results of previous action plan implementation. This is the opportunity for programs to close the assessment loop – to report on the success (or nonsuccess) of previously implemented action plans. It is very important for programs to respond to this section with thought and detail. This section is where programs provide evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results.

2015 Showcase

ART (GRAPHIC DESIGN) BFA Program Summary

The 2013-14 academic year was largely successful for the graphic design emphasis area. The unit designed and implemented a new capstone evaluation rubric and a new student exit survey, collected data using these instruments, and was able to report successfully met targets in all but one of the measures associated with these new metrics. (An action plan has been associated with the relevant unmet measure and improvement is anticipated in the 2014-15 academic year.) 25 students successfully completed the senior capstone project during the academic year. Several program improvements took place that are not directly related to WEAVE assessment criteria. In spring 2014, the graphic design emphasis area instituted a student-run graphic design agency, Rise Creative. The agency secures clients and delivers professional-caliber design work to these clients. Students apply to join Rise Creative and the graphic design faculty selects the strongest applications, ensuring the quality of work that is delivered to clients. The agency will continue to operate over the summer of 2014 and throughout the coming academic year under the supervision of Professor John Mark Lawler. Also in spring 2014, the AIGA Student Group at USM was established. AIGA is the professional association for graphic designers, and having a student group on campus will be an excellent networking and professional development opportunity for students. Organizational and planning meetings took place in spring 2014 and in fall 2014 the Office of Student Activities will review the group's official Application to Charter. The group will continue to operate throughout the coming year under the supervision of Professor Dori Griffin. Finally, in spring 2014, the Sophomore Portfolio Review took place, with 31 applications for acceptance into the upper-division graphic design program. 20 full-time students and 1 part-time student were accepted into the program, meaning that the program is now operating at (or, technically, slightly above) 100% capacity. Professor DeAnna Douglas chaired the committee of the whole graphic

RECOMMENDED READING

General Assessment Resources

Assessment Clear and Simple

NOTES