

Planning Assessment at the Departmental Level

Like everything else, with a bit of planning, the time spent on assessment can be used more effectively. If you are assessing at the department level- where working with others in your department is key- developing a formal plan can help clarify roles and expectations. Organizing the elements of your plan into a formal document and circulating it can help create buy-in and continuity.

Well-developed assessment plans often include information on (a) which outcome will be assessed, (b) how evidence will be gathered and analyzed, (c) who is responsible for specific tasks, (d) when key steps will happen, and (e) what will be done with the assessment results. Page three shows a sample planning matrix that organizes these dimensions into a grid. You could modify the matrix as needed, or you might organize your plan as checklist, narrative or some other way.

When making an assessment plan at the departmental level, you may want to think about the cycle of academic program review and try to line up with the cycle of academic program review. This way, you are able to assess all of your outcomes between program reviews. This may make assembling your department's self-study easier because the work has already been done and was spread out over a few years.

For illustrative purposes, there are two general approaches you might think about (or modify as needed).

(1) Sample Planning Matrix for Assessing Five Outcomes in a Five Year Cycle

What Outcome will you Assess?	When/ Where to Gather Evidence?	How will you Analyze Evidence?	Who is Responsible?	What will you do with findings?
Outcome 1	2014 (fall) Course 005	Apply rubrics to term papers	Departmental Undergraduate Committee	Share with department
Outcome 2	2015 (spring) Course 019	Item analysis of exams	Departmental Undergraduate Committee	Share with department; discuss need for co-curricular supports
Outcome 3	2016 (fall) Course 100	Apply rubrics to presentations	Departmental Undergraduate Committee	Share with department
Outcome 4	2017 (winter) Course 012A and Course 012B	Item analysis of exams	Departmental Undergraduate Committee	Discuss with instructors who often teach in relevant sequence
Outcome 5	2018 (spring) Course 180	Qualitative analysis of graduating seniors survey	Departmental Undergraduate Committee	Share with department

In the example above, the department is focusing on each outcome as part of a systemic approach to assess all outcomes over a few years. This might work well for larger departments where focusing on one outcome at a time may make it possible to work with larger amounts of evidence for each outcome. This may also mean that if you make programmatic adjustments based on findings there is time to implement changes and then, in the next cycle, assess what differences the changes may have made for student learning.

(2) Sample Planning Matrix for Assessing All Outcomes Every Year

What Outcome will you Assess?	When/ Where to Gather Evidence?	How will you Analyze Evidence?	Who is Responsible?	What will you do with findings?
Outcomes 1-5	2015 (spring) Course 195	Apply rubrics to senior projects	Program Coordinator	Share with cooperating faculty
Outcomes 1-5	2016 (spring) Course 195	Apply rubrics to senior projects	Program Coordinator	Share with cooperating faculty
Outcomes 1-5	2017 (spring) Course 195	Apply rubrics to senior projects	Program Coordinator	Share with cooperating faculty

In the second example, the department is assessing all outcomes in a capstone-type course every year. This approach might work particularly well for departments with a small number of majors or interdisciplinary program that must rely on courses in other departments where getting access to student evidence (e.g.: collecting term papers, etc.) might be problematic. This approach typically includes a well-developed project that will give students a chance to demonstrate their mastery of all outcomes.

Another general approach (not shown) is to cycle through different parts of the curriculum or distinct groups of course assessing the outcomes that are most relevant to those areas. For example, you might assess all knowledge based outcomes in lower division coursework one year and then outcomes related to applying that knowledge in upper division coursework the next year.

Whatever your specific plan is, the key is to think about which outcomes it makes sense to assess where and when as opposed to simply using current course offerings to assess outcomes selected haphazardly.

Blank Assessment Planning Matrix

What Outcome will you Assess?	When/ Where to Gather Evidence?	How will you Analyze Evidence?	Who is Responsible?	What will you do with findings?