**Academic Degree Programs Assessment**

Guidelines and Template



Submitted to the University Assessment Panel

AY 2023-2024

# Academic Degree Programs Assessment

## **GENERAL DIRECTIONS**

Each degree program will submit two documents: (1) an updated assessment plan that strategically maps the way forward and (2) a status report detailing current and prior assessment efforts. The assessment plan describes the who, what, when, and where of your program’s assessment system—it is forward thinking. The status report spells out what has happened in the past based on the previous assessment plan and what changes are being proposed. It should be noted that assessment plans evolve, meeting current and projected needs; revision to the assessment plan is to be expected.

Detailed directions with examples are provided in separate templates that follow and can also be found on our website at: <https://www.niu.edu/effectiveness/assessment/degree-programs.shtml>

## **RATIONALE**

Submitting a status report documenting the status of a degree program along with an updated assessment plan mapping the way forward is anchored in fostering proactive and engaged program assessment practices, which ultimately furthers and advances student successes. To that end, NIU has put in place three points where degree programs have an opportunity to share assessment results focused on student learning outcomes—and receive constructive feedback and support. The first occurs on a yearly basis, when degree programs submit an annual assessment update, which documents assessment activities that have occurred over the course of the previous year. The second point occurs mid-cycle in the program review process (which is typically an eight-year cycle). This is the updated assessment plan and the status report. The third point is program review, in which annual assessment update data and status report data are intended to support the vitality and quality of the degree program. Program review will require several years of assessment data documenting strategic continuous improvement efforts— data regarding these efforts are provided by annual assessment updates, the status report and the most recent assessment plan.

***Annual Assessment Updates***

AAE feedback

Student learning focus

***Status Report***

Student learning focus

UAP feedback

***Program Review***

Program focus

College Review

University Assessment Panel members and Accreditation, Assessment and Evaluation staff will review the updated assessment plans and status reports, noting strengths in the assessment system and offering suggestions for improvement where appropriate. Feedback from peers and colleagues has led many programs to improve efficiencies and effectiveness. The university uses this peer feedback to provide tailored support to individual degree programs and to the university as a whole by helping programs align student learning outcomes, the curriculum, and assessment methods. Having an effective and efficient assessment system will go a long way in supporting student successes.

# Academic Degree Programs Assessment

# Part I: Assessment Plan Explained

The assessment plan begins with an introduction setting the context for the updated assessment plan and is followed by a list of desired program-level student learning outcomes the program aims to have, a program-by-baccalaureate learning outcomes matrix (for undergraduate degree programs), and a curriculum map outlining the scope and sequence of courses students are expected to take (for all degree programs, both undergraduate and graduate). This is followed by an explanation of the program-level assessment methods that will be used to determine how students are meeting each student learning outcome. Target performance levels are set for each assessment method, along with a timeline indicating when each assessment will be carried out and who is responsible for carrying it out. The assessment plan is forward thinking; it is evolving to meet strategic needs of the program. It should be designed to provide your program with actionable data.

The general format for the assessment plan is:

**Cover Page**

**1. Introduction and Context**

**2. Student Learning Outcomes**

**3. Program-by-Baccalaureate Learning Outcomes Matrix**

**4. Curriculum Map**

**5. Assessment Methods**

Explanation of Assessment Methods Table

Assessment Methods-by-Outcomes Matrix

The cover page for the assessment plan is on the next page.

**Part I: Assessment Plan**

Insert [College]

Insert [Department or School]

Insert [Degree Program]

Insert [Degree]

Insert [Date of Plan]

Submitted to the University Assessment Panel by:

Insert [Name and Title of Person Submitting Assessment Plan]

**1. Introduction**

Begin the assessment plan with a brief introduction describing the relevant history/evolution of the program and the program goals as they are now. Describe significant factors that help in placing the assessment plan in context (e.g., a new minor, shifting demand, market forces, the need for revised student learning outcomes, the need for more appropriate/valid information, new accreditation standards, department organizational changes, retention issues, and the like). Readers of the assessment plan will benefit from knowing how the degree program is evolving and how the new assessment plan will strategically provide the program with actionable data.

Insert introductory text here…

**2. Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)**

List the degree program student learning outcomes in the space provided below. Do not include overall program goals (e.g., recruit more minority students, post-graduation employment, etc.). See the [*UAP Academic Program Assessment Plan and Status Report Rubric-Checklist*](https://www.niu.edu/effectiveness/_files/academic-program-assessment-plan-status-report-rubric.pdf) for a list of characteristics often seen in well-crafted student learning outcomes. It is not expected that all characteristics are present, but that essential ones are there, such as:

* Student learning outcomes are **student learning focused**;
* Student learning outcomes are **observable and measurable**;
* A sufficient number of student learning outcomes to add depth/breadth (>3), but not so many as to become cumbersome/intrusive (<12), 6-8 is manageable (unless mandated by accreditation); and
* Student learning outcomes **differentiate the program from similar programs.**

The goal is to continually improve student learning outcomes over time to meet program strategic needs and valued outcomes.

Insert degree program student learning outcomes here…

**3. Program-by-Baccalaureate Student Learning Outcomes Matrix**

This third section of the assessment plan is an alignment of the degree program student learning outcomes with the university baccalaureate student learning outcomes. **This applies only to undergraduate degree programs.**

List each program student learning outcome in the first column of the matrix below. Then identify the degree to which each program student learning outcome supports students meeting each of the eight baccalaureate student learning outcomes (see [www.niu.edu/bacreview](http://www.niu.edu/bacreview/) for additional information on the baccalaureate outcomes). Gauge whether each program outcome strongly supports (S), moderately supports (M), or doesn’t support (leave blank) each baccalaureate learning outcome. It is not expected that all program student learning outcomes support all baccalaureate student learning outcomes. You may find that several program student learning outcomes moderately support a baccalaureate student learning outcome, and that overall, the program strongly supports the baccalaureate learning outcome. With that in mind, determine the overall support the program provides for each baccalaureate student learning outcome. Place an S or an M in the Overall row or leave it blank if there is no support. A template follows.

| **Program Student Learning Outcome** | **Baccalaureate Student Learning Outcomes** |
| --- | --- |
| A. Global inter-connections and inter-dependencies | B. Intercultural competencies | C. Analyze human life and natural world inter-connections | D. Critical, creative, and independent thought | E. Communicate clearly and effectively | F. Collaborate with others | G. Quantitative and qualitative reasoning | H. Apply knowledge/ skills creatively |
| 1. Insert brief description of outcome #1 | M |  |  |  | M |  |  |  |
| 2. Insert brief description of outcome #2 |  | S |  | M |  |  |  |  |
| 3. Insert brief description of outcome #3 | M |  |  | M |  |  |  | M |
| … |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Insert brief description of last program student learning outcome |  |  |  |  | M |  |  |  |
| Overall | S | S |  | M | S |  |  | M |
| *Note.* Gauge whether each program outcome strongly supports (S), moderately supports (M), or doesn’t support (leave blank) each baccalaureate learning outcome |

**4. Curriculum Map**

The fourth section is a curriculum map. A curriculum map outlines the scope and sequence of courses students will take and aligns them with the degree program student learning outcomes. The curriculum map is an effective tool for not only sequencing the curriculum and instruction, but also for strategically identifying places for formative and summative assessments of student learning outcomes.

Required core courses are listed along the vertical axis of the matrix in chronological order. Degree program student learning outcomes are listed on the horizontal axis. For each course determine: (1) which outcomes are the ***primary*** focus of the course, and (2) the degree to which the course supports the outcome (i.e., at a beginning (B), developing (D), or proficient (P) level). Place a B, D, or P in the corresponding cell. It would be *unusual* to find all courses supporting all student learning outcomes—instead, concentrate on the primary focus of each course. This will map out the degree to which core courses support the development of the program’s student learning outcomes. The Four-Year Degree Path provided by the Academic Advising Center may be helpful ([www.niu.edu/advising/your-advising-plan/degree-paths](http://www.niu.edu/advising/your-advising-plan/degree-paths)). Look for strengths and gaps in the curriculum. Ideally, all outcomes should be supported with coursework through the proficient level. Below is an example of a curriculum map you can modify or model. **Note that each course should address at least one student learning outcome, but does NOT have to support all learning outcomes.**

| **Course** | **Program Student Learning Outcomes** |
| --- | --- |
| 1. Insert brief description of first outcome | 2. Insert brief description of second outcome | 3. Insert brief description of third outcome | … | … | … | Insert brief description of last outcome |
| NIU 110 | B |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| NIU 154 | D |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| NIU 241 |  | B |  |  |  |  |  |
| NIU 242 |  | D |  |  |  |  |  |
| NIU 300 | D |  | B |  |  |  |  |
| NIU 310 |  |  | D |  |  |  |  |
| NIU 354 | P |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| NIU 370 | P |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| NIU 402 |  | P | P |  |  |  |  |
| NIU 454 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| *Note.* Course supports the outcome at the B=beginning, D=developing, or P=proficient level. |

**5. Assessment Methods**

This final section of the assessment plan describes the assessment methods the degree program will be using to measure how well students are meeting program student learning outcomes. See the [*UAP Academic Program Assessment Plan and Status Report Rubric-Checklist*](https://www.niu.edu/effectiveness/_files/academic-program-assessment-plan-status-report-rubric.pdf) for a description of characteristics seen in well-functioning assessment methods.

**EXPLANATION OF ASSESSMENT METHODS TABLE**

The first part of the assessment methods section is an explanation of each assessment method that will be used to measure student learning outcomes. The description needs to be in enough detail to communicate to others what each assessment is, when it will be given, who is responsible for carrying out the assessment, what the desired target level of individual student performance is (to say a single student met the student learning outcome(s)), and what the desired overall target level of performance is for all students (to say the program is meeting the outcome(s)). Individual student-level achievement targets are often preset scores on an exam, scores on a rubric, etc. Program-level targets are often expressed as the percent of students demonstrating they meet individual student-level achievement targets. See the *UAP Academic Program Assessment Plan and Status Report Rubric-Checklist* for a list of characteristics seen in well-functioning assessment methods. Below is the table you may use to clearly communicate each of the assessment methods to other stakeholders.

| **Assessment Method** | **Explanation** |
| --- | --- |
| Description | Student-Level Achievement a | Program-Level Target b | When Data Will be Collected | Person Responsible | SLOs Covered |
| First Year Composition Assignment | Students are assigned a writing task in which they are to: (1) question the rhetorical appeal of written discourse; (2) invent, articulate, and understand their own ideas in the context of others; (3) use research to clarify and support positions; (4) demonstrate an awareness of the audience; (5) demonstrate control of genre and disciplinary conventions; and (6) demonstrate control over syntax and mechanics. | A student will receive a score of Meets (3) or better on each of the six performance criteria on the rubric. | 85% of all students will meet the student-level target (i.e., receive a score of Meets (3) or better on each of the six performance criteria on the rubric). | During the last week of Spring semester | Course instructor | 1, 3, 4 |
| Insert name of assessment method | Insert a brief description in enough detail for an outside reader to get a picture of the assessment. Attach all instruments, surveys, performance assessment directions and rubrics. |  |  |  |  |  |
| … |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| *Note.* a Student-level target is the score or performance an individual student must demonstrate to say the student met the student learning outcome.b Program-level target is the percent of all students that must demonstrate they meet the student learning outcome. |

## **ASSESSMENT METHODS-BY-OUTCOMES MATRIX**

The assessment methods section concludes with an assessment methods-by-outcomes matrix that maps which assessments will measure a given student learning outcome. Use the curriculum map to identify key places in the curriculum where existing assessment data might be used as a measure of program student learning outcomes (e.g., major projects/performances, capstone experiences, etc.). Outcomes are listed in the first row, and each assessment method is listed in the first column. It is useful if assessments are listed in chronological order, from the first students will see, to the last. For each assessment method determine: (1) which outcome(s) it ***primarily*** ***and intentionally*** measures, (2) if it is being used for formative (F) or summative (S) purposes, and (3) whether it is an indirect (I) or direct (D) measure of the student learning outcome.

**Formative assessments** occur earlier in the curriculum and are used to see if students are on track and progressing sufficiently; **summative assessments** occur at or near the end of the curriculum and are used to see if students have successfully met the program student learning outcomes.

**Direct assessments** are those that compellingly and clearly measure student performance (e.g., exam score, performance assessment, direct observation). **Indirect assessments** are rough estimates and proxies of student performance (e.g., self-reports of learning, alumni perceptions, etc.).

Place an F or S and an I or D in the corresponding cell. This will map out where your degree program is planning to conduct formative and summative assessments using direct and/or indirect methods. Look for opportunities and gaps. *Capitalize on what the program faculty/staff are already doing.* See how it aligns with the curriculum map. Below is an example of an assessment methods-by-outcomes matrix you can modify or model.

**Note:** Each assessment method **does NOT have to measure ALL student learning outcomes.** **All assessment methods listed in this section should also be explained in the *Explanation of Assessment Methods* table.**

| **Assessment Method** | **Program Student Learning Outcome** |
| --- | --- |
| 1. Insert brief description of first outcome | 2. Insert brief description of second outcome | 3. Insert brief description of third outcome | … | … | … | Insert brief description of last outcome |
| First Year Composition Assignment | F, D |  |  |  |  |  | F, D |
| NIU 456 course-embedded presentation |  |  | F, D |  |  |  |  |
| Culminating Capstone Activity | S, D | S, D |  |  |  | S, D | S, D |
| Employer and Advisory Board Survey | S, I | S, I | S, I | S, I | S, I | S, I |  |
| Alumni Survey | S, I | S, I | S, I | S, I | S, I | S, I | S, I |
| *Note.* F=formative assessment, S=summative assessment, D=direct assessment, and I=indirect assessment. See the paragraph above for an explanation of each type of assessment. |

# Academic Degree Programs AssessmentPart II: Status ReportGeneral Guidelines

While the assessment plan communicates what will happen going forward, the status report describes what has happened in the past and how assessment results are being used for continuous improvement purposes. Ideally, the status report integrates all prior assessment activities (including annual assessment update data). The goals of the report are several fold. The first is to aggregate and synthesize prior assessment data to gauge the status of student performance on all degree program student learning outcomes. The status report should answer the question, “Are our students meeting expectations?” The second goal is to report the synthesized findings in ways that replicate and support the program review process. This mid-cycle step provides the degree program and the university with information on the vitality of the assessment program and readiness for an upcoming program review. The status report (and accompanying assessment plan) answers the questions: “Is a proficient assessment system in place?” “What is working well?” “What changes are needed in the student learning outcomes, in the curriculum and instruction, and/or in the assessment system?” “Are supports needed?” The mid-cycle report is *formative* in nature.

The status report is organized by student learning outcome, with results reported for each assessment method for the corresponding outcome. Results for each student learning outcome are synthesized and described before going on to the next outcome. The general format for reporting results is:

## **Cover Page**

## **1. Reported Results**

**Student Learning Outcome 1**

Program-level Target

***Assessment Method 1***

Student-level Target

Assessment Method 1 Results

***Assessment Method 2***

Student-level Target

Assessment Method 2 Results

***Assessment Method 3, etc. …* repeat as above**

**Synthesis of Student Learning Outcome 1 Results**

**Student Learning Outcome 2**

… repeat as above for all student learning outcomes

## **2. Decisions, Actions, and Use of Results**

**3. Appendices (All Assessment Instruments/Rubrics)**

The status report concludes with discussion of the decisions, actions, and use of results for program improvement purposes. See the [*UAP Academic Program Assessment Plan and Status Report Rubric-Checklist*](https://www.niu.edu/effectiveness/_files/academic-program-assessment-plan-status-report-rubric.pdf) for a list of characteristics seen in effective reporting and use of results. The status report should shed light on student performance, the active use of assessments, and the decision making process as it relates to student learning outcomes, the curriculum and instruction, and the assessment system itself. It’s an opportunity to set priorities, close the loop, and receive feedback from peers and colleagues.

The cover page for the status report is on the next page.

# Part II. Academic Degree Programs Assessment

# Status Report

# Template

Insert College

Insert Department or School

Insert Degree Program

Insert Degree

Insert Date of Status Report

Submitted to the University Assessment Panel by:

Insert Name and Title of Person Submitting Status Report

**1. Reported Results**

This section of the status report is where the program presents all assessment results for each student learning outcome individually. Begin with a statement of the student learning outcome, including the desired program-level target of success (e.g., “At the end of the program, 90% of students will meet or exceed individual assessment targets”). This informs what levels of achievement the program expects to see from its students for each of the student learning outcomes. Next, report the actual assessment results for each assessment method that was used to measure the student learning outcome. Do so in ways that allow readers to follow how conclusions about the degree to which students met desired expectations were drawn. **This can be done by aggregating and summarizing assessment results in tables, charts, and/or narratives.** Descriptions and representations of trends and patterns over time convey a systematic approach to monitoring student performance. **For all assessments, include the sample size, date(s) the data was collected, and the desired performance level each student must demonstrate. Remember to aggregate data across students (i.e. do not list student names).**

After presenting the summary results for all assessments measuring a single student learning outcome, provide an analysis and synthesis of the data just presented. Clearly communicate conclusions about the degree program’s abilities to meet the student learning outcome. Support conclusions with the data.

Below is the format to follow when reporting results, one student learning outcome at a time.

**Student Learning Outcome 1.** Insert Student Learning Outcome 1 text here…

**Program-level Target:** Insert target text here…

***Insert Name of Assessment Method 1 Here***

**Student-level Target:** Insert target text here…

**Assessment Method 1 Results**

Insert Assessment Method 1 results here…

***Insert Name of Assessment Method 2 Here***

**Student-level Target:** Insert target text here…

**Assessment Method 2 Results**

Insert results for Assessment Method 2 here

***Insert Name of Assessment Method 3, etc.* …repeat as above**

**Synthesis of Student Learning Outcome 1 Results**

Insert analysis, synthesis, and conclusions text here. Highlight notable patterns and similarities/differences in reported results.

**Student Learning Outcome 2.** …repeat the same format and process for all student learning outcomes.

**Organize the results by the program’s student learning outcomes and not by assessment methods.**

**--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **REPORTING RESULTS EXAMPLE****Student Learning Outcome 1.** Students will demonstrate critical thinking and problem-solving skills when designing and implementing patient care.**Program-level Target:** Overall, 85% of students will demonstrate they meet or exceed desired performance levels on each of the assessments that follow.***Culminating Capstone Activity*****Student-level Target:** A student will need a score of Proficient (3) or Advanced (4) on the Capstone Activity Rubric to demonstrate they meet student learning outcome #1.**Culminating Capstone Activity Results**

| **Year** | **Level of Agreement** |
| --- | --- |
| **Beginning (1)** | **Developing (2)** | **Proficient (3)** | **Advanced (4)** |
| *2017* (n=26, fall of 2017) |  | 2(8) | 10(38) | 14(54) |
| *2018* (n=17, fall of 2018) |  | 1(6) | 6(35) | 10(59) |
| *2019* (n=13, fall of 2019) |  | 1(8) | 4(31) | 8(61) |
| *Note.* Reported as n (%). The rubric has been modified, but performance criteria are comparable over time (see attached rubrics). |

 |

**--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------**

**2. Decisions, Actions, and Use of Results**

This section of the status report is where you can discuss how your degree program used the reported assessment results for program improvement purposes. In doing so, describe the decisions that were made based on the assessment results presented and the actions that were taken. Comment on:

* what was done well,
* program improvements that are needed,
* improvement actions that are planned,
* improvement actions that have already been implemented, and
* how improvement actions will be assessed and have been assessed (making sure the program improvement loop is actually closed).

The discussion should shed light on how the program is proactively (and/or reactively) using assessment results to improve the program. The goal of this report is to make sure the degree program has an assessment process in place that can demonstrate that students are meeting student learning outcomes. Insights you report here, and feedback you receive, can be very helpful come program review time.

Insert discussion of decisions, actions, and use of results here…

**3. Appendices (All Assessments Instruments/Rubrics)**

Include copies of *instruments/rubrics for all assessment methods* that are included in the assessment plan and status report. While it is recognized that some assessment instruments may be unavailable for inclusion (e.g., state licensure exams, certification tests, etc.), every effort should be made to include the actual assessment instruments departments are working with. For performance-based assessments, include both the directions and the rubric, as your peers and colleagues can learn from what your program is doing and provide useful feedback to you. Assessment instruments will be securely stored and have limited distribution.

**Thank You** for your proactive and engaged support of quality assessment practices. If you have any questions concerning the assessment plan or the status report, please contact Accreditation, Assessment, and Evaluation (AAE) at assessmentservices@niu.edu or rsubramony1@niu.edu .

**SUBMIT** electronic versions (MS Word) of the assessment plan, status report, and attached tools/rubrics/other assessments to Accreditation, Assessment, and Evaluation (AAE) at assessmentservices@niu.edu.