

Quick Guide to Using Assessment to Inform Decision-making

This quick guide was prepared by the WSU Office of Assessment for Curricular Effectiveness (ACE) and is intended to help WSU programs and faculty consider good practices for using assessment to inform decision-making. ACE is also available to collaborate with WSU undergraduate degree programs to facilitate faculty discussions to use assessment in decision-making. Contact us at ace.office@wsu.edu for more information.

Introduction

Program assessment activities and data are intended to regularly inform faculty reflection and discussion about teaching, learning, and curricula, and ultimately inform decision-making to support student learning.

Decisions may include intentionally choosing to continue current effective practices, building on the program's existing strengths, and/or making changes to the program. Importantly, use of assessment can occur at any point in the process of collecting, analyzing, or discussing direct and/or indirect assessment.

Value of Using Assessment to Inform Decision-making

Program assessment activities and data can provide valuable information to faculty and program leadership to assist in making informed decisions. While all forms of program assessment can provide useful information for program improvement, using assessment aligned with specific learning outcomes is crucial to supporting quality undergraduate curricula and student achievement.

In this context, using assessment to inform decision-making can help programs:

- Take actions to provide students with the best possible educational experience
- Build on academic strengths
- Set priorities for improvement and plan interventions for feasible action
- Deliver a progressive and rigorous curriculum that produces intended student learning outcomes
- Act on matters of vital interest, including curriculum design, instructional practices, student development, and achievement gaps
- Meet evolving needs over time
- Provide evidence of program quality and support accountability to others (e.g., external accreditors)
- Promote a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement among program faculty and leadership through systematic processes for shared decision-making and action

Types of Decisions / Actions Which May Be Informed by Assessment Activities

Curriculum, Instruction, or Assignments

- Refining, reorganizing, or refocusing curricula
- Making curricular changes to improve student learning; making changes to courses or assignments
- Redesigning content or pedagogy of specific core assignments or courses; increasing alignment of assignments across courses

- Modifying program requirements or course scheduling
- Verifying that course sequencing and scheduling are appropriate
- Changing sequencing of courses in major curriculum; refining pre-requisites
- Guiding changes in scheduling rotations, course offerings, etc.; changes in scheduling or frequency of certain courses
- Adding or deleting courses
- Changing the number of students allowed in course sections so that student learning and effectiveness of teaching are maximized
- Developing or refining student learning outcomes; better aligning course, program, department, college, and institutional goals and outcomes

Faculty/TA Development

- Designing needed professional development program(s)
- Improving pedagogy and/or curricular cohesion; implementing new teaching techniques
- Supporting more effective use of TAs
- Helping faculty learn how to develop and assess learning outcomes

Program Assessment Processes

- Refining or changing measures, tools, methods, sampling, or timing; gathering additional or different information; disaggregating or aggregating data into meaningful groups
- Identifying bottlenecks and improvements to logistics of assessment (data collection and storage, analysis, and dissemination)
- Identifying benchmarks
- Including new stakeholders, or involving stakeholders in a new way (e.g., creating a student advisory board or employer advisory board; inviting participation from other WSU programs or colleges)

Other

- Changes to facilities, departmental policies, and procedures; refining design or use of lab facilities
- Adjusting faculty teaching loads and assigned release time
- Re-assigning faculty or requesting new lines
- Reorganizing or improving student support systems, such as advising, library services, and student development initiatives to improve the academic success of students in the program
- Reorganizing or refocusing resources to advance student learning; inform changes about how resources are used in department/school
- Identifying and promoting partnerships between departments or units to leverage efforts or share resources

How to Use Assessment to Inform Decision-making: Steps to Get Started

Step 1: Bring together faculty and leadership (as appropriate to the program context) for constructive dialogue about assessment data

Ideally, bring together individuals who can:

- Influence changes to relevant programs and courses
- Determine priorities for change
- Understand the technical and contextual considerations of the assessment data and program

Step 2: Review and interpret the assessment data, setting aside time for discussion

Questions to consider when interpreting program assessment data:

- What question is the program trying to answer with this assessment?
- Where are students doing well or excelling?
- Where are students struggling or encountering difficulties?
- Are there patterns or themes emerging?
- How does the program define success? (e.g., Are students achieving the learning outcomes of the curriculum/degree? Are the learning outcomes aligned with the skills and knowledge faculty value?)
- How/where are students given opportunities to practice and demonstrate particular learning outcomes? (When is competency expected and how do prior course learning experiences help ensure success? Is the curriculum intentionally structured to build and deliver these outcomes?)
- How do assignments elicit demonstrations of particular learning outcomes?
- What are the limitations of this assessment as a measure?
- Would further assessment help clarify these results?
- Are there other assessment findings that could be considered in conjunction with these results?
- What are the main takeaways from these results?

Step 3: Brainstorm possible actions the program could take in response to the assessment data

For areas of strength: (i.e., where students are meeting expectations on program learning outcomes or doing well/exceling)

- Consider ways to celebrate and publicize strengths:
 - Sharing results with faculty, staff, leadership, students, alumni, etc.
 - Sharing results for marketing or recruitment
 - Presenting at conferences or contributing to scholarly literature on teaching and learning
 - Organizing events where students and/or faculty showcase this work
- Consider where to continue current effective practices:
 - Identify the curricula, courses, assignments, activities, scaffolding, teaching strategies, etc. that produced high quality learning and should be maintained

- Consider ways to build on strengths:
 - Identify opportunities to challenge students further
 - Identify opportunities to replicate successful assignments, activities, scaffolding, teaching strategies, etc. in other areas

For areas of weakness: (i.e., where students are not meeting expectations on program learning outcomes or struggling/encountering difficulties)

- Consider interventions that could help students be more successful:
 - Changes to curricula, courses, assignments, activities, scaffolding, teaching strategies, etc. with reference to the curriculum map
 - Changes to student support systems, such as advising, tutoring, and other initiatives
 - Professional development for faculty, TAs, advisors, etc.

Note: See [Appendix A](#) for a list of resources to support WSU faculty in developing interventions that aim to advance student learning on program learning outcomes. See [Appendix B](#) for a list of academic support services available to WSU students that aim to advance student learning.

For areas where program assessment processes need improvement:

- Consider changes to measures, tools, sampling, etc.

Note: ACE offers a variety of [services to support program assessment](#) and is available to collaborate with undergraduate degree programs and faculty. Contact us at ace.office@wsu.edu for information.

Step 4: Prioritize actions and create an action plan

Once there is a list of potential actions, the following questions can help programs prioritize next steps:

- Which action(s) address what faculty care most about?
- Which action(s) are most feasible?
- Which action(s) will have the greatest impact?
- How can existing momentum be leveraged?
- Which action(s) can leverage institutional support/resources?
- Which action(s) generate the most motivation and enthusiasm among faculty members?
- Are there faculty/staff who are willing to take the lead on specific actions?

Once there is consensus on the action(s) to be taken, create an action plan that describes the goal, action(s) the program will take, who will take the action(s), and the timeline for implementation (see [Appendix C](#)).

Follow Up Steps

- Document key findings from the review and discussion of the assessment data; share appropriately
- Seek feedback on the action plan from key populations (students, faculty, staff, etc.), as appropriate
- Be sure to update the program's assessment plan, as needed, so that the program can monitor changes as they are implemented to determine whether they have the desired effect(s)

Appendix A. Resources for WSU Faculty Working to Develop Interventions that Aim to Advance Student Learning on Program Learning Outcomes

The following list contains a variety of resources available to support WSU faculty in developing interventions that aim to advance student learning on program learning outcomes (e.g., changes to curricula, courses, assignments, activities, scaffolding, teaching strategies, etc.). WSU also offers a variety of academic support services for students (e.g., tutoring, career services, etc.), see [Appendix B](#) for more information.

Note: This list was last updated on 10/20/25 based on information available on unit websites and may not be fully exhaustive. Please contact ace.office@wsu.edu with any feedback or suggestions.

Overview

(Additional details follow this section, click the links to navigate to more information about specific units.)

- [WSU's Office of Assessment for Curricular Effectiveness](#) → assignment design for program learning outcomes assessment
- [WSU's Learning Innovations Team](#) → course design, pedagogical tools, and technology integration (both on campus and online courses)
- [WSU's Writing Program](#) → writing assignment design, instruction, and assessment
- [WSU Libraries](#) → information literacy assignment design, instruction, and curriculum planning
- [WSU's Academic Success and Career Center](#) → integrating career content and career readiness into courses and curricula
- [WSU's Core to Career Program](#) → integrating career readiness into UCORE courses and assignments
- [WSU's Center for Civic Engagement](#) → integrating service learning into courses
- [WSU's Spark Team](#) → technology-supported approaches to teaching and learning
- [WSU's Transformational Change Initiative](#) → pedagogy, active-learning approaches, and behavioral interventions
- [WSU Teaching Academy](#) → advancing teaching and learning
- [WSU College of Veterinary Medicine Teaching Academy](#) → innovative curriculum, teaching, and learning (open to all WSU faculty)
- [WSU Grant Funding Opportunities](#) → funding to support teaching and learning projects
- [Other Resources](#) → NILOA assignment library, research repositories, academic journals, and more

WSU's Office of Assessment for Curricular Effectiveness

- The [Office of Assessment for Curricular Effectiveness \(ACE\)](#) works with colleges and programs to assess student learning towards the improvement of undergraduate academic programs.
 - ACE offers a variety of services to support undergraduate program-level assessment and is available to collaborate with undergraduate degree programs and faculty to [design effective assignments](#) for program learning outcomes assessment.

WSU's Learning Innovations Team

- Part of Academic Outreach and Innovation, the goal of the [Learning Innovations Team](#) is to provide support to faculty looking for ideas to overcome common teaching challenges, often through the application of academic technology. They work with all faculty, both on campus and online.
 - They offer a variety of [instructor support](#) options including:
 - [Appointments for teaching and learning support](#) for faculty interested in learning more about course design and pedagogical tools
 - [Scheduled workshop sessions](#) each semester on a variety of topics, such as innovative instruction and AI literacy
 - [Tailored group trainings](#) for WSU entities and affiliates including departments, cohorts, and committees on topics including pedagogical theories, active learning, and technology integration

WSU's Writing Program

- The [Writing Program](#) supports WSU students and faculty as they engage in the practices of learning, tutoring, and teaching writing. (See [Appendix B](#) for information about their services for students.)
 - They offer a variety of support options for faculty including:
 - The [WORD Faculty Fellows program](#) that supports faculty in developing more effective writing assignments, writing instruction, and writing assessment
 - Facilitated professional development conversations about teaching writing for faculty within a department or discipline through the [Brown Bag series](#)
 - A [writing assignment review service](#) that provides feedback on clarity, genre and audience concerns, and alignment between assignment and evaluation

WSU Libraries

- The [WSU Libraries](#) offer services that promote information literacy and aid students in identifying credible, accurate information. (See [Appendix B](#) for information about their services for students.)
 - They offer a variety of [resources and support for instructors](#) including:
 - [Instruction support](#), including course-specific workshops, assignment consultations, curriculum planning, and departmental sessions
 - [Library instruction sessions](#) and [online tutorials](#) to help students with completing research assignments or accessing materials for a specific class
 - [Departmental Liaison Librarians](#) that work with instructors and students to facilitate the learning and application of discipline-specific information literacy content
 - Designing [course guides](#) to help students with conducting research for a specific class
 - [Course reserves](#) and [open educational resources](#)

WSU's Academic Success and Career Center

- The [Academic Success and Career Center](#) provides tutoring and career services for students at WSU. They also offer [support for faculty](#) aimed at helping students become career ready, including integrating career content and career readiness into courses and curricula. (See [Appendix B](#) for information about their services for students.)

WSU's Core to Career Program

- [WSU's Core to Career program](#) supports Pullman and Vancouver faculty interested in intentionally incorporating career readiness into UCORE courses. *Note: The Core to Career program on the Pullman Campus is paused for AY 2025-26. Information concerning AY 2026-27 is expected to be available in April 2026.*

WSU's Center for Civic Engagement

- The [Center for Civic Engagement](#) facilitates student and faculty engagement with communities to promote shared knowledge, research, and service to society. They provide various levels of [support and resources to faculty and instructors](#) who wish to integrate service learning into their courses. (See [Appendix B](#) for information about their services for students.)

WSU's Spark Team

- Located on the WSU Pullman campus, [the Spark](#) is an academic facility equipped with collaborative learning spaces and instructional technology. The Spark Team offers various faculty events and open labs to spark creative, innovative, technology-supported approaches to teaching and learning.

WSU's Transformational Change Initiative

- The [Transformational Change Initiative \(TCI\)](#) is a student-centered implementation and research project established in 2016 to create an innovative framework for student success from matriculation through graduation and beyond.
 - The TCI offers a variety of faculty support opportunities including:
 - The [LIFT \(Learn. Inspire. Foster. Transform.\) Faculty Fellows program](#) supports educators committed to continuously improving the student experience, transforming courses, and developing pedagogy to boost student success through the application of active-learning approaches and brief behavioral interventions
 - The [Peer Observation in Support of Instructional Excellence \(POSIE\) program](#) where participants learn about the research and scholarship of peer mentoring and teaching observations, and to infuse that knowledge and experience into their own teaching
 - The [PIT \(Pedagogy, Innovation, and Technology\) Stops](#) faculty support series consisting of sessions held monthly as system-wide virtual events that provide opportunities to discuss, reflect, and share insights to solve emerging and immediate pedagogical challenges

WSU Teaching Academy

- The mission of the [WSU Teaching Academy](#) is to provide advocacy, expertise, and resources to WSU faculty, so they can involve students in transformative learning experiences and promote a university culture that values and rewards excellence and scholarship in teaching. The WSU Teaching Academy offers an annual [TEACHxWSU conference](#) and a [book club](#).

WSU College of Veterinary Medicine Teaching Academy

- The [WSU College of Veterinary Medicine \(CVM\) Teaching Academy](#) is an inclusive community of educators enhancing their teaching, career development, and educational scholarship. The academy fosters innovative curriculum, teaching, and learning. Their weekly events are open to all WSU faculty, staff, graduate, and professional students.

WSU Grant Funding Opportunities

- [Smith Teaching and Learning grants](#) are made from the Samuel H. and Patricia W. Smith Teaching and Learning Endowment, a fund established in 2000 to honor retired WSU President Sam Smith and his wife, Patricia. The Smith grants focus on one or more faculty who have ideas to improve class instruction; projects can stretch over the course of an academic year.

Other Resources

- [NILOA's Assignment Library](#): An online library of peer reviewed collegiate-level course assignments from a wide variety of academic disciplines, searchable by discipline, assignment characteristic (including Capstone), Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) Proficiency, and degree level
- General and disciplinary teaching and learning journals available through the [WSU Libraries](#), for example:
 - [Databases](#) (searchable collections of academic literature)
 - [ERIC: Education Resources Information Center \(EBSCO\)](#)
 - [Academic Search Complete \(EBSCO\)](#)
 - [eJournals](#) (search by journal title or browse by category)
- Professional associations and professional or specialized accreditors may be sources for discipline-specific resources

Appendix B. Resources for WSU Students that Aim to Advance Student Learning

The following list contains a variety of academic support services available to WSU students that aim to advance student learning (e.g., tutoring, career services, etc.). WSU also offers a variety of resources to support faculty in developing interventions that aim to advance student learning on program learning outcomes (e.g., changes to curricula, courses, assignments, activities, scaffolding, teaching strategies, etc.), see [Appendix A](#) for more information.

Note: This list was last updated on 10/20/25 based on information available on unit websites and may not be fully exhaustive. Please contact ace.office@wsu.edu with any feedback or suggestions.

Overview

(Additional details follow this section, click the links to navigate to more information about specific units.)

- [WSU's Academic Success and Career Center](#) → peer tutoring, eTutoring, and career services
- [WSU's Writing Program](#) → writing peer tutoring, asynchronous feedback, and WRITE courses
- [WSU's Math Learning Center](#) → math peer tutoring
- [WSU's Chemistry Learning Center](#) → chemistry peer tutoring
- [WSU Libraries](#) → information literacy drop-in support, live chat, and appointments with librarians
- [UNIV Courses](#) → course offerings designed to help students build skills to succeed at college
- [WSU's Office of Undergraduate Research](#) → peer mentoring and UNIV research course
- [WSU's Center for Civic Engagement](#) → service learning and community engagement
- [WSU Spokane Campus Student Support Services](#) → writing support, peer tutoring, learning assistance, and library services
- [WSU Tri-Cities Campus Student Support Services](#) → writing support, peer tutoring, career services, library services, and undergraduate research support
- [WSU Vancouver Campus Student Support Services](#) → writing support, math and science tutoring, career services, and library services
- [WSU Everett Campus Student Support Services](#) → peer tutoring, career services, and library services
- [WSU Global Campus Student Support Services](#) → eTutoring, career services, and library services
- [Other Resources](#) → additional student centers and organizations

WSU's Academic Success and Career Center

- The [Academic Success and Career Center](#) provides tutoring and career services at WSU. (See [Appendix A](#) for information about their services for faculty.)
 - They offer a variety of [resources and support for students](#) including:
 - [Peer-facilitated tutoring](#) and 24/7 online [eTutoring](#)
 - [Drop-in meetings for academic and career advising](#) (Pullman Campus)
 - [Career coaching services](#) and help [finding internships](#)

WSU's Writing Program

- The [Writing Program](#) supports WSU students and faculty as they engage in the practices of learning, tutoring, and teaching writing. (See [Appendix A](#) for information about their services for faculty.)
 - They offer a variety of support options for students including:
 - Individualized support to students through the [Undergraduate Writing Center](#), including walk-in consultations with trained peer writing consultants (Pullman Campus) and an asynchronous written feedback service (all campuses)
 - Writing instruction and support through [WRITE Courses](#), 1-credit courses designed for WSU students to take concurrently with a writing-intensive course (WRITE 302, for example, is designed to provide support for students enrolled in Writing-in-the-Major [M] courses or other upper division writing-intensive courses)

WSU's Math Learning Center

- The [Math Learning Center](#) offers in-person and online drop-in peer tutoring to support students needing help with math in STEM or UCORE courses.

WSU's Chemistry Learning Center

- Part of the Department of Chemistry, the [Chemistry Learning Center](#) offers in-person drop-in peer tutoring on the Pullman Campus to support any WSU student needing help with general chemistry and organic chemistry courses.

WSU Libraries

- The [WSU Libraries](#) offer services that promote information literacy and aid students in identifying credible, accurate information. (See [Appendix A](#) for information about their services for faculty.)
 - They offer a variety of [resources and support for students](#) including:
 - [24/7 Live Chat](#) offering assistance from WSU librarians as well as librarians from other academic libraries
 - [Individual appointments](#) with a librarian (in person or online) available to all students
 - [Drop-in support](#) on the Pullman Campus for assistance locating books or articles, choosing keywords, or narrowing a research topic
 - Support for [Global Campus students](#) and [Everett Campus students](#)

UNIV Courses

- The Division of Academic Engagement and Student Achievement (DAESA) oversees [UNIV Courses](#), which include one-, two-, three-, and four-credit elective course offerings designed to help students from all majors build skills necessary to succeed at college and in life. UNIV courses are organized into four broad categories, including academic support and transition, career preparation and exploration, leadership and global citizenship development, and research and creative discovery.

WSU's Office of Undergraduate Research

- [WSU's Office of Undergraduate Research](#) helps students with getting started in undergraduate research. They offer [peer mentoring](#), an [UNIV 199: Introduction to Directed Research](#) course, a [STEM Research Opportunities Fair](#), and an annual [Showcase for Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities](#).

WSU's Center for Civic Engagement

- The [Center for Civic Engagement](#) facilitates student and faculty engagement with communities to promote shared knowledge, research, and service to society. They provide several types of [community engagement options for students](#). (See [Appendix A](#) for information about their services for faculty.)

WSU Spokane Campus Student Support Services

- The [Interprofessional Learning Commons](#) assists WSU Spokane and Yakima students with tutoring, writing, and learning support.
 - They offer a variety of support options for students including:
 - Writing support appointments
 - Peer tutoring for WSU Health Sciences majors and programs
 - Learning strategies consultations to discuss test prep, time management, content retention, and student success plans
- The [WSU Spokane Health Sciences Library](#) supports the WSU health sciences programs. They offer one-on-one appointments with librarians in-person or via Zoom.

WSU Tri-Cities Campus Student Support Services

- [WSU Tri-Cities](#) offers resources to help students succeed inside and outside the classroom.
 - They offer a variety of support options for WSU Tri-Cities students including:
 - The [WSU Tri-Cities Writing Center](#) is a drop-in peer tutoring service and academic resource available to all students, of any discipline, during any phase of the writing process
 - The [Bechtel Tutoring Center](#) provides a space for students to meet with peer tutors, get feedback on assignments, schedule group study sessions, and work with faculty outside the classroom
 - [Max E. Benitz Memorial Library](#)
 - [Student career services](#)
 - [Undergraduate research opportunities](#)

WSU Vancouver Campus Student Support Services

- [WSU Vancouver](#) offers resources to help students succeed inside and outside the classroom.
 - They offer a variety of support options for WSU Vancouver students including:
 - The [WSU Vancouver Writing Center](#) offers drop-in face-to-face peer tutoring, Zoom tutorials by appointment, and an asynchronous written feedback service
 - The [Math and Science Skills Center](#) provides tutoring one-on-one or in small group settings in math, statistics, chemistry, organic chemistry, biochemistry, genetics and physics
 - The [Vancouver Campus Library](#) offers online chat, [appointments with librarians](#) (in person and online), and drop-in support options
 - The [Career Action Center](#) helps students prepare for life after graduation

WSU Everett Campus Student Support Services

- The [Student Success Center at WSU Everett](#) provides academic support, career guidance, and resources to help students thrive in college and beyond.
 - They offer a variety of support options for students including:
 - Career services
 - Drop-in [peer tutoring](#)
- The [WSU Libraries provide support for Everett Campus students](#)

WSU Global Campus Student Support Services

- The [WSU Global Campus Student Support Team](#) helps WSU Global students every step of the way on their journey to academic success.
 - They offer a variety of support options for WSU Global students including:
 - [eTutoring support](#), including the eWriting Lab, live tutoring via eChat, and asynchronous eQuestions
 - [Career support services](#)
- The [WSU Libraries provide support for Global Campus students](#)

Other Resources

- WSU's [Health Professions Student Center](#) provides support and services to Pullman and Global students who are interested in a career as a healthcare professional.
- WSU has a variety of [student centers and organizations under Student Affairs](#) that offer resources and support for all students, including the First Gen Student Center, Multicultural Student Center, Access Center, etc. Many of these centers and organizations offer tutoring, mentoring, career services, etc.

Appendix C. Action Plan Template

Goal/Objective

(Example: Improve student performance on our Scientific Writing SLO by enhancing students' abilities to write about science for a public audience.)

Relevant Findings from Assessment Data

(Example: Rubric scores from the AY24-25 capstone assessment revealed that while students were able to successfully write for a science audience, they struggled with writing for the public. Additionally, student feedback from the exit survey indicated that students are less confident in their ability to write clearly, as compared to other skill areas.)

Action Steps

(Example: Assemble a faculty working group to: 1) scaffold the capstone press release assignment to implement additional opportunities for practice and feedback, and 2) develop a structured peer-review process guided by clear rubrics.)

Leadership and Collaborators

(Example: A faculty working group chaired by the undergraduate studies director and comprised of the capstone course instructors from each campus)

Timeline for Actions

Short-term actions:

Mid-term actions:

Long-term actions:

Metrics for Success / Desired Outcomes

(Example: Increase the percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations on the audience rubric criteria for the Scientific Writing SLO in the capstone course from 70% to 80% within two years.)

Follow-Up and Evaluation

(Example: Continue the capstone assessment to collect rubric scores for the Scientific Writing SLO over the next two AYs. Review the assessment data annually with the faculty working group and undergraduate studies committee. Share progress at faculty meetings.)