

Quick Guide to Program Assessment Plans

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 developing and updating program assessment plans. ACE is also available to collaborate with WSU undergraduate degree programs to develop or update their program assessment plans, and assist with specific steps or projects. Contact us at ace.office@wsu.edu for more information.

Introduction

An assessment plan articulates a program's process and timeline for conducting program assessment activities, including collecting, analyzing, and using program assessment data. A detailed, comprehensive plan can be both a document to guide activities and a way to clarify roles for faculty, students, and program leadership. Much like a research plan, an assessment plan should include a realistic timeline of activities, as well as enough flexibility to allow a program to address any pressing questions or issues that might arise.

Value of Program Assessment Plans

Program assessment plans support efficient, effective, and sustainable assessment efforts as they can:

- Provide a reasonable scope, scale, and timeline for assessment efforts
- Allow for coordination and delegation of assessment efforts for individuals, committees, and other units within departments/schools and colleges, and across multiple campuses
- Contribute to regular documentation practices
- Support succession planning and continuity through expected and unexpected transitions

How to Develop or Update a Program Assessment Plan

Part 1: Take stock of recent program-level assessment and infrastructure

While planning and managing program-level assessment of student learning might seem a daunting task, it need not be. Among your first steps:

- **If you're new to the faculty assessment coordinator role, meet with the previous assessment coordinator**, if possible, so they can orient you to what was done recently and why, as well as successes, concerns, logistics, and where assessment activities ended.
- **If you're new to WSU or program assessment, review basic assessment expectations.** The ACE website offers resources and information [about program assessment at WSU](#), with links to WSU policies.
- **Take stock of what your program has done recently.** Review your program's assessment archive, including recent annual degree program assessment reports submitted to ACE/WSU, past assessment plans, and other assessment materials (e.g., rubrics, measures/tools, data, results, findings), as available. Review information about past activities to get a sense of the program's past approach to assessment, including its purposes and priorities, and uses of data. What assessment was done – or attempted – recently? Are the key elements of assessment up to date? How does assessment connect to curricular decision-making?
- **Meet with your chair/director to clarify and confirm [roles and responsibilities](#) for assessment and for its contribution to curricular decision-making.** This should include sufficient support and infrastructure (committee(s), administrative support in department, etc.), as program assessment is not the task of one person. Find out if there are any questions about the curriculum or student learning the chair/director wants assessment to focus on for the coming year.

Part 2: Identify any assessment challenges or opportunities your program faces

In addition to reviewing what your program did in recent years, it is also helpful to consider any assessment challenges and/or opportunities your program faces:

- **Assessment activities should provide useful results in a sustainable way.** Did you inherit a smooth operation or one that might improve with modifications or a change in direction? Does your program need to rethink its approach? Is there a pilot initiative that needs to scale up?
- **Identify information that program faculty – or your Undergraduate Studies committee – would like to know about student learning.** Are there any results from previous activities that need to be addressed – has the program used evidence from prior assessments to inform decision-making? What questions are arising about student performance or the curriculum?
- **Consider any recent curricular changes or other new opportunities for assessment.** Has your program added a culminating or capstone course for senior majors, for example?

Part 3: Draft or review and update your program's assessment plan

Creating a timeline, or calendar, is the next step in drafting or updating an assessment plan. ACE's website provides a range of [examples from WSU programs](#), as well as an [assessment plan template](#).

- **Identify program assessment activities.** The plan should indicate what is being measured (e.g., which program-level student learning outcomes), how it is being measured (direct and indirect measures), what student work (such as capstone projects, papers, presentations) will be assessed, and when the student work or data will be collected (e.g., end of term). The plan should indicate how faculty will participate, including when faculty or a committee (such as undergraduate studies committee) will meet to discuss the data. Some considerations:
 - Is the program piloting a new assessment measure? In the case of a new measure, it typically takes several semesters to pilot, refine, and scale up.
 - Do you have previously collected data that need to be analyzed and shared w/faculty for discussion? Are you making use of existing measures and data?
 - Does your program rubric need revision? Have you scheduled time in for norming faculty on the use of the rubric, practicing assessment on sample work?
 - Does your assessment include your majors on all campuses where the degree is offered (including Global or online)? Have you considered strategies for sampling, if needed?
 - Is the program's curriculum map current, or does it need an update to reflect changes in core courses or learning outcomes or new curricula?
- **Identify participating faculty and others for specific activities.** Identify the participants and pencil in individuals and dates for activities in your assessment plan. It's advisable to clarify which faculty – or committee – will participate, and to have chair/director leadership backing these expectations.
- **Contact ACE.** ACE's assessment specialists are a resource to discuss what your program has done with assessment and how to move forward. Contact us at ace.office@wsu.edu for more information. See ACE's website for resources and information about [our services](#) for undergraduate academic programs.

Follow Up Steps

- Develop an internal process for sharing the program assessment plan with the chair and faculty.
- Implement the assessment plan. Some assessment coordinators may find it helpful to enter program assessment activities into their Outlook or other calendar and set reminders.
- Revisit and update the assessment plan on a reoccurring basis, as appropriate to the program.