SLOAs: Student Learning Outcomes Assessments

What are they?

Assessment is the ongoing process of:
  • Establishing clear, measurable expected outcome of student learning.
  • Ensuring that students have sufficient opportunities to achieve those outcomes.
  • Systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well student learning matches out expectations.
  • Using the resulting information to understand and improve student learning.¹

At UAF, programs are required to:
  1. Have a current assessment plan on file with the Provost (hint: 1997 is probably not “current”!)
  2. Conduct assessment every year according to your plan.
  3. Submit a summary of your assessment findings to the Provost’s Office every two years (currently even-numbered years, so next due in 2016 if you are up to date with your summaries).

What purpose do they serve?

The plan: Student Learning Outcomes plans are designed to ask the question “What knowledge, skills, attitudes, or competencies do we expect our student to have acquired when they finish our program?” Asking this question should inspire your program to give some serious thought to the purpose, objectives, and expectations of your degree.

The assessment: Asking the question serves no purpose if you don’t try to answer it. Assessment of the outcomes that your program has designated as vital to your students’ education allows you to see if you are accomplishing what you have set out to do, where you are doing well, and where there is need of improvement.

The summary: Talking about your assessment results as a program should lead you to make appropriate curricular changes to better meet your goals, or to focus on areas where you are most (or least) successful.

Why do them?

  • *Institutional Accreditation: Standard 4.A.3:* The institution documents, through an effective, regular, and comprehensive system of assessment of student achievement, that students who complete its educational courses, programs, and degrees, wherever offered
and however delivered, achieve identified course, program, and degree learning outcomes. Faculty with teaching responsibilities are responsible for evaluating student achievement of clearly identified learning outcomes.

- They are a required part of Program Review.
- They are good for your program!

What happens to them?

- The most current plan and submitted summaries are posted on the Provost’s website (and for this reason should include no identifying student information per FERPA regulations).
- They are reviewed by the ALO and Accreditation & Assessment Coordinator.
- They are included as part of your program review. In program review, the committees will consider the following questions:

  ✓ Is there a program-specific SLOA plan?
  ✓ Are there multiple measures of student outcomes?
  ✓ Is there at least one direct measure of student outcomes?
  ✓ Is assessment information collected regularly and submitted on schedule?
  ✓ Are measures described in the plan addressed in the summary?
  ✓ Has the assessment process resulted in critical reflection and curricular improvement?
  ✓ Is the program making significant progress toward meeting the outcomes that it has set for itself?

What does a good one look like?

There are examples available on the Provost’s website and I am happy to work with any program that would like to improve their plans. A few basic tips:

- Your plan must include direct evidence of student learning. Direct evidence includes things like assessment of portfolios or capstone projects based on a rubric, national exam results, and student writing assessed on a rubric. Guidance on creating assessment rubrics is available at http://www.aacu.org/value-rubrics.
- You may also include indirect evidence of student learning. Indirect evidence comprises things like satisfaction surveys and questionnaires, graduation rates, and post-graduation employment.
- Grades in a course can be, but are usually not, direct evidence of student learning. For example, if an outcome is “Students will be able to communicate orally in Spanish at a near-native level,” their grade in a course probably includes many other components:
written work, participation, homework completion. A valid measure could be an oral presentation embedded in the course that is graded on a rubric.

- While it is a good idea to have one person who is responsible for making sure assessment happens, it should be a collective responsibility.
- Your summaries need to address the outcomes you have described in your plans. For example, if your outcome is “students will be able to perform x task,” but your summary talks about adding another section of a course due to high demand, there is a mismatch.
- Your plan need not be complicated. It should include information that you want to gather and will be able to use as a program.

Where can I find out more?

- Templates, examples, and links are available at http://www.uaf.edu/provost/assessment-review/assessment/
- Contact Alex Fitts at a.fitts@alaska.edu or 474-6253, or Michelle Strickland at m.strickland@alaska.edu or 474-2764.
- Check out the National Institute for Outcomes Assessment at http://www.learningoutcomeassessment.org/TFComponentSLOS.htm

---

Creating an Assessment Plan

This flowchart is designed to help you determine where to begin your assessment plan, and which steps to take from that point. Reading from right to left, your planning should begin at your first 'no' response. Use the steps following that point in the flowchart to guide your planning for completing the assessment cycle. Be sure to keep a record of what you have already accomplished, and document what you plan to do next.

- Select one or two outcomes to focus your assessment plan on.
- Analyze your data: summarize the collected data in a meaningful way.
- Prepare a user friendly report to share what you've learned with the members of your program.
- Plan to reassess the outcomes at a later time to determine if the outcomes are still satisfactorily achieved.

- Do you have evidence of student learning (e.g., scored rubrics, exam item or section scores, or survey responses)?
  - Yes
    - Collect your data: gather your evidence and apply your method (e.g., score your items, apply your rubric)
  - No
    - Revise the outcomes.
    - A curriculum map or pedagogical inventory can help you determine practices in your program that help students to achieve the outcomes.

- Do you have something that could be utilized as evidence (e.g., portfolios, recorded performances, theses)?
  - No
    - Revise the outcomes.
  - Yes
    - Determine what method you will use to know from the evidence if students are accomplishing the learning outcome (e.g., components of a rubric or exam items that address the learning outcomes).

- Has your program developed learning outcomes?
  - Yes
    - Develop learning outcomes.
  - No
    - Select the evidence of student learning you will use (e.g., an existing exam, survey, paper, performance or presentation).