



**United States University**

**Learning Outcomes Assessment**

**Principles and Process**

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## Introduction

United States University (USU) is committed to academic quality and student success. To this end, it has established a system of assessment of learning outcomes at the program level. All program learning outcomes will be reviewed within a five-year cycle, according to the learning outcomes assessment schedule shown in Appendix A1. In addition, a Program Review process has been developed in which the assessment data from those years constitutes a significant element of that evaluation (see Appendix A2 for the Program Review Schedule and the *Program Review Manual* for further detail).

The faculty of USU hold primary responsibility for assessing program learning outcomes, with assistance from academic administration. At the conclusion of each yearly cycle of learning outcomes assessment, the process will be reviewed by the Assessment Task Force and changes made as appropriate to improve the quality and implementation of the learning outcome assessment process.

## Purpose and Principles of Learning Outcomes Assessment: Improving and Proving the Quality and Integrity of the Program

Learning Outcomes Assessment is a cyclical process for evaluating student achievement of learning outcomes and continuously enhancing and reporting on the quality of the programs for which they are the guiding focus. As such, learning outcomes assessment forms the foundation of the integrity of the programs and the institution: we know what we want our students to learn, we know how well they are learning it, we collect and analyze evidence for how well they are learning, and we make improvements to programs based upon that evidence and analysis.

The assessment of student learning at USU is a faculty-owned process, conducted by individual program lead faculty working as an institutional team, the Assessment Task Force, with coordination, training, and other support from members of the Provost's office. While each program assessment lead is responsible for conducting the assessment of his or her own program learning outcomes, the preparation and planning stages of the yearly process are accomplished together as the Task Force for several reasons: 1) to maintain and enrich institutional definitions, outcomes, and alignments, 2) to create and maintain an assessment-focused community of learning and practice at USU, 3) to share cross-disciplinary practices (and inspiration and creativity), 4) and to provide structural and social support across the year through the Task Force's regularly-scheduled meetings.

The annual results of the assessment of learning outcomes are used to inform follow-up planning and budgeting processes at the program and institutional levels as part of the institution's overall quality assurance system. USU's learning outcomes are assessed annually in a five-year cycle, meaning that each program learning outcome is reviewed at least once every five years. These assessment results are then used as part of the more comprehensive program

review process which also occurs on a regular five-year cycle, meaning that each program is reviewed every five years.

The foundational principle of both the learning outcome assessment and program review processes is to provide faculty with the opportunity, time, and resources for thoughtful reflection and conversation about the quality and integrity of their programs with the goal of continual improvement.

## USU Learning Outcomes Assessment Policy and Process

The primary utility of learning outcomes assessment is to provide a structure to foster continual program improvement based upon direct and indirect evaluation of student learning as it relates to Program Learning Outcomes.

Learning outcomes assessment is an annual process at USU, with each Program Learning Outcome assessed at least once within a five-year cycle (see Appendix A1). The timeline of the yearly assessment activity is designed to provide information on program strengths and weakness as related to students' achievement of learning outcomes as well as to plan and make recommendations for quality improvement in sufficient time for consideration in budget development<sup>1</sup>. The general timeline for yearly learning outcomes assessment is:

- Fall 1<sup>2</sup>: Preparation
  - Assessment Task Force reviews the Institutional Learning Outcome and Institutional Definition for each of the current year's core competencies as scheduled<sup>3</sup>;
  - Assessment Task Force creates/reviews institutional-level rubric(s) for the year's assessment focus (including evaluative dimensions/criteria, quality definitions for levels of achievement);
  - Program assessment leads customize the institutional-level rubric for programmatic assessment (resulting in individual program-level rubrics), maintaining dimensions and general sense of quality definitions but revising language to be more reflective of the program discipline.
- Fall 2: Planning
  - Assessment Task Force discusses approaches to assessment assignments (if needed) and approaches for direct evidence of student learning;

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<sup>1</sup> As USU operates on a calendar year budget, budget development occurs in fall of the preceding year.

<sup>2</sup> USU's academic calendar is comprised of 3 semesters: Fall, Spring, and Summer. Each semester is composed of 2 consecutive sessions of 8 weeks: Fall 1, Fall2, etc.

<sup>3</sup> As most Learning Outcomes at USU are aligned with and categorizable by core competency, the assessment team uses the core competency designations as shorthand for the year's focus. Each year the team will concentrate on either one or two core competencies, or more precisely, the ILOs and PLOs associated with them. See Appendix A1 for the 5-Year Learning Outcome Assessment Schedule.

- Assessment Task Force discusses opportunities (institutional and programmatic) for indirect evidence of student learning;
- Program assessment leads create program assessment plans: courses and assignments from the coming terms (referencing their program's curriculum map) for direct evidence and any institutional or programmatic source of indirect evidence.
- Spring 1 and 2: Implementation and Collection
  - Any newly-created assignments for assessment added to designated courses;
  - Courses are run;
  - Assessment Coordinator retrieves assessment evidence from LMS or from program assessment lead (if evidence collected face-to-face).
- Summer 1: Scoring
  - Assessment Coordinator prepares student evidence for scoring (removing names, numbering samples, preparing rubrics, scoring sheets, and score tracking documents for scoring day(s));
  - Program assessment leads nominate program faculty for scoring; volunteers may also be requested from faculty community;
  - Assessment Coordinator holds assessment scoring training (if needed) for scoring faculty;
  - Assessment Coordinator (or designee) schedules and holds scoring day: rubric norming and scoring (if a one-meeting process), rubric norming and score-collection instructions (if a multi-day process);
  - Assessment Coordinator collects scores and prepares data for annual program assessment reports.
- Summer 2: Analysis, Improvement Planning, and Reporting
  - Assessment Coordinator distributes preliminary Annual Program Assessment Reports with current year's scoring data and improvement proposals from previous years;
  - Program leads analyze scoring data and plan improvements with program faculty;
  - Program leads complete Annual Program Assessment Reports with current year analysis, discussion notes, and improvement proposals (including any budgetary requests) as well as status updates on previous years' improvement proposals;
  - Program leads submit completed Annual Program Assessment Reports to Assessment Coordinator and Provost.
- Fall Year 2: Institutional Response, Reporting, Planning, and Implementation

- Provost responds to program leads re: Annual Program Assessment Reports and includes any agreed-upon budgetary requests in the academic budget for the upcoming year; non-budgetary improvement tasks are assigned where appropriate;
- Assessment Coordinator compiles data from the Annual Program Assessment Reports (scoring data, analyses, improvement proposals) into the Preliminary Annual Institutional Assessment Report which is then distributed to faculty, staff, and administration prior to the annual Assessment Summit;
- Assessment Coordinator holds annual Assessment Summit where results are discussed with a focus on identifying institutional-level opportunities for improvement and discussing potential improvement interventions; as a group, the attendees at the Assessment Summit (all faculty, staff, and administration are invited) formally request any institutional improvement proposals be submitted to the Provost for budgetary consideration;
- Assessment Coordinator amends Preliminary Annual Institutional Assessment Report to include results of the Assessment Summit and distributes Final Annual Institutional Assessment Report to faculty, staff, and administration; the Final Annual Institutional Assessment Report is also posted on the USU website;
- Provost includes any budgetary requests resulting from the Assessment Summit that can be accommodated in the academic budget for the upcoming year; non-budgetary improvement tasks are assigned where appropriate.

This suggested timeline has been designed to permit a reasonable distribution of assessment activities for the program leads and faculty across one academic year with follow-up institutional-level responses (including budgeting and institutional planning) to occur in the fall semester of the following academic year (as program leads and faculty are commencing the next round assessment activity). Resource recommendations must be made available in the fall, to permit consideration in the following year's budget development.

## Learning Outcomes Assessment for Specialized Accreditation Reviews

Although discipline accreditation or certification reports may substitute for portions of the Program Review for the institution, all programs at USU will engage in the learning outcomes assessment process by providing an Assessment Task Force faculty member for each program, conducting the assessment of the designated PLOs (or their equivalents), and submitting the Annual Program Assessment Reports.

Programs whose disciplinary accreditation requires data reporting needs that are not addressed by the USU learning outcomes assessment process, will use a modified Annual Program Assessment Report template, when possible, that will address those needs in addition to those of the institution.

## Appendix A1: USU Student Learning Outcomes Five-Year Cycle of Review

Learning Outcomes				Year of Review					Comments
Core Competency	USU Institutional Learning Outcome (ILO)	Teaching Credential (TPE)*	Last Review	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	
Written Communication (WSCUC Undergraduate Core Competency)	1. Communicate clearly and effectively through writing, speaking, and using technology	TPE 3	2015-16					x	
Oral Communication (WSCUC Undergraduate Core Competency)	1. Communicate clearly and effectively through writing, speaking, and using technology		2015-16						x
Quantitative Reasoning (WSCUC Undergraduate Core Competency)	2. Apply quantitative reasoning to address complex challenges		2014-15				x		
Critical Thinking (WSCUC Undergraduate Core Competency)	3. Apply critical thinking in research and problem-solving processes	TPE 4 & 5	2013-14			x			
Information Literacy (WSCUC Undergraduate Core Competency)	4. Effectively gather, analyze, and integrate information from a variety of sources		2014-15				x		
Ethical Reasoning	5. Demonstrate ethical reasoning and actions to provide leadership as a socially responsible citizen	TPE 6	N/A		x				
Diversity	6. Work effectively across race, ethnicity, culture, religion, gender and sexual orientation	TPE 2	N/A	x					
Collaboration	7. Work collaboratively as members and leaders of diverse groups		N/A	x					
Mastery of Knowledge	8. Exhibit mastery of knowledge and skills within a discipline	TPE 1	N/A		x				moved from 2015-16

\* Teaching Credential TPE Assessment to begin 2017-18 with 2016-17 for TPE remapping and re-alignment.

## Appendix A2: USU Program Review Five-Year Cycle

Academic Degree Programs			Year of Program Review					Accreditation Status			Comments		
College	Program Name	Most Recent Review	Year Program Started	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	Yes	In Progress		No	Next Visit Date
COBM	Bachelor of Arts in Management (BAM)	N/A	2011	x						x		TBD	IACBE
COBM	Master of Business Administration (MBA)	N/A	2011		x					x		TBD	IACBE
COE	Master of Arts in Education (MAED)	N/A	2011		x						x		Moved from 2015-16 due to CCTC report & visits
COHS	Bachelor of Science in Health Sciences (BSHS)	2014-15	2011				x				x		
COHS	Master of Science in Health Science (MSHS)	N/A	2011	x							x		
CON	Bachelor of Science in Nursing (RN to BSN, ABSN)	2015-16	2011					x	x			2017 CCNE	ABSN on hiatus
CON	Master of Science in Nursing, Family Nurse Practitioner (MSN-FNP)	2014-15	2009				x		x			2017 CCNE	
CON	Master of Science in Nursing (Specializations)	2014-15	2011				x		x			2017 CCNE	
COHS	General Education (non-degree program)	2010-11	N/A			x					x		
COE	Teaching Credential (non-degree program)	2015-16	2003					x	x				CCTC



## Appendix A3: List of Responsible Parties

Responsible Parties	Role
<p>Program Assessment Lead  <i>Faculty members appointed by provost, one per program: BAM, BSHS, GE, Teaching Credential, MAED, MBA, MSHS, MSN-FNP.</i></p>	<p>Participates in preparing for assessment year with other faculty on Assessment Task Force; plans assessment of his or her PLOs; collects face-to-face student samples (if needed); participates in norming of rubrics and scoring of student samples; analyzes and discusses results with program faculty and creates improvement proposals; completes Annual Program Assessment Reports and submits to Assessment Coordinator and Provost; follows up with Provost on any budgetary needs regarding proposals; attends and participates in Assessment Summit.</p>
<p>Assessment Task Force  <i>Members are Program Assessment Leads; Headed by Assessment Coordinator</i></p>	<p>Learning outcomes assessment preparation and planning body; attend regularly-scheduled meetings and trainings; prepare institutional-level rubrics, review institutional-level core competency definitions and associated ILOs.</p>
<p>Assessment Coordinator</p>	<p>Provides training, coordination of activities, sample collection and scoring support; supplies program leads with scoring data in preliminary annual program assessment report templates; creates annual institutional assessment report and holds annual summit; maintains reports and other documents.</p>
<p>Institutional Research</p>	<p>Provides programs with student data that supports assessment of student learning (student survey data, etc.)</p>
<p>Provost</p>	<p>Selects program assessment leads. Receives Annual Program Assessment Reports and provides input regarding improvement proposals, particularly as regards budgetary requests. Attends and participates in Annual Assessment Summit, responds to institution-level improvement proposals, particularly as regards budgetary requests. Approves Final Institutional Assessment Report for publishing on the USU website. Includes assessment requests in the next year's academic budget.</p>

## Appendix A4: List of Documents/Forms

(Available at: <https://sites.google.com/a/usuniversity.edu/office-of-the-provost/learning-outcomes-assessment-1>)

Program Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan template  
Annual Program Assessment Report template  
Current Institution-Level Assessment Rubrics  
WSCUC Program Learning Outcomes Quality Rubric  
Past Annual Institutional Assessment Reports