Assessment FAQs

Q: Why do we need to do assessment?

Assessment involves providing evidence of the effectiveness of courses, curriculum, and services offered. While reporting this evidence may fulfill programmatic accreditation requirements for academic areas, it is useful for determining whether academic, service, and support areas are achieving the identified outcomes.

Understanding what assessment is, how to do it, and providing the tools to do it, will empower you to improve student success efforts and those of your department. Assessment allows us to gather data surrounding the work being done at our institution.

Q: I'm new to assessment. What do I need to know about the reporting process?

Every academic program and non-academic department on campus is required to complete UTC's Outcomes Assessment process. All programs and departments are covered by the institution's SACSCOC accreditation, and some academic programs also have programmatic accreditation from an external accrediting body. SACSCOC requires, as part of the Reaffirmation Compliance Certification and Fifth-Year Interim Reports, that UTC provide evidence of the progress each program and department has made over time in improving student learning, support, and assessment practices. Once those reports are completed, they are reviewed by the Office of Accreditation and Assessment and feedback is provided.

Q: What should be included in the yearly reports, and how does the reporting process work?

UTC uses the Planning software developed by Anthology as a platform for programs and departments to enter their information into one of three templates: Student Learning Outcome, Service Outcome, or Program Outcome. The following templates should have the following information:

Student Learning Outcome: Title, Student learning outcome description, Reporting cycle outcome last assessed (when was the last time information was entered on this outcome), Means of Assessment (what is used to assess the outcome), Relation of means of assessment to the outcome (description of how the selected means of assessment(s) relates to the student learning outcome), Criteria for Success (the beginning status, or number, to which you will compare the results), Assessment Data (Results including strengths and weaknesses seen), Analysis and Interpretation of the Results (what trends or gaps are seen), Follow Up Actions Planned (what action will be taken in upcoming years based on the results), and Continuous Improvement (description of how changes that were implement since the last assessment of the outcome impacted the results).

Service Outcome: Title, Department Goal (broad overall statement), Outcomes expected (this is actually what is being measured), Reporting cycle outcome last assessed (when was the last time

information was entered on this outcome), Means of Assessment (what is used to assess the outcome), Relation of means of assessment to the outcome (description of how the selected means of assessment(s) relates to the service outcome), Criteria for Success (the beginning status, or number, to which you will compare the results), Assessment Data (Results), Analysis and Interpretation of the Results (what trends or gaps are seen), Follow Up Actions Planned (what action will be taken in upcoming years based on the results), and Continuous Improvement (description of how changes that were implement since the last assessment of the outcome impacted the results).

Program Outcome: Title, Program outcome description, Reporting cycle outcome last assessed (when was the last time information was entered on this outcome), Means of Assessment (what is used to assess the outcome), Relation of means of assessment to the outcome (description of how the selected means of assessment(s) relates to the program outcome), Criteria for Success (the beginning status, or number, to which you will compare the results), Assessment Data (Results), Analysis and Interpretation of the Results (what trends or gaps are seen), Follow Up Actions Planned (what action will be taken in upcoming years based on the results), and Continuous Improvement (description of how changes that were implement since the last assessment of the outcome impacted the results).
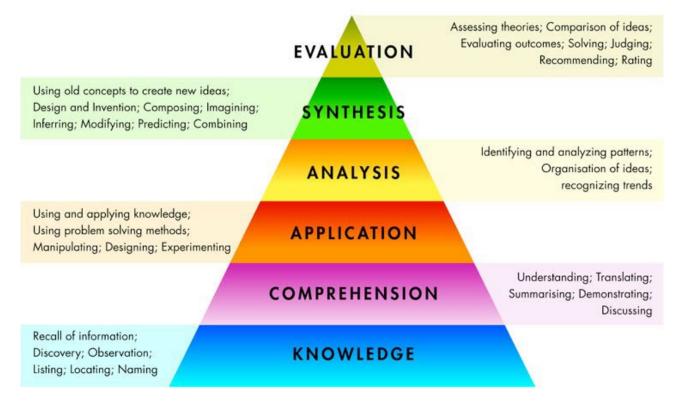
Each program/department should have 3-5 outcomes that describe competencies that students in the program should master by the time they graduate and/or services available to students. Once they have been established, the program or department representative must decide how they will measure the performance in these areas. This is generally decided in mid- to late fall semester and should be indicated in Anthology – Planning by January 31st. Once this is decided data is collected during the current fall semester and the following spring semester. Then during the summer and the beginning of the fall semester, the programs and departments discuss the results and based on the results, determine what the need for improvement is, and develop a plan to address what they will do to improve. Irrespective of the results, all information is reported in the Anthology – Planning module by September 30th.

Q: How do you write a clear outcome?
Learning outcomes are statements describing what students should be able to know, think, or do by the end of the cycle. Service outcomes are statements describing what services or programs are offered to students and other constituencies. Program outcomes are statements describing what students will know, be able to do, etc. as a result of completing an academic program. A SMART outcome is a good outcome which describes an observable behavior that can be measured within a specific time frame. (See below for description of a SMART outcome.)

Using the revised Bloom's Taxonomy (The Amazing World of Teaching) to pick action verbs that match the outcome you are trying to produce will also guide what method is used:

B L O O M S   T A X O N O M Y

Beware of outcomes that are too words or too complex, measure multiple skills at a time, or that are not specific enough.

Q: What are SMART outcomes?
Before you begin, identify any information that may already be collected by other processes in place. Discuss your desired outcome with others in your unit to gauge whether they already have methods to measure your outcome. This ensures your time is spent efficiently gathering information that is not already being assembled. It is recommended that all faculty and staff within a program or department discuss and agree on outcomes and the assessment measures used to complete the process. One way to ensure you are being effective in your assessment strategy is to be SMART.

SMART

S

Specific: What student skill/process/practice are you trying to improve? Try to answer the w's (who, what, where, when, and why).

M

Measurable: Include the measures you will use to judge your progress towards achieving the outcome.

A

Achievable: What amount of growth do you plan to achieve? Don't set it so that you won't be able to achieve.

R

Relevant/Realistic: Aligns with course, department, area/unit, college goals. Should related to and support university's vision.

T

Timed: Determine adequate timeframe or schedule for goal. When will you collect evidence of accomplishment?

Remember that assessment does not require complex methods or multiple methods to capture data, but at least one of those methods for academic areas needs to be a direct method. Once you have inventoried what information has already been collected, match the outcome to an assessment method; there may be instances where multiple methods are appropriate, but it is not required to have a multitude of methods. Overall, your assessment method should reflect the learning or service you are trying to assess.

Q: Where do my outcomes come from? Do we have a list of outcomes that we have to choose from? Does SACSCOC, the University, or OAA tell us what we have to assess?
SACSCOC, the University, nor OAA determine what outcomes have to be assessed. Each program/department determines what outcomes would be the most beneficial for them to evaluate. Each area is responsible for developing, assessing, and reporting their outcomes through UTC's Outcomes Assessment process.

Q: What is the difference between a direct measure and an indirect measure?

Direct measures are those that measure student learning by assessing actual samples of student work. Examples include exams/tests, papers, projects, presentations, portfolios, and performances.

Indirect measures are those measures that imply learning, or a service occurred and include perceptions or attitudes related to student's abilities or services offered. They assess opinions or thoughts. Examples include surveys, interviews, and course evaluations.

Both forms of assessment can be completed to triangulate data or measure other outcomes.

Q: Is a direct measure required?
At least one form of direct measure is required for each Student Learning Outcome.

Q: Can course grades be used as a means of assessment?
No, course grades cannot be used as an assessment method because what they measure goes beyond a single outcome. A course grade provides little information about what could be enhanced to help students more effectively master the outcome. Course grades usually incorporate non-instructional measures (attendance) or those that are not direct measures of learning (participation).

Q: Do we have to assess all our students?
No, you may use appropriate sampling strategies.

Q: What are some appropriate sampling strategies?

Appropriate sampling strategies will depend on the size of the population in each program. In small programs a representative sample would be adequate. What constitutes representation would be determined by the program and the mechanism for sampling should be a part of the assessment plan.

Q: Do we have to assess every year?

Yes, assessment should be an on-going process. However, you do not need to assess every student or service every year, nor do you have to assess every outcome every year. However, you are required to assess a minimum of three outcomes every year. You can have more than three outcomes listed but you need to be sure that they are all assessed at least once within a three-year period. Your assessment plan should identify areas that need improvement in your program/area, and from that you can choose to focus on three outcomes each year.