Table of Contents:

Continuous Improvement and Academic Student Learning Outcomes  3

Student Learning Outcome Assessment Plans  4

Purpose  4

Creating an Academic Program SLOAP  4

Part I Developing a SLO Assessment Plan  5

Determining SLO Assessment Methods  6

Direct Assessment Techniques  7

Indirect Student Assessment  7

Part II SLOAP Assessment Result Report  8

Faculty Engagement  8

Glossary of Terms  10
Continuous Improvement and
Academic Student Learning Outcomes

Systematic assessment of student learning produces information that is needed to support a program’s efforts to implement the institution’s strategic goals as well as ensure a process of continuous improvement within GRU’s educational activities. Assessment results may assist an academic program to:

- modify curricular plans so that course offerings reflect the best academic pathway through courses in a given field of study;
- make curricular changes, such as revising program requirements, proposing new academic programs, or revising existing programs;
- collect the consistent types of information needed over time to support accreditation reports and comprehensive program reviews; and
- develop more knowledgeable graduates.

When the faculty assesses student learning outcomes and better understands student achievement, they are able to reframe curricula and program requirements to ensure that students have access to courses that convey knowledge and skills essential to a field of study. Teaching methods can be changed, new student assignments can be developed, and new courses or even programs, can be designed to meet needs identified by assessment projects.

Student learning outcome assessment helps faculty better prepare graduates through a process that identifies the strengths and weaknesses of an academic program as identified through the learning of students. Problem areas can be identified and addressed in a timely fashion, and issues identified from year to year can be systematically recorded so fluctuations can be understood and evaluated in a way that supports funding and program redevelopment requests.

[Adapted from University of Wisconsin: https://kb.wisc.edu/ls/page.php?id=25306]

Institutions that take the goal of continuous improvement seriously incorporate assessment into their overall culture. In such an environment all major decisions are driven by assessment results or other data that demonstrate institutional strengths and weaknesses and suggest actions that need to be taken to promote ongoing improvements. It is our hope that the information that follows will help each academic program at GRU engage in the assessment of student learning so that our graduates reflect our commitment to continuous improvement.
Student Learning Outcome Assessment Plans (SLOAPs)

[Planning worksheets can be found at: http://www.gru.edu/ie/assessment/slo.php ]

The purpose of this handbook is to assist department chairs and program directors as they actively create new, or maintain and update ongoing, program Student Learning Outcome Assessment Plans (SLOAPs). The handbook summarizes the purpose of, and procedures for developing and assessing student learning outcomes and for reporting on the results of the assessment process. It assumes a process of SLO creation and assessment that impacts curriculum development and evaluation in an ongoing feedback loop.

Purpose

The assessment of student learning, and student development, is essential to the health and vitality of academic programs at Georgia Regents University (GRU). Implementing the assessment process advances student learning through improved curricula and instruction. Additionally accreditation agencies for various professional areas, as well as the institution as a whole, have standards that require the assessment of student learning. GRU's commitment to program level assessment of student learning is reflected in each program's Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan or SLOAP.

Creating an Academic Program SLOAP

The SLOAP should be created by program faculty, approved at the school/college level, and updated annually to reflect assessment activities and the changes made as a result of assessment.

The faculty of each academic program owns the program curriculum. Thus it is the natural responsibility of those faculty members to plan, conduct, report, and use the results of assessment activities. The ongoing assessment and quality improvement program requires that all SLOs are clear and measurable, that program faculty members meet to reflect upon outcomes of the assessment, and that the results of the assessment are used to improve the student learning. In sum, it is the responsibility of the faculty to ensure that SLO Assessment Plans and SLO Assessment Results Reports are completed.

All SLOAPs should include, at a minimum:

- A summary of SLO’s for the program
- A clear and specific plan for the assessment of each student learning outcome (SLO) over a designated period of time
- A summary of assessment results
- An explanation of the changes designed to improve student learning that
resulted from the unit’s assessment activities.

Each academic program SLOAP is created in two parts and posted by the academic program in Campus Lab: Compliance Assist. The first part of the SLOAP process is the development of an **SLO Assessment Plan**, which is created between August 15 and October 31 of each academic year.

The SLO Assessment Plan includes:

- Academic program-level SLOs
- Target student learning performance levels (when appropriate and desired)
- Identification of the person(s) responsible for the assessment
- Timetable for execution of the assessment plan.

The second part of the SLOAP process is the creation of a **SLO Assessment Results Report**, which is created between July 1st and August 15 of each academic year for the prior academic year activities.

The SLO Assessment Results Report includes:

- Identification of appropriate SLO assessment methods
- A summary of the SLO assessment results
- A summary of assessment-driven actions taken by the academic program to improve student learning
- Supporting Evidence such as assessment summaries and a record of faculty review.

For most academic programs student learning outcomes are relatively stable from year to year; however the assessment of student learning is likely to change from year to year. So, creating an SLO Assessment Plan and preparing an SLO Assessment Results Report is an ongoing activity that entails regular attention throughout the academic year. Although some accrediting bodies require more, a general target for GRU academic programs is a full round of assessment activities each academic year. Program SLOAPs are updated every year.

**Part I: Developing a SLO Assessment Plan [August 15th – October 31st each year]**

1. **Establishing** Student Learning Outcomes
   a. The first step in developing and/or updating an SLOAP is for the program faculty to choose the SLOs they wish to assess.

   b. **Defining** what should SLO’s look like?
      i. In thinking about SLO assessment it may be helpful for academic
program faculty to consider the following set of questions:

1. What should your students know, or be able to demonstrate upon graduation?
2. What skills or abilities does your academic program seek to create or refine in a student?
3. Does the academic program accomplish what it sets out to do?
4. How can the students’ academic learning experience be improved?
5. How does the academic program compare to others programs at peer institutions? (Adapted from Volkwein, J., “Program evaluation and assessment: What’s the Question?” (1996).)

ii. After asking the above questions it is also important to remember that each SLO should

1. Focus on a single student skill or ability
2. Use action words to help identify the skill being measured.
   a. Examples of common action words include:
      i. Analyze
      ii. Apply
      iii. Compare
      iv. Create
      v. Estimate
      vi. Demonstrate
      vii. Illustrate

2. **Determining** SLO Assessment Methods
   a. Once the SLOs have been chosen each academic program must determine the best ways to assess student learning for each SLO.
      i. Programs are not expected to assess all of the student learning outcomes during a single academic year, but programs should plan to assess at least three SLOs each academic year.
      ii. Complete assessment of learning outcomes may take 3 – 10 years.
   b. Selecting Assessment Techniques
      i. Programs should seek to use multiple methods to assess each learning outcome. A link to a table of assessment techniques. For more information please visit the following link: [http://www.gru.edu/ie/assessment/slo.php](http://www.gru.edu/ie/assessment/slo.php). Multiple measures can assess different components of a complex task; they reduce the need to try to design a complicated all-purpose method; and they allow a determination of the reliability of the assessment when several methods produce similar findings.
      ii. It is good practice to use at least one direct and one indirect measure for each student learning outcome and to include qualitative as well as quantitative measures.
      iii. In the end, it is important to use an assessment method that
matches your department/college culture.
c. The assessment methods (some of which may already be available to your program) may include, but need not be limited to
   i. course-embedded assignments with grading rubrics
   ii. end-of-course or end-of-program tests and exams
   iii. course-embedded or program-level presentations or recitals
   iv. portfolios with art work, writing samples, or research that is graded with a program-wide rubric
   v. forced-choice surveys
   vi. open-ended questions on surveys and interviews
   vii. exit interviews with SLO focused questions
d. **Direct Assessment** Techniques evaluate students’ actual performance of a stated objective.
   i. To obtain a direct measure of student learning,
      1. Systematically gather data across student performances using
         a. Scores on standardized or locally prepared examinations
         b. Graded course activities designed to measure student learning for a SLO,
         c. Scoring rubrics for performances, projects, theses, etc.
   ii. If you choose to base your assessment in part on culminating experiences or portfolios, be explicit in explaining how the products of these activities will be analyzed. In these cases, the use of a scoring rubric is highly recommended.
   iii. **Course-Embedded Assessment** Activities: These activities include the use of an assignment, project, examination or some of the questions on an exam in a particular course to gather evidence of student learning. This approach to assessment provides multiple benefits:
      1. Course embedded assessments save student and faculty time by making an activity serve multiple ends.
      2. Use of a common assignment, examination or project applied across multiple sections of the same course can unify otherwise disparate sections of the course by measuring common learning objectives in the same way.
      3. Arguably, an additional benefit of embedding assessment activities in courses is the motivation it provides students to give the activity a high priority in order to achieve a course grade.

e. Indirect student assessment techniques often involve the use of surveys that involve
   i. students’ self-reports of progress of learning
   ii. experiences to which students attribute their learning
   iii. how students feel about what they know (i.e, their judgments of
their competence or confidence)
iv. what students value as a result of their educational experiences
v. third-party reports of what students know and can do (e.g., internship supervisor evaluations, employer evaluations)
f. **In sum**, an effective assessment plan should
   i. be aligned with the classroom instruction and learning goals;
   ii. provide constructive feedback regarding learning outcomes to instructors, program directors and department chairs, curriculum coordinators, deans and students;
   iii. help students understand the elements of excellent work so they may begin to develop the skills of self evaluation
   iv. incorporate assessment of the College's general education requirements;
   v. provide standardized measures that accommodate all levels of learning;
   vi. be fair and unbiased;
   vii. be simple and easy to administer.

![The Teaching - Learning - Assessment Cycle](image)

**Part II: SLOAP Assessment Results Report [July 1st –August 15th]**

1. **Closing the Loop**: While the student learning outcomes for most academic programs will be relatively stable, a program's response to the assessment of those outcomes produces a living document that will be revised and updated annually. New assessment findings will be recorded, and changes made to curriculum, courses, or teaching methods in response to assessment results will be documented. Thus, the SLOAP will include
a) a description of assessment activities  
b) results of the assessment activities  
c) recommendations made as a result of considering the assessment data  
d) changes in the delivery of the program as a result of those findings and recommendations

2. **Faculty Engagement:** the institution must be able to show that its program faculty has engaged in an explicit discussion of the issues outlined above. A record of this discussion must be captured in department/College minutes and reflected in the annual update to the academic program SLOAP.  
a) Your SLO Assessment Results Report should reflect the following:  
   i. The academic program faculty met to consider assessment results and program planning  
   ii. The academic program faculty recommended program changes designed to improve student learning based on assessment outcomes  
   iii. An identified individual was given the responsibility of implementing the identified change. (Fresno State Office of Institutional Effectiveness [http://www.fresnostate.edu/academics/oie/assessment/soap.html](http://www.fresnostate.edu/academics/oie/assessment/soap.html))
Glossary Terms

Alignment
Alignment is the process of analyzing how explicit criteria line up or build upon one another within a particular academic program.

Assessment:
The evaluation or estimation of the nature, quality, or ability of someone or something, i.e.: "the assessment of student learning".

Assessment Cycle:
The assessment cycle for student learning outcomes refers to the process by which an academic program identifies and assesses student learning outcomes and the use of this information to take actions that are designed to improve student learning.

Assessment Method/Techniques:
A statistically reliable method of measuring the level of student learning as it relates to an identified student learning outcome. Such measures may be tools that assist a program in efforts to directly or indirectly measure student learning. These tools can be both quantitative and qualitative and refer to both traditional paper-and-pencil tests, as well as to alternative forms of assessment such as oral examinations, group problem-solving, performances and demonstrations, portfolios, peer observations, and others.

Bloom’s Taxonomy:
Bloom’s Taxonomy is an example of one of several classification methodologies used to describe increasing cognitive complexity or intellectual sophistication:
1. Knowledge: recalling or remembering information without necessarily understanding; includes behaviors such as describing, listing, identifying, and labeling.
2. Comprehension: Understanding learned material; includes behaviors such as explaining, discussing, and interpreting.
3. Application: Putting ideas and concepts to work in solving problems; includes behaviors such as demonstrating, showing, and making use of information.
4. Analysis: Breaking down information into its component parts to see interrelationships and ideas; behaviors include differentiating, comparing, and categorizing.
5. Synthesis: Putting parts together to form something original; involves using creativity to compose or design something new.
6. Evaluation: Judging the value of evidence based on definite criteria; includes behaviors such as concluding, criticizing, prioritizing, and recommending. (Bloom, 1956)

Closing the Loop:
Closing the loop refers to the use of assessment results to improve student learning through collegial dialogue informed by the results of student learning outcome assessment. It is part of the continuous cycle of collecting assessment results, evaluating them, and using the evaluations to identify actions that will improve student learning.

**Continuous Improvement:**
Continuous improvement reflects an ongoing, cyclical process of identifying evidence and implementing incremental changes to improve student learning.

**Course-Embedded Assessment:**
Student learning assessment that takes place within the regular class or curricular activity. Class assignments linked to student learning outcomes through primary trait analysis serve as grading and assessment instruments, (i.e., common test questions, CATs, projects or writing assignments).

**Curriculum Map:**
A document that maps an academic program’s student learning outcomes to the specific classes in which students receive the educational inputs that lead to their attainment of the identified knowledge, skills, attitudes or values. The map may also include a brief summary of the assessment methods to be used for each outcome, the anticipated dates of assessment, the individuals responsible for executing the assessment, and the date the collected assessment data will be reviewed.

**Direct Assessment of Learning:**
This occurs when measures of student learning are based on student performance or demonstrations of student the learning. Examples include scoring performance on tests, term papers, or the execution of lab skills. Direct assessment of learning can occur within a course or as a result of a test taken during or at the end of an academic program.

**Grades:**
Grades are the faculty evaluation of a student’s performance in a class as a whole. Course grades represent an overall assessment of student class work, which sometimes involves factors unrelated to specific outcomes or student knowledge, values or abilities. For this reason equating grades to SLO assessment is not recommended but in some instances can be done carefully. NOTE: It is often far easier to design a course-embedded assessment that measures student learning as it relates to a specific student learning outcome. When this is done, that specific grade can be used as an assessment measure.

**Indirect Assessment of Learning:**
This method of assessment uses perceptions, reflections or secondary evidence to make inferences about student learning (e.g., employer surveys, students’ self-assessments). Overall course grades and program completion rates can
sometimes be used as indirect evidence of learning, but such uses are not recommended unless they are supplemented by additional direct assessment methods.

**Performance Target:**
The level of student learning an academic program identifies as its targeted goal for a particular student learning outcome, i.e.: “80% of all students will obtain a score of 76 or more on the exit exam.”

**Program:**
An academic degree program approved by the Board of Regents, that Georgia Regents University offers.

**Program Faculty:**
Faculty members who teach courses, outside of the general education core, that make-up the foundation of an academic degree program.

**Program-Level Student Learning Outcome:**
This phrase is used to distinguish student learning outcomes that have been established for a program of study from those that may be established for a particular course within an academic program. Program-level assessment focuses on the overall student performance rather than the academic performance of an individual student, or the performance of students within a particular class.

**Responsible Party:**
The individual assigned the duty of performing a given task.

**Rubric:**
In education terminology this word identifies a “scoring rubric” designed to communicate expectations of quality around am educational task. For student learning outcomes, scoring rubrics are used to delineate consistent criteria for assessing the level of learning achieved by an identified student population performing a common task, i.e., the qualities a student’s essay must demonstrate to be considered to have met expectations.

**Student Learning Outcome (SLO):**
An SLO is a statement of the knowledge, skills, attitudes or values that a student will be able to demonstrate upon completion of a program.

**Student Learning Outcome Assessment Plan (SLOAP):**
Each academic program creates a yearly report that is developed in two parts

**PART I: The SLO Assessment Plan:**
A plan developed by each academic program that identifies:
- The program’s student learning outcomes
• The methods that will be used to assess student learning for each outcome
• The identification of a target student learning performance level for each outcome
• The identification of the responsible persons and dates that assessment will take place

Part II: The SLO Assessment Results Report:
• A summary of the students’ assessed level of learning,
• A statement about the assessment-driven actions the program intends to take to improve student learning, and
• Identification of the person responsible for implementing each step of the plan.

Student Learning:
The degree to which a program can demonstrate student mastery of an identified set of knowledge, skills, attitudes or values.

Use of Results:
Sometimes referred to as “closing the loop” in educational terminology, this phrase identifies the actions an academic program is prepared to take to improve student learning as a result of a review of the student learning outcome assessment data it has collected.