



# Assessment

Handbook for Administrative, Academic, and Student  
Support Services

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*LSU Health Sciences Center at Shreveport*

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# Introduction to Administrative, Academic, and Student Support Services Assessment

## What is assessment?

Assessment is a systematic process of gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine to what extent outcomes meet expectations. Assessment is an iterative ongoing five-step process involving: 1. setting goals, objectives, and expected outcomes, 2. assessing current performance, 3. collecting results, 4. analyzing and reflecting, 5. implementing actions for improvement. In higher education, assessment can refer to processes at the classroom, course, academic program, administrative unit, or institutional levels. This handbook focuses on the assessment of operational outcomes at the administrative unit level (e.g., administrative, academic, and student support services).

Administrative assessment addresses the following questions:

- *What are we trying to do?* Start by clearly defining the unit's mission and expected outcomes.
- *How well are we doing it?* Systematically gather, analyze, and interpret evidence to determine whether the unit's performance matches expectations.
- *How can we improve what we are doing?* Use the resulting information to understand and improve operations, programs, and services.

## Why participate in assessment?

Assessment provides insight into the strengths and weaknesses of administrative, academic, and student support services and guides the implementation of changes to improve quality and customer satisfaction.

The main purposes of program assessment are as follows:

- **To inform:** the assessment process should reveal the contributions of the unit to the institution.
- **To improve:** the assessment process should produce information regarding how to improve support services.
- **To prove:** the assessment process should demonstrate what the unit is accomplishing to internal and external stakeholders and be used to support external accountability activities, including compliance with accreditation requirements.
- **To support:** the assessment process should produce actionable, meaningful information that enables data-based decisions at the unit level.

Assessment benefits administrators and staff by:

- Clarifying the purpose and key functions of a unit and its role in supporting the mission and goals of the institution.
- Providing coherence and direction to the unit's work.
- Providing personnel with clear expectations for their work.
- Providing administrators and staff with information about how their functions and services are used and perceived by their customers or stakeholders.
- Providing data to support administrators' decisions regarding improvements or changes to services.
- Providing data to guide budgeting and resource allocation.

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*All administrative, academic, and student support services units are REQUIRED to participate in assessment.*

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The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), requires outcomes assessment of all educational programs, administrative support services, academic and student support services, and general education competencies.

As explained in Section 7: Institutional Planning and Effectiveness of the [2018 SACSCOC Resource Manual for the Principles of Accreditation](#):

*“An institutional planning and effectiveness process involves all programs, services, and constituencies; is linked to the decision-making process at all levels; and provides a sound basis for budgetary decisions and resource allocations.”*

Specifically, SACSCOC Standards 7.3 and 8.2.c outline assessment requirements for administrative support services and student and academic support services respectively:

**Standard 7.3** The institution identifies expected outcomes of its administrative support services and demonstrates the extent to which the outcomes are achieved. (Administrative effectiveness)

**Standard 8.2.c** The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of seeking improvement based on analysis of the results for academic and student services that support student success. (Student outcomes: academic and student services)

## Overview of Administrative Assessment at LSUHSC-S

Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center at Shreveport (LSUHSC-S) is committed to continuous improvement of its administrative units and academic and student support services based on evidence from ongoing systematic assessment. Each unit is responsible for the planning and assessment process which entails the following components:

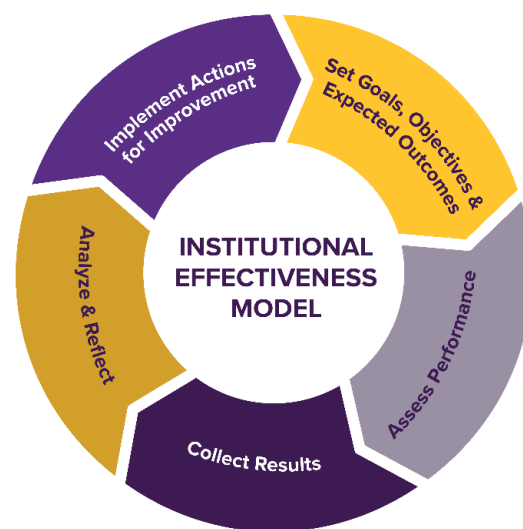
- Identify goals, objectives, and expected outcomes
- Assess performance
- Implement actions for improvement based on results

These essential elements are defined in an assessment plan adopted and implemented by each unit. The assessment planning and reporting process occurs over an annual cycle. In this cycle, expected outcomes, measures, and targets are submitted in the fall, and findings, action plans, and analyses are reported by the summer of the following year.

To provide structure and maintain consistency for the documentation of the assessment process, LSUHSC-S licenses WEAVE, a web-based assessment planning and reporting system. WEAVE documents the planning and evaluation processes at LSUHSC-S that support continuous improvement and evidence-based decision-making. The Office of Institutional Planning, Effectiveness, & Accreditation coordinates the institution’s assessment program and reviews the information in WEAVE. WEAVE data is used for internal and external purposes (e.g., accreditation reports, integrated, institution-wide planning efforts, etc.).

While units may employ various approaches to assessment, the following best practices should be incorporated:

- Programs should have clearly defined and measurable outcomes.
- Assessment measures should clearly identify criteria for success.
- Multiple assessment methods should be used including direct measures.
- Data and information should be collected over time and analyzed longitudinally.
- Improvements in the unit should be planned and enacted in response to the findings.
- Outcomes should align with the institutional mission and strategic goals.



*Institutional Effectiveness Model*

# Developing an Assessment Plan: Specifying Unit Mission

## How do you develop a mission statement?

Mission statements enable the unit to define their purpose within the context of the greater institutional mission. The unit's mission statement should effectively communicate to internal and external stakeholders the key functions of the unit and how it contributes to the institution.

To develop a mission statement, units should consider the following questions:

- *What is your primary purpose?* Discuss why you do what you do.
- *Who do you primarily serve?* Discuss who your key stakeholders are (e.g., students, faculty, staff, etc.).
- *What are the most important functions or services that you provide?* Discuss what you do.
- *How do you support the institution's mission?* Discuss how your unit aligns with the mission of the institution.

Once the unit has drafted a statement addressing the preceding questions, ensure that the resulting statement is specific and unique enough that it differentiates the unit from others.

# Developing an Assessment Plan: Expected Outcomes

## What are expected outcomes?

Expected outcomes are specific, measurable statements describing the desired end-result and quality (e.g., timeliness, accuracy, responsiveness, frequency, etc.) of the key functions and services of the unit. Outcomes should be directly related to the mission of the unit.

Units may specify operational outcomes, which focus on the impact of their functions and services to their customers, and/or strategic outcomes, which focus on the future of the unit. In addition, expected student learning outcomes, which focus on the development of students' knowledge, values, or skills (like those of educational programs) may be used (i.e., a library unit tasked with providing information literacy instruction to students, or wellness programming aimed at influencing student behaviors).

When drafting outcomes, it may help to create a flowchart of the unit's work processes to determine what the unit will accomplish and what stakeholders will think, know, or do following the provision of the service. Questions to consider include:

- What are the most important results or impacts that should occur because of the unit's activities?
- What are the unit's critical work processes and how should they perform?
- What does the end user experience through interaction with the unit?

Outcomes should be **SMART**:

**Specific:** Stated in definite language, outcomes should describe the specific functions and services provided to customers or stakeholders.

**Measurable:** Data related to the outcome should be readily available, and the data collection process should be feasible considering available time and resources.

**Aggressive but Attainable:** In the spirit of continuous improvement, units should determine an assessable criterion for success or benchmark for the outcome that will progressively move the unit closer to achieving its goals.

**Results-oriented and Time-bound:** Outcomes should specify what the expected level of unit performance should be after a finite period (e.g., 5% improvement in customer satisfaction rates in the next year). These specifications may be based on experience, previous assessment results, external requirements, local, state, or national benchmarks, etc.

# Developing an Assessment Plan: Assessment Methods

## What are assessment methods?

Assessment methods refer to a variety of techniques and tools used to indicate how a unit plans to collect data related to each outcome. Selection of assessment methods can only be accomplished after clearly articulating the expected outcome. The chosen methods should logically align with the outcome in question and be reliable (i.e., produce replicable results), useful, and efficient.

## Types of assessment methods

Assessment methods are typically categorized as direct or indirect:

**Direct methods** of assessing operational or strategic outcomes include measurements of the demand, quality, efficiency, and effectiveness of key functions and services. Direct assessment methods include, but are not limited to:

- Number of complaints
- Number of errors; error rate
- Number/percentage change of applications/users/alumni donors
- Number of training sessions
- Growth in attendance
- Number/amount/percentage increase of donations
- Timeliness of response
- Level of compliance
- Average service time
- Average wait time
- Auditor's findings
- Pre- and post-workshop tests

**Indirect methods** of assessing operational or strategic outcomes include measurements of customers' *perceptions of or satisfaction with* key functions and services. Indirect methods can support and contextualize direct methods of assessment.

Indirect assessment methods include, but are not limited to:

- Satisfaction surveys
- Participant feedback
- Staff training hours
- Focus groups
- Opinion surveys
- Awareness surveys

The best assessment practices utilizes both direct and indirect methods to paint a more complete picture of the quality, efficiency, and effectiveness of key functions and services.

## Tips for selecting assessment methods

- *Questions to consider:*
  - Will the assessment method answer questions that are important and meaningful to the unit?
  - Does the method align with the outcome being assessed?
  - Is the method feasible given available financial resources and time?
  - Will the method result in useful information about the strengths and weaknesses of the unit?
- *Use existing information whenever possible.*
- *Strive to use multiple methods to assess each outcome:* This increases confidence that the results through assessment are accurate, consistent, and replicable.
- *Do not reinvent the wheel:* Take advantage of published assessment tools in your area, such as rubrics or surveys, as opposed to developing your own.

## Setting targets for outcomes

- Unit performance can be compared to past levels of performance or to the performance of another group. Example benchmarks and questions to consider include the following:
  - *External Peer Benchmark*: How does our unit performance compare to that of similar units at other institutions?
  - *Best Practices Benchmark*: How does our unit performance compare to the best practices in our field?
  - *Value-Added Benchmark*: Is the institution improving because of our performance?
  - *Historical Trends Benchmark*: Is our performance improving?
- Unit performance can be compared to a specific level of performance. Examples levels and questions to consider include the following:
  - *Local Standards*: Are we meeting our own standards?
  - *External Standards*: Are we meeting standards set by someone else?

## Guidelines to inform target selection:

- *Consider how the assessment results will be used*: If the purpose of assessment is to improve the unit, the standard for success for each outcome should be set relatively high.
- *Consider the consequences of setting the bar too high or too low*: If the bar is set too high, the unit may not have the resources available to address all the identified areas needing improvement. If the bar is set too low, the unit risks not performing essential functions and services.
- *Consult external sources*: Professional standards, external requirements, etc. can all be used to set and justify unit standards and benchmarks.
- *Consider previous assessment results*: If unit performance has historically been below the desired benchmark, adjust targets in the short-term to focus on continuous improvement towards the desired, more aggressive benchmark.



# Closing the Loop

## What is “closing the loop”?

Assessment is an iterative ongoing five-step process: 1. setting goals, objectives, and expected outcomes, 2. assessing current performance, 3. collecting results, 4. analyzing and reflecting, 5. implementing actions for improvement. The cycle must be completed and repeated to see whether the changes have produced the desired result. This last critical step in assessment is commonly referred to as “closing the loop”.

## Reporting assessment results

For assessment results to be used, they first need to be summarized, compared against specified benchmarks and targets, and reported.

- **Tallies:** Tallies refer to simple counts. For example, units could tally the number of service requests completed, the number of errors made, the number of trainings delivered, etc.
- **Percentages:** Percentages are typically more meaningful than presenting tallies and facilitate historical comparisons across distinct groups. For example, units could report the percentage of customers who indicated that a particular service met their needs this year compared to last year.
- **Aggregates:** Often, multiple items on a survey or instrument relate to a single outcome; accordingly, tallies or percentages of unit performance across the relevant items may be appropriate to use. For example, 80% of workshop participants indicated high levels of satisfaction on survey items related to the content of the workshop, but only 40% indicated high levels of satisfaction on survey items related to the setting of the workshop.
- **Averages:** Averages, including the arithmetic mean, median, and mode, can be used to summarize the central tendency of assessment results and to compare results to standard benchmarks.
- **Qualitative Summaries:** Qualitative assessment methods (e.g., focus groups, open-ended survey questions) can be analyzed via read-throughs and grouped listings. Read-throughs involve quickly reading through qualitative results to get a general sense of common responses. Grouped listings involve separating or tallying qualitative results into common, discrete categories (e.g., 60% of customers commented on the speed of service, whereas 20% commented on the quality of service).

After data has been collected, compare the results to the set criterion for success or target. Then, for each result, determine if:

- **“Met”:** The finding meets the minimal acceptable level of unit performance.
- **“Partially Met/Not Met”:** The finding does not meet the minimal acceptable level of unit performance. Unit performance needs to be improved.

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***NOTE:** The goal of assessment is to drive continuous improvement. Identifying areas in need of improvement does not constitute “failure” and, on the contrary, is essential to guide forward action and promote positive change. UNITS WILL NOT BE JUDGED ON THEIR RESULTS. However, units will be evaluated on the extent to which they use assessment results to make meaningful improvements over time.*

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## Using assessment results

After collecting and analyzing assessment data, decisions need to be made collectively to determine whether/what changes will be made. Using assessment results effectively is the most challenging, yet most critical, component of the assessment process.

Assessment, by itself, does not result in improvements to functions and services. Assessment results, along with professional judgment, must be reflected upon and used to make decisions that result in improvements.

The following guidelines will ensure that the use of assessment results is fair, ethical, and responsible:

- Make assessments planned and purposeful: The unit’s staff should have a clear understanding at the outset of why it is engaging in assessment and the types of decisions that assessment will inform.
- Focus assessments on important goals.
- Actively involve those with a stake in decisions stemming from the results in discussions about assessment and use of results.
- Communicate assessment information widely and transparently.
- Discourage others from making inappropriate interpretations of assessment results. For example, communicate the limitations of assessment techniques, sampling, and other factors that could affect the accuracy and replicability of the results.
- Do not hold personnel accountable for things that they cannot control.
- Do not penalize personnel for disappointing assessment results.
- Do not let assessment results alone dictate decisions. Decisions should be based on sound professional judgment.
- Promote the use of multiple sources of information when making decisions.
- Keep personnel informed on how assessment findings are being used to inform decisions.

### What should be considered when assessment results indicate “partially met/not met”?

The unit should reflect on what they learned through the assessment process and report actions they plan to take to improve relevant functions and services. Actions should directly relate to the reported outcomes and be clear, logical, and feasible. Possible actions to report include planned modifications of service offerings, improvements to technology, changes in unit personnel or roles, additions to trainings or professional development resources, revisions to unit standards or processes, improvements to communications or marketing, etc. The unit may also report planned modifications to their assessment plan, including revisions to outcomes, assessment methods, or targets.

### What should be considered when assessment results indicate “met”?

Findings do not have to be bad to improve. Although assessment results may indicate “met”, the unit should be proactive in seeking ways to enhance their area. For example, consider setting more challenging goals or targets or changing the unit’s assessment plan to focus on new outcomes.

Remember, the purpose of assessment is to drive continuous improvement.

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*Applaud the unit’s success and recognize the unit’s personnel!*

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