

Assessment Guidance for Academic Programs

Developing an Action Plan

The intent of assessment is to gather information that allows us to determine what students have learned and how we can better assist them in their learning. Thus, a key step in the assessment process is specifying what action will be taken to improve student performance. Identifying an action plan is often referred to as the “use of results” or “closing the loop.”

It is important to recognize that an action plan should not be based solely on whether or not a target was met, but also on how well students are performing over *time*. That is, what are the trends in learning outcomes? Is student performance:



An examination of student performance over time will better inform faculty as to when action is needed and what that action should be. Note that a trend analysis should include at least 3 to 5 cycles of learning outcomes' assessment data.

Below are the action types available for Learning Outcomes in the University's assessment management platform Watermark's Planning & Self-Study (P&SS):

- Revise curriculum
- Restructure outcome statement
- Revise measurement/assessment
- Gather additional data
- Revise benchmark/target
- Implement new programs or services
- Community Partnership
- Modify position/personnel
- Adopt or expand technologies
- Additional training
- Collaborate with another department/unit/program
- Modify the physical environment
- Maintain assessment strategy

All action plans require a description. This can be thought of as the “Use of Results” section of an assessment plan. As such, it should include the following information:

- A statement as to why a particular action plan was selected
- The specific action steps to be taken
- Details on how the action plan will be implemented
- Timeline for implementing the action plan

The following table provides a list of the more commonly used action plans in P&SS when they might be used, and questions to consider when describing the selected plan.

















Additional Assistance

Additional resources can be found on the Office of Institutional Effectiveness website at https://www.southalabama.edu/departments/institutionaleffectiveness/academic_program_assessment_reporting_resources.html

What Action Plan When

The table below provides information as to when a specific action plan might be selected based on the assessment findings – both how student performance is trending and whether or not the target was met. The “Questions to consider” are intended to guide faculty discussion about their assessment findings, why a particular action is appropriate, and details to include when describing their action plan.

LEGEND – Student Performance Trend:  Improving  Declining  Stable  Fluctuating

Action Plan(s)	Findings		Description – Questions to consider
	Trend	Target	
Revise curriculum	  	Met or not Met	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o What, if any, changes were implemented after the last assessment cycle? Did these changes impact student performance as intended? Will these changes be continued? o If the target was not met, what (additional) changes are needed to improve student performance? o If the target was met, are there some areas where students are not performing as well as other areas? What steps might the faculty take to improve student learning where needed?
Implement new programs/services Collaborate with another department	 	Met or not Met	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Are there services available that would support student learning? o How might faculty collaborate with other departments to expand existing services or implement new ones?
Adopt or expand technologies	 	Met or not Met	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Are there tools available that would assist faculty in their efforts to support student learning? o Are there tools available that would better support students?
Revise measurement/assessment Restructure outcome statement	  	Met or not Met	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Does the current measure provide an adequate assessment of learning outcomes? Can faculty identify students' strengths and weaknesses? o Is the current measure aligned with the learning outcome? Review the map of course outcomes to assessment methods to ensure they are aligned. o Does the current outcome accurately reflect the knowledge and skills students should acquire?
Gather additional data	 	Met or not Met	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o What factors may have contributed to the results? What additional information is needed to better understand the trends in student performance? How will that data be collected?
Revise benchmark/target	 	Met or not Met	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Are faculty satisfied with the degree of improvement in student performance? Is the current target for assessing student performance unrealistic? What is a more realistic target? o Is the target too low? Do faculty find that while students are performing well, they are not being challenged enough? What is a more appropriate target?
Maintain assessment strategy	 	Met	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o If student performance improved, what factors may have contributed to this improvement? o What, if any, changes were made before the current assessment cycle? Why were these changes made? Will these changes be continued? o Also applies if the program is gathering baseline data.