

Assessment Policies

The University of Southern Mississippi (USM) conducts annual assessments at the program-level, including certificates and stand-alone minors, to document support of *SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation Section 8: Student Achievement*.

Standard 8.2:

The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of seeking improvements based on analysis of the results in the areas below:

Standard 8.2 a:

For each of its educational programs.

The USM assessment process was established in 2005. From 2005 to 2021 the University Assessment Committee (UAC) directed the program-level assessment process by conducting the review of annual assessment reports and by approving and revising assessment policies and guidelines. In academic year 2021-2022, faculty oversight of the USM assessment process transitioned to the Program Review Committee of the Undergraduate Council and the Program Review Committee of the Graduate Council for undergraduate-level and graduate-level programs, respectively.

The Program Review Committees conduct annual reviews of student learning outcome assessment reports and evaluations of student achievement indicators. The committees present a summary report of the reviews to the Undergraduate and Graduate Councils at the end of each academic year.

Undergraduate Programs

All USM undergraduate-level academic programs on the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL) active program inventory are required to assess program-level student learning outcomes. Undergraduate programs that offer more than one degree option at the same level may combine assessments, provided appropriate distinctions are made within the report (e.g., BA/BS).

Policy approved the UAC 09/30/09.

To support this requirement, the University Assessment Committee established the following sub-policies for programs with emphasis areas that share the same CIP code and programs with education emphasis areas.

Programs with Emphasis Areas

Programs with emphasis areas (i.e., programs that have the same Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) code and share a core curriculum) determine whether they assess at the program-level or emphasis-level. Programs are encouraged to complete emphasis-level assessments if the

plans of study vary greatly. Additionally, the Program Review Committee of the Undergraduate Council can recommend emphasis-level assessment if the program-level assessment report is deemed inadequate; the Program Review Committee can also recommend emphasis areas be assessed within one report.

Example: Criminal Justice BA and Criminal Justice (Juvenile Justice) BA are assessed within a single assessment report titled “Criminal Justice BA.”

Some undergraduate programs with emphasis areas do *not* share substantial curriculum requirements or are not offered in the same location. These programs *cannot* be assessed within one report.

Example: Media and Entertainment Arts (Film) BA has a unique curriculum and is taught at Gulf Park; it *cannot* be included within the Media and Entertainment Arts BS report. The Media and Entertainment Arts BS emphasis areas share curriculum and are taught at Hattiesburg.

Policy approved by the UAC 10/28/2009.

Policy modified by the UAC 03/16/2018.

Policy modified to reflect committee transition 2025.

Programs with Education Emphasis Areas

Programs with teacher licensure emphasis areas may combine assessments, provided appropriate distinctions are made within the report. There should be at least one education/licensure student learning outcome and at least one education/licensure program objective. Licensure pass rates must be included as a program objective.

Example: Dance (Dance Education) BFA and Dance (Performance and Choreography) BFA are assessed within a single assessment report titled “Dance BFA.”

Policy approved by the UAC 03/06/2018.

Graduate Programs

All USM graduate-level academic programs on the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL) active program inventory are required to assess program-level student learning outcomes. Graduate-level assessments must demonstrate 1) knowledge of the literature of the discipline, 2) ongoing student engagement in research and/or appropriate professional practice and training experiences, and 3) progressive distinction between degree levels.

Policy approved by the UAC 09/30/09.

Programs at the undergraduate and graduate-levels *cannot* be assessed within one report.

Example: Criminal Justice BA and Criminal Justice MA *cannot* be assessed within one report due to their distinct degree levels.

Example: Nonprofit Studies Minor (undergraduate-level) and Nonprofit Studies Graduate Certificate *cannot* be assessed within one report due to their distinct degree levels.

To support these requirements, the University Assessment Committee established the following sub-policies for same-level graduate programs that share the same CIP code and en route graduate programs that share the same CIP code.

Similar Degree Programs

Graduate programs that offer more than one degree option at the same level may combine assessments, provided appropriate distinctions are made within the report. For example, graduate programs at multiple levels that have the same Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) code and share a core curriculum may be assessed in one report. The assessment report should contain multiple common student learning outcomes and at least one separate student learning outcome for each degree.

Example: Education (Educational Administration P-12) EdS, Education (Educational Administration P-12) EdD, and Education (Educational Administration P-12) PhD are assessed within a single assessment report titled “Education (Educational Administration P-12) EdS/EdD/PhD.”

Some degrees may appear similar (i.e., appear to be emphasis areas), but do not share the same core curriculum. These programs *cannot* be assessed within one report.

Example: Nursing (Nurse Anesthesia) DNP and Nursing (Clinical) DNP *cannot* be assessed within one report.

*Policy approved by the UAC 09/30/2009.
Policy modified by the UAC 02/22/2017.
Policy modified by the UAC 03/06/2018.*

En Route Programs

Graduate programs that offer en route degrees may combine assessments, provided an appropriate explanation is provided within the report. An en route degree is a degree option for students pursuing a doctoral degree (e.g., EdS/PhD, MS/PhD).

Example: Psychology MA and Psychology PhD are assessed under a single assessment report titled “Psychology MA/PhD.”

*Policy approved by the UAC 09/30/2009.
Policy modified by the UAC 02/22/2017.
Policy modified by the UAC 03/06/2018.*

Certificates

Certificates that have a unique Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) code and do not share curriculum with a “parent” program (i.e., stand-alone certificates) must be assessed independently with certificate-level student learning outcomes. Certificates that share a CIP code and curriculum with a parent degree may be assessed within the parent degree assessment report. If a certificate is assessed within a degree assessment report, it should be explained within the report.

Example: The Uncrewed Maritime Systems Operator Undergraduate Certificate completes an independent assessment report.

Example: The Criminal Justice Graduate Certificate is assessed within the Criminal Justice MS report.

*Policy approved by the UAC 09/30/2009.
Policy modified by the UAC 02/29/2012.
Policy modified by the UAC 02/22/2017.*

Minors

Minors that have the same Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) code and curriculum as a degree program may be assessed with the program-level assessment report. Minors that have a unique CIP code and do not share curriculum with a “parent” program (i.e., stand-alone minors) must be assessed independently with minor-level student learning outcomes.

Example: The Biological Sciences Minor is included within the Biological Sciences BS assessment report.

Example: The Disability Studies Minor completes an independent assessment report.

*Policy approved by the UAC 10/28/2009.
Policy modified by the UAC 02/29/2012.*

Proficiency Badges

SACSCOC approved the establishment of USM’s first proficiency badge in September 2021. The first badge was awarded in 2024.

Proficiency badges indicate mastery of a specialized or discipline-specific skill through coursework. Proficiency badges allow students to earn a micro-credential upon successful completion of a combination of specific coursework and demonstration of proficiency in one or more skillsets. As such, proficiency badges require the assessment of competencies before the badge can be awarded. For administrative purposes, the single discipline-specific zero (0) credit hour course, graded on a Pass (P) or No Pass (NP) basis, encompasses competency assessment. The zero-credit course is a requirement for a proficiency badge, and a grade of P must be earned for the badge to be awarded. Because the zero-credit course measures summative competencies, the course must be the final activity to complete the badge. The Instructor of Record for the course must be the Badge Coordinator.

Policy approved by the Undergraduate Council and Graduate Council March 2023.

Programs in Teach-out

Programs, certificates, and stand-alone minors that are in an approved teach-out plan are *not* required to submit an assessment report.