



Guidelines and Instructions for Completing Program-Level Assessment Reports Cycle: 2022-2023

Academic Program Assessment

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

Student learning and student success are at the core of the mission of all institutions of higher learning. Effective institutions focus on the design and improvement of educational experiences to enhance student learning and support student learning outcomes for its education programs.

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.

Important Updates

- The **due date** for all 2022-2023 program-level assessment reports is **September 1, 2023**. All data and supplemental documentation must be entered into Weave by this date. Additionally, the status of the report must be set as “Complete” on Weave.
- Please include all **Student Learning Outcomes** under the first **Outcome Type** box titled Student Learning Outcomes. Please include all **Program Objectives** under a second Outcome Type titled Program Objectives.
- **Each finding must include an analysis.**
- **Action plans must be entered into Weave for “not met” targets.**
- For programs that met all their targets, continuous improvement initiatives/action plans are still required at least every other year.
- **Measures must explain the evaluation method used.** If a rubric has been attached to the report as evidence for the evaluation method used, please reference the rubric in the measures section.
- **Measures must have findings.** If a measure had no data collected for the 2022-2023 cycle, it will need to be updated to ensure data collection in the future.
- **Programs** must include the *Annual Program and Action Plan Analysis* document as a project attachment.

- For **programs with emphasis areas**, each emphasis area should have a designated Student Learning Outcome. There may be several SLOs that apply to all emphasis areas, but an individual SLO should be included for each emphasis area.

Academic Program-Level Assessment Plan and Report Guidelines

Assessment Plan Guidelines

- All USM degree programs on the IHL Academic Program Inventory assess student-learning outcomes at the program level.
- Separate assessment plans are encouraged at the emphasis level.
- Licensure programs may choose to assess within one plan. These plans must have a minimum of one student-learning outcome and one student achievement objective focused on licensure.
- Programs that offer separate online emphasis areas or distinct emphasis areas at different sites assess separately.
- Programs with two degrees at the same level in the same subject can choose to assess within one plan or separate plans. Graduate programs that offer en route degrees may combine assessments
- Program-level assessment plans must have a minimum of five (5) outcomes. At least four (4) outcomes must be Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs), and at least one (1) outcome must be a Program Objective focused on student achievement. Student achievement includes enrollment and retention rates, graduation rates, job placement rate, and licensure and certification rates.
- SLOs must show progressive distinction between degree levels (BA, MA, PhD) in the same academic unit.
- Graduate program SLOs and measures must demonstrate: 1) knowledge of the literature of the discipline and 2) ongoing student engagement in research and/or appropriate professional practice and training experiences.
- Each SLO must have two (2) measures and targets; one (1) must be a direct measure. At least one (1) measure and target are required for program objectives.
- Overall course grades are **NOT** acceptable measures, direct or indirect.

Report Guidelines

The following components are required for a complete assessment plan/report:

- Program Description:** This is a descriptive summary of the program that includes the program's mission/purpose. The specific skills, knowledge, and career opportunities students gain from the program are outlined here. Please include the number of hours required for the degree and how many of those hours are program specific. Please include where the program is offered (Hattiesburg/Gulf Park) and mode of delivery (face-to-face/online). Additional information that can be included: if the majority of students are part-time or full-time, how many years/semesters it takes to complete the program, what higher education opportunities are available to students after graduation, etc.
- Outcomes:**

- a. **Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs):** A statement regarding knowledge, skills, and/or traits students should gain or enhance as a result of their engagement in an academic program. SLOs should complete the sentence, “*When students complete our program, they will be able to...*” A program does not need to state all possible outcomes, but it should articulate those that are fundamental. SLOs should be succinct and specific to the program; a SLO should not contain multiple learning outcomes (bundled). You should have no less than four (4) SLOs.
- i. For ***post-baccalaureate programs***, SLOs and measures should demonstrate 1) knowledge of the literature of the discipline and 2) ongoing student engagement in research and/or appropriate professional practice and training experiences. SLOs should show progressive distinction between degree levels (BA/BS, MA/MS, PhD, etc.) (***SACSCOC Standard 9.6, Post-baccalaureate program rigor and curriculum***).
 - ii. For programs with emphasis areas, each emphasis area should have a designated student learning outcome. There may be several SLOs that apply to all emphasis areas, but an individual SLO should be included for each emphasis area.
 - iii. Please include all Student Learning Outcomes under the first Outcome Type box titled Student Learning Outcomes. In this way, all SLOs will be under 1 Outcome Type. An example is shown below:

Outcome Type
1 Outcome Type Student Learning Outcomes
DESCRIPTION leave empty
Outcomes
1.1 Outcome SLO1: TITLE
DESCRIPTION SLO 1 description.

- b. **Program Objective:** A statement focused on student achievement measures such as enrollment and retention rates, graduation rate, job placement rate, licensure, and/or certification. Please include all Program Objectives under a second Outcome Type titled Program Objectives. In this way, all Program Objectives will be under 2 Outcome Type.

3. **Measures and Targets:** A measure identifies evidence and methods used to determine achievement of expected outcomes. Measures should be detailed and specific. Targets are the quantitative criteria for how success will be measured. Measures can be direct (i.e., directly measure/evaluate a student's work – exams, papers, portfolios, projects, etc.), or they can be indirect (i.e., methods that reflect on students' learning – interviews, surveys, etc.). Each SLO must be assessed using at least two (2) measures, with at least one (1) being a direct measure. At least one (1) measure is required for program objectives. Measures and targets should show progressive distinction between degree levels.
 - a. Targets should be aspirational. The goal of assessment is to continuously improve the program and student learning.
4. **Findings:** Findings are the results of the program's measures. *Findings must be reported separately by site/mode of delivery and include all sites and/or modes.* Sample size must be included. If sampling is used, a detailed description of the sampling method must be included. All semesters must be included (Fall, Spring, and if applicable, Summer and intersession). Findings should explicitly state what semesters the data is from. After the findings have been entered, change the Target status to "met" or "not met."
5. **Analysis of Findings:** The results are analyzed to determine whether or not student learning has been achieved and provide direction for continuous improvement. If a target is "not met," what can be done to improve student learning? Have actions already been taken to improve student learning? For targets which are "met," what action plans were implemented that led to this result? What best practices are in place? What challenges remain or have been overcome? Do new targets or measures need to be chosen now that the target has been met? Remember, the goal of assessment is continuous improvement.
 - a. Stating that the target was "met" and no further action is to be taken is not an acceptable analysis.
6. **Action Plans:** A new action plan is required at least every other year and if a target is not met. Action plans must be entered into Weave for targets that were "not met" or "partially met." Action plans may be specific to individual student learning outcomes or program-level action plans. An action plan is an organized activity undertaken to help programs more effectively achieve intended outcomes, or an activity developed by faculty to improve the program for the future. The results of action plans should provide evidence of continuous improvement activities and improve student learning. Action plans do not contain vague phrases such as "we will look into this" or "no action required." If an action plan has been completed and the loop has been closed on a previous report, it no longer needs to be included in the assessment reports.
 - a. In Weave action plans are tied to measures and/or outcomes. Action plans that are not specific to an outcome should be entered into the Outcome Type "Action Plans." Please ignore the "budge source" prompt; unfortunately, it cannot be removed from the Weave platform.
 - b. If an Action Plan was completed in the previous year and discussed in the closing the loop narrative section, it should be deleted from this year's report. To delete the action plan, select the three dots and delete the section.
7. **Analysis Document:** The *Annual Program and Action Plan Analysis* document must be completed and included as a project attachment.

Detailed Analysis and Program Impact Reporting

A separate Word document, *Annual Program and Action Plan Analysis*, which includes a list of questions and a request for program inventory data, will be provided to you. Additional directions on the program inventory review /program relevance requests are included below. **This Word document must be completed (all sections answered) and attached to your project in WEAVE for your project to be considered complete.**

Program Inventory Review/Program Relevance

All programs included in the IHL inventory must report graduation and enrollment data. If multiple emphasis areas are reported in one Weave report, please complete the tables and analysis *for each emphasis area* in the *Annual Program and Action Plan Analysis* document.

All majors, certificates, and stand-alone minors on the USM Active Program Inventory strive to meet the following three-year graduation criteria:

Undergraduate

Majors, stand-alone minors, and certificates – 36 graduates over a three-year period

Graduate

Master's level and certificates – 30 graduates over a three-year period; doctoral level – 10 graduates over a three-year period

The data for the enrollment and graduations tables is accessible on the Institutional Research website (instructions below).

- Go to the website [Institutional Data | Institutional Research | The University of Southern Mississippi \(usm.edu\)](https://www.usm.edu/institutional-research)
- Click on *Faculty and Staff Data Access* (USM log-in required)
- Once logged-in, scroll down to the *Program Review* tab and click to open
- Click on *3-year program trends*
- Use the sort functions to the left-hand side of the workbook to locate the data for a specific program

Continuous Improvement and Closing the Loop

Programs are required to complete the following: enrollment and graduation analysis, comments on current action plans that are in-progress, and comments on completed action plans.

Program-level analysis should provide an overview of student strengths and weaknesses that were observed during the year. Do students struggle with certain SLOs? Do students do well with certain SLOs? Will any program-wide changes be implemented in the next year to improve student learning?

Updates should be provided for *current action plans*, action plans that were established in previous cycles and are “in-progress.” What actions from this plan have already been implemented? Have any changes/improvements been noticed, thus far? What will be done next; what are the next steps in the plan?

“Closing the loop” is the last step in the assessment cycle. Previously, the program's findings were analyzed, and that information was used to inform action (action plans) for improvement. Now, it is important to know: was our action plan successful? If not, what new efforts (new action plans) should we implement? To evaluate if an action plan was successful, compare the new assessment report results to the initial results (before action plan).

Resources

If you have any questions regarding the assessment plan and guidelines or Weave, please contact Claire Blackwell (Claire.Blackwell@usm.edu), the Institutional Assessment Coordinator. Additionally, [the Office of Institutional Effectiveness website](#) contains resources regarding program assessment, navigating weave, and SACSCOC requirements.

Best Practice / Tips

- Enter data into Weave after each semester; do not wait until close to the due date to enter all data.
- Discuss the assessment report with other members of your school. Let faculty know the results of the report and the identified areas for improvement.
- Include two direct measures for a SLO. (Only one is required; however, reviewers find that two direct measures seem to strengthen assessment.)
- Have a variety of measures. Use multiple assignments instead of one or two to measure all SLOs.
- See the previous year’s Undergraduate Program-Level overview report for examples of various components of the report.

Reviewing and Submitting the Report

- Proof-read the report; check for grammatical errors, spelling errors, and typos. Remove any “empty/blank” sections that are not used.
- Use the provided checklist, *Program-Level Complete Report Checklist*, to ensure all parts of the report are complete.
- It is encouraged to compare the report to the Review Committee quality rubric.
- Have the School director and/or dean review the report, if applicable.
- Change the status of the project to “Complete” in Weave.

Thank you for your efforts and commitment to continuous improvement!