
Assessing Assessment

COMPLYING WITH SACS 3.3.1

The University Assessment Committee (UAC) and the Office Institutional Effectiveness (IE) work together to ensure The University of Southern Mississippi complies with Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1. Championing the process of continual self-evaluation and improvement, the UAC and IE continue to revise and advance the assessment reporting and reviewing process.

University Assessment Committee

Purpose

The purpose of the University Assessment Committee is to support the process of continual self-evaluation and improvement across all academic and administrative units at The University of Southern Mississippi. The committee's primary responsibility is to ensure that the institution complies with the Principles of Accreditation for Quality Enhancement published by the Southern Association for Colleges and Schools with regards to assessment as stated in Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1:

3.3.1. The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results in each of the following areas: (Institutional Effectiveness)

- 3.3.1.1 educational programs, to include student learning outcomes*
- 3.3.1.2 administrative support services*
- 3.3.1.3 educational support services*
- 3.3.1.4 research within its educational mission, if appropriate*
- 3.3.1.5 community/public service within its educational mission, if appropriate*

Responsibilities

- Advise and support the Office of Institutional Effectiveness in all assessment matters.
- Assist in reviewing continuous improvement as demonstrated by assessment documentation.

Office of Institutional Effectiveness

Mission

The Office of Institutional Effectiveness facilitates ongoing, integrated, institution-wide planning and evaluation processes.

Responsibilities

- Facilitate assessment process for academic departments and administrative units. Inform the university community and stakeholders about assessment processes and results.
- Research current literature in institutional effectiveness to provide up-to-date guidance about assessment and analysis to all departments. Provide resources for campus to access.
- Administer the program review process.
- Analyze institution-wide data to provide useful information that will lead to institutional improvements.
- Assist the University in developing new processes and tools to improve results and achieve institution-wide goals.

IMPROVED ASSESSMENT EVALUATION PROCESS AND TOOLS

Just as programs and units are required to objectively assess student learning outcomes and administrative objectives, so must the UAC and IE assess assessment activities. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness would like to share the university's improved assessment evaluation process and tools.

UAC Responsibility

In its nascent years, the UAC focused on reviewing assessment plans – program and unit mission statements, student learning outcomes, objectives, and measures. After several reviewing cycles, the majority of the plans were found to be acceptable as defined by the assessment plan guidelines, but the quality of the subsequent report was not evaluated. Since the crux of Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1 is to “provide evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results,” it soon became apparent the UAC should focus on the reporting aspects of assessment. The UAC voted to amend their responsibility from reviewing assessment plans to reviewing continuous improvement as demonstrated by assessment documentation.

UAC Reviewing Process

From its inception, the University Assessment Committee utilized a one-phase assessment reviewing process. In this process, two reviewers – one internal (within the college or division) and one external (outside the college or division) – reviewed each plan or report. The results were summarized by Institutional Effectiveness and reported to the departments and units. Inefficiencies in this process led to the development of a new two-phase reviewing process.

In the first phase, external reviewers evaluate the assessment report with the Assessment Report Reviewing Rubric. In the second phase, internal reviewers complete the Review of Reviews, a form that allows the second reviewer to either concur or not concur with the first reviewer's evaluation. If Phase II reviewer does not agree with the Phase I review, a new Assessment Report Reviewing Rubric is completed for that program. The Review of Reviews serves as a summary of the quality of all assessment reports for the department or division.

After the first implementation of the two-phase review, a survey was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of this new process. The UAC members overwhelmingly agreed to continue with the two-phase review and suggestions for improvement were implemented. In the second implementation of the two-phase review, a mediating step was inserted between the first and second review. IE reviewed the Phase I reviews before they were distributed to Phase II reviewers and addressed any apparent issues or misunderstandings. Departments were notified of any missing elements. This resulted in improved Phase II reviews.

Assessment Report Evaluation Rubric

The UAC Assessment Evaluation Rubric has undergone multiple revisions. The first reviewing rubric was designed to assess assessment plans and asked a series of questions to be answered with “agree,” “partially agree,” “disagree,” and “don't know.” Based subjectively of the number of “agree's,” IE returned the reviews to the departments with a memo containing one of the following statements; “no substantial changes needed,” “needs a few modifications,” or “unacceptable as written.” The next revision of the rubric asked the reviewer to evaluate each outcome and measure on a set of criteria. Developed in Excel spreadsheets, this rubric provided more detail but was deemed cumbersome. When the UAC switched to reviewing assessment reports, a new, simpler rubric was developed. Still in Excel, it required reviewers to shade out one cell of criteria (out of four) for each reporting element and could be printed on one sheet of paper.

The rubric was enhanced yet again with the new two-phase review cycle. Checkboxes were added for each criterion within a cell and instructions for determining the overall score for each row were developed. The criteria for each reporting element reflect the Assessment Guidelines. Any 1's or 2's indicate Assessment Report Guidelines were not followed. To evaluate the overall quality of the report, reviewers were asked to determine whether the report does not support, inadequately supports, adequately supports, or commendably supports SACS 3.3.1. This overall evaluation does not necessarily have to correspond to the scores on the rubric. The rubric is posted on the Web and linked to in assessment correspondences. A Word document that can be printed on one two-sided page or filled out electronically, the new rubric has been well-received by both the reviewers and the reviewed.

Academic Program Reporting Calendar

Initially, academic programs were required to submit a full assessment report every summer, including action plans for improvement. Faculty felt this cycle did not allow time to collect adequate data to inform curriculum decisions and did not permit all faculty to be involved in assessment planning activities. In response to requests to modify the assessment cycle, a two-year planning and annual reporting cycle was adopted by the UAC. With this new cycle, assessment plans are in place for two years, action plans are developed every two years, and assessment reports remain annual. Incomplete and/or missing findings and late reports led to the implementation of multiple due dates for entering findings in the assessment reporting software.

In the spring semester of the second year of the cycle, departments are asked to gather faculty; review past assessment reports (including data from the current year); reevaluate learning outcomes, measures, and targets; and develop action plans for next assessment cycle implementation. Departments now have more than a full year of data (including any summer semester data) to evaluate when developing new action plans and assessment plans.

Two-year Assessment Cycle (2008-09 & 2009-10)

Fall 2008	Implement new Action Plans and Assessment Plan
January 31, 2009	Record Fall 08 Findings (by site)*
May 31, 2009	Record Spring 09 Findings (by site)*
June 30, 2009	Submit Analysis, Action Plan Tracking, & Annual Summary for 08-09
January 31, 2010	Record Summer 09 and Fall 09 Findings (by site)*
Spring 2010	Department evaluates assessment documentation to date and develops Action Plans and Assessment Plan for 2010-11 & 2011-12
May 31, 2010	Record Spring 10 Findings (by site)*
June 30, 2010	Submit Analysis, Action Tracking, & Annual Summary for 09-10
	Submit New Action Plans and Assessment Plan for 2010-11 & 2011-12

*Programs offered at multiple campuses or by multiple formats MUST report their findings by site

Administrative Unit Reporting Calendar

Administrative units, reporting on an administrative year of July 1 to June 30, were originally required to submit assessment reports in the summer and assessment plans in the fall. In response to requests from several administrative units (admissions, first year experience, controller, etc.) to align the assessment calendar to reflect a September 1 to August 31 administrative year, the administrative unit assessment cycle was altered as well. Since an assessment report's action plans should essentially translate into next year's objectives, assessment reports and plans are now due on the same day.

Traditional Calendar (Administrative Year = July 1 – June 30)

July 31, 2009	2008-09 Assessment Report (Findings, Analysis, Action Plans, & Annual Summary)
	2009-10 Assessment Plan (Objectives & Measures)
July 31, 2009	2008-09 Assessment Report (Findings, Analysis, Action Plans, & Annual Summary)
	2009-10 Assessment Plan (Objectives & Measures)

Alternative Calendar (Administrative Year = September 1 – August 31)*

September 30, 2009	2008-09 Assessment Report (Findings, Analysis, Action Plans, & Annual Summary)
	2009-10 Assessment Plan (Objectives & Measures)
September 30, 2009	2008-09 Assessment Report (Findings, Analysis, Action Plans, & Annual Summary)
	2009-10 Assessment Plan (Objectives & Measures)

*To determine if administrative unit meets the criteria to qualify for the Alternative Calendar, please contact Institutional Effectiveness (ie@usm.edu)

TOOLKIT FOR EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATION

ASSESSMENT POLICIES & PROCEDURES

“Official” document; developed and amended at meetings of the University Assessment Committee by 2/3 vote.

Defines Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes participants; Assessment of Administrative Objectives participants; Assessment of Research within the University’s Mission; and Assessment of Community/Public Service with the University’s Mission

Establishes procedures for new entities, dissolving entities, and reorganizations

Outlines Assessment Requirements

Outlines Assessment Cycles

ASSESSMENT INSTRUCTIONS AND GUIDELINES

Living documents; posted on the Web and linked to in assessment correspondences.

Academic Program Guidelines and Instructions

Administrative Unit Guidelines and Instructions

UAC POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Bylaws document; developed and amended at meetings of the University Assessment Committee by 2/3 vote.

States UAC Purpose and Responsibilities

Establishes Membership and Terms of Service & Rotation

Establishes Subcommittees and Duties

Outlines Meeting Requirements

UAC FOLDER

New folder distributed at the first UAC meeting of each AY; contains the following materials:

Core Requirement 2.4 & 2.5 and Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1 & 3.4.1 from the *Resource Manual for the Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement*
(<http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/handbooks/Exhibit%2031.Resource%20Manual.pdf>)

UAC Policies & Procedures

UAC membership and contact information

Assessment Guidelines & Instructions

ASSESSMENT SHOWCASE BOOKLET – ACADEMIC

Booklet distributed at the Annual Assessment Showcase and given to new Assessment Contacts throughout the year.

Assessment Policies & Procedures

USM Vision, Mission, Plan

Assessment Policies

Assessment Process Overview

Definitions, Best Practices, and Samples of Exemplary Assessment Components

Recommended Reading