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.
- 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.

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 the 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 (2012-13 & 2013-14)

| Fall 2012 | Implement new Action Plans and Assessment Plan |
| October 31, 2013 | Record Fall 12 Findings (by site)* |
| May 31, 2013 | Record Spring 13 Findings (by site)* |
| September 30, 2013 | Alternative Calendar Complete 2012-13 Report Due Date |
| Oct. 1 – Dec. 2013 | University Assessment Committee Review of Assessment Reports |
| Jan. – Feb. 2014 | UAC Reviews returned to Departments |
| January 31, 2014 | Record Summer 13 and Fall 13 Findings (by site)* |
| Spring 2014 | Department evaluates assessment documentation to date and develops Action Plans and Assessment Plan for 2014-15 & 2015-16 |
| May 31, 2014 | Record Spring 14 Findings (by site)* |

*Programs offered at multiple campuses or by multiple modes MUST report findings by site.

University Assessment Committee Policy Regarding Academic Programs’ Participation in the University-Wide Assessment Process

The purpose of the University Assessment Committee (UAC) is to support the process of continual self-evaluation and improvement across all academic and administrative units at The University of Southern Mississippi. Assessment involves the articulation of desired student learning outcomes, the design of measures to assess student learning in relationship to those outcomes, and the systematic collection of findings to determine if, and to what extent, student learning is occurring. Student learning outcomes assessment data are reported and preserved in WEAVEonline, the program adopted by the UAC as the university-wide assessment database.

Each year, a report of program and academic unit assessment participation is made to the deans, provost and president of The University of Southern Mississippi. The UAC will continue (1) its recognition of academic programs judged to provide adequate and commendable support to SACS Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1; (2) to hold the annual Assessment Showcase that recognizes academic programs judged to provide commendable support to SACS Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1; and (3) to provide focused guidance and assistance to those programs that do not achieve at least an adequate rating in a given year. The UAC will include in that report a list of any academic programs that did not submit plans and reports required within the university-wide assessment process.

The UAC finds it unacceptable that some academic programs consistently do not participate in the university-wide assessment process and documentation of such in WEAVEonline. Such lack of participation undermines the university-wide efforts in assessment and jeopardizes the university response to SACS Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1. The UAC supports academic programs’ participation in discipline-specific accreditation processes; however, this participation does not exempt a program from participation in the university-wide assessment process.

UAC Approved 04.19.11
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 and Guidelines
- Outlines Assessment Cycles

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

- Incorporates Academic Program Guidelines

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:

- Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1 from the Resource Manual for the Principles of Accreditation
- UAC Policies & Procedures
- UAC membership and contact information
- Assessment Guidelines & Instructions
- Previous Year’s Committee on Committees Annual Report

ASSESSMENT SHOWCASE BOOKLET
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 Guidelines
- Assessment Process Overview
- Assessment Updates
- Definitions, Best Practices, and Samples of Exemplary Assessment Components
- Recommended Reading