Assessment Policies
ADOP TED BY THE UNIVERSITY ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE

Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes Participants:

A. Educational Programs — IHL maintains the official inventory of USM academic programs (http://www.mississippi.edu/research/stats.html). To be in compliance with SACS policy, all degree programs in this inventory must assess program-level student learning outcomes in accordance with the Academic Program Assessment Plan and Report Guidelines. UAC Approved 9.30.09

B. Certificate Programs — The Office of Institutional Research maintains the inventory of active USM certificate programs (http://www.usm.edu/institutional-research). To be in compliance with SACS-COC Principles of Accreditation policy, all certificate programs in this inventory must assess program-level student learning outcomes in accordance with the Certificate Program Assessment Plan and Reporting Guidelines. UAC Approved 9.30.09; Modified 02.29.12

C. Emphasis Areas — All teacher licensure programs must assess separately. All other programs with emphasis areas determine whether they assess at the program-level or the emphasis-level. Many programs have elected to separate their assessments at the emphasis-level. The UAC encourages programs to consider emphasis-level assessment if plans of study vary greatly. The UAC can recommend emphasis-level assessment if program-level assessment reports are deemed inadequate. The UAC can also recommend programs address emphasis areas within the same report by having several common student learning outcomes for the program and at least one separate student learning outcome for each emphasis area. UAC Approved 10.28.09

D. Stand-alone Minors — All stand-alone minors must assess minor-level student learning outcomes in accordance with the Certificate Program Assessment Plan and Report Guidelines. A stand-alone minor is defined as a program of study that does not have a “parent” degree. UAC Approved 10.28.09; Modified 02.29.12

The University of Southern Mississippi Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes Participants Policy document is a “work-in-progress.” The University Assessment Committee will continue to develop these policies to ensure the university is in compliance with the areas of assessment as outlined in SACS Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.:

- educational programs, to include student learning outcomes
- administrative support services
- educational support services
- research within its educational mission, if appropriate
- community/public service within its educational mission, if appropriate
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

Items for Future Consideration:

UAC recommendations for the future are that (1) University Assessment Committee processes be incorporated into the program prioritization processes used by the University Priorities Committee (UPC), and (2) successful completion of assessment documentation be incorporated in performance evaluations of those department chairs and program coordinators responsible and of their respective deans. It is essential to the continued success of the university that assessment data are collected and the results be acted upon for improvement of student learning.

UAC Approved 04.19.11
Plan and Report Guidelines

Academic Program Assessment Plan and Report Guidelines

PLAN GUIDELINES:
1. All USM degree programs on the IHL Academic Program Inventory assess student learning outcomes at the program level.
2. Separate assessment plans are encouraged at the emphasis level.
3. To assist with the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) assessment requirements, all teacher licensure programs assess at the emphasis level.
4. Programs that offer separate online emphasis areas or distinct emphasis areas at different sites assess separately.
5. Programs with two degrees at the same level in the same subject can choose to assess within one plan or separate plans.
6. Program-level Assessment Plans have a minimum of five outcomes. At least four outcomes must be Student Learning Outcomes and at least one outcome must be a Program Objective focused on student achievement. Student achievement includes enrollment and retention rates, graduation rate, job placement rate, licensing, and certification.
7. Each student learning outcome must have two measures; one must be a direct measure. At least one measure is required for Program Objectives.
8. Course grades cannot be used as measures.

REPORT GUIDELINES:
Programs offered at multiple teaching sites or by multiple delivery modes must report their findings by site and include all sites and/or modes in the findings analysis.

The following components are required for a complete assessment report:
1. Findings (separated by site/mode if applicable)
2. Action Plans (required in year 2 of the assessment cycle)
3. Analysis
4. Program Summary - Programs are asked to describe the program and summarize program highlights of the past year. The summary field is needed to provide context to an outside reviewer. Program contributions, activities, and accomplishments should be included in this field.
5. Continuous Improvement Initiatives (Additional Action Plans) - Any department-level or program-level action plans for improvement that are not necessarily tied to a specific student learning outcome or program objective should be described in this field. Efforts to improve enrollment and retention rates, graduation rate, job placement rate, licensing, and certification should be captured in this field.
6. Closing the Loop (Action Plan Tracking) – Programs are asked to summarize the results of previous action plan implementation. This is the opportunity for programs to close the assessment loop – to report on the success (or nonsuccess) of previously implemented action plans. It is very important for programs to respond to this section with thought and detail. This section is where programs provide evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results.
Certificate Program Assessment Plan and Report Guidelines

All certificate programs must identify a minimum of two student learning outcomes. Each student learning outcome must be assessed with at least one direct measure.

Certificate programs must assess annually, following program-level calendars. The following components are required for a complete assessment report:
1. Findings (separated by site/mode if applicable)
2. Action Plans
3. 2-part Analysis to include Closing the Loop as applicable

Stand-alone Minor Assessment Plan and Report Guidelines

All stand-alone minors must identify a minimum of two student learning outcomes. Each student learning outcome must be assessed with at least one direct measure.

Stand-Alone Minors must assess annually, following program-level calendars. Stand-Alone Minors shall follow certificate reporting guidelines.

Assessment Process Overview

SPRING 2013

2012-2013/2013-2014 Academic Program Assessment Plans are in place.

An assessment plan includes:
 a) Program Mission/Purpose
 b) Student Learning Outcomes
 c) Measures and Targets
A complete 2012-2013 Academic Program Assessment Report includes:
 d) Findings (due May 31)
 e) Action Plans (due June 30) - Action Plans are not required in Year 1 of assessment cycle
 f) Analysis (due June 30)
 g) Annual Report (due June 30) - alternative calendar programs have a due date of September 30

University Assessment Calendar for degree programs can be found on the Institutional Effectiveness Web site: http://www.usm.edu/institutional-effectiveness/academic-program-assessment

The University Assessment Committee (UAC) directs the assessment process at the University of Southern Mississippi. Southern Miss follows a two-year planning and annual reporting cycle. With this cycle, assessment plans are in place for two years, action plans are developed every two years, and assessment reports are annual.

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. With the two-year cycle, departments should have more than a full year of data (including any summer semester data) to evaluate when developing new action plans for improvement and revising assessment plans if needed.

The University Assessment Committee (UAC) reviews assessment reports in the fall semester to determine if:
1) Assessment Plan and Report Guidelines were followed
2) The Assessment Report supports SACS Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1

These reviews are returned to the departments and presented to the deans and the provost in the spring semester.