An Assessment Walkthrough

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Using the Assessment Cycle for Planning

Assessment Inventory: Before you get started with your assessment plan, take inventory of the work you have already done. Gather student learning outcomes; syllabi and co-curricular learning handouts; rubrics, tests, surveys, and other measures; curriculum details; past assessment plans and reports; Academic Program Reviews and Three-Year Reports; and any other materials related to student learning.

Four Steps + Action Research Questions: The steps below follow the four-part assessment cycle, which represents a continuous loop of assessment activities. After taking inventory of what your program already has in place and working through the four parts, you will have the core of your assessment plan. Then you can build a schedule around your *action research questions* to stipulate which learning outcome you will examine, when, and how.

1. **Create or Clarify Student Learning Outcomes:** Reflect on student learning outcomes (*SLOs*) for your program.

   - What will students know when they complete this program?
   - What will students be able to do when they complete this program?

2. **Analyze Learning Opportunities:** Map SLOs to courses and co-curricular learning opportunities to analyze where learning happens (*curriculum mapping*).

   - Which courses/activities help students to achieve these outcomes?
   - How do courses/activities work together to build mastery?
   - Where do you expect mastery of each SLO?
   - How do your SLOs contribute to institutional-level learning outcomes? (UMBC's Functional Competencies)

3. **Measure Learning:** Embed multiple direct measures at key learning opportunities and identify complementary indirect measures.

   - Use your *curriculum map* to identify where key assessments should occur (i.e., core courses, exams, portfolios, capstones, etc.)
   - Design *direct measures* (*rubrics, tests,* etc.) to assess learning.
   - Consider *indirect measures* (i.e., student satisfaction surveys) that could add insights to your direct measure evidence.
   - Devise data collection and *aggregation* methods (i.e., Blackboard, Excel spreadsheets). If possible, collect data on all of your SLOs, even though you don't need to analyze and apply all of the data this year.

4. **Apply the Results:** Create a plan to use the evidence effectively to improve the program.

   - *Triangulate* your data—what do the results from multiple measures suggest about student learning?

- Identify shared areas of concern—reflect on course-level and program-level *interventions* that could improve these learning areas.
- Brainstorm about *institutional-level interventions* that could help. Reflect on issues that cannot be addressed within the program—these may require college- or institutional-level interventions if other programs share these concerns (backed by learning data).
- Create *continuity mechanisms** to make assessment part of everyday life. Schedule time with your faculty to discuss the results, reflect, compare, question, etc. Set up a system to capture action items and results and integrate collecting and using data with your other teaching and learning work.
- Craft *action research questions:* Begin with a question/assumption/thought about student learning in your program. For example, if you suspect students struggle with citing and integrating sources, begin by examining the related student learning outcome data.
- Design follow-up measures for each *intervention* (if an intervention works, then it becomes an improvement).

(**Continuity mechanisms* are tools and practices that embed assessment work in everyday processes to foster continuity across cycles and programs. For example, add language to your plan that requires faculty to include course-level student learning outcomes on their syllabi and build time to discuss assessment results and interventions at standing meetings.)

Putting Your Assessment Plan Together

Once you have worked on your SLOs, curriculum map, measures, and data (or action research questions if this is your first assessment cycle), you can lay out a schedule.

Put it all together. Integrate the pieces you worked on above into a plan. How does it all fit together? Explain how the learning outcomes at each level align, how the learning opportunities enable students to achieve the outcomes at each level, how you know (data from past measures) and plan to find out more (data from current and future measures), and how you apply the results to help student learn better.

Begin at the end. What happened with the last round of the assessment cycle? What did the measures reveal and how did you apply them? Use your data to shape the next steps.

Create a schedule. Begin with your priority action research questions in the first year of your plan. Then schedule time to analyze student learning in the other SLOs for the next cycles. Clearly explain when and how you will assess each of your outcomes, how you will embed continuity mechanisms into your plan to ensure that you are routinely examining and using your assessment plan and results, and how you will implement improvements based on findings.

Plan for Interventions. After you celebrate your students' learning achievements, focus on ways you can help them learn even more effectively. If the learning data reveal student learning challenges, how could you intervene to support struggling students? Build in time at meetings with colleagues to discuss effective, research-based approaches that you could implement at each level (and how you will measure to find out if they work).

- *Course-Level Interventions:* At the course-level, you can revise, add, or divide assignments to help students to better achieve the learning outcomes you have identified. Consult with colleagues and Faculty Development Center staff to discuss possibilities.

- *Program-Level Interventions:* If your evidence reveals a learning challenge shared by colleagues throughout your program, reflect on ways your program can support students, for example, by adding scaffolded learning opportunities to core courses.

- *College- or Division-Level Interventions:* Challenges across a college or division might warrant investment in an intervention across programs, for example, funding a special tutorial program.

- *Institutional-Level Interventions:* Sometimes your evidence will point to a student learning need that spans the entire university. UMBC already offers a number of institutional interventions, like library workshops and writing and tutoring services from the Learning Resources Center. These interventions can be a good place to start—for example, if your students struggle to synthesize resources, you can require that they attend relevant library workshops. If you identify something that has not yet been addressed, attend one of the Faculty Development Center's Closing-the-Loop programs to share your concerns. Then review learning results from other programs, discuss with colleagues, and share your recommendations with your chair, dean, or director.

Share with Your Audiences. Include a few details about how you will share your plan with your various audiences, especially students.

- How will students learn about the program and course outcomes? Will you publish your plan on your website? Will you use your curriculum map to advise students? Will you engage students in crafting your direct measures?

- Where will you share your learning results? Will you post results on your website?

- How will you showcase your closing-the-loop through interventions and improvements?

Anticipate Reporting Requirements. Review the assessment reports that you are required to submit to your chair or dean. How will you present the results? How can your results be aggregated or compared to learning results in other programs? If you report to an external accreditor for your discipline, explain how you will adapt your results to those requirements. Keep biennial reports and the seven-year APR and three-year follow-up report in mind, so you can pull results easily from your plan and connect it to learning in other programs.

- Visit the Provost's Office website for institutional reports
  http://provost.umbc.edu/assessment/.

- See the 2015 Closing-the-Loop Template here:
  https://umbc.box.com/s/zsx3jw08b81zgvlkxc2p7dnrsxcnr2gx.)

Assess Your Plan. Discuss your plan and the results with your colleagues—is it useful? How could it be more useful? A metarubric can simplify your assessment, for example the WASC Senior College and University Commission's rubric
(https://www.wascsenior.org/content/rubric-program-learning-outcomes).