

# Student Learning Assessment Policy

## Introduction

SUNY Downstate academic program leaders and faculty conduct cyclical assessment of student learning to maintain the highest standards of education for students and to facilitate ongoing program enhancements. Non-academic programs and related administrative units engage in self-assessment of their services, aligning their efforts with strategic goals in accordance with the institutional strategic plan.

## Policy

The faculty and leadership of each college, school, and program will hold primary responsibility for defining how best to teach and assess student learning.

The faculty and leadership within each School and College should develop and maintain plans to assess the effectiveness of their academic degree and certificate programs. Assessment plans should be reviewed and updated periodically to maintain effectiveness.

Each assessment plan should include the five basic elements of the Assessment Cycle Framework:

- Program Learning Objectives (PLO) to set expectations for what students will know or be able to achieve by completing an academic program.
- Details to indicate how and when the teaching and learning will occur for each PLO, and whether each PLO aligns with Institutional Learning Objectives (ILO). Details of teaching and learning activities are commonly summarized in a curriculum map or maps.
- Criteria or benchmarks for evaluating the effective delivery of each PLO. Benchmarks might be defined by program accrediting agencies.
- Methods and/or strategies to measure the level of achievement of each PLO including the frequency by which each strategy or method is applied. Details for assessment strategies and methods are commonly summarized in a curriculum map or maps.
- Methods and strategies for implementing changes based on the results of assessment.

Each College and School will share their assessment plans, as defined above, and periodic updates with the Outcomes Assessment Coordinating Committee (OACC) using the Downstate template or templates. Colleges and Schools that have existing assessment plans for their programs should share each plan, include the Downstate assessment plan template as a cover page, and cite the relevant pages from their existing plan to align with the Downstate assessment plan template.

Each College and School will identify a person who is currently responsible for assessment and accreditation activities in their respective College or School and who will serve as the liaison to the EOAA for assessment and accreditation activities.

Each College and School will share an annual Assessment Report with supporting analyses where appropriate using the approved Downstate template to the OACC.

Each College and School will share as needed copies of official accreditation documentation and communications with the Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs, including any required reports and

supporting documents submitted to the program accreditor, and communications of action and requests from program accreditors.

Deans, senior leaders, and their designees will use the results of assessment for the improvement of educational effectiveness including but not limited to changes in the academic programs and resources to enhance the educational experience. The results of academic assessment will not be used for evaluation of individual students, or of faculty or administrators in promotion, tenure, or appointment procedures.

The OACC does not have authority over the deans. Deans will continue to share assessment and accreditation information as appropriate to their roles within the University's organizational structure.

### Common Terminology:

**Academic Programs:** curriculum of didactic and/or clinical study whose completion results in an academic award of a degree or advanced certificate.

**Assessment:** A systematic process for understanding and improving student learning, involving collecting, analyzing, and discourse on multiple data sets to make informed decisions about teaching and student progress.

**Evaluation:** The process of making judgments about the quality or value of something, such as an educational program, using various data sources including but not limited to student learning assessment data, administrative metrics such as financial position and enrollment trends, and discipline-specific measurements.

**Analysis:** The process of examining and interpreting data to understand trends, correlations, and patterns, often used within the context of assessment and evaluation.

**Observation:** A method of data collection where behaviors or processes are watched and recorded, often used to gather qualitative data in an educational setting.

**Examination:** A formal test measuring student knowledge or proficiency in a specific area, used as a direct method of assessment.

**Measurement:** quantification of the attributes or performance of students. Measurement is often a component of assessment and involves the use of tools or instruments (like tests, scales, or rubrics) to gather numerical data or scores that represent a student's level of achievement or proficiency in a specific area.

**Program Goals:** Broad, mission-derived statements outlining what the program aims to provide to students and achieve within the academic institution.

**Student Learning Objectives:** Specific, measurable statements of what students are expected to learn or be able to do by completing in a particular educational experience or activity. Objectives are prospective.

**Student Learning Outcomes:** The observable and measurable results of student learning, indicating the knowledge, skills, and competencies students have acquired or demonstrated. Outcomes are reflective.

**Program Learning Objectives:** Student Learning Objectives at the program-level.

**Program Learning Outcomes:** Student Learning Outcomes at the program-level.

**Course Learning Objectives:** Student Learning Objectives at the course-level.

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While all the above terms are interrelated in the context of educational assessment, each serves a unique purpose.

- Assessment and evaluation involve broader processes that include planning, data collection, and decision-making.
- Analysis is a part of these processes, focusing on interpreting the data.
- Observation and examination are specific methods of data collection, with observation being more qualitative and examination being more formal and quantitative.
- Measurement is the act of quantifying attributes or performance, often feeding into the overall assessment or evaluation process.
- Objectives and outcomes are sometimes used interchangeably, but often objectives are prospective to indicate faculty expectations and outcomes are often reflective to indicate student achievements.

## Assessment Cycle Framework

The Assessment Cycle Framework, also known as the Assessment Loop Process, is widely used in higher education and promoted by various institutions and authors in the field of assessment for program assessment and improvement.

The Assessment Cycle Framework involves a cyclical process of assessment that typically includes the following steps: setting learning objectives, designing assessment methods, collecting data, analyzing results, and using findings for improvement. This framework emphasizes the continuous nature of assessment and its role in program improvement.

At Downstate, the Assessment Cycle Framework is structured using five questions:

1. What do you want to do? (*learning objectives: expectations of knowledge and skills students will achieve by end of a program*)
2. How / When are you going to do it? (*curriculum maps: how/when to teach and to measure PLOs using direct and indirect measurements*).
3. How well are you doing it? (*assessment criteria, benchmarks, and/or program accreditation standards*).
4. How do you know? / what have you learned? (*observations and results of assessment at the level of Program Learning Objectives (PLO).*)  
*NB: employment and licensure rates show high-aggregate outcomes, but those outcomes might not be sufficient for what middle states is looking for at the level of individual program learning objectives in each academic program.*
5. What are you going to do next? (*"closing the loop." Actual or planned use of assessment results for Continuous Quality Improvement*)

## Review Process:

The Student Learning Assessment Policy will be reviewed at minimum every three years.

Endorsed unanimously by the OACC February 12, 2023

Approved by the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and College and School Deans February 29, 2024