

Review of Annual Assessment Reports for Academic Programs

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Received Reports

Northern faculty submitted 39 assessment reports corresponding to academic programs at both the undergraduate and graduate level. Most of these reports documented student progress towards program learning goals, as evidenced by data collected during the 2018-19 academic year. But faculty from some programs chose to spend their energy on re-writing the program's learning outcomes, rubrics, and data collection plan, rather than summarizing data according to an outdated assessment plan. All 39 of these documents were reviewed by assessment committee members; the feedback in those reviews was then returned in early May. These documents are accessible in the below shared directories.

Submitted assessment reports: <H:\Faculty-Staff>

<Data\Assessment\FacultyWorkingDirectory\AcademicProgramAnnualAssessment\Assessment Reports by Year\2018-19>

Reviews of assessment reports: <H:\Faculty-Staff>

<Data\Assessment\FacultyWorkingDirectory\AcademicProgramAnnualAssessment\Reviews of Assessment Reports by Year\2018-19>

It should also be noted that there were ten programs that did not submit an assessment report despite having students enrolled in those programs. They are listed below.

Associate Degree Programs

(AA) Criminal Justice
(AA) General Studies
(AS) Business Administration
(AS) Banking & Financial Services
(AS) Biotechnology

Bachelor's Degree Programs

(BGS) General Studies

Master's Degree Programs

(MSEd) Educational Studies
(MSEd) Leadership & Administration
(MSEd) Sport Performance & Leadership
(MSEd) Teaching & Learning

Programs were given a template for these annual academic program assessment reports, containing three main components.

1. For each program learning outcome, five data items: a statement of the learning outcome itself, the method of assessment (i.e., type of student artifact used and the criteria for rating the artifact into each proficiency category); the goal for the assessment results; the summary of all data collected; and a final marking of whether the goal for this outcome was "Met," "Partially Met," or "Not Met."
2. A narrative that summarizes and interprets the results for the program holistically.
3. A list of proposed action plans. For each action plan, the form asks what action is being suggested, what goal and timeline is in mind for this action, who is responsible for completing this action, and what resources are needed to take this action.

Observations

Assessment of academic programs has had renewed attention among many departments during the last year. In many units, faculty worked to identify at least five BOR cross-curricular skills addressed by each program, as required by [BOR policy statement 2.11](#). There are still some programs who have not yet finalized their assessment plans, but it is expected that all 2019-20 assessment reports (due December 31, 2020) will demonstrate progress in this respect.

The below table shows the number of times each BOR cross-curricular skill was included in an undergraduate program's stated learning outcomes, split out by the academic units of the College of Arts & Sciences, the School of Professional Studies, and the School of Fine Arts. It appears that Northern programs most often include the cross-curricular skills of Critical & Creative Thinking, Inquiry & Analysis, and Problem Solving, while the skill Civic Knowledge & Engagement is identified least often as an included learning outcome.

BOR Cross-Curricular Skill	NSU College/School				Total
	A&S	Business	Education	Fine Arts	
Inquiry & Analysis	10	0	4	0	14
Critical & Creative Thinking	10	0	3	2	15
Information Literacy	3	0	1	2	6
Teamwork	4	0	2	0	6
Problem Solving	6	0	2	2	10
Civic Knowledge & Engagement	2	0	0	0	2
Intercultural Knowledge	4	0	1	2	7
Ethical Reasoning	2	0	3	0	5
Foundational Lifelong Learning Skills	4	0	0	2	6
Integrative Learning	2	0	2	0	4
Diversity, Inclusion & Equity	4	0	3	0	7

Most programs reported between 5-10 learning outcomes, but there were some outdated assessment plans that listed fewer than five. Another area of consistency among programs was the type of student artifact collected for assessment purposes; nearly every program used graded assignments or exams as evidence of student learning. But some programs included other artifacts as well: surveys, nationally-normed exams (e.g., Peregrine, Praxis, ETS Major Field Test), locally-written exit exams, course grades, and student portfolios. For some programs, use of some of these types of artifacts will be abandoned once the faculty adopt their updated assessment plan.

For each program learning outcome assessed in the report, faculty were asked to categorize the outcome as “Met,” “Partially Met,” or “Not Met,” as evidenced by the 2018-19 artifacts collected and analyzed. Across all submitted assessment reports, 69% of program learning outcomes were deemed “Met.” The categories of “Partially Met” and “Not Met” claimed 20% and 11% of the outcomes, respectively. There were two programs (BS Management, BS Marketing) with a majority of the outcomes considered “Not Met.” At the other end of the spectrum, there were eleven programs reporting that all learning outcomes were “Met,” according to the criteria described for each. These eleven programs come from the areas of education, music, and business: AS Digital Media Design; BA Art (both Fine Art and Graphic Design); BME Music Education; BS Banking & Financial Services; BS Economics; BSEd Art; BSEd Elementary Education; BSEd Special Education; MME Music Education; and MSED Counseling – School Counseling.

In the last section of the assessment report template, reserved for suggested actions prompted by the observed results, most program reports described work that was underway to re-write the program’s learning outcomes, rubrics, and assessment plan. There were other suggestions, too, such as changing the type of student work collected, adding opportunities for students to get additional instruction on a specific subject (i.e. optional workshops or a new required course), regularly making space during departmental meetings to discuss implications of assessment results, and more.

Reports to Highlight

Some programs submitted exemplary reports and are highlighted here. These reports described rigorous data collection, thoughtful reflection, and/or an appropriate plan of action.

There were three programs with commendable data collection strategies to measure student learning. Having trustworthy information is the first step to a rigorous assessment process.

- The faculty in the BA Sociology program used detailed descriptions, as well as appendices at the end of the report, to explain what student work is collected for which learning outcome. The assessment committee member who reviewed this report noted the “multiple measures at different points” of a student’s progression through the major, stating that this will “definitely help faculty to identify students who are struggling and to ensure student success.”
- The MSED Counseling reports (both Clinical Mental Health and School Counseling) also used multiple student artifacts to measure progress. The reviewing committee member described it this way: “The

multi-modal aspect of the program assessment is well thought out and clearly allows faculty to identify and remedy issues early.” The reviewer went on to say, “All goals are measured in a consistent way across the program and seem to also be consistent with the standards set by their accrediting body and the field (CPCE exams).”

- Finally, the BS Sports Marketing & Administration report was another example of faculty including clear descriptions of the student work collected to assess their progress. The report included copies of those exact exam/assignment prompts and scoring rubrics. This detailed documentation facilitates a consistent assessment process across instructors and terms.

With the availability of reliable data, faculty can then analyze the results, reflect on the implications of those results, and suggest appropriate actions.

- The report from the BA/BSEd English programs thoughtfully considered how to use their collected results to improve their program. The faculty described two action items that seemed wholly appropriate for the situation. First, they noted that lack of student progress towards one of the learning outcomes might be due to students not being able to include in this portfolio the complete array of media formats used by students. To address this, they suggest transitioning from a paper portfolio to an electronic one that allows students to include digital works like web content and audio or visual files. Second, the faculty put forward the idea of creating workshops for students, focused on grammar issues. They described the possibility of arranging this with staff in the Student Success Center to increase the visibility of the event. The assessment committee member who reviewed this report summarized these suggested actions in this way: “The approach taken here by the faculty to the assessment process is thoughtful, genuine, and comprehensive.”
- The BA Music and BME Music Education programs suggested curricular changes as a response to data collected. In particular, faculty mentioned the possibility of adding an opportunity for formative assessment in the form of “Recital Hearings,” described as a preview of a student’s preparation for his/her senior recital. The report also included a plan of action to add a course, MUS-102, to the list of requirements for the BME. This Introduction to Music Education course would provide a foundational explanation of the requirements and expectations of the BME program. It’s not clear, though, which learning outcome might see improved student learning by this change.

As stated earlier in this document, some academic programs summarized data that was collected under their previous assessment plan in the annual report, but noted a new approach to assessment was being finalized amongst themselves. These newly improved assessment plans were also submitted so that assessment committee members could review them. Here are some comments about these improved assessment plans.

- BA Communication Studies: The reviewer stated, “The assessment plan uses a curricular map and accompanying rubrics to describe how student work will be assessed to measure progress towards each outcome. This detailed language is clear and promotes consistency.”
- BS Medical Laboratory Science: The reviewer noted that the old assessment plan used course grades and rates of post-graduation employment to assess student learning. In the updated plan, course learning outcomes have been rewritten with particular coursework and rubrics listed for each outcome.
- BS/BSEd Mathematics: The reviewer commented, “The math faculty have submitted a new assessment plan which includes rubrics, BOR cross-curricular skills, and intended student artifacts for collection. This new plan will generate assessment data that is more usable for identifying program features to initiate or retain to be satisfied with student learning gains.”
- BS/BSEd Chemistry: The reviewer observed deficiencies in the prior assessment process, saying, “The chemistry program is revamping their learning outcomes and assessment plan, so this report simply highlights some of the concerns of the current plan. A new approach to assessing student learning, one that uses student work from required courses, aligned with specific learning outcomes, and assessed using a common rubric, will provide the program’s faculty with usable data.”
- BS Environmental Science: The reviewer noted that the newly submitted assessment plan contains “clearer information about the assessments and learning outcomes” than the plan associated with the collected data from 2018-19 summarized in the report. This clarity is an important improvement.

Concerns

Just as some submitted reports were especially data-driven and reflective, there were other reports that did not yet adhere to the assessment guidelines posted on Northern's portal webpage for assessment. Moreover, it's not clear that efforts are underway to improve the department's approach to assessing their students' learning gains.

The first concern to raise here is that some programs have not yet identified at least five cross-curricular skills addressed by the program among the BOR's list of eleven such skills.

Many reports lacked specificity in terms of how student work was assessed and ultimately assigned a proficiency score.

- Some reports lacked rubrics. Without rubrics, the assessment process is vulnerable to inconsistency in that the criteria for being deemed "proficient" will likely vary across faculty and academic terms. This leads to questionable aggregations of the collected data, and even less trust in conclusions drawn from those aggregations.
- Some reports didn't specify the student work that was collected. Including descriptions of such artifacts, especially the assignment prompts provided to the students, provides faculty with the necessary context for interpreting the assessment data generated by this process.
- Most concerning, some reports simply relied on course grades for determining a student's progress towards specific learning outcomes. While there is indeed much correlation between course grades and progress towards related learning outcomes, other factors (unrelated to the specific knowledge, skill, or disposition described in the learning outcome) can influence a student's grade in a class. It can also be difficult to suggest an action plan to address poor learning gains by simply using course grades as evidence.
- Some programs reported using the same evidence to measure progress towards more than one learning outcome. Assuming that a program's learning outcomes are stated clearly, a student's progress towards one learning outcome should not necessarily be tied to his/her progress towards another outcome. It could be that the same assignment is used to assess two different outcomes, but a rubric would then describe what distinct features constitute a "proficient" rating for each distinct outcome.

Some reports described using student work that was misaligned with the statement of the learning outcome. For instance:

- A multiple-choice test is not the best way to measure a student's ability to design a research project.
- Having gainful employment does not imply that a student can think critically as it pertains to a program's learning goals.
- Student's approval or appreciation for a program and its faculty is not evidence for mastery of the program's content.

In these cases, close attention should be paid to the specific goals laid out for students in the learning outcomes. Then faculty simply need to decide what student assignments or artifacts would demonstrate progress towards those goals. This is what is meant by having alignment between the program's learning outcomes and the student work collected during the assessment process.

Finally, the action plans for some programs listed suggestions that were vague, difficult to quantify, or indirectly related to the data presented in the report. It's reasonable for the person or persons tasked with enacting the plan to have clear expectations for what to do and when to do it. Additionally, connecting the action plan to an issue raised by the assessment data gives meaning to the task.