



# WSU's Guide to Effective Program Outcomes Assessment

*“Assessment is the process of gathering and discussing information from multiple and diverse sources in order to develop a deep understanding of what students know, understand, and can do with their knowledge as a result of their educational experiences; the process culminates when assessment results are used to improve subsequent learning.”*

HUBA & FREED, 2000

**STAKEHOLDERS:** A community of partners who are qualified to verify the relevance of a program's work and help improve learning outcomes. Stakeholders will differ from program to program, but should always include faculty and students. Some programs emphasize employers and industry professionals, while others focus on alumni, community members, colleagues at other institutions, or others the program deems relevant. Stakeholders are important contributors to assessment, helping to make the work verifiable and credible. Collaboration with stakeholders confirms WSU's commitment to engage in the larger community.

## Students are key stakeholders in all WSU programs.

Students should be encouraged to become well acquainted with program goals and learning outcomes and to become skilled at peer and self-assessment. They are often valuable partners in the interpretation and refinement of performance criteria.

**CORE THEMES:** Core themes are the essential elements of an institutional mission. WSU's Core Themes are its 4 Strategic Goals & 6 Learning Goals of the Baccalaureate.

**PROGRAM GOALS:** A goal is the “end one tries to achieve.” Program goals are the overarching knowledge, skills and attitudes that the program targets with its curriculum. They should support and align with the WSU's 4 Strategic Goals, and 6 Learning Goals of the Baccalaureate. Example: *Graduates will use a disciplined and systematic approach to accessing, evaluating and using information.*

**STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:** Program-level student learning outcomes describe what students should be able to demonstrate as a result of study in the program. They are observable and measureable. Examples: a) *Students will be able to analyze rhetorical phenomena from multiple theoretical perspectives.* b) *Students will be able to diagnose system failures.*

**PERFORMANCE CRITERIA:** Performance criteria spell out the nature of the expected performance. This is the part of the performance assessment where what counts is described and decided. The challenge is to not only describe what “outstanding” performance looks like, but also to map each of the different levels of performance leading up to the highest levels. The goal is to establish a vocabulary to use in communicating with each other and with our students about what constitutes successful performance. The important instructional question is this: Do I know the difference between successful and unsuccessful performance (or novice, developing, and expert performance) and can I convey that difference in meaningful terms to students?

**MEASURES:** In outcomes assessment, a measure is a tool or instrument for measuring the quality of something. Both direct measures (what people can *do*) and indirect measures (what people *say* they can do/think/feel/want) should be used to assess learning and learning activities, curricular coherence, cognitive and affective development of students, impact of instructional design, and/or questions the program identifies as relevant.

**EVIDENCE:** Evidence is what is advanced to support a claim that something is true. This makes evidence different from things like “information,” “data,” or “facts” in at least five subtle but important ways. Collection of evidence is intentional and purposeful; it addresses questions that are important to programs, institutions and their stakeholders. Evidence is implicitly or explicitly located within a dialogue among those who seek to reach agreed upon conclusions about what is true. What counts as evidence, then, is not a given but rather a particular community of judgment. Useful evidence is relevant, verifiable, representative, cumulative and actionable. It provides information on multiple dimensions of student performance to provide a picture of overall strengths and weaknesses.

**SCHOLARSHIP of TEACHING & LEARNING (SoTL):** SoTL involves systematic study of teaching and/or learning and the public sharing and review of such work through presentations or publications. SoTL shares established criteria of scholarship that can be reviewed critically by members of the teaching and learning community, and can be built upon by others to achieve greater learning gains.

1: Assessment Purpose, Team, and System												(Evidence for this section to be provided in exhibits to assessment report)					
Initiating				Developing				Refining				Engaging					
0.5	1	1.5		2	2.5		3	3.5	4		4.5	5	5.5		6		
PURPOSE	The assessment team reviews and recommends academic program policies, including degree requirements, course offerings, academic advising, and program assessment for accreditation.			The team uses assessment to identify strengths and weaknesses of program curricula, course design, and focuses on teaching and learning strategies. The team identifies shared questions of interest about teaching and student learning to plan or refine assessment.				The team engages in a continual cycle of intentional inquiry through outcomes assessment to refine and improve program practices. Assessment is focused, realistic, and manageable. Assessment may be situated in the national discussion of teaching and learning in the discipline.				The assessment system is guided by a shared understanding that a) assessment is essential for continuous program improvement and that b) the program team is a responsible steward of the public trust. The assessment system and its team and purpose are communicated publicly. Diverse stakeholders engage continuously in ways that are transparent and accessible beyond the program. Students are respected partners and use program criteria to self- and peer-assess in ways that feed back into curriculum. Assessment is systematic, realistic, and manageable. It is strategically embedded at key points in the curriculum and focused on improving the students' learning and learning experiences. The assessment is situated in the national discussion of teaching and learning in the discipline and guided by questions that are of genuine concern to program members.					
	Stakeholders have been identified.			Some stakeholders are involved identifying, developing, implementing, and/or evaluating the program's assessment system.				Multiple stakeholders are involved in affirming, refining, and/or evaluating the program's assessment system.									
	Internal reports of assessments are made on a regular basis.			Reporting is two-way with many program members involved in reviewing assessment results and identifying next steps. Some external stakeholders may be involved in interpreting assessment findings.				Reporting is transparent, engages participants in ongoing dialogue, and is accessible beyond the program. Program members, as well as other stakeholders, review assessment results and help inform or guide next steps.									
	The program has identified one or two members to investigate and fulfill assessment requirements.			Multiple program members are involved in developing and piloting an assessment system.				A broad and representative range of program members—adjuncts, senior faculty, chairs, TA's, and students, etc.—meet regularly to review and refine the program's assessment system.									

## 2: Program Goals, Student Learning Outcomes, and Measures (Evidence for this section to be provided in exhibits to assessment report)

		Initiating			Developing			Refining			Engaging		
		0.5	1	1.5	2	2.5	3	3.5	4	4.5	5	5.5	6
GOALS	The program is in the process of articulating its own program goals.	A manageable number of program goals have been defined and are publicly shared. Program goals may be revised periodically as the program works to align them with the university's core themes (i.e., strategic and learning goals).			The program has defined and mapped its goals in relation to the university's core themes (i.e., strategic and learning goals).			The program clearly demonstrates how its goals and student learning outcomes support the university's core themes (i.e., strategic and learning goals).The program situates its goals and outcomes in the national discussion around teaching and learning in the discipline. It routinely verifies the relevance of its curriculum, performance criteria, measurement tools and assessment processes by soliciting feedback from multiple stakeholders. Course evaluations and surveys target information relevant to program/institutional goals. Stakeholders, including faculty and students, engage in refining program goals, student learning outcomes, and measures.					
	The program is in the initial stages of defining its student learning outcomes.	The program has articulated a manageable number of observable, measurable student learning outcomes within the context of the curriculum. The program is developing performance criteria connected to the outcomes.			Student learning outcomes are aligned with program goals and are defined by a manageable number of performance criteria. Outcomes are contextualized in the curriculum and reflect the national conversation on teaching and learning in the discipline. They are publicly shared.								
	The program systematically measures demographics (GPAs, retention, graduation rates, career placement). The program may be exploring realistic, useful, and effective ways to measure its outcomes and move beyond grades as measures.	The program has begun to develop core course assignments that prompt outcomes. The chosen measures are being piloted at strategic points across the curriculum. Multiple direct and indirect measures are used and focus on questions or issues that concern faculty.			Multiple credible direct and indirect measures are designed to provide useful information about teaching and learning in the program. The performance criteria used in a program-level rubric or other assessment tool are designed to be useful for improved teaching and learning. Assessment measures and how they are used by the program are routinely verified by independent review.								

### 3: Evidence, Analysis, and Action Plan (Evidence for this section to be provided in exhibits to assessment report)

Initiating			Developing			Refining			Engaging			
0.5	1	1.5	2	2.5	3	3.5	4	4.5	5	5.5	6	
<b>EVIDENCE</b>	The program collects some baseline information such as number of students retained, graduation rates, course grades, and course evaluations. The program is exploring strategies for collecting more focused information about student learning.			The program summarizes core findings generated from a variety of direct and indirect measures of student learning, including student work, syllabi and/or assignment prompts that inform questions or issues that concern faculty.			The program summarizes core findings generated from a variety of direct and indirect measures of student learning in ways that can be confirmed and verified. Evidence is drawn from representative samples of student and faculty work across the curriculum. The information collected has been focused to provide evidence and is useful for considering next steps.			The program systematically collects representative, relevant and verifiable measures of students learning from strategic points in the curriculum over multiple cycles to identify patterns and discrepancies. This data is analyzed by program members and stakeholders to gain a clear picture of program strengths and weaknesses, and to consider if evidence of student learning represents an acceptable level of achievement. The program refines the assessment system and measures to provide evidence that is both informative and actionable. It uses evidence from SoTL to guide cycles of action and assessment. Program changes are made and assessed. Changes to the student learning outcomes, learning experiences and the learning environment are documented and discussed by the assessment team.		
<b>ANALYSIS</b>	Assessment data are clearly sorted and ranked, and ready to be analyzed by a few key program members with direct responsibilities for the assessment.			Assessment data are reviewed and analyzed by teaching faculty and administrators that have opportunities to implement change.			Assessment data are reviewed and analyzed by all relevant stakeholders who meet to reflect on the findings and identify next steps, including identifying data gaps.					
<b>ACTION PLAN</b>	The action plan focuses on general goals or minor changes in course sequencing or pre-requisite requirements. Proposed actions may be identified as ready for discussion in order to determine next steps and priorities.			The action plan focuses on concrete strategies such as refining the assessment system, addressing holes in the data, and considering how the curriculum or even coordinating teaching practice might change in response to future assessments that confirm the results of assessment. Next steps have been identified and prioritized.			The action plan is guided by the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), stakeholder input, and solid evidence that changes will lead to the improvement of teaching and learning. Next steps, constraints, timeline, resources, as well as roles and responsibilities of participants have been identified and prioritized.					

## 4: Administrative Leadership and Support

(Evidence for this section to be provided in exhibits to assessment report)

		Initiating			Developing			Refining			Engaging		
		0.5	1	1.5	2	2.5	3	3.5	4	4.5	5	5.5	6
POLICY	Leadership acknowledges a commitment to developing an effective assessment system and outlines plans for how it will commit time and resources.	Leadership ensures the program has explicit policies and guidelines for the kinds of support available for assessment.			Leadership provides incentives in the form of time, money, other resources and recognition to program members involved in assessment and encourages member involvement.			Leadership has established a foundation of robust and long-term support that endorses a culture of ongoing, effective assessment. It provides resources for professional development related to assessment. Leadership engages in and encourages attention to the national discussion of teaching and learning challenges in the discipline. It stewards this effort by rewarding program members involved in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and corresponding innovation. Leadership demonstrates recognition of efforts to improve student learning and acknowledges the risks associated with those efforts. Leadership provides a safe environment where open inquiry about student learning is encouraged. Leadership builds capacity in current students and alumni to partner in the assessment dialog.					
	Leadership has plans to encourage the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) in the program.	Leadership identifies and disseminates information about the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) and about the national discussion around learning in the discipline. It encourages the adoption of research-based practices and organizes SoTL workshops and seminars.			Leadership invites guest speakers on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), recognizes faculty publications on SoTL, and encourages program members to participate in local, regional, national, and international opportunities to advance their knowledge of research in teaching, learning, and assessment.								
	Leadership is exploring ways to create an environment where teaching is valued.	Leadership encourages a culture of inquiry and seeks to build shared values and vision among program members. It creates an environment that values innovation, lessons learned, and risk-taking.			Leadership actively supports and endorses faculty learning communities. Leadership encourages participation from all program members in an effort to experiment, explore, take risks, and share insights from innovative teaching. Leadership identifies and manages constraints when prioritizing. Program members take risks and share insights from lessons learned.								

### **Developing and Refining the Guide to Effective Program Outcomes Assessment Rubric**

Beginning in late 2009, The Office of Assessment and Innovation has given WSU programs feedback on their assessment activities which target the student learning experience and outcomes. The Guide to Effective Program Assessment Rubric is being developed and validated based on principles of program assessment, current scholarship, and WSU's needs and priorities, which include reporting requirements to NWCC&U, the HEC board, and WSU's APR guidelines.

The rubric will be periodically updated / revised based on changing reporting requirements or emphases and on feedback from programs and other stakeholders. Accordingly, in each review cycle, program reports are being assessed using an updated rubric. A program's feedback on their assessment report and ratings may change in relation to the feedback and ratings given with previous versions of the rubric, based solely on changes to the rubric. The current rubric is available at <http://oai.wsu.edu>.

#### Version History:

Ver 1.0 Dec 2009

Ver 2.0 May 2010: Changes: an additional scoring level added to the scale on all dimensions, and several key aspects of assessment clarified, regrouped, and/or moved to a different dimension of the rubric.

Ver 2.1 August 2010: Changes: relabeling of two levels of performance

### **Sources Consulted**

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