

## **STEPS FOR DEVELOPING A PROGRAM ASSESSMENT PLAN**

Adapted from the Office of Curriculum, Accreditation, and Assessment, the University of Northern Kentucky [<http://access.nku.edu/oaca/assessmentguidelines.html>]

A program assessment plan is a document that specifies how a program evaluates student achievement of student learning outcomes and program goals, and how the information obtained from that evaluation is used to improve student learning.

Step 1) Develop, review, or revise the program mission statement.

A mission statement should:

- aim to focus the work of faculty and students in the program by clearly stating the purpose of the program
- align with the Dominican's mission "...prepares students to pursue truth, to give compassionate service and to participate in the creation of a more just and humane world"
- indicate that the program's efforts are somewhat unique from other programs within the university
- be agreed upon by the faculty in the program

.Step 2) Develop program goals. Goals should:

- state what students should know, care about, or be able to do upon completion of the program
- have an obvious relationship to the mission of the program, college or school, and the university
- direct the teaching and learning efforts in the program

Step 3) Develop specific learning outcomes for students in the program. Student learning outcomes should:

- be results-oriented and easily understood
- be specific statements describing behaviors that the program expects its students to demonstrate at the end of instruction
- be measurable (*student attainment of learning outcomes should be observable, achievable and measurable*)

Step 4) Develop measures to assess the student-learning outcomes. These measures should:

- yield useful and valid results (*the measures should actually evaluate progress on the intended goals and learning outcomes*)
- be realistic (*make sure the program will be able to develop/administer/analyze/utilize the measures*)
- be comprehensive (*taken as a whole, the measures should assess as many learning outcomes as possible*)
- represent multiple methods of measuring learning outcomes (*see examples below*)
  - measures within the instructional setting; i.e.: capstone courses, traditional course exams, performance exams, projects, presentations, surveys, interviews, focus groups, standardized tests
  - measures outside the instructional setting; i.e. feedback from graduate programs on campus, graduate program enrollments, portfolios, senior projects, thesis or research project, juried performances/presentations, exit interviews, internships, employment within the field...

Step 5) Develop an assessment timeline. This timeline should:

- specify when, where, and by whom the measures will be administered
- specify a plan to gather data
- identify how the program will analyze the information
- *TIP*: it might help to define action steps and assign responsible parties to the steps

Step 6) Gather the measures or assessments.

- before you develop a unique assessment, search for similar measures already utilized by other programs/departments/colleges and adapt them to your program
- select the best method for your goals based on the following criteria:
  - efficiency: a good tool requires a relatively small amount of resources to yield useful information
  - directness: a good assessment provides direct evidence of the attainment of program goals/outcomes
  - usefulness: a good assessment yields information that will be used by the program for future improvement

Step 7) Administer/conduct the measures according to the timeline.

- collect data from the assessments (*as described in the timeline*)
- evaluate the merits of each assessment (*should this assessment be used in the future?*)
- *TIP*: in order to measure learning over time, embed a few questions in a measure administered upon entry to the program and embed the same questions in measures administered toward the end of the program. Track the responses across the experience to find out if particular components need more focus.

Step 8) Analyze the information obtained

- analyze data from each assessment separately to see if goals and outcomes are being met
- if possible, aggregate data from multiple assessments to provide an overall indicator of progress
- track data from similar assessments over time to identify trends

Step 9) Communicate assessment results.

- gather faculty and staff involved in the program to discuss information obtained
- discuss areas of relative strength and weakness, as well as any trends noticed over time

Step 10) Evaluate the program (and the assessment plan) based on results.

- identify potential areas of improvement for the program
- revise the goals and outcomes as necessary in line with the results of the assessments
- utilize the reports of assessment findings to develop budget priorities, update the department's strategic plan and/or program review document, and update the plan for the next year