LSU Guidelines for Assessment of Degree Programs and Stand-Alone Certificates

LSU requires all degree programs and stand-alone certificates to adhere to the following guidelines for meeting the SACSCOC compliance requirements for the assessment of student learning outcomes and the improvement of learning based on the results of assessment.

Each academic program must submit a Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Report on an annual basis. Programs accomplish this by completing the Assessment Methods, the Findings & Analysis, and the Action Plan templates in Taskstream. The report describes the results of student learning outcomes (SLOs) assessment activities and strategies for seeking improvement.

The Degree Program Assessment Template in Taskstream allows programs to document findings per measure assessed. Accordingly, the process of developing a SLO Assessment Report entails, for each learning outcome assessed, describing the methods, performance targets, results, and improvement strategies to be enacted based on the findings.

All data used to assess student achievement of learning outcomes is maintained within Taskstream by Watermark, the university’s system of record for all assessment, strategic planning, and institutional improvement initiatives. All degree programs and stand-alone certificates are enrolled in workspaces in Taskstream. A workspace refers to the data silos where users enter assessment data. Each program’s workspace within Taskstream is divided into two main parts: Standing Requirements and Cyclical (Ongoing) Requirements.

**Standing Requirements** are those core elements of your program that remain relatively static over time; they are not expected to change from year to year. These include Program Mission, Learning Outcomes, Curriculum Map, and Assessment Plan.

**Program Mission:** A concise statement that defines the purpose of the program and includes general values and guiding principles. Each program is expected to formulate a mission statement. Student Learning outcomes derive from a program’s mission.

**Student Learning Outcomes:** Statements that describe the measurable and/or observable knowledge, skills, and competencies that students are expected to demonstrate upon completion of a degree program. At minimum, all degree programs and stand-alone certificates must articulate at least three student learning outcomes.

**Curriculum Map:** A visual representation of the structure of the curriculum, with a listing of expected student learning outcomes on one axis and a program’s courses on the other. Ideally, each course should have a set of learning objectives that align with the degree program level.
SLOs. Mapping provides clarity regarding where specific outcomes are addressed and developed across the curriculum.

**Assessment Plan:** Each degree program and stand-alone certificate is expected to develop and implement an assessment plan. It is not necessary to assess student achievement of all expected learning outcomes every year. An assessment plan allows programs the flexibility to focus on a subset of learning outcomes each year. The plan identifies the specific year that each stated outcome will be assessed over a three-year period. Programs are expected to assess all stated learning outcomes over a three-year cycle.

**Cyclical Requirements** are those elements of your program that change from year to year and appear under the heading “Assessment Cycle.” These include **Assessment Methods, Findings & Analysis, Action Plan, and Follow-Up Report.**

**Assessment Methods:** The direct and indirect measures used to assess student achievement of learning outcomes. Multiple measures per outcome are desirable. The university requires, at a minimum, at least one direct measure per outcome. The Assessment Methods template copies over the learning outcomes articulated under the Standing Requirements category. Taskstream provides the option to “Copy Existing Plan as a Starting Point” or “Create a New Plan.” Selecting the “Copy Existing Plan” option copies over the outcomes and measures implemented during the previous cycle. You can then make changes to the template as appropriate. Selecting the “Create New Plan” option allows you to select a subset of the outcomes to be assessed during the given cycle and to input the corresponding measures. In each case, carefully describe the measures for each outcome to be assessed along with performance targets. Each measure under the Assessment Methods tab includes the following fields: Measure Title, Measure Type, Measure Level, Details/Description, Acceptable Target, Ideal Target, Implementation Plan, and Key/Responsible Personnel.

**Findings & Analysis:** The results of assessment activities. These include the raw data generated from implementation of assessment methods and the narrative interpretation of the data with respect to what they suggest about the degree of student learning. Assessment results should be analyzed and compared to performance targets. The following questions should inform the narrative interpretation of the data: Have targets been achieved? How do the results compare over time? Was the measure chosen appropriate? What strengths are revealed? Are there opportunities for improvement? This last question is by far the most important as the primary purpose of assessment is to improve student learning. The data and interpretation constitute substantiating evidence for the Action Plan you will describe and implement for the purpose of improving student achievement of a given outcome. Keep in mind that assessment results and findings are reported per measure. Accordingly, each Measure, under the Findings & Analysis tab, includes the following fields: Summary of Findings, Recommendations and Action Steps for Next Year, Reflections/Notes, and Target Achievement. Taskstream provides the option to attach supporting documentation after findings for the applicable measure have been
submitted. Lastly, the Findings & Analysis template provides space to enter Overall Recommendations and Overall Reflections.

**Action Plan (Use of Results):** The specific steps to be taken, in response to assessment findings, to improve student learning. The Action Plan links your assessment results with improvement actions. In that regard, an Action Plan should be developed for each outcome in which a need for improvement was identified in the assessment findings. There are several problems that assessment findings might suggest. For example, if results suggest revisions of course content, document this action by describing what specifically will be revised in the course and indicate the expected improvement that will result from this change in course content. This information is to be provided in the Action Plan template in Taskstream. Elements of the Action Plan include Action Item Title, Action Details, Timeline, Responsible Personnel, and Budget Requirements.

**Follow-Up Report:** Provides periodic status updates on the ongoing improvement actions described in the Action Plan. Note that the Follow-Up Report is organized by Actions copied over from the Action Plan. For example, if assessment results lead to revisions of course content, the Follow-Up Report provides a summary of the progress related to this improvement action. This information can be as basic as a statement that this action steps were implemented at a certain point in time and as significant as a statement of what the data show upon a re-implementation of the assessment method after a reasonable period of time. To allow time for implementation of planned changes (described in the Action Plan), the Follow-Up Report is completed a year after the submission of a Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Report. For example, Follow-Up Reports for the 2017-2018 cycle are due by September 30, 2019. In cases where planned changes are implemented over a period of multiple years, the Follow-Up Report documents the current status of an ongoing action, particularly with respect to whether or not the action seems to have led to an improvement in student learning. Elements of the Follow-Up Report include Current Status, Budget Status, Additional Information, Next Steps, and Substantiating Evidence.

Note that some elements of the Assessment Cycle must be repeated annually as consistent with the program assessment plan. The deadline to complete all requirements of the assessment cycle for the prior academic year is **September 30**, with the Dean’s Authentication due October 31.
### Critical Points in the LSU Assessment Cycle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DUE DATE</th>
<th>REQUIREMENTS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>May 31</strong></td>
<td><strong>Learning Outcomes Data Files</strong>&lt;br&gt;The data files generated from implementation of assessment methods for <strong>fall and spring</strong> semesters loaded into Taskstream (Findings &amp; Analysis).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>September 30</strong></td>
<td><strong>Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Reports</strong>&lt;br&gt;SLOs Assessment Reports address assessment findings of the <strong>prior academic year</strong> and describe the improvement actions to be taken in response to assessment results (Findings &amp; Analysis and Action Plan).&lt;br&gt;Designate in Taskstream the student learning outcomes to be assessed during the <strong>current cycle</strong> along with the corresponding measures and achievement targets (Assessment Methods).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>October 31</strong></td>
<td><strong>Dean’s Authentication</strong>&lt;br&gt;Each College Dean reviews and <strong>authenticates</strong> Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Reports for all degree and stand-alone certificate programs in their college or school. The Purpose of this review is to ensure that programs are fulfilling the requirements for assessing student learning. If any aspects of the assessment process are incomplete the programs are out of compliance with the University’s assessment requirements.</td>
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<td><strong>March 1</strong></td>
<td><strong>URAC Review of Student Learning Outcomes Reports</strong>&lt;br&gt;The University Review and Assessment Council reviews student learning outcomes assessment reports (of prior academic year) and provides feedback as appropriate to degree and stand-alone certificates programs. Programs are expected to revise their Assessment Plans (SLOs, Measures) by addressing feedback from URAC.</td>
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SAMPLE ASSESSMENT PLAN

Three-Year Assessment Plan

College: 
Program: 
Contact Person for the Assessment Plan: 
Date: 

Mission Statement:

Student Learning Outcomes

SLO 1: 
SLO 2: 
SLO 3: 
SLO 4: 

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outcome 1</td>
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<td>Outcome 2</td>
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<td>Outcome 5</td>
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<td>Outcome 6</td>
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# SAMPLE CURRICULUM MAP

Courses and Activities Mapped to Degree Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Courses and Learning Activities</th>
<th>Outcome 1</th>
<th>Outcome 2</th>
<th>Outcome 3</th>
<th>Outcome 4</th>
<th>Outcome 5</th>
<th>Outcome 6</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COUR 1001 Course Title</td>
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<tr>
<td>COUR 2000 Course Title</td>
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<tr>
<td>COUR 3040 Course Title</td>
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<tr>
<td>COUR 4015 Course Title</td>
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**Legend:**
- **I**: Introduced
- **R**: Reinforced
- **A**: Assessed
## ASSESSMENT METHODS

### Direct Versus Indirect Measures

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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</table>
| **DIRECT** | Prompt students to represent or demonstrate their learning or produce work | • Standardized instruments  
• Student portfolios  
• Capstone projects  
• Performance, products, creations  
• Case studies  
• Embedded-assessments  
• Orals |
| **INDIRECT** | Capture students’ perceptions of their learning attitudes, perceptions, and experiences. May also include informal observation of student behavior, evaluation of retention rates, and analysis of program procedures that are linked to student learning. | • Focus groups  
• Student surveys and exit interviews  
• Interviews  
• Alumni surveys  
• National surveys (e.g., NSSE)  
• Self-Reports  
• Observation  
• Curriculum and syllabi analysis |

**NOTE:** Direct measures assess actual samples of student work and provide the most accurate assessment of student learning. Indirect methods alone do not provide adequate information about student learning outcomes. They must be supplemented with direct measures.

### Examples of Direct Assessment Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Method</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</table>
| **Capstone Projects** | • Culminating research projects that provide information about how students integrate, synthesize and transfer learning  
• Assess competence in several areas  
• May be independent or collaborative  
• Focus on higher order thinking  
• Are useful for program-level assessment  
• Examples: exams, integrative papers, projects, oral reports, performances  
• Typically disciplined based and may be designated as a “senior seminar”  
• Scoring Method: Pre-Specified rubrics |
| **Course-Embedded Assessment** | • Assessment procedures that are embedded into a course’s curriculum  
• May include test items or projects  
• May be take-home or in-class  
• Usually locally developed  
• Can be used assesses discipline-specific knowledge  
• Scoring methods: Raw scores or pre-specified rubrics |
| **Performance Assessment** | • Use student activities to assess skills and knowledge  
• Assess what students can demonstrate or produce  
• Allow for the evaluation of both process and product |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Scoring Methods</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Portfolio Assessment</strong></td>
<td>Collection of student work over time that is used to demonstrate growth and achievement</td>
<td>Pre-Specified rubrics</td>
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<td>Usually allows student to self-reflect on incorporated work</td>
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<td>May include written assignments, works of art, collection of projects, programs, exams, computational exercises, video or other electron media, etc.</td>
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<td>Focus on higher-order thinking</td>
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<td>Scoring Methods: Pre-Specified rubrics</td>
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**Standardized Instruments**
- Instruments developed outside the institution with standardized administration and scoring procedures and frequently with time restrictions
- Psychometrically tested based on norming group
- Sometimes allow for national comparisons
- Caution: Content may not link to local curriculum and so may not pinpoint where to improve; normative comparisons may be inappropriate; do not allow for examination of processes of learning;
- Scoring Methods: Answer key, scored by testing company

**Localized Instruments**
- Instruments within the university usually developed within the department for internal use only
- Content may be tailored to match outcomes exactly
- Caution: Not as psychometrically sound as standardized instrument unless validated internally
- Scoring Methods: Answer key, scored internally

**Source:** Stanford University.