Framework for Assessment at Clayton State University (CSU)

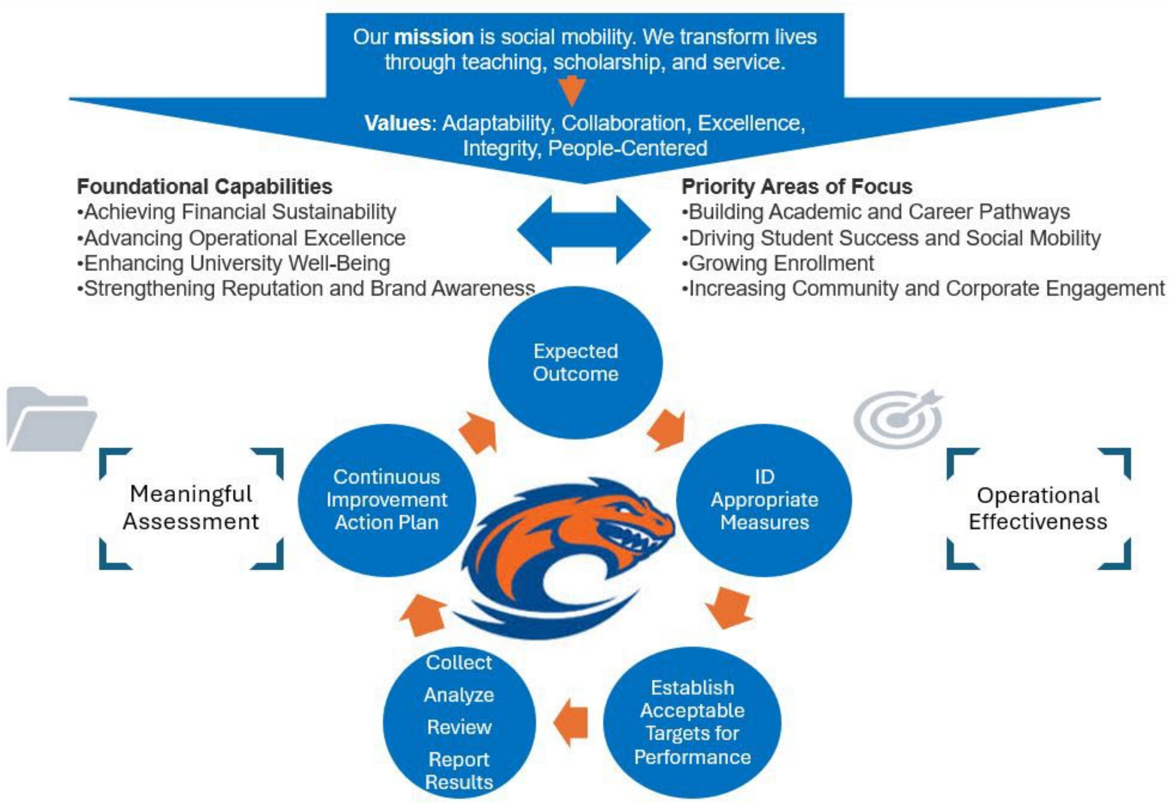
The following provides a framework for 1) assessment of academic programs at CSU and for 2) assessment of offices and programs that provide services to CSU students that may not be aligned with an academic program.

Section I. What is Assessment?

A. Assessment is an ongoing process of:

- Establishing clear, measurable expected outcomes of student learning or of student experiences.
- Ensuring that the specific measurable outcomes align with the existing unit's strategic plans which align with the strategic plans and mission of the university.
- Ensuring that students have sufficient opportunities to achieve those outcomes and stakeholders (faculty, staff and leadership) have sufficient opportunities to understand and improve student's learning and campus experiences.
- Systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well 1) student's learning matches our goals or 2) student's service experiences match our expectations.
- Using the resulting information to understand and improve student learning and student service experiences.

It is important to emphasize that an assessment plan is mission-driven and aligns with the values, foundational capabilities, priority areas of focus, and signature initiatives of the university.



B. Definition of Key Assessment Terms

Mission Statement – is a concise declaration of an organization's core purpose and values or a holistic vision of the values and philosophy of the unit. The mission statement often contains statements about the goals and vision of the unit.

Goal – is a statement of what your college/school/program/department aims to accomplish in alignment with your mission. General statements about functions and services expected from units. Describes the aims or purposes of the unit; goals should be broadly stated, meaningful, achievable, and assessable. Goals are more general and broader as compared to objectives and outcomes.

Vision – is a forward-looking, aspirational statement that describes the long-term goals and desired future state of an academic department. It articulates the department's ambitions and the impact it seeks to have in its field, on its students, and in the broader community.

Outcome statement – is a statement that refers to a destination rather than the path taken to get there (i.e., the end rather than the means). Outcome statements clearly state the knowledge, skills, attitudes, competencies, and habits of mind that students acquire from an experience (i.e., course or program). Outcomes are student-centered and less specific than an objective. Outcomes are more often written for program assessment.

Objective-is a statement that describes the intended results from an experience or from instruction. It is more specific than an outcome and they are written in terms of teaching intentions and indicate the subject content that the instructor tends to cover. Objectives are more often written for course-level assessments.

Meaningful Assessment – Collecting data that effectively measures the outcomes. Data collection methods for outcomes assessment are generally divided into two categories (i.e., direct and indirect measures).

Direct Assessment – These measures involve tangible, visible, or measurable evidence of what students have learned. These measures assess actual student performance and skills directly related to the learning objectives (Examples include assignments, exams or quizzes).

Indirect Assessment – These measures assess learning based on student perceptions, reflections, or secondary evidence rather than actual performance (Examples include surveys, focus groups or self-assessment). They offer insight into how students feel about their learning experiences or the effectiveness of the educational environment.

Section II: How to Approach Steps Taken in Assessment Framework

Statement from SACSCOC: Effective outcomes assessment can be achieved in a variety of ways, and the mentality that "one size fits all" is inappropriate and diminishes the individual missions of institutions. This is especially true regarding the use of language to describe processes; for example, "assessment," "evaluation," "goals," "outcomes," and "objectives" may have precise meaning to a reviewer, but the institution may have a meaningful effectiveness system even if it is not as precise with its language as the reviewer would like. The institution should develop and/or use methods and instruments that are *uniquely suited to its circumstances and are supported by its faculty and its academic and student support professionals (2024, SACSCOC).*

While faculty, staff and administrators are encouraged to create and measure the success of specific objectives created for an experience (faculty are also required to list learning objectives on their syllabi), these objectives are not necessarily what should be assessed for program effectiveness. They can certainly be included in assessment reports, but they are not required. Assessment of learning outcomes is what is required to be reported in assessment reports.

A. **Crafting a Mission Statement, Vision, & Goals:** A mission statement is often an aspirational statement; It may include information on history, academic environment, student body, connections to the community, etc. A good mission statement should be clear, inspiring, and focused, conveying the organization's essence in a way that motivates employees and informs stakeholders. This mission statement is often developed with specific goals and vision in mind. Often the vision and/or goals are listed along with the mission statement. It is essential for the mission to align with the strategic plan of the university. It is important that all stakeholders within the unit are involved in creating the mission statement.

i. ***The Mission Statement should cover the following key elements:***

1. *Identify Purpose, Goals, & Vision:* The department clarifies its purpose, goals, values and holistic vision, including what it seeks to achieve in education, research, and community service. It clearly defines why the organization exists and the primary objective it seeks to achieve.
2. *Target Audience or Beneficiaries:* Specify who the organization serves—customers, clients, stakeholders, or communities.
3. *Gather Input:* Faculty, staff, students, and key stakeholders contribute ideas through meetings, surveys, or discussions to reflect a collective purpose, values and vision.
4. *Core Values and Principles:* Highlight the values that guide decision-making and behavior, such as integrity, inclusivity, societal impact, innovation, or sustainability.
5. *Highlight Unique Strengths:* Describe what sets the unit apart from others in the same field such as specialized programs, research areas, or community partnerships. What makes it distinct or special?
6. *Scope of Activities:* Outline the key products, services, or initiatives the organization engages in to fulfill its mission.
7. *Draft and Revise:* A committee drafts the mission statement based on all input, which is then reviewed and refined through feedback loops to ensure clarity, alignment with institutional goals, and inclusivity of all voices.
8. *Approval and Adoption:* The final draft is approved by the stakeholders, department leadership and possibly higher administration.
9. *Public Display*: The mission statement should be prominently displayed on the department's homepage. This will serve as a guide for the public and all stakeholders for future actions and decisions.

ii. **Example Mission Statements**:

Academic Short Version: The Department of Film, Communication, and Performing Arts seeks to serve and represent the community through excelling in teaching, research, and creative endeavors. The department's diverse programs are linked by their commitment to nurturing creativity and professional expertise. Working with a professionally active faculty, students learn, create, and develop skills in a supportive environment committed to embodying core values of diversity, equity, inclusion, and access. Graduates of our programs are equipped to excel in advanced studies or professional careers in the context of being citizens of a richly diverse and deeply interdependent world.

Academic Detailed version: https://www.clayton.edu/arts-sciences/departments/film-communication-and-performing-arts/

Academic Example 2: https://www.clayton.edu/library/mission

Non-Academic Program Related Example 1: https://www.clayton.edu/archives/index

Non-Academic Program Related Example 2: https://www.clayton.edu/about/administration/business-operations/budget-finance/index

B. Writing Outcomes/Objectives: Once a unit or program has identified its mission, goals, and vision, it can identify the outcomes its unit or program can achieve, and objectives and specific objectives it can use based on the services or curriculum it provides. While the development of the mission, vision and goals for academic programs is the same as non-academic programs or student services, the development of outcomes is quite distinct. This section will be divided into two different sections, i) Academic Learning Outcomes/Objectives (program level and course level) and ii) Administrative Unit Outcomes (Table 1).

Table 1. Description of Different Types of Outcomes/Objectives

Outcome Type	Definition
1: Academic	**Academic Program Level Student Learning Outcome** – Specified knowledge, skills, abilities or attitudes that students have achieved and can demonstrate at the end of a program of study (less specific). & **Course Level Student Learning Objectives** – Brief clear statements about knowledge, skills, abilities or attitudes that students could attain by the end of a course of study (more specific).
2: Administrative	**Administrative Unit Objectives** – Used to measure the effectiveness of co-curricular educational programming, services, and activities for continuous improvement of student success initiatives (Some examples include outcomes for Center for Academic Success and Center for Advising and Retention).

If you are assessing an academic program and are developing academic program learning outcomes or (PLOs), then continue reading from page 5 and skip pages 9-11.
If you are assessing administrative unit outcomes, then turn to page 9 and continue reading.

i. Academic Program Learning Outcomes (PLO) and Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) or Objectives

Outcomes and objectives are used for course and program level assessment. They are both very similar in that they both require an action verb that identifies the performance and cognitive level of learning, a learning statement that identifies the learning to be demonstrated and the criterion or standard for performance. Objectives describe in detail the behaviors that students should be able to perform and represent the results or consequences of instruction. Outcomes are the achieved results or consequences of what was learned, and they describe significant and essential learning that learners have achieved. It is often appropriate to state that outcomes are more broad statements about learning and objectives are much more specific. Objectives can be mapped to outcomes when assessing a course or a program.

Examples:
--Objective: Upon completion of Biology Research Practicum, students will be able to present their research clearly and appropriately to an audience of their peers and faculty members.

--Outcome: After completing the B.S. Biology program at Clayton State University students will accurately formulate hypotheses, collect, evaluate and interpret scientific data to solve problems in the biological sciences and supporting fields.

Program learning outcomes (PLO) refer to the outcomes achieved upon student completion of the program (upon graduation) and student learning outcomes (SLO) refer to outcomes achieved upon completion of something (a course, an activity, etc.). They are developed very similarly, but in the context of what is being assessed. In this section we will refer to PLOs specifically.

The easiest way to start considering program learning outcomes (PLOs) is to address the following questions.

1. What knowledge, skills, abilities and dispositions should a student graduating from a program demonstrate?
2. How will the student be able to demonstrate these capacities?
3. How well does the program prepare students for careers, graduate/professional study and/or lifelong learning?
4. What assessments can be used to demonstrate growth in students' knowledge, skills, abilities and dispositions as they progress through a program?

Once these four questions are considered the outcomes must be written with a specific structure to make them clear, concise and measurable. The structure follows a specific format.

1. An action word that identifies the performance to be demonstrated
2. A learning statement that specifies what learning will be demonstrated in the performance
3. A broad statement of the criterion or standard for acceptable performance.

The structure of a learning objective is very similar, but more specific. The ABCD Model (Audience, Behavior, Condition, and Degree) is commonly used for writing learning objectives.

Table 2. ABCD Model of Learning Objectives

Audience	Who will be doing the behavior?
Behavior	What should the learner be able to do or what is the performance?
Condition	Under what conditions do you want the learner to be able to do it?
Degree	How well must the behavior be done? What is the degree of mastery?

The behavior verb or action verb is an action verb that specifically describes the behavior (for example, communicate, explain, translate, identify, calculate). The verb must describe something that can be measured effectively. Verbs such as understand, appreciate, value and internalize are NOT good behavior verbs for learning objectives since they are too vague, too difficult to measure effectively, and will confuse the student to misinterpret what you want them to do. It is important to remember that when using a behavior that is covert (or not typically visible), such as "discriminate", use an indicator behavior to clarify to the students exactly what they must do. For example, if you want your students to discriminate legal and illegal actions an appropriate indicator would be "sort". The outcome would then become: Students would be able to discriminate and sort legal actions from illegal actions.

When writing learning outcomes, it is essential to use behavior verbs that target the correct cognitive domain and learning levels. Blooms Taxonomy is a framework developed by Benjamin Bloom in 1956. The framework has six major categories of learning levels. Originally, they were described as Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis and Evaluation. In 2001 a revision to the taxonomy was made to use action words to describe the cognitive processes by which learners encounter and work with knowledge. The revised taxonomy is listed below. Knowledge is the basis for the six cognitive processes, but in this revision the authors created a separate taxonomy of the types of knowledge used in cognition.

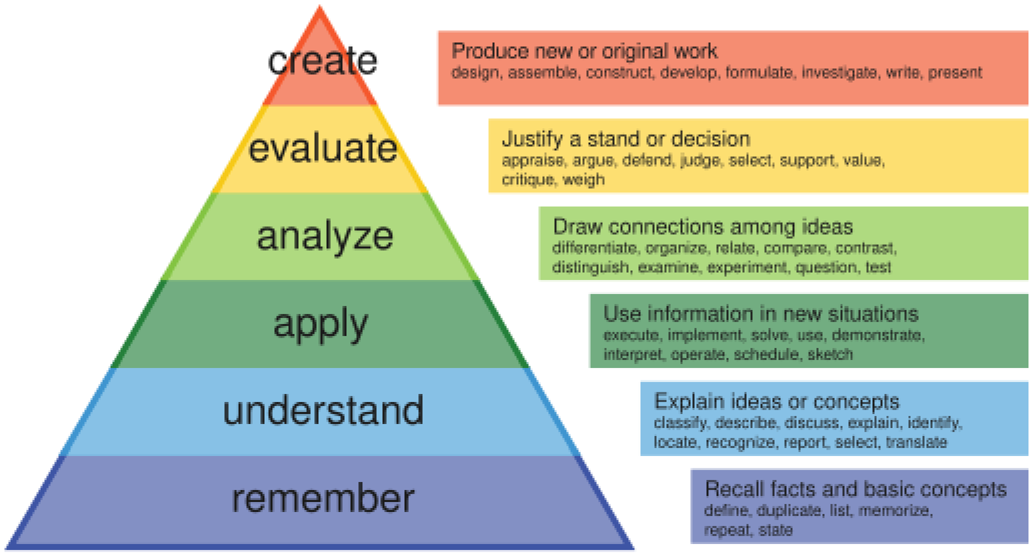


Figure 1. Blooms Taxonomy: Six Cognitive processes for working with knowledge.

Table 3. Types of Knowledge used in Cognition.

Types of Knowledge	Examples
Factual Knowledge	Knowledge of terminology Knowledge of specific details and elements
Conceptual Knowledge	Knowledge of classifications and categories Knowledge of principles and generalizations Knowledge of theories, models, and structures
Procedural Knowledge	Knowledge of subject-specific skills and algorithms Knowledge of subject-specific techniques and methods Knowledge of criteria for determining when to use appropriate procedures
Metacognitive Knowledge	Strategic Knowledge Knowledge about cognitive tasks, including appropriate contextual and conditional knowledge Self-knowledge

It is important that learning outcome statements are transparent. Transparent student learning outcomes statements are:

- Specific to the program-level
- Measurable
- Written from the learner's perspective
- Clearly expressed and understandable by multiple audiences
- Prominently posted or linked to multiple places across the website and syllabi
- Updated regularly to reflect current students, factors and curriculum changes
- Receptive to feedback or comments on the quality and utility of the information provided

Academic Program Learning Outcomes (PLO) Examples:

Poorly Written PLO: *After completing the B.S. Biology program at Clayton State University students should know how to conduct research in the biological sciences and supporting fields.*

> This is poorly written because 1) "conduct research" is a vague action verb or behavior, 2) the conditions are not clearly identified and 3) the degree of mastery is not clear either.

Better PLO: *After completing the B.S. Biology program at Clayton State University students will formulate hypotheses, collect, evaluate and interpret scientific data in the biological sciences and supporting fields.*

> This is better because it says what steps students should be able to take when conducting research. It has more specificity and describes the condition and cognitive domains required to meet the outcome. It is not great, however since it still does not provide the degree of mastery.

Best PLO*: After completing the B.S. Biology program at Clayton State University students should be able to* ***accurately*** *formulate hypotheses and collect, evaluate and interpret scientific data to solve problems in the biological sciences and supporting fields.*

> This is considered the best PLO of the three since it is transparent, describes the condition, cognitive domains and degree of mastery to meet the outcome.

Another effective PLO: Graduates of the History program will be able to accurately contextualize historical events within broader social, cultural, political, and economic frameworks.

It is always best to use a rubric or checklist to evaluate PLOs to ensure that they are well written, clear, measurable, and useful for assessing the program they were written for. Provided below is a checklist that can be adapted.

Checklist	**Used for "Another effective PLO"**
☐ *The PLO specifies the level, criterion, or standard for the knowledge, skill, or disposition that must be demonstrated.*	The words "accurately" and "contextualize" provide detail of how it should be performed.
☐ *The PLO includes the conditions under which they should be able to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and dispositions.*	The conditions of the frameworks (social, cultural, political and economic).
☐ *It contains an action verb that spells out the level of cognition (Blooms Taxonomy) and knowledge used.*	"Contextualize" historical events within broader frameworks (apply or analyze factual and conceptual knowledge).
☐ *It is measurable and can be evaluated by more than one assessment method (ideally) and all elements in the outcomes statement can be assessed by a single method.*	Research paper, essays or oral presentation evaluated with a rubric.
☐ *Outcome should be aligned with the mission and goals and framed in terms of the program and not individual courses.*	While this is difficult to demonstrate here this outcome is clearly aligned with the program, its mission and goals.

ii. Administrative Unit Outcomes

Developing outcome statements for student support services and administrative services is similar but approached differently than that of academic program learning outcomes. As stated previously, these outcomes are aligned with the mission, goals and vision of the applicable administrative unit. The outcomes should include information about what students will do or experience when interacting with the unit and/or information about what the unit will produce in service to its overall goals. There are two types of outcomes that are used to assess administrative units: Student Learning Outcomes and Office Performance Outcomes.

Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) describe what students will be able to think, know, or do because of their experience with the administrative unit. Offices that directly serve students are encouraged to have at least one student learning outcome that can be assessed. These can be co-curricular SLOs when the administrative unit has an overlap with existing academic program learning outcomes, but do not have to be. If the office does not directly interact with students on a regular basis (Human Resources for example) then that office may not be able to have any SLOs to assess.

Key components of a well written SLO:

> **Actionable and Specific:** Students will demonstrate tangible skills (e.g., identify, evaluate, and create).
>
> **Measurable**: Success can be assessed through student artifacts (students complete a survey or submit evidence that they achieved the outcome).
>
> **Aligned with Applicable Goals**: For example, it focuses on promoting autonomy, academic clarity, and/or goal setting.

Sample SLOs:

> After a visit to the Office of Academic Advising, students will be able to identify their degree requirements, evaluate their academic progress, and create a semester-by-semester course plan that aligns with their educational and career goals.
> [Possible assessments for this SLO may be a survey question where students rate their ability for an indirect measure or a student artifact such as a semester plan written by the student and evaluated by the advisor for a direct method.]
>
> After visiting the office of behavioral health students will be able to apply strategies at home and at school to improve their mental health (examples may include reduce anxiety, stress, or fatigue).
> [Possible assessments for this SLO may be a survey question about number of times the student used the strategies or a quiz question where the student is asked to list one or two strategies that can help reduce stress and anxiety.]

Office Performance Outcomes (OPO): These describe the desired operational aspect of an administrative unit. They can be related to customer satisfaction, quality of work, timeliness of a product or process, etc. OPOs help administrative units identify potential pain points and use the data for targeted improvements. OPOs also allow administrative units to identify value added to the institution. OPOs often include a comparison or a benchmark to demonstrate a measurable improvement or continuous improvement. Metrics should be included with the outcome. The outcome can be written to include the metric, or the metric can be included separately. If done separately it is easy to change the metric annually (based on continuous improvement or changes in structure) without impacting the outcome.

Example where metric is separate

> Outcome: The Office of Advising will reduce the average waiting time for advising appointments.
>
> Metric: Increase the percentage of students who can secure an appointment within 5 days of their request from 70% to 80%.

Examples where metric is included

> The Office of Advising will reduce the average waiting time for advising appointments by increasing the percentage of students who can secure an appointment within 5 days of their request from 70% to 80%.
>
> The Office of Student Affairs will provide events to increase student participation in Laker Life activities by 10% in two years.

It is also important not to confuse operational outcomes with task objectives. Task objectives describe the activities, tasks or processes of an office that supports the operational aspects. For example, if the Office of Student Affairs proposed the following as an operational outcome, then they would be asked to revise the outcome. "The Office of Student Affairs will implement club football on campus to increase student participation in campus events." This statement describes a specific action that can be used to meet the original outcome listed earlier, but it is not an actual operational outcome.

Specific actions or task objectives **should** be identified and adjusted to meet this outcome, but should not be an actual part of the outcome. The tasks will be included in the assessment report, but not in the outcomes section.

Well written performance outcome statements meet the following criteria:

1. The outcome is written as a full sentence and clearly indicates what the office is seeking to accomplish in each period. There is a subject of interest (students, benchmark, report, etc.) and an action.
    a. Example: The Office of Financial Aid will resolve all unpaid balances for full-time students within one month of notification through active outreach.
2. The outcome should align with the mission and goal of the unit. It should be clear that the objective will produce evidence in support of the mission and goals of the office and can be measured.

    a. Example: If an office does not have a goal or mission to engage faculty, then they should not have an outcome that addresses increased faculty engagement.

3. Outcome statements should be more specific than the goals of the office and be detailed enough for a site visitor from SACSCOC to identify what the office expects to accomplish in a defined period.
    a. Example: The Office of Student Affairs has the following goal: “Complement student learning experiences by providing strategic, quality programs, services, and initiatives that promote overall development.” An appropriate performance outcome could be the following: “The Office of Student Affairs will increase student participation in Laker Life activities by 10% in two years.”
4. Performance outcome statements must be observable and measurable.
    a. An example of an outcome that is not measurable is “Students will integrate into the culture of CSU.” It would be nearly impossible to observe and measure integration into the culture. A more reasonable outcome would be, “Ten percent more students will feel a sense of belonging on the CSU campus in two years.” This outcome is measured by the National Survey of Student Engagement that is administered by the Office of Institutional Research.
5. The outcome needs to be useful for improvement. Since many student behaviors are outside of our control, it is not always easy to make an adjustment in an office that would make an improvement.
    a. For example, administrative unit outcomes related to graduation and retention rates must be written carefully. An effective example would be “Students attending orientation will have a higher retention rate than students not attending orientation.” In this example the Office of Orientation can make efforts to continuously improve orientation to meet the outcome and then make efforts to improve attendance at orientation (two action items) and they can then show that these efforts improved the retention rates (i.e., the orientation had a positive impact). But if they just wrote that their office would increase retention rates by 10% leaves them very vulnerable of not reaching that outcome (since it heavily relies on student behaviors that are outside of their control).

C. **Measuring Outcomes**– Once academic programs and administrative units have identified their outcomes and mapped the outcomes to courses or course objectives or task objectives or actions, the measurement of the outcomes will require planning. Data collection methods for outcomes assessment are generally divided into two categories (i.e., direct and indirect measures, which are defined on page 2). Indirect measures alone are not sufficient for measuring outcomes. It is important to have both indirect and direct measures. Additionally, it is ideal to have a normative assessment method to assess student knowledge when assessing academic programs. Normative assessments compare an individual’s performance to a group typically using statistics to rank the results. National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE) are normative. Many academic programs have normative examinations that are taken by students in that same major across the nation or the world. Normative assessments are very useful for measuring performance and even suggest or provide benchmarks.

Examples of direct measures include:

1. Exams or quizzes
    a. Course embedded
    b. Pre and post testing
    c. Licensure exams or senior exit exams
2. Grading with scoring rubric
3. Employer or internship supervisor direct evaluation of performance
4. Culminating experiences like capstone projects or theses
5. Written assignments
6. Presentations
7. Portfolios
8. Performance-based assessments (students demonstrate they can do specific things)
9. Enumerating incremental changes

Examples of indirect measures include:

1. Surveys
2. Interviews and focus groups
3. Self-assessment and reflection
4. Course evaluations

Assessment measures often utilize rubrics. Designing effective rubrics can be time consuming and challenging. The American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) developed an initiative called the Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) in 2009. This project provides free rubrics designed to support the assessment of student learning in the following domains: Intellectual and Practical Skills, Personal and Social Responsibility, and Integrative and Applied Learning. These VALUE rubrics can be found at this website: https://www.aacu.org/initiatives/value-initiative/value-rubrics

Penn State University provides suggestions for student activities and assessments to meet various cognitive domain levels of learning. https://sites.psu.edu/objectives/

Here are some important guidelines for measuring outcomes:

1. Each outcome must have a minimum of one measurement. Ideally each would have more than one measurement.
2. Sufficient detail should be included so an outside observer understands the measurement. For example, if an outcome is going to be measured using a focus group, then the questions used during that focus group should be available to the observer.
3. The measurement must align with the outcome. This seems obvious but can be tricky. For example, if the outcome has to do with student success, you will not use student evaluations of a course to measure this.
4. The measurement should be accurate and precise. For example, using the NSSE survey data to measure an outcome is much better than using a homegrown survey. This is because NSSE is vetted, normative and statistically accurate.

5. When developing measurement plans, it is essential that everyone engaged in the process is identified and everyone is aware of their roles.
6. Discussions on how all students from all campuses will be involved in the measurements and data collection. Obviously collecting data from students who are exclusively online is different than those who are exclusively face to face. These factors must be considered so that data collection is inclusive.
7. The measures should be useful for improvement. For example, measuring the number of students at an event may not help to improve the event itself, but could be helpful to improve the marketing of the event.

It is important to remember to avoid assessment fatigue. While it would be fabulous for every unit on campus to have a large number of outcomes that are measured every semester and action plans that address every outcome every year, this will become a full time job and the individuals involved in the assessment will become fatigued and this will result in the reduction in the quality of the data. It is required for every unit to measure at least one outcome each year, but it is up to the unit to choose which outcome, or outcomes will be measured and at what frequency. For some offices it would be appropriate to simply measure one or two outcomes per year and develop an improvement or action plan based on the data obtained from those measurements. That unit would then work on that action plan while measuring a different one or two outcomes the next year. Once the unit puts an improvement or action plan in place then then the unit will decide how much time is needed before measuring the same outcome that action plan addresses. It is up to the academic or administrative unit to decide the number and cycle of outcomes assessment based on their structure and function. Most academic programs that have under 10 program outcomes should consider measuring 1-2 outcomes per semester and reassessing those same outcomes within 2 years (or 1 year after an improvement plan to address any issues has been set in place).

Examples of Direct and Indirect Measures for Previous Listed Outcomes

Outcome	**Indirect Measure**	**Direct Measure**
After completing the B.S. Biology program at Clayton State University students will be able to accurately formulate hypotheses and collect, evaluate and interpret scientific data to solve problems in the biological sciences and supporting fields.	Survey	Rubric to evaluate student's research projects.
Graduates of the History program will be able to accurately contextualize historical events within broader social, cultural, political, and economic frameworks.	Survey	Rubric to evaluate research papers
The Office of Advising will reduce the average waiting time for advising appointments by increasing the percentage of students who can secure an appointment within 5 days of their request from 70% to 80%.	Survey	Tracking appointment requests received
The Office of Student Affairs will provide events to increase student participation in Laker Life activities by 10% in two years.	Survey	Track events and participation over time.

D. Establishing Targets for Performance – Is it necessary to define the expected level of performance or the benchmark indicator for success when developing outcomes and measuring those outcomes. This was mentioned previously in section B (Outcomes/Objectives). These targets for performance may change periodically and most definitely should be reevaluated periodically. Programs/departments can use their own data to benchmark performance or consider benchmarking against aspirational peers or national sources (normative assessments). It is important to define an increase or decrease by a percentage or a number but choose numbers that are realistic. It is important to define your timelines for meeting certain benchmarks. Will it take one year or one semester? Your timeline will then determine the frequency and timing for measuring the outcomes. There is no exact science to developing targets for performance and timelines. Discuss your ideas with other units or programs that may have similarity to your own. Talk to colleagues in your Regents Advisory Committee. Sometimes we create unrealistic targets, and it is okay to adjust them (within reason).

Best Practices to Consider:

- *Internal Benchmarks*: Analyze historical performance data within your program to establish a baseline. For example, review previous graduation rates, course pass rates, or assessment results.
- *External Benchmarks*: Compare your program's performance to similar programs at peer institutions, accreditation standards, or national data.
- *SMART*: Make targets Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound.
- Involve all stakeholders in setting targets to ensure they are realistic, meaningful, and aligned with available resources.
- Establish a target that challenges the program to improve but is attainable based on resources and historical trends.
- Start with provisional targets and revise them after a pilot period to ensure feasibility and effectiveness.
- Regularly assess progress and adjust targets based on changing circumstances, such as new institutional priorities, or funding.

E. Collect, Analyze, and Review Data: Assessment Reporting – At a minimum of once per year, programs must collect assessment data, analyze the results, produce an assessment report that includes a continuous improvement plan (sometimes called and "action plan"; discussed in section F). The Office of Institutional Research can assist you with some data collection and reporting aspects. The annual reports will be due to the Executive Director of Institutional Effectiveness and Accreditation (EDIEA) once per year. Your program will receive feedback from EDIEA with recommendations approximately two months after the report is received. These assessments will be utilized during comprehensive program reviews (for academic programs) and accreditation reviews. The assessments should contain the data, and a descriptive summary of the data collected in alignment with the outcome. The summary should include specific percentages, scores, benchmarks and sample sizes in alignment with the target for performance. Templates are provided on the assessment website. Due dates for Assessment Reports and resources can be found in Section III.

F. Continuous Improvement Plan or Action Plan – The Continuous Improvement Plan (AKA Action Plan) must be included in the assessment reports. After analyzing the data program, evaluators must write a summary of what will be done to enhance/improve the outcome(s) that was/were assessed that year. It should include who will do what, by when, and how. It should explain how that action is expected to improve or enhance the outcome. Instructions on the continuous improvement action plan are included in the templates.

Keep in mind that sometimes outcomes and performance targets or benchmarks need tweaking or changing. Sometimes they become obsolete, need to be realigned with the institutional priorities, or impacted by changing circumstances. This should not be done frequently or randomly, but it is okay to include outcome and performance target changes in the continuous improvement plan when this is justified.

Section III. Recommendations, Due Dates and Resources

A. Recommendations – Assessment reviews can feel overwhelming and can be easily forgotten by program coordinators, directors, department chairs, and deans. Forgetting to collect the data will put your program in danger; therefore, the reviews should be given high priority each semester. Additionally, it is very important to remember that this process should be collaborative. All stakeholders within the department and outside of the department should be involved in the process. Make sure the process is inclusive. There is nothing worse than having a cluster of stakeholders feeling the processes are flawed and the data are not useful. Following these suggestions can certainly help with the stressful nature of assessment data collection.

1. Work with your stakeholder to create a five-year outcomes assessment plan (See Figure two). You do not have to assess every outcome, every semester. Choose 1/4 to 1/3 of the outcomes for that program or unit to assess each period (i.e. Semester).
2. At a unit or program level meeting prior to the due date for the annual assessment report, work with your stakeholders to review the previous year's outcomes assessment data. After a discussion about the data (that can be used in the annual assessment report), review the five-year plan to make certain no changes are necessary. For example, if your group decides to make a change to improve an outcome that previously generated concerns then make sure you assess that outcome again after the change is implemented or if an external event occurred that could potentially impact a specific outcome, then you may choose to assess that outcome to see if the outcome was impacted in a positive or negative way. That data may or may not indicate the need for a change.
3. Work with your team to agree to use common rubrics. Make certain you are very clear about what needs to be collected. Provide templates if available and don't hesitate to ask for help. Consider using the AAC&U Value Rubrics (https://www.aacu.org/initiatives/value-initiative/value-rubrics). Additionally, AI does a great job at generating a rubric if you provide it with the correct information.
4. Assign the outcome and data collection to one or more people in your department each period. Work with your team to make sure nobody feels overburdened or left out. Do not always assign all the data collection to a select group or person. This will result in burnout and bad data collection. Try to be inclusive so everyone feels like they are a part of the team. Remember to give your volunteers a deadline to submit their data and remind your

volunteers at once per week in the last 4 weeks leading up to the deadline (in person, at meetings and/or via email). If you are assessing an academic program, make sure your deadline is well in advance of a winter or summer break.

5. Academic Programs: Make sure you select one or more courses/assessments that are taken early in the program (freshman/sophomore level) and one or more courses/assessments that are taken late in the program for each outcome so you can demonstrate growth.
6. Collect the data before the individuals leave for the holidays or summer break and remember to look at it and ask for clarification on anything before the individual leaves for break. As time passes the details regarding the data collection will fade.
7. Consider collecting the data in time for all stakeholders in your unit to review and discuss the data before a report is written. Best practices in assessment involve seeking input from your team prior to reporting.
8. Some team members may request training. It is important to provide them the training. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Accreditation in collaboration with the Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) will provide the training and can assist in finding additional training if necessary.

B. Links to Important Resources –

Academic Program Assessment

Administrative Unit Assessment

Survey data from NSSE, FSSE, graduation survey

SACSCOC Accreditation

University Strategic Plan 2027

C. Important Assessment Dates to Consider

- Academic Program Assessment Reports—Due June 30 (starting 2025)
- Academic Comprehensive Program Reviews—Due June 30 (at a minimum every 7 years for undergraduate and every 10 years for graduate)
- Administrative Unit Assessment Reports—Due January 31 (starting 2026)
- SACSCOC Assessment Report for Fifth Year Review—January 31, 2030 (Administrative) & June 30, 2029 (Academic).
- SACSCOC Assessment Report for Reaffirmation—January 31, 2033 (Administrative) & June 30, 2033 (Academic).

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