

GCOA Recommendations for Best Practices in Graduate and Professional Program Assessment

Assessment Plan

- Use the [most current assessment plan template](#).
- Remember that assessment is about your program.
 - It is about improvement of your program and not the number of students passing or failing.
 - You should expect that there will be areas that need improvement. Identifying these is the purpose of program assessment.
 - It is fine to update your assessment plan itself as you learn what works and what doesn't. When you update the plan, send it to the relevant COA.
- Provide justification when setting your target/benchmark performance level.
 - What will prompt further investigation into making a change?
 - If the target is too low, opportunities for improvement may not be identified
 - If the target is too high, too many unnecessary changes might be considered
 - Beware of the temptation to always meet this target!! The target is there to help provide opportunities for discussion for meaningful improvement in the program.
 - If the target is always achieved, consider increasing the target or increasing the level of rigor.
 - If your accrediting body has a benchmark, consider setting your targets above that level so you have ample warning of possible missed targets.
- Make sure your learning goals are specific to your program.
 - The Graduate School learning goals only provide a broad stroke look at the skills and knowledge gains appropriate for a graduating student.
 - Align your learning goals to the Graduate School learning goals.
- Choose assessment points that tell you how students are doing relative to these goals midway through the program as well as at the end.
- Consider a broad set of artifacts for assessment – a combination of written and oral work.
 - A combination of knowledge repetition and synthesis and application would help assess the various program goals more effectively.
 - Attempt to use activities that are already chosen to be included in a course or program to assess student learning. (That is, do not to create “new” deliverables just for assessment purposes.)
 - Develop a rubric for each artifact used in the assessment plan.
 - Develop descriptors for exceeds, meets, does not meet to reduce variation among evaluators, reduce variation over time for the same instructor, and reduce the burden for grading as well as assessment.
- Document your assessment process so that is clear to everyone what they need to do.
 - Make sure that your plan contains adequate detail for someone to implement it without needing to talk to a previous director.
 - Include every step of your process in the Continuous Improvement Section. For example, how and when is data collected, aggregated, and reviewed? How are decisions tracked? How and when are program faculty involved in reviewing the data?
 - Develop structures to engage all faculty contributing to developing the program assessment plan as well the discussion of the results. Many programs review their

assessment data together in an annual meeting and some also do this with advisory committees.

- Ensure assessment results are widely discussed among the faculty in a program, with the purpose of identifying issues with content, pedagogies, and knowledge flow in the program. Keep in mind that poor student assessment results in a course artifact might relate to content and knowledge in a previous course.

Annual Performance Report

- Use the [current annual performance report template](#) specific to your graduate/professional program.
- Include details in your log. Use the log as a repository of the improvements made in the program and the impact of the changes.
- Base your decision on staying the course or making changes on your log and Question 2.
 - To determine your decision, you may consider what you are required to report to your accrediting body and what changes are required to be submitted through shared governance review.
 - If you made programmatic or significant curricular changes, you may not be staying the course.
- Evaluate if your assessment plan is working to improve your program. That is, is your data providing the information you need?