



Guidelines for Program Assessment and Continuous Improvement

GO FORTH *inspired.*

Welcome from Institutional Research & Effectiveness Leadership

Dear Colleagues,

On behalf of the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness, I am pleased to present the 2024-2025 Assessment Handbook for Wiley University. This handbook is designed to serve as your comprehensive guide to the assessment process, providing the frameworks, tools, and resources you need to evaluate and enhance student learning across every program and department at Wiley University. Assessment is not merely a compliance obligation; it is the cornerstone of our institutional commitment to academic excellence and continuous improvement.

At Wiley University, we believe that a robust culture of assessment strengthens every dimension of the student experience. When faculty and staff engage thoughtfully in assessment, they gain valuable insights into how well students are meeting learning outcomes, where curricular adjustments may be warranted, and how institutional resources can be directed most effectively. Our accrediting body, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), recognizes assessment as a hallmark of institutional quality.

This handbook reflects the collaborative work of faculty, department chairs, deans, and Institutional Research and Effectiveness staff who have contributed their expertise and insights over the past several years. Whether you are new to assessment or an experienced practitioner, you will find practical guidance here. Our office stands ready to support you at every step of the assessment cycle.

With Wildcat pride,

Runell J. King, Ph.D.

Vice President for Institutional Research & Effectiveness

Assessment Fundamentals at Wiley University

What Is Assessment?

Assessment is the systematic process of gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well students are achieving the intended learning outcomes of a program, course, or institution. Unlike grading, which evaluates individual student performance, assessment focuses on aggregated data to evaluate the effectiveness of curricula, pedagogy, and support services. Assessment answers the fundamental question: Are our students learning what we intend them to learn, and how do we know?

At Wiley University, assessment is understood as an ongoing, cyclical process rather than a one-time event. Each academic program is expected to articulate clear student learning outcomes, measure those outcomes using appropriate methods, analyze the resulting data, and use findings to inform decisions about curriculum, instruction, and resource allocation.

Purpose and Benefits of Assessment

- **Improve Student Learning:** Assessment provides evidence-based insights into student strengths and areas for growth, enabling faculty to refine teaching strategies and curricular design.
- **Demonstrate Accountability:** Stakeholders including students, families, governing boards, and accrediting agencies expect transparent evidence that educational programs deliver on their promises.
- **Support Strategic Planning:** Assessment data informs institutional strategic planning by identifying trends, resource needs, and priorities for investment.
- **Meet Accreditation Standards:** SACSCOC requires institutions to demonstrate a commitment to student learning assessment and continuous improvement as a condition of accreditation.
- **Foster Faculty Development:** Engagement in assessment encourages reflective practice and provides opportunities for professional growth in curriculum design and pedagogical innovation.

Assessment and SACSCOC Accreditation

Wiley University is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). Several SACSCOC standards directly address the assessment of student learning outcomes. In particular, Standard 8.2a requires that each educational program identify expected student learning outcomes and assess the extent to which those outcomes are achieved. Standard 8.2b further requires the use of assessment results to improve programs and services.

TIP: Assessment is about program-level effectiveness, not individual faculty evaluation. Focus on what students are learning collectively across sections and semesters, rather than on the performance of any single instructor.

The Assessment Cycle

Phase	Activity	Timeline
1. Plan	Define or review student learning outcomes; select assessment methods and tools.	August–September
2. Collect	Administer assessments and gather data from courses and experiences.	October–April
3. Analyze	Compile results, disaggregate data, identify patterns and trends.	May–June
4. Improve	Develop action plans, implement changes, document improvements.	June–August

Developing Student Learning Outcomes

What Are Student Learning Outcomes?

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) are clear, measurable statements that describe what students are expected to know, be able to do, or value upon successful completion of a program of study. Well-crafted SLOs are the foundation of effective assessment because they establish the criteria against which student achievement is measured.

Characteristics of Effective SLOs

At Wiley University, we use the acronym SMART as a guide for writing quality outcomes:

- **Specific:** The outcome clearly identifies what the student will demonstrate, avoiding vague language such as “understand” or “appreciate.”
- **Measurable:** The outcome can be assessed using direct or indirect methods, yielding quantifiable or qualitative evidence.
- **Achievable:** The outcome is realistic and attainable within the scope of the program.
- **Relevant:** The outcome aligns with the program's mission, disciplinary standards, and student needs.
- **Time-bound:** The outcome specifies when the student is expected to achieve the competency.

Bloom's Taxonomy and Action Verbs

Bloom's Taxonomy provides a hierarchical framework for categorizing the cognitive complexity of learning outcomes. Select action verbs that correspond to the appropriate level:

Level	Description	Example Verbs
Remember	Recall facts and basic concepts	Define, list, identify, name, recall, recognize
Understand	Explain ideas or concepts	Describe, explain, summarize, paraphrase, classify
Apply	Use information in new situations	Demonstrate, solve, implement, use, execute

Analyze	Draw connections among ideas	Compare, contrast, differentiate, examine, organize
Evaluate	Justify a decision or stance	Assess, critique, judge, justify, argue, defend
Create	Produce new or original work	Design, construct, develop, formulate, compose

Writing Effective SLOs: A Step-by-Step Approach

1	Review your program mission. Ensure your outcomes align with the stated mission and goals of the program.
2	Identify key competencies. Determine the essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions graduates should possess.
3	Select appropriate action verbs. Use Bloom's Taxonomy to choose verbs that reflect the intended cognitive level.
4	Draft the outcome statements. Write concise statements beginning with an action verb, specifying what students will demonstrate.
5	Review and refine. Consult with colleagues, advisory boards, and Institutional Research and Effectiveness staff to ensure clarity and measurability.

Selecting Assessment Methods and Tools

Direct vs. Indirect Assessment Methods

Direct methods require students to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, or abilities. Direct assessment is the preferred approach because it provides the most robust evidence. Indirect methods capture perceptions, opinions, and self-reports about student learning. They should always be used in combination with direct methods.

Method Type	Examples	Strengths	Limitations
Direct: Exams & Tests	Standardized exams, comprehensive finals, licensure exams	Objective, reliable, easily quantified	May not capture higher-order thinking
Direct: Portfolios	Student work portfolios, e-portfolios, capstone projects	Captures growth over time, authentic	Time-intensive to evaluate
Direct: Rubric-Scored Work	Research papers, presentations, lab reports	Aligned to outcomes, flexible	Inter-rater reliability concerns
Direct: Performance	Clinical simulations, recitals, student teaching	Authentic, real-world application	Difficult to standardize

Indirect: Surveys	Graduation surveys, alumni surveys	Captures perceptions, benchmarks	Self-report bias, low response rates
Indirect: Focus Groups	Student focus groups, employer panels	Rich qualitative data, nuanced insights	Small sample, facilitator influence

TIP: Every program should use at least one direct method for each student learning outcome. Indirect methods should supplement, not replace, direct evidence.

Data Collection Procedures

Effective data collection requires careful planning. Before administering any assessment, programs must determine what data will be collected, from whom, when, and how.

Step-by-Step Data Collection Process

1	Identify the assessment point. Determine which course(s) or experience(s) provide the best opportunity to assess each SLO.
2	Select or develop the assessment instrument. Choose an existing rubric, exam, or tool, or develop a new one in collaboration with Institutional Research and Effectiveness.
3	Determine your sample. Decide whether you will assess all students or a representative sample.
4	Train assessors. If multiple faculty members will score student work, conduct a norming session.
5	Collect and organize data. Administer the assessment, record scores in the designated Institutional Research and Effectiveness data system.
6	Verify data quality. Review collected data for completeness, accuracy, and consistency.

Sampling Guidelines

Program Enrollment	Recommended Sample	Notes
Fewer than 30 students	Census (all students)	Small programs should assess all completers
30 – 100 students	Minimum 30 students or 50%	Ensure representation across sections
More than 100 students	Random sample of 50–75	Stratify by section, instructor, or modality

TIP: Protect student privacy at all times. Assessment data should be de-identified before sharing outside the program. Never include student names, ID numbers, or other personally identifiable information in assessment reports.

Analyzing Assessment Data

Quantitative Analysis

- Descriptive statistics: Calculate means, medians, standard deviations, and frequency distributions.
- Percentage meeting benchmark: Determine the proportion of students who met or exceeded the performance benchmark for each SLO.
- Trend analysis: Compare results across multiple assessment cycles to identify patterns.
- Disaggregation: Break results down by relevant subgroups to identify equity gaps.

Qualitative Analysis

- Thematic analysis: Identify recurring themes or patterns in student work or responses.
- Content analysis: Systematically categorize and code qualitative responses.
- Rubric narrative feedback: Review qualitative comments from rubric-based scoring.

Setting and Interpreting Benchmarks

Benchmark Format	Example
Percentage meeting proficiency	80% of students will score Proficient or higher on the capstone rubric
Mean score threshold	The mean score on the comprehensive exam will be 75% or higher
External comparison	Pass rate on the licensure exam will meet or exceed the national average
Improvement target	The percentage meeting the benchmark will increase by 5% over the previous year

TIP: When interpreting results, look beyond the numbers. Ask why students performed as they did. Consider factors such as curriculum alignment, instructional strategies, student preparation, and the validity of the assessment instrument itself.

Reporting Your Results

Every academic program at Wiley University is required to submit an annual assessment report to the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness. The assessment report documents the program's assessment activities, findings, and planned improvements for the academic year.

Required Report Components

- Program Mission Statement
- Student Learning Outcomes
- Assessment Methods
- Results Summary
- Analysis and Interpretation
- Action Plan
- Follow-Up on Prior Actions

Writing Tips

- Be concise but thorough. Provide enough detail for an external reviewer.
- Use data tables and charts to present results visually.
- Avoid jargon and be specific with quantitative claims.
- Connect findings to actions. Every area for improvement needs an action item.

Annual assessment reports are due to the Institutional Research and Effectiveness office by June 30 of each academic year.

Using Results for Continuous Improvement

Closing the Loop

'Closing the loop' is the process of using assessment findings to make meaningful changes to curricula, pedagogy, or support services, and then reassessing to determine whether those changes had the intended effect. This is the most important step in the assessment cycle.

Developing Action Plans

- Specific Action: What change will be made? Be precise.
- Responsible Party: Who will implement the change?
- Timeline: When will the change be implemented?
- Resources Needed: What resources are required?
- Assessment of Change: How will effectiveness be evaluated?

NOTE: Example: Assessment data from the Education program revealed that only 62% of student teachers met the benchmark for classroom management skills. The department added a dedicated classroom management module and increased supervised field hours. The following year, 81% met the benchmark.

Assessment Calendar and Deadlines

The following calendar outlines key assessment activities and deadlines for the 2024–2025 academic year.

Month	Activity	Responsible Party
August 2024	Assessment plans due; review and update SLOs	Program Coordinators
September 2024	Assessment workshop series begins; norming sessions	Institutional Research and Effectiveness Office / Faculty
October 2024	Fall data collection begins	Faculty
November 2024	Mid-semester check-in with Institutional Research and Effectiveness liaison	Program Coordinators
December 2024	Fall semester data collection ends	Faculty / Program Coordinators
January 2025	Spring assessment planning; review fall data	Program Coordinators
February 2025	Spring data collection begins; report template released	Faculty / Institutional Research and Effectiveness Office
March 2025	Assessment brown-bag lunch series	Institutional Research and Effectiveness Office
April 2025	Spring data collection ends	Faculty
May 2025	Data analysis period; compile full-year data	Program Coordinators
June 2025	Annual assessment reports due by June 30	Program Coordinators
July 2025	Institutional Research and Effectiveness reviews reports and provides feedback	Institutional Research and Effectiveness Office

TIP: Mark your calendar now! Programs that stay on schedule throughout the year find the annual reporting process significantly less burdensome.

Resources, Templates, and Appendices

Available Templates and Forms

Template / Form	Purpose	Available From
Assessment Plan Template	Document program SLOs, methods, benchmarks, and timeline	Institutional Research and Effectiveness Website
Annual Assessment Report Template	Submit annual findings and action plans	Institutional Research and Effectiveness Website
Rubric Development Worksheet	Guide for creating criterion-referenced rubrics	Institutional Research and Effectiveness Office
Curriculum Map Template	Map SLOs to courses across the curriculum	Institutional Research and Effectiveness Website
Action Plan Template	Document improvement actions with timelines	Institutional Research and Effectiveness Website
Data Collection Log	Track when and how assessment data are collected	Institutional Research and Effectiveness Office
SACSCOC Compliance Checklist	Self-audit tool for standards 8.2a and 8.2b	Institutional Research and Effectiveness Office

Recommended Reading

- Suskie, L. (2018). *Assessing Student Learning: A Common Sense Guide* (3rd ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Walvoord, B. E. (2010). *Assessment Clear and Simple* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- SACSCOC Resource Manual for The Principles of Accreditation (sacscoc.org).
- National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) – learningoutcomesassessment.org.