# Tarleton State University

# Guide to Developing a Quality Assessment Plan

In general, since outside reviewers have limited institutional knowledge, be specific and descriptive.  If you have specific questions, contact your Academic Assessment Committee representative(s).   Following is a brief guide. More comprehensive workbooks have been developed by other universities, such as:

* [Richmond University](http://oir.richmond.edu/Assessment/AssessmentWorkbook.pdf)
* [Ball State University](http://www.bsu.edu/web/assessment/resources.htm)

On Faculty-Reserve in the library are several [recommended assessment books](http://www.tarleton.edu/~academicassessment/documents/AssessmentReferences.pdf)****.****

## I.     Mission Statement

“The mission statement concisely articulates a clear vision of the desired future.  It serves as an anchor to keep a department or organization from drifting or losing its purpose and should correlate with the program’s official catalog description.  As an anchor, it provides stability, yet it also allows for some flexibility.  A degree of flexibility is important in the rapidly changing world in which we live and, for this reason, a mission statement does not discuss methods to accomplish the vision.”\*

Mission Statements should be brief and must correlate with the program’s catalog description.  An effective way to develop a mission statement follows (modified from [oir.richmond.edu/Assessment.htm](http://oir.richmond.edu/Assessment.htm)):

****The mission of**** [ *insert name of your program here* ] ****is to**** [*academic programs insert primary educational purpose here—for example, to provide certain types of skills such as critical thinking, analytical thinking, writing or communication skills or broad background/theoretical foundation in a certain academic discipline (art history, biology, philosophy, sociology, etc.; departments/budgetary units insert primary functional purpose here—for example, to provide certain types of services such as lab facilities, student support, training, etc.)* ]

\*  From “Assessment and Planning” by Rebecca Wolfe and Gay Wakefield, in the upcoming National Communication Association volume on assessment (in press), edited by Phil Backlund and Gay Wakefield, pp. 30.

## II.    Goals

“Long-term in nature [two years or more], program goals form the foundation for student-learning assessment.  Directly linked to the program’s mission, goals stipulate the major principles the program serves (e.g., to develop student competence meeting employer demands in the field of practice).”\*

Goals must be stated clearly and must directly support the program’s mission.  *For programs offered on more than one campus or via alternate delivery modes, at least one goal should focus on comparable results for multiple campuses/delivery modes*.

* [Administrative/Departmental Example](http://www.tarleton.edu/~academicassessment/documents/AdminExample.doc)
* [Student-Learning Example](http://www.tarleton.edu/~academicassessment/documents/SLOExample.doc)

\*  From “Assessing Communication Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes” by Phil Backlund, Timothy J. Detwiler, and Pat Arneson, in the upcoming National Communication Association volume on assessment (in press), edited by Phil Backlund and Gay Wakefield, p. 12.

## III.   Outcomes/Objectives

“Short-term in nature [one year or less] and directly linked to the program’s goals, student-learning objectives encompass the specific knowledge, skills, and attitudes that students are expected to achieve through their college experience; expected or intended student-learning outcomes.”\*

Effective outcomes/objectives are measureable.  They must be stated clearly and directly support one or more program goals.  Each outcome/objective must be followed by a listing of strategies leading directly to the desired output.  *For programs offered on more than one campus or via alternate delivery modes, objectives should focus on comparable outputs for multiple campuses/delivery modes*.

Outcomes/objectives fall into two categories:

1. ****Student-learning outcomes/objectives (SLO’s)**** are required for all academic-program assessment plans, and are appropriate only for academic programs.  These are measurable statements of what students should accomplish—the desired result expected in terms of student knowledge, skills, and/or values—and should reflect the top 2-6 overriding priorities the program’s faculty consider most important for all students graduating from the program.   
     
   SLO’s must be accompanied by a listing of ****strategies**** that lead clearly to the desired outcome.  Strategies might include required courses, assignments, events, activities, etc., that help students gain the knowledge/skills/values necessary to achieve the intended outcome/objective.  Strategies applicable to elective courses/activities should not be listed, since they cannot be assured for all program graduates.
   * ***Every********undergraduate********academic******program must*** *have at least one SLO addressing student use of* [*discipline-appropriate technolog*](http://www.tarleton.edu/~academicassessment/assessment/dato.html)y *(as approved by Academic Council in December 2004).*
   * ***Every********graduate********academic program must*** *have at least (as approved by Graduate Council in September 2008):*
     + *one SLO addressing in-depth knowledge of the discipline literature and*
     + *one SLO addressing ongoing student engagement in research and/or appropriate professional practice and training experiences.*

*Associations also are required for objectives*. Each student-learning objective must be associated with at least one designated student-learning program goal on that drop-down list in WEAVEonline. In addition, *if an objective directly supports*—*and directly measures*—one or more of the a) "General Education or Core Curriculum" objectives (either undergraduate, preceded by "U" on the WEAVEonline drop-down list, or graduate, preceded by "G" on that list), b) "Institutional Proprities", or c) "Strategic Plans", such associations should be checked on the WEAVEonline drop-down lists for those categories. Discretion should be used in indicating associations with university-wide objectives, since *programs must be prepared to prove those associations with direct findings and related action plans*.

* [Student-Learning Example](http://www.tarleton.edu/~academicassessment/documents/SLOExample.doc)

1. ****Departmental/Administrative outcomes/objectives**** are required for all budgetary-unit evaluation plans, and are appropriate only for budgetary units.  These are measurable statements of what the unit plans to accomplish—the desired result expected—and should reflect the unit’s top 2-6 overriding priorities for the year.  Each outcome/objective must be accompanied by a listing of strategies, such as approaches, events, activities, etc., expected to help achieve the outcome/objective.

*Associations also are required for objectives*. Each student-learning objective must be associated with at least one designated student-learning program goal on that drop-down list in WEAVEonline. In addition, *if an objective directly supports*—*and directly measures*—one or more of the a) "Institutional Proprities", or b) "Strategic Plans", such associations should be checked on the WEAVEonline drop-down lists for those categories. Discretion should be used in indicating associations with university-wide objectives, since *programs must be prepared to prove those associations with direct findings and related action plans*.

* [Administrative/Departmental Example](http://www.tarleton.edu/~academicassessment/documents/AdminExample.doc)

\*  From “Assessing Communication Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes” by Phil Backlund, Timothy J. Detwiler, and Pat Arneson, in the upcoming National Communication Association volume on assessment (in press), edited by Phil Backlund and Gay Wakefield, p. 13.

## IV.   Measures & Targets

Measures are the specific methods used to gather data proving whether outcomes/objectives were accomplished, with triangulation of measures considered the best practice--“… meaning that results of at least two measures need to point to the same conclusion...”\*

Each measure should be defined clearly and should state the time period and party responsible for data gathering.  *For* ***programs offered on more than one campus or via alternate delivery modes****, the process for data gathering across campuses and delivery modes must be defined clearly*.

For each measure, at least one related outcome/objective must be selected from the WEAVEonline drop-down list; checked relationships should be those only for which findings will be segmented by each related objective/outcome.

Triangulation of student-learning outcomes/objectives

*At least two* *****direct measurements********are required*** *for each student-learning outcome/objective*.  Direct measures for student-learning assessment “... require students to display their knowledge, skills, and attitudes for measurement.  Objective tests, essays, presentations, portfolios, and classroom assignments all are examples of this criterion; tools such as student-perception reports or alumni surveys do not meet this criterion because they measure student perceptions about learning, rather than measuring actual student learning.”

Triangulation of budgetary-unit outcomes/objectives

*At least two* *****one direct measurement is********required*** *for each budgetary-unit outcome/objective*.  Direct measures for budgetary-unit evaluation include recruitment figures, participation totals, resources secured, programs developed, etc.

For budgetary units, direct measures can be triangulated with other direct measures or with indirect instruments.  Indirect measures of assessment “… ask students to reflect on their learning, attitudes, and skills, rather than to demonstrate same.  Direct measures are preferred highly over indirect instruments.”  Indirect measures of budgetary-unit effectiveness might include satisfaction surveys, focus groups, exit interviews, etc.  Every measure must include a realistic, challenging achievement target for each outcome/objective it evaluates.

* [Administrative/Departmental Example](http://www.tarleton.edu/~academicassessment/documents/AdminExample.doc)
* [Student-Learning Example](http://www.tarleton.edu/~academicassessment/documents/SLOExample.doc)

\*  From “Assessing Communication Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes” by Phil Backlund, Timothy J. Detwiler, and Pat Arneson, in the upcoming National Communication Association volume on assessment (in press), edited by Phil Backlund and Gay Wakefield, p.12.

For more specifics, see [Assessment Instruments and Methods for Assessing Student Learning in the Major](http://www.tarleton.edu/~academicassessment/documents/AssessmentGuidelines.pdf).

## V.    Findings

Findings for measures must be reported by each related outcome/objective.  Make sure that each finding entered is consistent with the language and expectations of the measure to which it correlates.  *For academic programs offered on more than one campus or via alternate delivery modes, comparative results for multiple campuses/delivery modes must be reported.*

* [Administrative/Departmental Example](http://www.tarleton.edu/~academicassessment/documents/AdminExample.doc)
* [Student-Learning Example](http://www.tarleton.edu/~academicassessment/documents/SLOExample.doc)

## VI.  Action Plans

After findings are entered, *action plans need to be established for objectives/outcomes*.  Enter plans for assuring more progress during the next year (new strategies, adjustment in current strategies or measures, etc.). Indicate whether the plan is to change current activities, revise the target level, focus on a different objective next year, etc.  Also include information about any changes planned for measures.

Be sure to include deadlines for completion and designees responsible for following through on the action.  If the planned action requires resources, discuss: 1) whether these are new or reallocated resources, 2) how those resources will be used, and 3) what is planned if the resources are unavailable (i.e., lowering a target might be necessary).

An action plan that relates to more than one objective does not have to be repeated as a separate action plan for each related objective in WEAVEonline. Instead, the "Details" section in WEAVE's "Action Plan Tracking" allows editing of "Measure-Outcome/Objective Relationships" to designate multiple relationships for one action plan.

* [Administrative/Departmental Example](http://www.tarleton.edu/~academicassessment/documents/AdminExample.doc)
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## VII.  Analysis

Analysis closes the loop by summarizing assessment activities for the academic program and/or administrative unit.  Highlight important findings, being sure to address both successes and continuing challenges.  Refer to longevity results for objectives that have been measured prior to the current year, discussing progress over time.  When an objective has been met consistently over time, becoming a proven strength, program faculty might wish to replace it with a different objective for the next year.  Include information regarding how any resources designated specifically to help meet assessment objectives were expended, and describe the impact.

## VIII. Annual Report

Only budgeted units must complete annual reports.  For instance, none of the academic programs in the Department of English and Languages (e.g., B.S. in Spanish) complete annual reports, but the Department of English and Languages does complete an annual report.  The annual report should provide:

* A concise, but comprehensive, report about the annual activities and accomplishments—and also future challenges—for a budgeted University unit.
* Valuable data that can be used in the next-level supervisory unit’s annual report (e.g., the highlights from the report for the Department of Biological Sciences should be incorporated into the annual report of the College of Science and Technology, and the highlights from the Office of School Relations should be incorporated into the annual report of the Division of Enrollment Management).
* A reflective narrative.

For details about what is expected in various sections of the annual report, refer to the Annual Report Guidelines on the [WEAVEonline®](http://www.tarleton.edu/~academicassessment/weave/weave.html) page.