Academic Assessment Update

Georgia Southern University

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ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT UPDATE

There's a lot to wrap up at the conclusion of this academic year! Our newsletter provides additional information about preparation for the upcoming reaffirmation of accreditation with SACSCOC, an overview of the results of peer-review of assessment documents for 2019-2020, an update on Gen Ed Redesign, a feature celebrating excellence in academic program assessment, and introductions to some of our newest team members.

From the Assessment Coordinator

Get Ready for Your Closeup!

If you haven't already heard, we are gearing up for a very important event at Georgia Southern -- our reaffirmation of accreditation with SACSCOC in 2025. Preparing for this event will require participation and collaboration from everyone on our campuses. As part of this process, we will submit an extensive Compliance Document that will be reviewed by a group of trained peer-reviewers from other institutions. This will be followed by an on-site visit during which peer-reviewers get to see for themselves everything we have to offer and verify the evidence presented in our Compliance Document.

This means over the next three years as we initiate integration of evidence into the Compliance Document, we will continue to emphasize reviewing academic assessment processes and documents with an external audience in mind. Starting next year, assessment documents for academic programs and core courses will be made publicly available in the interest of transparency and collaboration.

In addition to positioning us for a successful reaffirmation process, making these documents available will benefit our faculty and academic leadership. We truly have a rich and diverse selection of academic programs and core courses, each taking an approach to assessment tailored to the needs of their program and students. Sharing this information openly will allow us all to benefit from the examples and experience of others engaged in academic assessment at the institution and signal the genuine value and priority we place on students and their learning.

As you think ahead about your assessment documentation, I wanted to offer a few tips for preparing for your "close up:"

Visit our Website
Peer-review feedback from the Academic Assessment Steering Committee (AASC) has been returned for Graduate Certificates and Academic Programs who submitted assessment plans or document on February 1, 2021. The AASC reviews these documents based on criteria in the Academic Program Assessment Rubric. The following infographics show a comparison of the documents submitted and the peer-review scores by rubric trait for 2018-2019 and 2019-2020.

(Due to extenuating circumstances, feedback for four of the 131 submitted academic program assessment documents remains outstanding.)
The AASC also reviewed initial assessment plans submitted by all graduate certificates at the beginning of the spring semester. Assessment plans only include the first five sections of the academic program assessment template, and are also reviewed and scored based on the criteria included on the Academic Program Assessment Rubric. A summary of scores for the assessment plans is presented in the infographic below.

**Core Curriculum**

Core Curriculum Assessment Documents are reviewed by the General Education and Core Curriculum (GECC) Committee and scored based on criteria in the Core Curriculum Assessment Rubric. The following infographics show a comparison of the documents submitted and the peer-review scores by rubric trait for 2018-2019 and 2019-2020.
On Thursday, March 25th Interim AVP of IAA Dr. Delena Gatch officially kicked off the SACSCOC reaffirmation of accreditation with a one-hour presentation to extended leadership across campus. This presentation included the process and timeline for reaffirmation of accreditation, a focused look at critical standards, and a proposal for next steps to prepare Georgia Southern for a successful peer-review by the SACSCOC team.
Academic Program and Core Course assessment documents serve a critical purpose as evidence that the institution meets SACSCOC standards 8.2.a (Student outcomes: Educational Programs) and 8.2.b (Student Outcomes: General Education). In preparation for the upcoming peer-review for our reaffirmation of accreditation, assessment documents will be shared more widely across campus and IAA will be more closely monitoring for satisfaction of SACSCOC standards and guidelines. The General Education and Core Curriculum (GECC) committee and the Academic Assessment Steering Committee (AASC) will also play a critical role in ensuring the quality and compliance of assessment processes through the annual review of assessment documents.

8.2.a Student outcomes: educational programs

- “Annual” submission of academic program student learning outcome assessment documents by academic departments
- Peer review performed by Academic Assessment Steering Committee
- Resources:
  - Template
  - Rubric
  - Handbook
  - Folio Training Course

https://academics.gsu.edu/use/academic-assessment/academic-program/
At the beginning of the 2021-2022 academic year, IAA received notification that the USG BOR’s timeline for Gen Ed Redesign was delayed due to shifting priorities resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. IAA anticipated that the redesign would progress at some point in the future, and continued to pursue goals set for Phase 1 Information Gathering and Phase 2 SLO Development/Thematic Journey Development. These phases were intended to lay some initial groundwork prior to the proposal for a curriculum structure and development or revision of core courses.

For most institutions, general education redesign is a process that can take up to 10 years, making it difficult to keep pace with rapid evolutions in pedagogy and professional trends. By continuing work this academic year, Georgia Southern has positioned itself to move more proactively through this process as additional guidance is provided by the USG BOR Council on General Education.

Based on the current information from the USG BOR, the GECC voted in their March 26 meeting to pause work for the remainder of the Spring 2021 semester and to revisit the redesign in Fall 2021, pending additional guidance from the USG.

GECC Subcommittees and Student Working Groups Report
As GECC Gen Ed Redesign conclude their work on Phase 2 goals for this academic year, they are sharing materials collected and drafts of potential student learning outcomes with IAA. IAA will compile these materials, share them with GECC members, and archive them for consideration by the committee in Fall 2021. The contributions of subcommittee members representing all colleges and representative administrative divisions has been essential to these initial stages of the redesign process.

In addition to the GECC Gen Ed Redesign Subcommittees, a group of students volunteered to participate in Student Working Groups to contribute a student perspective through the initial drafts of student learning outcomes. The Student Working Group met monthly to debrief from their work on the subcommittees and to contribute additional insights into the redesign process. Final reflections will be collected from these student volunteers through a survey distributed by IAA.

Ongoing updates can be found on the General Education Redesign website.

Excellence in Academic Program Assessment: EdS Teaching and Learning

A common challenge in student learning assessment is determining how to use the data collected to make strategic decisions and meaningful changes to support student learning and success. The Ed.S. in Teaching and Learning stands out as an example of using assessment data to drive decisions that improve student learning. This approach to data-driven decision making is in line with the program mission, which aims to equip educators with research and leadership skills, including “active engagement in data-based decision making to improve their schools, classrooms, and learning experiences for their students.”

The program documented action plans based on assessment results for 2018-2019 and 2019-2020. While the data indicated that targets for program SLOs were met, the program identified specific strategies that could be implemented to further support student learning and success. The program acknowledged some challenges to implementing these plans, including bringing new faculty up to speed with the program
changes post-consolidation and transitions in leadership with the appointment of a new program director. In spite of these challenges, the program put forward a robust and detailed action plan with a range of proposed interventions.

The proposed action plans from the Ed.S. Teaching and Learning offer many options that directly address student learning. Keep these strategies in mind when analyzing and interpreting assessment data as potential action items to support student learning outcomes. Some of the proposed interventions include:

- **Changing course rotations.** Some course content is more difficult to master in shorter summer terms and needed to be shifted to fall or spring semester to allow more time for students to develop the necessary skills and knowledge to be successful.
- **Changing course sequencing.** Students needed more foundational skills leading into culminating courses. The program shifted more complex courses to later in the program to better equip students for success.
- **Collaborating with other departments.** The program collaborated with Writing and Linguistics on issues related to academic writing, then developed modules specific to scholarly research and writing with a focus relevant to content-specific trends and issues.
- **Adding course content.** The program developed additional learning modules for courses to reinforce specific areas where students needed additional support.
- **Improving assignments.** Providing more detailed instructions for assignments along with examples gives students clearer guidelines for how to best demonstrate their learning. Incorporating peer feedback opportunities further engages students in reviewing and refining their work.
- **Adjusting SLOs.** The program recognized that a new SLO is needed to reflect expectations for teaching and learning in diverse contexts. This addition supports the emphasis on school reform initiatives to prepare students to meet emerging challenges in the field.

The Ed.S. Teaching and Learning exemplifies a proactive and multi-faceted approach to improving student learning. In addition to their attention to the needs of current students, they are leveraging awareness of current trends in education to continually refine their program to ensure their graduates take on leadership roles in shaping the future of education.

**IAA Welcomes New Team Members**

We are pleased to introduce a new staff member who joined our team in April.

![Linda Smith](image)

**Linda Smith** is a retiree who joined IAA as a part time clerical assistant. Linda started working at GSU in the Marvin Pittman Laboratory School in 1989. From there she worked several years in the Management Department, twenty-three years in the Physics Department, and five years in the Geology and Geography Department. Her institutional knowledge and administrative expertise will support the efficient operation of IAA.

**IAA Faculty Fellows Summer 2021**

We are pleased to welcome two faculty fellows to the IAA team for Summer 2021. The Faculty Fellows will contribute to specific initiatives to support curriculum, assessment, and accreditation.

**Michelle Cawthorn** is a faculty member in the Department of Biology. In addition to her regular duties in the Biology Department, she has served on the Academic Assessment Steering Committee and the General Education and Core Curriculum Committee for the last 8 years, and is the assessment coordinator in the Biology Department.
Cynthia Costa is a senior lecturer of art history and the general education coordinator at the Betty Foy Sanders Department of Art. She has taught ancient to Medieval art history at the Armstrong campus and online since 2009. Most recently, her SoTL research on effective teaching, course design, and engagement strategies has been presented at several national conferences and webinars.

Upcoming Events

Assessment Document Writers Group
Summer 2021

The Assessment Document Writers Group is offered to support academic program and core course coordinators and others who assist with student learning assessment on an annual basis. The Writers Group includes an overview of assessment best practices, with a focus on meeting the expectations of peer-reviewers through practical writing tips and examples. The Writers Group gives faculty from all disciples and levels of experience an opportunity to share their unique strategies, challenges, and questions surrounding assessment and compiling assessment documentation.

IAA is offering two sessions of the Assessment Document Writers Group in Summer 2021. Session 1, offered in Summer Term A, will be offered as a combination of asynchronous Folio resources with weekly workshops offered via Zoom. Session 2 is a new, intensive one-week version of the Writers Group and will be offered August 2-6 as a face-to-face workshop, offered synchronously on the Statesboro and Armstrong campuses. Additional sessions may be added based on demand.
Institutional Assessment and Accreditation (IAA) works collaboratively with faculty, staff, and administration to ensure the quality of the programs and educational experiences offered by the university, addressing the unique assessment needs of courses, departments, colleges, or units through individual and group consultations, professional development workshops, recommendations for technology implementation, and best practice reference materials.