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Academic Assessment Update

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Georgia Southern University

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ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT UPDATE

In this edition of our newsletter, we offer tips for passing the initial quality check when you submit your assessment documents on October 1st, share some thoughts about what it means to have a culture of assessment, offer suggestions for addressing ongoing disruption to your assessment processes, highlight new resources, and celebrate an example of assessment data used to plan for improvement of student learning.

Visit our Website

Initial Quality Check of Assessment Documents

All core course and academic program assessment documents are **due for submission on October 1**. We sent out a preliminary notification to bring a few changes to your attention, and we wanted to reiterate the significance of the initial quality check that will take place this fall.

Assessment documents submitted this year and for the next two academic years will be included in our compliance certification for our SACSCOC reaffirmation of accreditation, so the IAA team is taking some extra steps now to ensure that we are well prepared to meet all standards. The purpose of the initial quality check is to catch any issues that will need to be corrected for SACSCOC review and to make those corrections now, as early in the process as possible. ***If your submitted document does not pass the initial quality check, it will be returned for revisions before it is accepted by IAA.***

Five tips for passing the initial quality check:

1. **Make sure you are using the current version of the template.** Download it from the IAA website as a Word document and submit it as a Word document. Do not convert it to a pdf! (Use these links to access the correct version: [Academic Program Student Learning Outcome Assessment Template](#); [General Education Student Learning Outcome Assessment Template](#)).
2. **Academic programs: reference the current [university mission statement](#).** If you are submitting a document for an academic program and you reference the university mission statement in your program mission statement, make sure it is current.
3. **Academic programs: include a unique program mission statement and student learning outcomes appropriate to the degree level.** Do not duplicate mission statements and student learning

outcomes from another program.

4. **Include data from the correct academic years.** We all make copy/paste errors sometimes, so do check to make sure those tables, charts, and graphs are reflecting the 2020-2021 academic year, or the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 academic years if you are reporting on a two year cycle.

5. **Include data for each campus location.** No matter how many students are enrolled in a course or program on each campus, if the core course or academic program is offered on that campus, SACSCOC requires that we report separate data for that location. Online also counts as a separate location.

From the Assessment Coordinator

What is a Culture of Assessment?

On October 18th, Georgia Southern will be launching a Survey of Assessment Culture distributed by Sam Houston State University. This survey marks an important milestone in the IAA strategic plan, and we anticipate that the insights we gain from it will drive innovations and developments over the coming years to better serve our faculty and students.

Georgia Southern is the fifth institution of higher learning I have worked at during my career (sixth if you count my graduate teaching assistantship), and each one has had a unique culture of assessment. That culture is shaped by many factors -- the type of institution, its size, the characteristics of the student body and faculty, its region of accreditation, its age, and its institutional mission, to name a few.



Our culture of assessment is defined by some of the big questions that guide what we do as an educational institution:

*What do we value?
How do we set goals to support those values?
How do we know when we are succeeding?
Who benefits when we succeed?
How do we adapt and adjust to do better?*

And our culture of assessment is focused more specifically on our students and their learning. I think we would all agree that learning is more than just a simple equation of knowledge in = knowledge out, but that it is also made up of ways of thinking and problem solving, interacting with others, and navigating evolving social and global contexts. Assessment is a process of fine tuning the complex process of learning. It is looking really closely at the details of what makes learning work and then figuring out ways to make it work better for our specific students, at this specific university, at this point in time -- together, through a collaborative effort.

Sam Houston State University defines a culture of assessment as "an institutional ethos or way of operating that uses assessment for ongoing program or curricular improvement." That is a very broad definition that I believe we will elaborate on through participation in the Survey of Assessment Culture. On October 18th, if you receive the invitation to participate in the survey, I hope you will respond and help create a unique, Georgia Southern definition for the culture of assessment that reflects the commitment to excellence in teaching and learning that motivates so much of what you do.

Thanks for being part of our culture!

Sam Houston State University
Survey of Assessment Culture
October 18 - November 17, 2021

More Information

COVID Impacts on Assessment

IAA would like to acknowledge that the 2020-2021 academic year continued to present unique challenges to continuity of instruction and assessment processes for many of our academic programs and core courses. We have been impressed by the resilience of our faculty as well as the innovation and persistence that resulted in improved peer-review results on many assessment documents submitted for the 2019-2020 academic year in spite of the obstacles presented.

We would like to remind all academic program and core course coordinators that the 2020-2021 year may still require some clarification regarding any disruption to your assessment processes or documentation. As [previously recommended](#), please be transparent and direct in your narrative when describing the impact COVID-19 may have had.

You may find it useful to consider some of the changes made to adapt over the past year and to group those changes into categories:

- Changes that have been ultimately beneficial and that have been maintained as instruction returns to pre-pandemic formats
- Changes that were beneficial during emergency remote or hyflex instruction but will no longer be beneficial as instruction returns to pre-pandemic formats
- Changes that were not beneficial and will not be maintained

Some of the changes that fall into the first category could be incorporated into your action plans for future improvement to your academic program or core course, particularly if you find that assessment results reflect the benefits gained by students.

New Assessment Resources

Updated Assessment Document Handbooks

Over the summer, we made some improvements to our assessment document handbooks:

- Updated design, table of contents, document flow
- Updated terminology and order to reflect changes to templates
- Added examples to Academic Program Student Learning Outcome Assessment Document Handbook

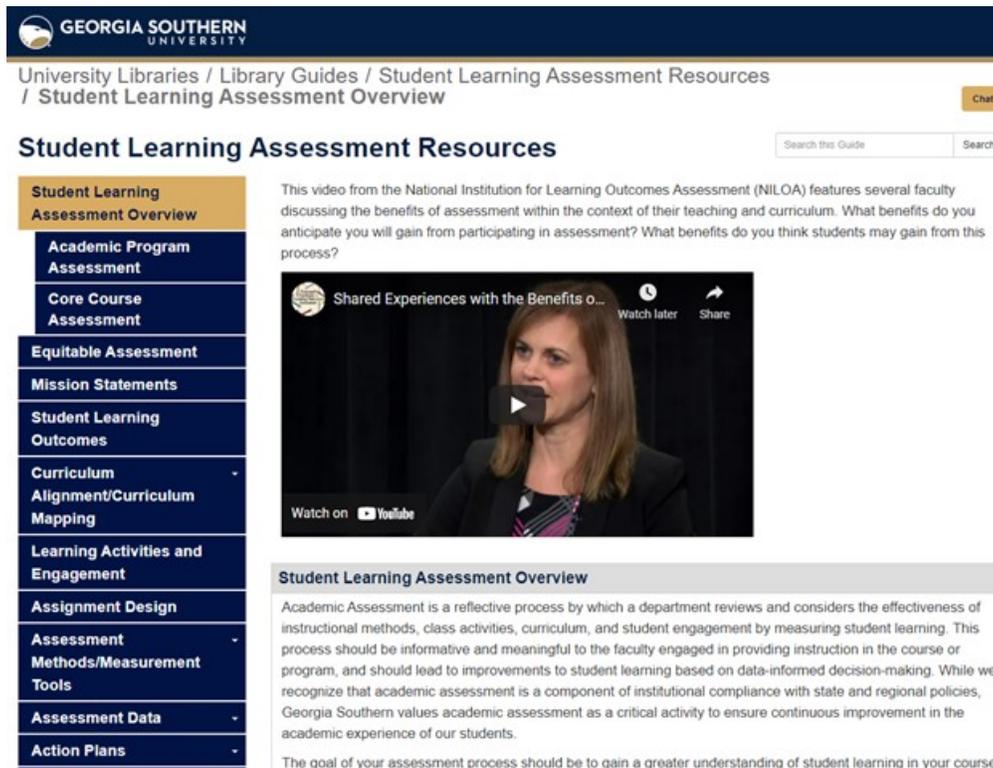
The assessment document handbooks are meant to serve as a quick reference for best practices for your assessment process as well as tips for documenting those processes in your annual report. You can check out the improvements by clicking the links below:

[Academic Program Student Learning Outcome Assessment Document Handbook](#)

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Student Learning Assessment Resources Library Guide

IAA has enhanced the student learning assessment resources available through our website through a [library resource guide](#). The library resource guide incorporates information from the handbooks and the peer-review rubric with the addition of resources compiled through a literature review of assessment best practices. Each topic in the research guide includes short videos, links to articles, quick-reference sheets, worksheets, checklists, and other resources for faculty and assessment coordinators.



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University Libraries / Library Guides / Student Learning Assessment Resources / Student Learning Assessment Overview

Student Learning Assessment Resources

This video from the National Institution for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) features several faculty discussing the benefits of assessment within the context of their teaching and curriculum. What benefits do you anticipate you will gain from participating in assessment? What benefits do you think students may gain from this process?

Student Learning Assessment Overview

Academic Assessment is a reflective process by which a department reviews and considers the effectiveness of instructional methods, class activities, curriculum, and student engagement by measuring student learning. This process should be informative and meaningful to the faculty engaged in providing instruction in the course or program, and should lead to improvements to student learning based on data-informed decision-making. While we recognize that academic assessment is a component of institutional compliance with state and regional policies, Georgia Southern values academic assessment as a critical activity to ensure continuous improvement in the academic experience of our students.

The goal of your assessment process should be to gain a greater understanding of student learning in your course

Excellence in Core Course Assessment: MATH 1001 Quantitative Literacy

IAA places high value on assessment that is both meaningful and manageable, meaning that academic programs and core courses should engage in assessment processes that yield data and insights that can lead to improvements in student learning. This kind of improvement is directly linked to expectations specified in SACSCOC standard 8.2.b: *The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and **provides evidence of seeking improvement based on analysis of the results for student learning outcomes** for collegiate-level general education competencies of its undergraduate degree programs.*

MATH 1001 Quantitative Reasoning provides an example of assessment data that is analyzed and used to plan for improvements to student learning outcomes. This course is part of area A2 in our general education curriculum, aligned with the area learning outcome "Students will apply mathematical knowledge using analytical, graphical, written, or numerical approaches to interpret information to solve problems." With eight course learning outcomes, the content of this course includes mathematical skills ranging from percentages and probabilities to linear equations and descriptive statistics. Student learning aligned with the eight course SLOs is assessed by a set of common short answer, multiple choice, and multiple selection questions which faculty add to their final exams.

Barbara Ross, core course coordinator and Lecturer in the Mathematics department on the Liberty campus, shared the data provided through this assessment with faculty to determine specific weaknesses in student learning and to develop detailed plans to help students improve their math knowledge, skills, and achievement. In the discussion of data and action plans for this course, the faculty considered variations in student performance across the three campus locations where the course is delivered and proposed actions to support the needs of students on all campuses. Using the data as a starting point, the faculty identified where targets were met or not met, as well as where scores had improved or declined from the previous year. A more careful examination of student performance on each test item revealed the most common types of errors, which allowed the faculty to draw conclusions about specific concepts and skills that students had not yet mastered.

Based on this analysis, the faculty developed specific action plans for each SLO. These action plans consisted of practical and immediate adjustments faculty could make to course content, assignments, and teaching to reinforce critical content relevant to each SLO. The faculty further discovered some common areas of difficulty that weakened student performance on several SLOs and prioritized these skills. For example, faculty found that students often used the wrong approach to solving scenario-based problems. To address this weakness, they proposed giving students more practice with selecting the method to solve a problem based on a scenario. Faculty also found that students struggled with rounding accurately and proposed that adding some instruction early in the course on rounding to specific places would help students be more successful in answering questions correctly for all SLOs. One area that showed strength was the combination of lecture and mini-projects, which led to a 98.1% success rate for meeting targets on SLO 5. Faculty plan to continue and expand upon this model of instruction in the course.

The steps proposed in the action plan for MATH 1001 indicate that this is a meaningful process for the faculty since it directly addresses the needs of the students. The faculty will be able to continue to examine scores in future assessment cycles to see if their plans lead to desired results.

Upcoming Events

Academic Assessment Q&A Session

One open Q&A session remains! If you have general questions as you are finishing up your assessment documents for either academic programs or core courses, join us for the final Academic Assessment Q&A Session of our September series.

Tuesday, September 21
12:30 - 1:45 p.m.

[Zoom Link](#)

REMINDER: Assessment Document Submissions due October 1



[IAA website](#)

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.

[Assessment Services Request](#)