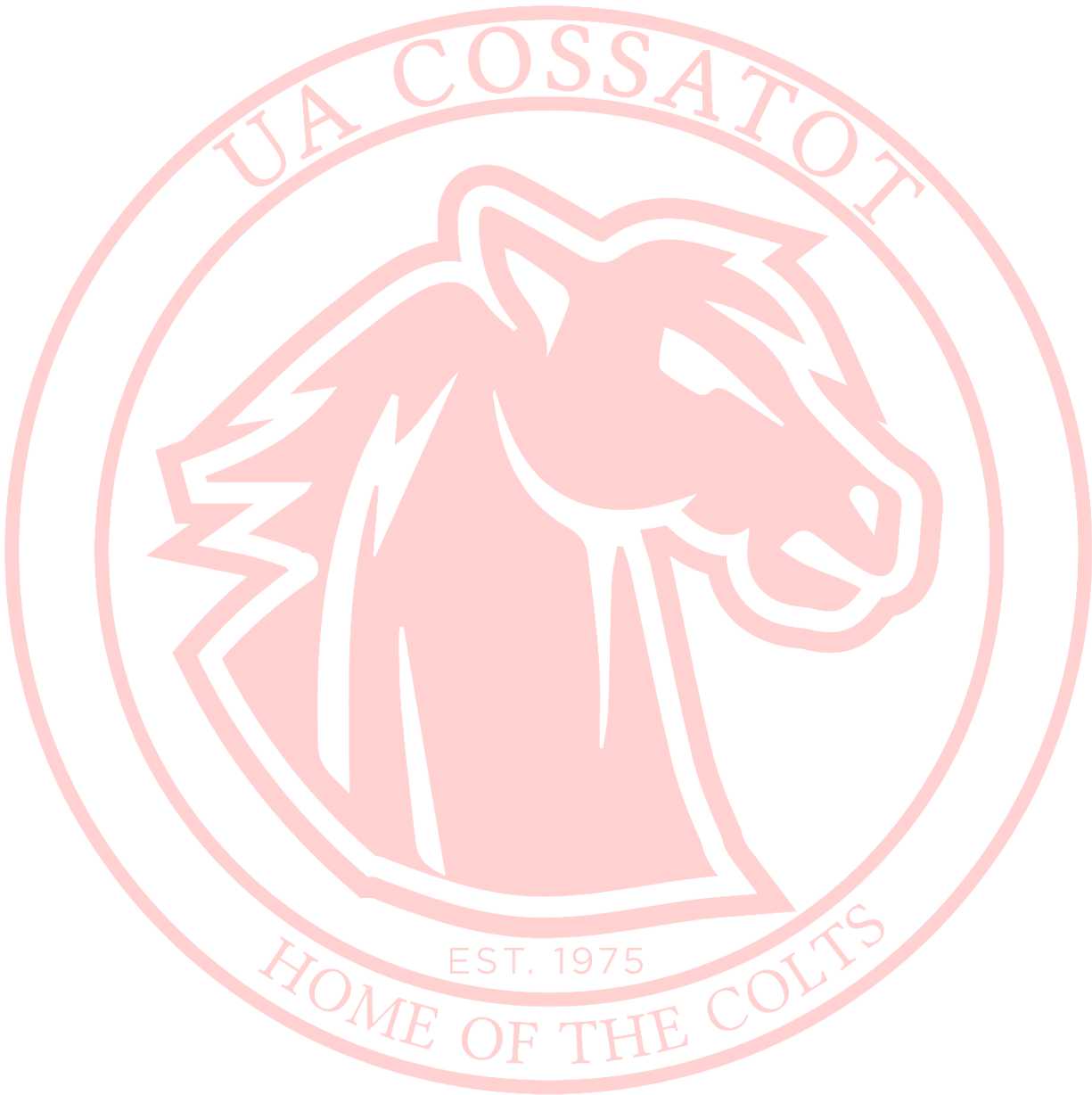# University of Arkansas Cossatot
Assessment Handbook

Created February 2024
Revised December 2025

UA Cossatot is committed to improving the lives of those in our communities by providing quality education, outstanding service, and relevant industry training.
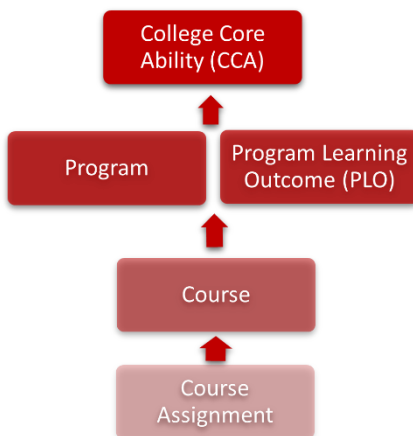
Table of Contents

What is Assessment?

Assessment is the "process of gathering data to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of student learning"[1]

Assessment Is an Important Part of Teaching and Learning

Faculty assess every day! Instructors constantly evaluate what works well and what does not work well in the coursework provided to students. These observations are used to make changes and adjustments to the curriculum to improve student learning. Formal assessment of learning outcomes at the "program level" provides information (data) on what and how much students are learning in a program. Results of assessment activities then guide necessary program changes that will strengthen the program and ensure that graduates have learned what they need to know for success. A good assessment program includes assessment of student learning outcomes at various levels within the program. At UA Cossatot, assessment of student learning is completed at the following levels:

College Core
Ability (CCA)

Program | Program Learning
Outcome (PLO)

Course

Course
Assignment

Here is an example of how this looks for an assignment in Accounting II.

Communication

AS Business | Communicate
professionally in oral and
written communication.

Accounting II

Concluding project

This faculty handbook focuses on assessment processes at UA Cossatot. The concepts presented here guide faculty through the assessment processes, including planning for assessment, collecting assessment data, completing and submitting assessment forms, and using data to improve student learning.

---

[1] Harris, T. L., & Hodges, R. E. (Eds.). (1995). The literacy dictionary: The vocabulary of reading and writing. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Assessment of Student Learning is Part of Accreditation
UA Cossatot is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). HLC has four criteria by which the college must comply. Assessment of student learning falls under Criterion Three: Teaching and Learning for Student Success.

HLC Criterion 3.E. The institution improves the quality of educational programs based on its assessment of student learning.
Check out the [Higher Learning Commission](#) (HLC) website to learn more about accreditation.

UA Cossatot College Core Abilities
UA Cossatot believes that general education provides the opportunity for students to acquire knowledge and skills necessary for living and working in today's global society.

The College has established a required core of general education courses for the Associate of Applied Science degrees, the Associate of Arts and Science degrees, and the Technical Certificates. General education is integrated into teaching each college course so that one or more of these concepts are practiced.

Students who earn an Associate degree or Technical Certificate are expected to demonstrate proficiency in the following core abilities:

The core abilities represent the college learning outcomes (College Core Abilities).

C Communication

O Occupational Skills

L Life Skills

T Technology

S Social Skills

- The *Communication* core ability includes skills such as reading, writing, speaking, citations, and teamwork.
- The *Occupational Skills* core ability consists of safety and employability skills and encompasses pertinent occupation-specific skills for the Skilled and Technical Sciences and Medical Education students, although Professional Studies and General Education may have some as well.
- The *Life Skills* core ability measures student learning in the areas of leadership, problem solving and critical thinking.
- The *Technology* core ability includes all technological skills that students use for learning, including but not limited to microscopes, computers (hardware, software), calculators, and industry specific tools.
- The *Social Skills* core ability comprises social responsibility, public issues, academic integrity, and ethics.

How does assessment improve learning?

Gathering assessment data is useless without analysis and follow-up action. Student learning assessment occurs when that data is analyzed to determine areas where desired student learning is not occurring or not meeting outcomes. Assessment and analysis are conducted at the course, program, and college levels. Assessment itself does not improve learning. The "action" (follow-up) that results from analyzing the data and implementing the changes needed is what improves student learning.

Assessment Processes

Assessment at UA Cossatot is a faculty-driven process. Faculty are involved in every step of the assessment process. The primary goal of the core ability assessment is to improve curriculum design and graduate well-rounded students who have the potential to achieve their learning and career goals. To achieve its assessment goals, the College collects assessment performance data and uses it to make changes in curriculum. College core ability assessment at UA Cossatot is tied directly to the institution's mission to improve the lives of those in our region by providing quality education.

Step 1: Faculty work with division chairs to determine/update PLOs.
Step 2: Faculty and Division Chairs work together to complete curriculum maps, identifying courses to be used for PLO assessment.
Step 3: Faculty and Division Chairs create a timeline for PLO assessment. At least one PLO must be assessed each fall and spring semester.
Step 4: Faculty identify the assignment(s) to be used to assess the PLOs.
Step 5: Faculty set the alignments in Blackboard and/or keep identified assignments submitted in other ways.
Step 6: Faculty collect identified assignments throughout the semester.
Step 7: At the end of the semester, program faculty assess the collected assignments (100% of total collected) using existing methods.
Step 8: Faculty complete a Program Assessment Report Form (each semester) and submit to appropriate division chair. ([Program Assessment Report Form](#))
Step 9: The division chairs collect Program Assessment Report Forms and review results with program faculty.
Step 10: The Assessment Chairs correlate PLOs to the College Core Abilities.
Step 11: The Assessment Chairs make recommendations for next steps.
Step 12: Division chairs and/or directors discuss recommendations with program faculty.
Step 13: Assessment results are shared with the public via the College website.
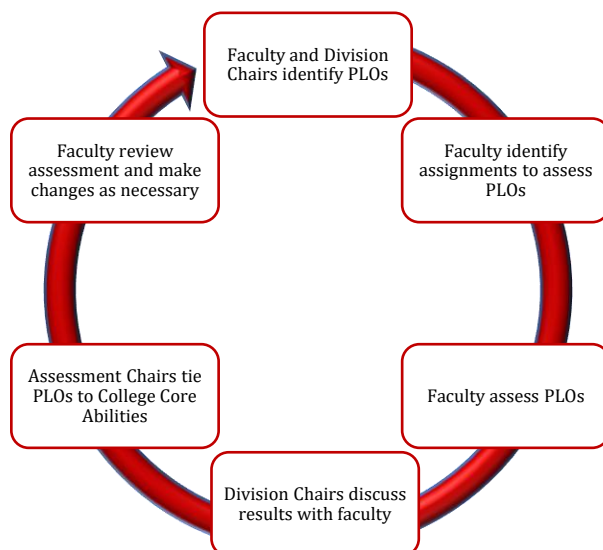
Measurements, Analysis, and Follow-up Actions

Recording Assessment Results

Recording measurements simply means documenting the results of the assessment activities conducted. The Program Assessment Report Form includes a section for recording results.

Example 1:

Education PLO 1: 70% of students will score at adequate level or above on each part of the common rubric (identify attributes of an effective teacher, including establishing a positive classroom environment, maintaining student/teacher rapport, and understanding cultures and diverse backgrounds of students).

Results:

Identifies Attributes of Effective Teacher: 64% scored adequate or above

Positive Classroom Environment: 73% scored adequate or above

Maintaining Good Rapport with Students: 73% scored adequate or above

Understanding Diverse Backgrounds of Students: 73% scored adequate or above

Engages Students in Learning: 73% scored adequate or above

Passion for Teaching: 73% scored adequate or above

The results should be recorded in the "What were the results?" section of the Program Assessment Report Form as indicated above. Include all pertinent data that you have collected regarding your student assessment. These results did not include the number of students, and for statistical purposes, it is better to have the number of students for each data set.

Example 2:

Industrial Technology PLO 1: 70% of students will make a C or higher on a test related to PLO 1 (attain knowledge of basic electrical systems).

Results: 98% of students passed the test.

The results should be recorded in the "What were the results?" section of the Program Assessment Report Form as indicated above. Include all pertinent data that you have collected regarding your student assessment. When using the results from a test, include the number of students who took the test.

Analysis of Assessment Results

Analysis is the process of interpreting the results or data. Analysis is written in a narrative format and included in the "Were the results different from your goal? If so, why do you think that happened?" section of the Program Assessment Report Form. When thinking about what your assessment results mean, keep the following questions in mind:
- Did the assessment activity truly "assess" the PLO?
- Did the students meet or not meet the expected learning target? If you do not have a target (70% of students will achieve…), you need to develop one.
- Were there any indicators (areas) where students excelled at consistently? Scored lower on consistently?
- Why might the results be as they are?

Follow-Up Actions

The most important part of assessment is "closing the loop" or using the information you have gathered through assessment to improve student learning and strengthen your program. Follow-Up Actions are written in narrative format and included in the "How are you going to use these results?" section of the Program Assessment Report Form. As you complete this section, think about the following questions:

- What needs to happen as a result of the analysis of measurements (data)?
- What are the plans to improve student learning based on your analysis?

In some cases, you may not need to make any plans to improve student learning. Your targets may be achieved. This indicates that students are learning the material and performing to the level you have specified. If this occurs consistently over several semesters, you may want to work with your division chair to revise the targets. For example, if your target is that 70% of your students will achieve adequate level on a rubric, you could adjust this to 80% or 90%. On the other hand, if students are consistently not achieving the targets set for them, the assignment may need to be revised or adjusted. It could be that the assignment isn't measuring the PLO effectively or the rubric does not match what students are submitting for the assignment.

Assessment Reporting

Once the Assessment Chairs have met and compiled the assessment results, the results will be shared with all faculty and posted to the [Student Learning Assessment page](#) on the College website. Division chairs will work with individual faculty to monitor and make recommendations or changes as necessary. If observable, consistent patterns emerge related to one or more of the College Core Abilities, the Assessment Chairs and/or division chairs may meet with groups of faculty to adjust how PLOs and CCAs are measured. Faculty will always have input into any changes that are made.

After all PLOs for a program have been assessed, adjustments may be made to the overall assessment processes.

Glossary of Terms

<u>ACTS transferrable courses</u> – courses selected for guaranteed transfer by ADHE (Arkansas Division of Higher Education); primarily courses in the Division of General Education and also Business courses; these courses share outcomes across all college campuses in the state of Arkansas

<u>Assessment Activity</u> – assignment or activity an instructor selects to measure student learning that is linked or tied to a program learning outcome and/or college core ability

<u>Assignment</u> – activity used in the classroom (in-person or online) used for student grades; may also be used as an assessment activity

<u>Blackboard alignment</u> – tagging assignments and/or assessment activities to a program learning outcome and/or college core ability using Blackboard (useful for online, hybrid, and enhanced courses); it is the instructor's responsibility to contact the appropriate division chair for help with aligning assignments

<u>Closing the loop</u> – using assessment results to make changes in curriculum, assessment activities, and/or assignments to improve student learning

<u>College Core Abilities (CCAs)</u> – the skills that all students should possess once they graduate with an Associate degree or Technical Certificate, regardless of program; include Communication, Occupational Skills, Life Skills, Technology, and Social Skills/Values

<u>Course Learning Outcomes</u> – skills that all students should possess once they complete a course; written by the instructor and division chair for non-guaranteed transfer courses OR taken from ADHE guidelines for ACTS transferrable courses

<u>Objective</u> – the way that an instructor chooses to show measurement of a course learning outcome

<u>Outcome</u> – overarching goal of student learning achievement; can be at the course level, program level, or college level

<u>Program</u> – defined course of study that leads to a Technical certificate or Associate degree

<u>Program Assessment Report Form</u> – form that faculty complete each fall and spring semester that shows student learning for a particular program learning outcome

<u>Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)</u> – skills that all students should possess once they complete an academic program

<u>Qualitative data</u> – typically "descriptive" data; any information captured that is not numerical

<u>Quantitative data</u> – information about "quantities;" any information that can be measured and written down with numbers

<u>Rubric</u> – scoring tool that clearly defines performance expectations for an assignment or assessment activity