

Assessment Handbook

Revised Fall 2005

ASSESSMENT IS:

- A systematic study of actual student performance.
- Assessment answers the questions: Are students learning what we expect them to learn?
Is UAM improving teaching and learning as a result of an assessment analysis?

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The format and content of this handbook was modified from the *College of Saint Mary Academic Assessment Handbook*, Academic Year 2002-2003, written and maintained by Ken Ryalls (<http://www.csm.edu/assessment>).

**CASAA Committee
(Council on Assessment of Student Academic Achievement)**

Bob Stark, Sara Bloom, Marsha Clayton, Terri Hopkins, Sue Martin, Sayeed Mehmood, Ranelle Eubanks,
Hassan Saayar, Beverly Lobitz, Leia O’Fallon, Ava Pickard, Shirlene Josey,
Veronica Studdard, Jeffery Dickens, Laura Hughes, Peggy Doss.
Ex-officio: R. David Ray, Provost

Please direct comments or suggestions to Ranelle Eubanks (eubanksr@uamont.edu)

Assessment Initiatives

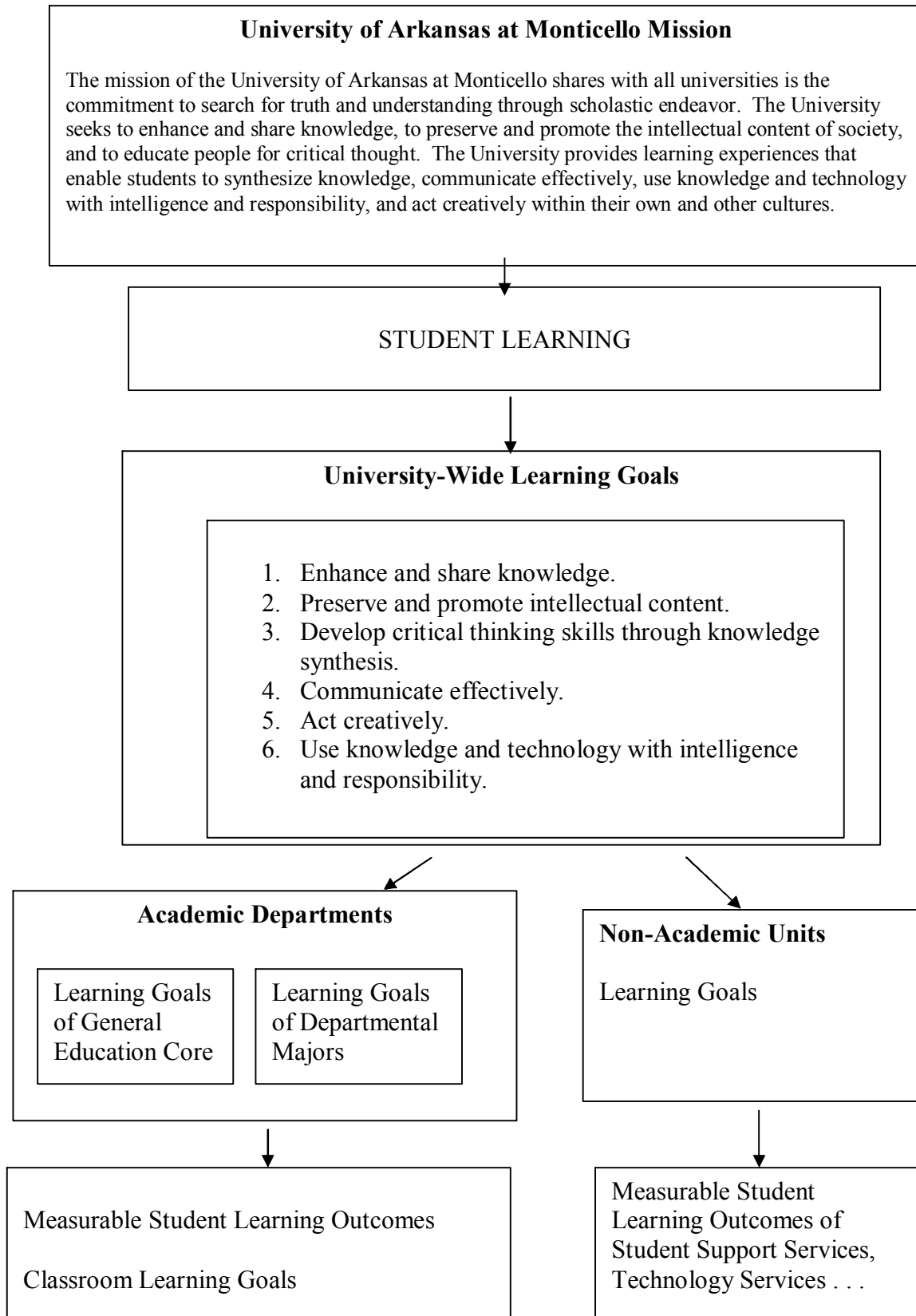
UAM has made progress with assessment of student learning, but the following are needed improvements.

1. **Identify university-wide learning goals** to develop greater coherence in assessment conceptual framework.
2. **Develop a sense of student learning centeredness.**
3. **Have clear assessment information in syllabi.**
4. **Develop pre- and post-tests** to assess student learning.
5. **Include all units in assessment.**
 - a. Have units refine their mission to include student learning and assessment
 - b. Put Assessment of Student Learning at the top of strategic planning goals for all units
 - c. Beginning with general education goals, decide which ones can be assessed by support services (like values, critical thinking, communication, health and wellness).
 - d. Have units develop five-year plans, having specific goals addressed each year--and complete annual assessment reports of these specific goals.

- e. Find ways units could work together to assess learning goals. For example, the Praxis I assessment (a teacher education requirement) is a measure of general education; the CAAP assessment (required of all students between 45-60 hours) is also a measure of general education.
 6. **Improve programs** based on analysis of learning outcome assessment.
 7. **Integrate assessment with strategic planning.** Assessment of student learning should be at the top of the university-wide strategic plan and departmental strategic plans across campus: “Student learning is everybody’s mission.” Everyone can teach thoughtfulness, and respect. (See “[A Culture of Assessment](#)” in this handbook.)
 8. Integrate and analyze university-wide assessments like the ACT or CAAP or Praxis I.
 9. **Develop a feed-back cycle:** analyzing the results of assessment data in order to improve teaching and learning.
 10. **Tie assessment to the budget.**
 11. **Simplify! Simplify!** Simplify unit/departmental goals. Do not try to do too much.
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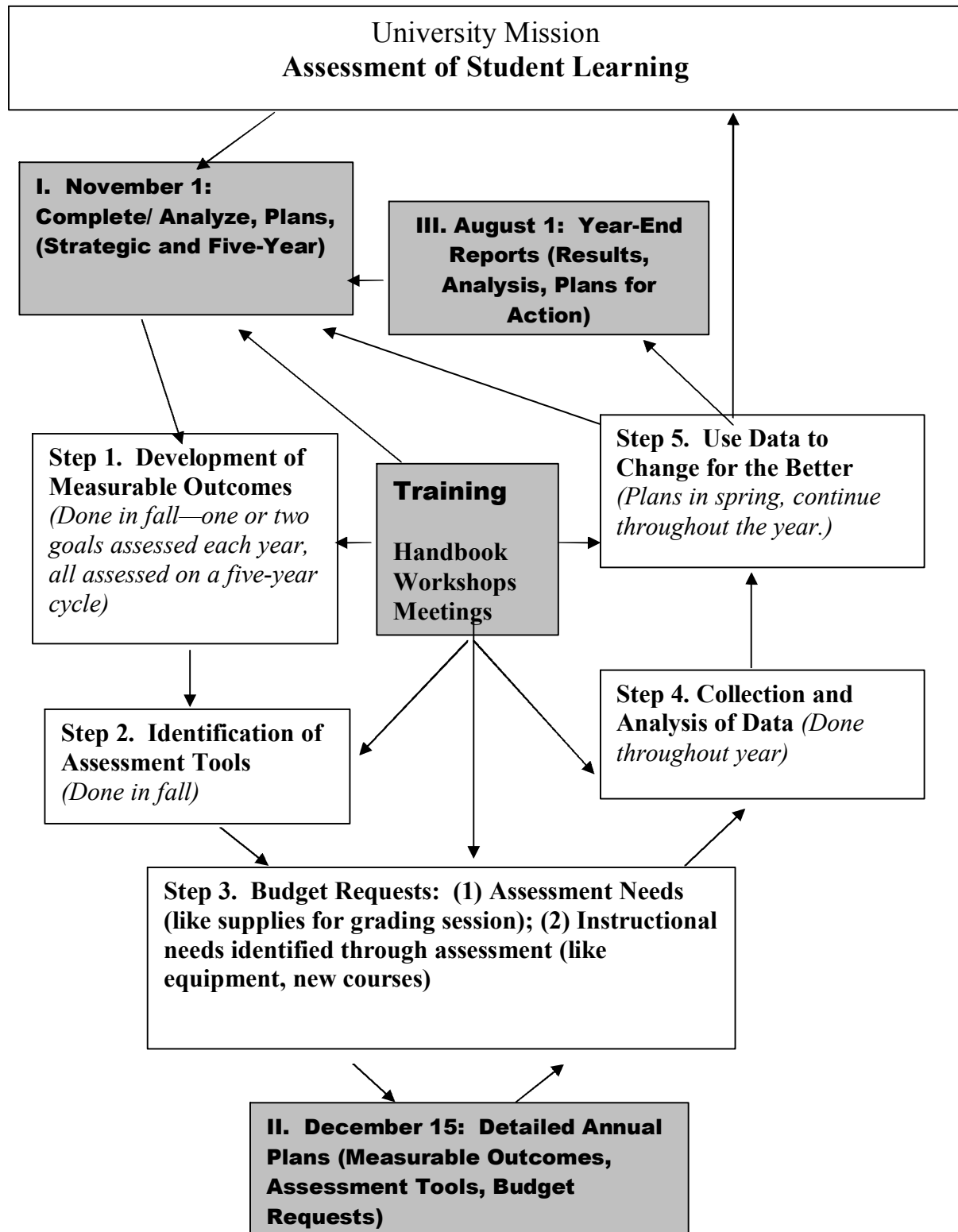
A Culture of Assessment

Student Learning is Everyone's Mission



Academic Assessment Cycle

Creating the Loop



Overview of Assessment

Requirements of the Higher Learning Commission

In the *Handbook of Accreditation*, the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (HLC/NCA) outlines expectations for assessment

- The organization provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.
 - The organization's goals for student learning outcomes are clearly stated for each educational program and make effective assessment possible.
 - The results should testify to achievement of stated goals for student learning.
 - The results should enable the organization to strengthen and improve the capacity for student learning.
 - The results should have credibility with the faculty responsible for creating effective learning environments.
 - The results should have such credibility that they shape budgeting and planning priorities.
- See <http://www.ncahigherlearningcommission.org>

Requirements of the Arkansas Legislature

- Act 874 of 1993 mandated by the Arkansas Legislature has required administration of the CAAP (Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency) to all students between 45-60 hours as a way of measuring general education proficiencies in Writing/English, Math, General Education, Science, and Critical Thinking or Reading.

Requirements of Subject-Specific Accrediting Agencies

- Several units/departments also must address specific requirements of accrediting agencies including:
 - National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE)
 - Council on Social Work Education
 - National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission
 - Society of American Foresters
 - National Association of Schools of Music

Benefits of Assessment

- While external requirements seem to drive assessment, faculty should regard assessment as a means of ensuring quality of student performance and effectiveness of academic programs as well as a mechanism by which the University of Arkansas at Monticello can constantly improve its educational efforts. A characteristic of excellent programs is the ability to develop and improve; to that end, no program will ever be perfect.
- The Higher Learning Commission clearly grants to the faculty, control of and responsibility for, the evaluation of student learning. Non-academic units should also participate in assessment of student learning. In order to assist the University in assessing student learning and student mastery of the level of knowledge appropriate to the degree granted, the CASAA (Council on Assessment of Student Academic Achievement) has developed this *Assessment Handbook*.

Assessment Governance and Responsibilities

- **Provost**--Ultimately, the Provost is responsible for assessment of student learning. The Provost works with the assessment committee, deans, department heads, and faculty to ensure faculty involvement, control of and responsibility for, the evaluation of student learning. Non-academic staff also participate in the assessment of student learning, so other administration members share responsibilities.
 - The **CASAA Committee**, a standing academic committee with representatives from each academic unit, the Colleges of Technology, and support units, oversee and coordinate assessment efforts throughout the institution. The CASAA committee maintains the assessment web page (provide link here) which publishes departmental reports, classroom assessment reports, and minutes. The committee may also organize workshops, publish informational material, and evaluate procedures and processes.
 - **Unit Assessment Committees** in some areas coordinate assessment efforts within that unit.
 - **Deans and Department Heads** coordinate assessment efforts of their units, ensuring participation by faculty and staff within those units and completion of required assessment departmental reports.
 - **Faculty and staff** participate within the departmental assessment activities and some serve on the CASAA committee.
 - **Recommendations for change:** The Provost, administration, deans, and department heads ensure that consideration is given to recommendations for changes which result from departmental assessment reports.
 - **Requests for funding for assessment activities** should proceed through normal department channels.
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Fundamental Assessment Requirements

Are students learning what we expect them to learn?

1. **Program goals and outcomes should flow clearly from the University's mission.**
2. **Data from previous assessment efforts should enable departments to revise goals and outcomes.**
3. **Learning outcomes should be specific and measurable.** For example, rather than “improve performance,” goals should specify that students will “improve performance on the departmental grading rubric for the senior project by 10% over last year's scores.” Simplify and specify your learning goals.
4. **Learning outcomes should measure actual student learning (what students know or are able to do),** not just the intention of the instructors or programs. Rather than “the course covers “X””: indicate “The student will demonstrate X.”
5. **Assessment tools should be as objective as possible.** Simply having grades or scores or points is not sufficient assessment criteria. Locally developed instruments should be clearly defined and tested and calibrated whenever possible.
6. **A sufficient number of students should be assessed** so one could reliably assert that students as a whole are meeting educational outcomes. Departments may wish to identify common assessment instruments to use in all—or a valid sample—of sections.
7. **Assessment of goals and outcomes should measure** attainment of goals in several different ways. For example, to measure students' knowledge of the scientific method, a department could use a required paper in a required course, an analysis of journal articles in another, and/or a standardized exit exam.

Is the university improving teaching and learning as a result of examination of assessment data?

8. **Assessment efforts are continuous.** Assessment is never “finished.” Efforts toward improvement must continue over time with the goal of improving in problem areas and maintaining successful outcomes. Data from the previous year(s) should always be used to make informed decisions for the next year.
9. **Assessment is a process of reflection.** Assessment requires the reflective understanding that working toward continuous improvement is not a sign of weakness but an indicator of strength. If a program determines that all students are learning at 100 percent, program goals should be refined and redirected. No program will ever be perfect; something in each program can be improved each year.

General Assessment Advice

1. **Keep activities as simple as possible.** Keep goals focused and assessment efforts reasonable. If every faculty member is analyzing every paper written by every student in order to assess a writing skill, we're working too hard. Take a valid sample—it's much easier.
2. **Plan ahead over time.** It is not necessary to assess every goal every year. However, in a planned sequence over time, all goals should be assessed. Departments may find that they are trying to assess too many goals or that the goals are too complex and may need to be streamlined.
3. **Assessment is everyone's responsibility.** Everyone should be involved; group projects are helpful and create an opportunity for collegial discussions of learning and teaching.
4. **Communicate effectively.** Faculty and students should be involved in analysis of the data, discussions of the learning outcomes, and plans for improvements.
5. **Watch for knee-jerk reactions to data.** Data naturally fluctuate, so wait for patterns of evidence to emerge before implementing an action plan to fix a perceived problem. For instance, if 95% of students pass a state-mandated test this year, and the next year only 91% pass, should you panic? No. On the other hand, a drop from 95% to 42% should be acted upon quickly.
6. **Work within the constraints of the current system.** Of course, the budget is inadequate; of course, the faculty and staff are overworked; and, of course students may be under-prepared. Nevertheless, quality assessment, given the current constraints, is necessary. Funding needs should be communicated to department heads, deans and the Provost for consideration.
7. Assessment is useful in making a case for **budget requests**. If data show that newer versions of software are being used in the market, relate that to student learning outcomes and the need for an increased budget for newer software.
8. **Faculty can use assessment reports as pedagogical research.** Many of the projects useful for assessment purposes could be developed as action research projects worthy of funding for a research grant and publication in the disciplines.
9. **Ask questions** when you are unsure of the purpose, if something is unclear, or if something is not working.

10. **If your unit has special assessment requirements from your accrediting agency,** request possible modifications to your annual unit report to limit duplication of efforts and redundancies.
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Mission, Goals, Outcomes

- The **mission statement** is the global statement of the university's role and purpose. A mission statement should be further defined by goals and outcomes before it can be assessed or measured.
- A **goal** is a more specific statement of purpose: "Students will demonstrate fundamental scientific research skills." University-wide student learning goals to provide greater coherence between the university mission and the learning goals should be established.
- A goal should be more concretely defined by at least one measurable **outcome**: "All graduating psychology majors will achieve a rating on their senior projects at least at a level of 'competent' on the departmental rubric for scientific research skills." Both goals and outcomes should have "students" as the subject of the sentence. "Outcome" (rather than "objective") more clearly indicates that **the student does something**. Assessment should examine "outcomes," i.e. what students know and are able to do.

The A, B, C and D of Measurable Outcomes (See [Appendix E](#) for a worksheet.)

- A. **Audience** the group of students the assessment is measuring. (*All graduating psychology majors...*)
 - B. **Behavior** or learning outcome expected (*will enumerate...*)
 - C. **Condition** under which the learner is to exhibit the learned knowledge, skill, or attitude (*on their senior projects...*)
 - D. **Degree of proficiency** the learner must exhibit (*at least at a level of 'competent' on the departmental rubric for scientific research skills...*)
- Primary trait rubrics are particularly valuable tools to use to make abstract, higher level performances measurable. For some brief, basic information about primary trait rubrics, see [Appendix G](#).
 - If the "degree of proficiency" is not specified by a level on a rubric or a numerical target, it is assumed that the goal is for all students to perform with 100% accuracy.
 - Particularly difficult or complicated goals may need to be defined in terms of several outcomes, or they may need to be streamlined and simplified.
 - Goals and outcomes should be stated using action verbs. (See [Appendix F](#) for some helpful verbs.) However, sometimes goals may involve processes of education as well as outcomes. For example, in English composition a student's ability to engage in constructive peer review could be part of the assessment of a student's ability to communicate effectively. If assessment includes process as well as outcomes, we may have a better idea of what to "fix" if outcomes are not what we wish.
 - Clearly-defined outcomes will, of course, imply the assessment tool to be used.

Assessment Tools

Here are some ideas for assessment tools. Remember to be as simple and inexpensive as possible. Build upon what is currently available.

Method/Tool	Advantages	Disadvantages
Standardized tests	Comparative data usually available	Expensive, detailed feedback hard to obtain
Expert Juries (can be departmental colleagues or external assessors)	Helpful for analyzing the quality of a complex or creative performance; provide an opportunity for discussion among faculty	Time-consuming, can assess only a limited number of performances; may be difficult to arrange for external juries
Portfolios—in addition to papers, evaluations, presentations, usually include reflection by the student	Good for measuring improvement over time	May assess organizational skills rather than the intended learning goals; time consuming to assess
Oral Questioning	Flexible, allows for immediate feedback	Difficult to standardize, need to plan expected responses which can be verified as recorded evidence
Surveys/Questionnaires	Good for assessing perceptions and attitudes, relatively easy	Indirect measures of cognitive growth, relatively subjective
Objective questions such as multiple choice, true/false.	Cheap, efficient for large groups, quick results	Tests ability to recognize and eliminate rather than understand, difficult to use for problem solving and higher order thinking
Short answers/ essays	Tests more complex skills, higher order thinking, and problem solving	May assess language/literacy skills as well as knowledge, time-consuming to assess, need for careful rubrics to reliably assess
Observation/performance	Direct assessment, can be done in actual or simulated environment	Needs well-constructed rubric, does not test underpinning knowledge, possible logistical difficulties
Self/Collaborative Assessment	Encourages self-direction, often improves performance as students understand the criteria	Learners may need practice and direction
Senior Projects	Capstone experience which can provide a summative assessment	Must be carefully monitored, time-consuming for faculty
Adapted from ‘VET Initial Teaching and Learning – plan, conduct, and review assessment. A learner guide. (Department of Education and Training, 1999).		

- Many of these tools could be common assignments or test questions in all sections of courses. After the assessment tool is used in the classroom for grading, validly collected samples can be examined by group graders (or expert juries) to “close the feedback loop” and suggest improvements to the program.
- Classroom assessments are closest to the actual student learning in the classroom and provide very good feedback to the faculty. They provide especially strong evidence of the culture of assessment at the institution. However, classroom assessments graded only by the teacher cannot be the only assessment tool; their usefulness is enhanced if a valid sample of students is assessed (as in a classroom assessment within a required course in a

major or in all sections of a required course). Their validity can be bolstered if there is an expert jury evaluation procedure, too, even if only a sample of student work is evaluated outside the classroom setting.

Annual Assessment Reporting

The following timeline is a guide for developing the Annual Assessment Report.

November 1:

a. Analysis/Completion of Data

Departments should analyze data from the previous academic year.

b. Plans for Action

Departments should make plans for improvements—either in assessment procedures or in teaching and learning—on the basis of the analysis of assessment data.

c. Strategic Plan

Departments should integrate assessment with strategic planning by making the assessment of student learning the first goal of their strategic plans.

d. Revisit the Five-Year Plan

Departments should revisit the five-year plan. In particular, consider the goals and how they relate to University-wide goals as well as how goals could be simplified and assessments streamlined.

Non-academic units who have not developed assessment data should modify their strategic plan and develop their assessment plans and modify their strategic plans.

Example of Five-Year Plan Outline:

Five-Year Plan (Developed in Fall 20xx, May be Revised)					
School/Division/Program Name					
Dean/Chair/Program Director's Name					
20xx-20xx					
Mission [Insert your program's mission statement]					
1. General Education Goals	Years	Tool #1	Tool #2	Tool #3	Tool #4
Goal 1					
Goal 2					
2. Departmental Learning Outcome Goals	Years	Tool #1	Tool #2	Tool #3	Tool #4
Goal 1					
Goal 2					
Goal 3					
Goal 4					
Goal 5					

- In the far left column list the learning goals of the program

- In the “Years” column indicate the academic year(s) to focus on each goal.
- In “Tools 1-4” columns, list what assessment tools will be used to assess that learning has been achieved. Tools can assess more than one goal. More than one tool can be used per goal.

Add or delete rows or columns as necessary. If you have fewer or more than five goals, devise a rotation that will ensure that all goals are assessed within the five-year period.

December 15:

Detailed Program Assessment Planning

- Develop measurable learning outcomes
- Detailed plans for assessment (How/when assessments will be given, what criteria will be assessed, who will analyze the data (Who? What? When? Where? How?))
- Develop budget requests related to assessments

Sample outline below:

Detailed Assessment Plan (annually by December 15)			
School/Division/Program Name			
Dean/Chair/Program Director’s Name			
Academic Year 20xx-20xx			
A. Learning goals to be assessed during the year, assessment tools to be used, and measurable outcomes.			
1. General Education Goal(s) to be Assessed (from Five-Year Plan)	Tool #1	Tool #2	Tool #3
Goal 1			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tool #1: Goal; Measurable Outcome; Who administers assessment, When assessment is given; Who analyzes and when. • Tool #2: Goal; Measurable Outcome; Who administers assessment; When assessment is given; Who analyzes and when. • Tool #3: Goal; Measurable Outcome; Who administers assessment; When assessment is given; Who analyzes and when 			
2. Departmental Major Goals to be Assessed (from Five-Year Plan)	Tool #1	Tool #2	Tool #3
Goal 1			
Goal 2			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tool #1: Goal; Measurable Outcome; Who administers assessment, When assessment is given; Who analyzes and when • Tool #2: Goal; Measurable Outcome; Who administers assessment; When assessment is given; Who analyzes and when • Tool #3: Goal; Measurable Outcome; Who administers assessment; When assessment is given; Who analyzes and when 			
B. Budget Requests			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requests for assessment projects or needs 			

Data will be collected throughout the year. Departments may begin completing portions of the report with the data already available.

August 1:

Each unit/department's Annual Assessment Report due in Office of the Provost

- Completed data
- Analysis of results
- Plans for action

The Annual Assessment Report should be sent, in digital format, to Office of the Provost.

The School of Arts and Humanities, the School of Education, and the Division of Computer Information Systems are good examples of annual assessment reports. These reports can be viewed on-line at [UAM Assessment Reports](#).

The Year-End Report gives the data, analysis, and plans for the future from the assessments throughout the year.

Year-End Report (Due Annually August 1)

School/Division/Program Name
 Dean/Chair/Program Director's Name
 Academic Year 20xx-20xx

A. Results and analysis of data for learning outcomes goals assessed during the academic year.

Describe all relevant data collected. Were measurable outcomes met? Discuss findings in relation to the previous years' data. Use tables and charts. What do these data tell you?

1. General Education Goal(s) to be Assessed (From Five-Year Plan)	Tool #1	Tool #2	Tool #3
Goal 1			

- Tool #1: Data, results, analysis
- Tool #2: Data, results, analysis
- Tool #3: Data, results, analysis

2. Departmental Major Goals to be Assessed (From Five-Year Plan)	Tool #1	Tool #2	Tool #3
Goal 1			
Goal 2			

- Tool #1: Data, results, analysis
- Tool #2: Data, results, analysis
- Tool #3: Data, results, analysis

B. Actions: What will be done with the information? Wait for more data? Change your goals? Change your assessments? Change your curriculum? Fully explain your intentions.

C. Assessment efforts not completed with plans for completion. Indicate what assessment data (and tools for collecting the data) planned but not implemented. Explain why the data were not collected and plans for completing assessment efforts.

Be concise, informative, and thorough. Report a sufficient amount of data to support your conclusions, though it is not necessary to supply all the raw data.

Based on the choices/decision you make when analyzing your data, be sure to justify your choice in your report. The decision of what to do with the data is a crucial step in the process of assessment.

Be careful to report only aggregated data, not information that could be identified to a particular student, except with the student's permission. For example, a model student performance exemplifying an outstanding level of performance might be worthy of inclusion in the Annual Assessment Report.

If learning outcome goals are not achieved in some areas, for example some students do not meet the "competency" level on a departmental rubric for communication on the senior project, here are some suggestions:

- **Change the learning outcome goal:** Before jumping to conclusions, the department might reconsider the goal. Perhaps the learning outcome is unachievable or not clearly defined. It might be better to set a learning outcome goal an increase in student performance from a baseline. Be sure that learning outcome goals are attainable and reasonably difficult before setting them. In the absence of any baseline criteria, the learning outcome goal might be wrong from the start. Changing a learning outcome goal based on a pattern of data over time would be justifiable.
- **Refine the assessment procedure(s).** Closely examine assessment measures and tools to make sure they are appropriate and fit the learning outcome.
- **Add a new learning outcome goal.** Sometimes data collection for other goals might reveal a "hole" in our process or something departments want to improve upon. In particular, when looking at departmental major goals in relation to University-wide learning goals, departments may wish to add a discipline-specific version of such University-wide goals as communication, critical thinking, values, integrative learning, or technology.
- **Develop an action response.** If the learning outcome goal seems achievable and the measures appropriate, the department should develop a plan of action. We have data that tell us how well students are learning and we develop a plan to improve based on the data. For example, in response to poor performance by students on communication in their senior projects, the department could provide practice opportunities for students in presenting their projects—with feedback from the departmental rubric—or increase the number of presentations in required classes.