



Idaho State University

Comprehensive Assessment Plan

2020

Assessment Overview

The purpose of this assessment plan is to provide the framework for the expectations, process and culture of the assessment cycle an ongoing continuous improvement at Idaho State University. The goal is to help visualize the process and the support available for assessment. This is not a “how to” manual about assessment. This assessment plan communicates the objectives of assessment at Idaho State University and how the institution supports and achieves them.

Assessment for student learning and success

Assessment is a way for faculty and programs to gauge student learning and develop strategies for continuous improvement. Program assessment provides students, faculty and the public with a roadmap of the value-added skills and knowledge that result from an Idaho State University education. Faculty are committed to students and learning and the assessment process is one of the ways to evaluate student work in a systematic way that can point to possible changes to enhance learning.

Grades are part of a college education, but assessment involves viewing higher education through the lens of what students can do once they graduate. If a student were interviewed for a job and replied when asked what they learned with the comment, “the grade tells you everything you need to know about my degree,” they likely would not get the job. Assessment allows all of us to answer the question, “what did you learn?”

Idaho State University supports a culture of assessment that focuses on student success and learning through a continuous process of collecting data, evaluating what it means, and making changes to programs. The focus of assessment, available on the assessment web site, isu.edu/assessment, is based on the following concepts that assessment is:

- faculty driven,
- inclusive and equitable recognizing the role of contingent faculty,
- used to make changes, not find fault, developed collegially,
- recognized positively in promotion,
- tenure and evaluation and;
- is communicated transparently to stakeholders

An overview of the principals of assessment used to guide assessment of academic programs, non-academic units and the institution’s mission and core themes is provided in Appendix A. Definitions are provided to help Idaho State use a common set of terminology in its assessment efforts.

Assessment of student learning occurs in all academic programs and courses at Idaho State University. The assessment process is typically unique to the accreditation standards of those programs with external accreditation or follows the guidelines of the Idaho State University program review process. Non-academic units also participate in regular reviews of their operations and, if applicable, student learning. The schedule of program reviews and

accreditation visits is available on the web at <https://www.isu.edu/academicaffairs/program-information/program-review/>.

ISU established an institutional assessment planning process to support achieving mission fulfillment. Assessing student learning outcomes and non-academic services are key elements that directly support accomplishing ISU's core themes, the strategic plan, and mission fulfillment. <https://www.isu.edu/meridian/about-us/mission-and-core-themes/>. ISU regularly assesses benchmarks for the mission and core themes as part of the process of continuous improvement. These efforts are in addition to the assessment efforts of programs and non-academic units.

There is a perception that effective assessment is time-consuming, collects large amounts of data, and has results that are difficult to interpret. Effective assessment is streamlined, part of the process of continuous improvement, and involves a process that can be fine-tuned to make sure that it is a meaningful process as streamlined as possible. Effective assessment is based on asking three questions (Hutchings and Marchese, 1990)¹:

1. What are you trying to do?
2. How well are you doing it?
3. Using the answers to the first two questions, how can you improve what you are doing?

These three basic questions help faculty and programs frame their assessment efforts. Question one is answered as faculty and programs develop their objectives, assessment plan and student learning outcomes. After faculty determine the kinds of work they will assign and use for assessment, evaluating that work will provide data and results to answer question two. The final step is to think carefully about the results and decide how to “close the loop” with changes to a course, program, or process. Selecting a meaningful change to make does it involve redesigning the course from the ground up. It can be something as simple as adding an additional practice homework or recognizing that the concept or skill was introduced but not reinforced sufficiently to result in student success in their learning.

A successful institutional culture of assessment provides the framework not only for student learning and success but also for accountability and the requirements of our regional accreditor, the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU).

Accreditation

The NWCCU has two standards that cover all aspects of the higher education experience. Standard one, Student Success, and Institutional Mission and Effectiveness, includes institutional mission, improving institutional effectiveness, student learning, and student achievement. Standard two, Governance, Resources, and Capacity, includes governance, academic freedom, policies and procedures, financial resources, human resources, student support services, library

¹ Hutchings, P., & Marchese, T. (1990). Watching Assessment: Questions, Stories, Prospects. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 22(5), 12–38. doi: 10.1080/00091383.1990.9937653

and information resources, physical technology infrastructure. Details on the standards are available at: <https://www.nwccu.org/accreditation/standards-policies/standards/>.

The student learning standards of the NWCCU align with our culture of assessment and include the following:

1.C.3 The institution identifies and publishes expected program and degree learning outcomes for all degrees, certificates, and credentials. Information on expected student learning outcomes for all courses is provided to enrolled students.

1.C.5 The institution engages in an effective system of assessment to evaluate the quality of learning in its programs. The institution recognizes the central role of faculty to establish curricula, assess student learning, and improve instructional programs.

1.C.6 Consistent with its mission, the institution establishes and assesses, across all associate and bachelor level programs or within a General Education curriculum, institutional learning outcomes and/or core competencies. Examples of such learning outcomes and competencies include, but are not limited to, effective communication skills, global awareness, cultural sensitivity, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and logical thinking, problem solving, and/or information literacy.

1.C.7 The institution uses the results of its assessment efforts to inform academic and learning-support planning and practices to continuously improve student learning outcomes.

Institutional resources

Idaho State University supports assessment with approximately 65 individual assessment coordinators will work closely with faculty in their programs, units, or departments to lead efforts for student learning and success. Units have a variety of processes consistent with the needs of their faculty and students and their mix of degrees, general education classes, specialized accreditation, and discipline-specific objectives. Colleges and programs recognize the importance of assessment by supporting those individuals who coordinate efforts.

Idaho State University has online resources for faculty available at isu.edu/assessment. The Internet site provides access to resources for all segments of the assessment cycle from determining broad objectives in developing an assessment plan to using the data change which is often called “closing the loop.” There are many examples of how programs close the loop at Idaho State University. Appendix B provides insight about how the assessment results led to change.

Assessment at Idaho State University

Committees

Idaho State University has an assessment support structure at all levels of the institution. The institutional level assessment procedures and results can be a topic for discussion and

information at the Leadership Council. The Leadership Council can provide a high-level overview of assessment at Idaho State University and share their thoughts and ideas with the campus community. Their role is to review and respond to the proposals and work of the other campus committees. Figure 1 illustrates the committee framework. Below is a list and brief description of the committees at the university level and their responsibilities.

Accreditation, Assessment & Academic Program Review (AAAPR). This committee includes representation from across campus. It's responsibility is to collaboratively prepare mid-cycle and other periodic reports for the NWCCU. The AAAPR representation includes members from academic and non-academic units. This committee meets as needed to complete reporting and research.

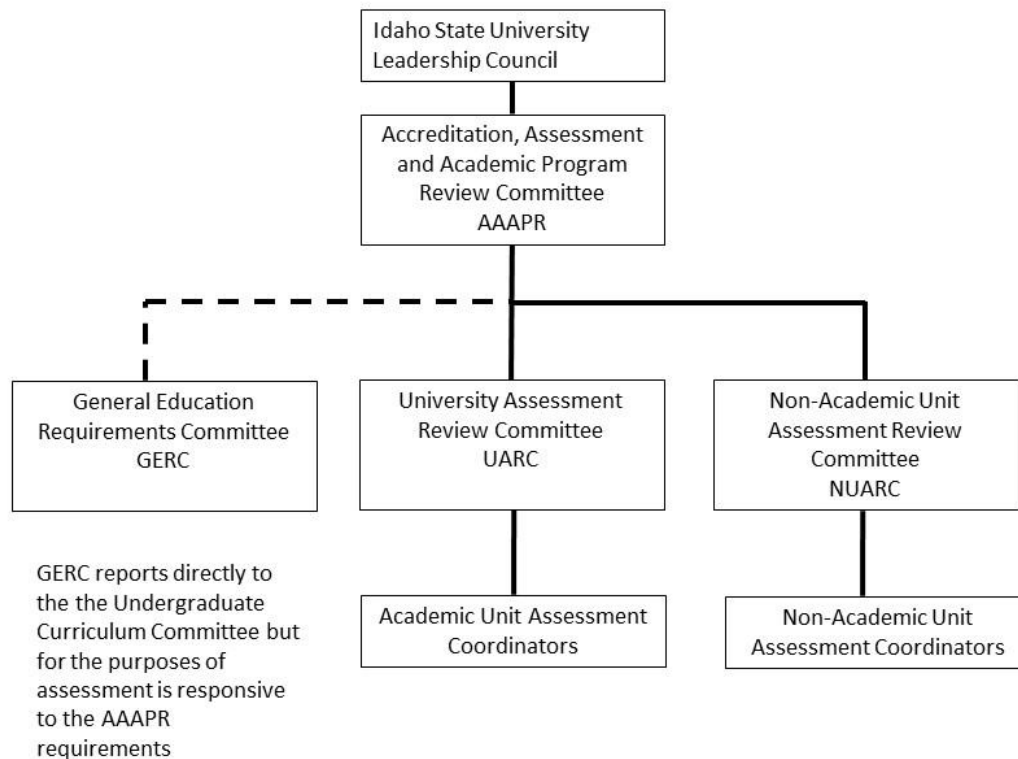
University Assessment Review Committee (UARC) The Committee provides support for faculty involved in assessment processes. This committee has representatives from each of the Colleges on the ISU campus. The committee determines the software needs of assessment, reviews the progress of assessment on the campus, and works to support creating a culture of assessment at all levels of the institution. The committee meets monthly during the academic year.

Non-Academic Unit Review Committee (NAURC). The NUARC assists the non-academic units as they develop or implement assessment plans and implement them throughout the assessment cycle. The NUARC includes the assessment officer from Academic Affairs and members from each of the Institution's non-academic units: Advancement, Athletics, General Counsel, Finance, non-programmatic units in Academic Affairs, Facilities, Student Affairs, Research, and Information Technology Services. Each member represents their area of responsibility and provides information to their subordinate organizations. A subcommittee of NUARC members and other individuals are responsible for evaluating and responding to the non-academic unit evaluations. NUARC members are currently developing a streamlined process similar to the program reviews used by academic units without external accreditation. As with program reviews, non-academic unit reviews include assessment and other operational aspects of units.

General Education Requirements Committee (GERC) <https://www.isu.edu/gerc/>. The purpose of the GERC is: to consider all courses and policies that relate to the University's general education requirements; to evaluate, on a regular basis, the University's general education courses for appropriateness, rigor, and assessment; and to make general education curricular recommendations based on these evaluations to the UCC. Regular and ongoing review of General Education assessment occurs. All courses and all locations including dual enrollment classes in high schools submit an annual assessment plan each fall which the committee reviews annually each spring. The general education objectives are reviewed on a staged, 5-year cycle; not all of the objectives need be evaluated at once. The five-year reviews are more in-depth providing detail over the assessment cycle.

GERC is headed by a Chair who also serves as a member of UARC. GERC is a subcommittee of the Undergraduate Curriculum Council (UCC). Although GERC has a direct reporting line to the UCC, it is a committee of the Faculty Senate. GERC includes representatives from all academic programs as voting members. Representatives from Academic Advising, the Registrar's Office, Instructional Technology Services, Academic Affairs, and Curriculum Council and the Director

of Assessment attend meetings but do not vote. Minutes from GERC meetings are posted on the University's website. Agendas and minutes are available at <https://www.isu.edu/gerc/meeting-information/>.



Departmental and Program-Level Committees. Departments and Programs have assessment committees and coordinators. The structure and membership of these committees is determined by the needs of the unit. The membership, process of assessment, and collaborative involvement throughout the assessment cycle depend on a unit's culture, the requirements of its discipline, or the requirements of external accreditors. Faculty are encouraged to find a structure that works for them, their students, and their discipline.

Levels of Assessment

Course- and Program-Level Assessment. Assessment occurs at all levels of the institution beginning in the classroom. Program-level assessment brings together all the required classes in a program or degree into a cohesive, interconnected structure. Classes in a program may include those in the general education curriculum or classes outside a department. Any course in the degree pathways listed as required is included in the assessment plan of a program. Classes that are not required in a program or are not part of the General Education program should also assess student learning. Course level assessment is detailed in the Course-Based Review and

Assessment Handbook <https://isu.edu/media/libraries/academic-affairs/institutional-research/ir-assessment/ISU-Course-Assessment-Handbook.pdf> and program review is detailed in the Program-Based Review and Assessment Handbook, <https://isu.edu/media/libraries/academic-affairs/institutional-research/ir-assessment/ISU-Assessment-Handbook.pdf>.

Institution-Level Assessment. Assessment at this level includes a review of the level of support for change as a result of assessment by faculty. Institutions share results with the state and federal government. The institution also assesses benchmarks for the core themes and mission statement. Assessment of student learning outcomes occurs with students and by faculty, but institutions too collect data, review results, and make changes for continuous improvement.

The Assessment Process

Mission Statements. The first step for any program or unit is to set objectives (goals) but to do this, they must establish a mission statement. The mission statement is composed of essential elements that encompass the purpose of the organization. The mission statement must also align with the University's and if it has one, its parent unit.

Elements that compose a mission statement:

- Be clear and concise
- Be distinctive and specific to the program or unit
- State the purpose of the unit
- Indicate the unit's essential elements
- Identify the stakeholders
- Identify any clarifying statements that are specific to the unit
- Align with the Department, College, and University mission statements

The Assessment Conversation. The important thing to think about is that faculty and other stakeholders should have a conversation before starting the eight steps of assessment. This is an opportunity to bring in the insights of advisory boards and listen to the needs of those who employ students. Student focus groups can also be used to determine what they hope to learn from a program. There are organizations for every academic discipline and for non-academic units that outline objectives programs should achieve. Some organizations provide workshops on developing assessment plans and all its components while others have data online to help in this process. This reflective process will help determine what your program wants to do.

Objectives. Once a mission statement is complete, the program or unit will use its essential elements to create objectives. The objectives will be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART). The objectives should focus on the desired end-state and not the means of getting there. Additionally, non-academic units must define the customer or the stakeholder.

Academic programs focus their objectives on improving student learning while non-academic units, depending on their mission, have the discretion to shape their objectives to improve student learning or creating a service oriented outcome. Service oriented unit objectives will focus on improving the program's efficiency, effectiveness, or communication with a customer

or stakeholder. For each objective, programs and units must have at least one student learning outcome and typically no more than five.

Figure 2 on the next page illustrates the assessment steps and provides brief description. A more in-depth description along with helpful resources is available at https://isu.edu/media/libraries/academic-affairs/assessment/3_24_20-Toolkit-Final.pdf.

Programs with external accreditation often have requirements they need to meet in terms of objectives for the program, student learning outcomes, and standards of achievement. Accredited programs, just like other programs, engage in a process of continuous review. That means that assessment isn't ongoing process with creative ideas to help develop the skills, knowledge and abilities of students. This is not a one-size-fits-all process because the characteristics of students, the community, faculty, and resources help determine the best way to assess student learning.

After all the steps are completed, the continuous review process means assessing the assessment. Programs may decide they have too many objectives or that they've created a process that involves more data or activities than can reasonably be used to make change. As programs take another look at their assessment plan, activities, curriculum maps, data, the results and how those results reviews for change, there can be opportunities to streamline the process yet collect and use meaningful data.

The timeline for assessment will depend on the number of student learning outcomes for each objective. The typical expectation is that each student learning outcome will be assessed twice within a five-year period. The first time a student learning outcome is assessed in the data collected faculty will need to look at results and think about what they'd like to change. This reflective process may occur each semester or for some units once a year. The next step is to make the change and again assess the student learning outcome. The purpose of assessment is to consider how our students are learning what we want them to know. If we achieved that, using data and information, faculty, programs and units will have everything they need to fulfill accreditation requirements.

Faculty that participate in assessment meetings, collaborate on assessment activities and evaluate, or serve as a coordinator to help the project management process of their colleagues should include this on their annual activity report. Supervisors at all levels including Dean's should reflect on the hard work faculty do to assess student learning. Dean's may want to share the results with their advisory boards, the public or in promotional materials. Highlighting assessment activities communicates to those who would hire our students what they learned and what they should be able to do in ways that a grade for course description can't communicate.

IDAHO STATE UNIVERSITY

8

Steps to assessment
success

Get started

01

Assessment Plans

- What do we want students to learn and be able to do?
- How can we include all who teach, from tenured faculty to adjuncts?
- Be inclusive of all types of faculty and all the places you teach including online and in high schools.

02

Program Objectives (Goals)

- What information does your accreditor or national professional organization have about assessment? Do you have Gen Ed classes that ISU or the State Board of Education has already-designed objectives?
- Does our program already collect data we can use?
- Do we have an assessment plan or one we can revise?

03

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

Student Learning Outcomes should:

- Be measurable & framed using action words; apply, calculate, demonstrate
- Appear on syllabi and a program's internet sites
- Be incorporated into the curriculum map for a program which shows the activity, the required classes where it is introduced, reinforced and mastered

04

Creating signature assignments & activities

- What kind of student work will we collect? Projects, observations, test questions, assignments?
- How can we have a consistent process in our required program classes?
- Can we all use the same question or other work in all sections?

05

Writing and using rubrics

Rubrics are just the guidelines or standards faculty use to decide if student work evaluated for assessment exceeds, meets or does not meet the expectations for the work. 1 is does not, 2 is meets and 3 exceeds, for example. Having written descriptions of the criteria and discussing them helps consistency.

06

Collecting Assessment Data

If your program already has data, use it. Data may be direct or indirect. Indirect data is collected from focus groups, surveys or the perceptions of students and alumni. Direct data is created when you evaluate student work. Decide how to collect the data so all faculty and locations are included.

07

Organizing and Analyzing Data

When it is time to assess, faculty can pick a random sample or assess each student. Deciding to assess each student means you can then match their outcomes with demographic and other data available from the institution. That analysis can pinpoint groups that might need extra support.

08

Sharing and Using Results

Meet as a group and talk about the results. Ask questions:

- Why do you think the results occurred?
- What do they tell us about student learning?
- What could we change?
- Who can we share our results with?

Collecting Data, Analysis and Activities, and Communicating Assessment Results

Direct and Indirect Assessment Measures. An assessment measure should provide meaningful, actionable data that the unit can use to base decisions. Direct or indirect measures are the two methods used for assessing outcomes.

- Direct measures of assessment measure what a student knows or can do, and the faculty or staff member makes a decision regarding what a student learned and how well it was learned.
- Indirect measures focus on a student's perception and satisfaction with the service, and the student decides what he or she learned and how well it was learned.

Direct assessment is the most effective form of assessment when measuring a single objective. It provides the faculty or staff member with clear and actionable information. Indirect methods alone do not provide adequate information about the outcome and should be supplemented with direct measures to provide a more comprehensive view of the outcome. Indirect measures should be used to seek a student, customer, or stakeholder's view of the program or service. A list of examples of direct and indirect measures is available at

<https://www.skidmore.edu/assessment/archived/direct-v-indirect-assessment.php>.

Collecting and keeping student data. As you collect student data and work (artifacts) that will need to be archived in the department or program for a period of seven years. There are several options for maintaining student work including paper documents, videos, PDF scan documents, and other student work. Many faculty have students submit papers or work in Moodle but Moodle is not a long-term archive. At the end of each term download student papers and organize them.

Because of personnel changes, it is important that access is maintained should someone leave campus. Maintaining student work should follow FERPA guidelines. Faculty receive training on these guidelines and should follow them while maintaining the archive of assessment artifacts. After faculty evaluate student work there is little likelihood that they will need to return to those documents for further evaluation. Maintaining the archive provides documentation of your process. At times assessment committees or coordinators may want to look back over data or student work in different ways either for assessment analysis or for scholarly publication.

Institutional Research. ISU has one of the nation's premier organizations dedicated to identifying, tracking, and measuring data. [Institutional Research](#) (IR) can assist programs and non-academic units with establishing data collection techniques and creating reports that supports their assessment requirements. IR already provides a great deal of information and academic intelligence accessible to the colleges on its website.

Faculty reporting in Digital Measures/Activity Insight. The University recognizes that faculty who engage in assessment activities develop curricular and programmatic changes that better help students learn. The annual reporting process for faculty includes the ability to select service activities in Activity Insight (Digital Measures.) Faculty can report a wide array of activity ranging from conducting assessments and the class, evaluating student work for purposes of assessment, meeting and collaborating on components of the assessment cycle, and serving as an

assessment coordinator. Some faculty also serve on committees whose focus is assessment which exist at all levels of the institution.

Annual assessment report. Appendix C provides an example of the draft of the annual assessment report. That report will be piloted in the summer of 2020 covering the academic year 2019-2020. Based on feedback from those units volunteering to pilot the reporting, the reporting form will be edited and changed. The goal of the report is to provide units and programs with a basic way to share what they've accomplished in their assessment plan.

ISU Catalog. The new template for the Idaho State University course catalog includes program objectives and student learning outcomes. During the transition to the new template some programs will have more complete information in the catalog than others. Once the transition is complete the online catalog provide information what programs and units want students to know once they receive their degree and how that knowledge acquisition will be assessed.

Academic Affairs Feedback. No report should ever be submitted and sits on a shelf unused. The annual assessment report submitted via Google docs will be evaluated by the assessment officer in academic affairs in conjunction with the University Assessment Review Committee. The review will be designed to help programs and units find recognition for their assessment accomplishments and work. In addition reports might indicate ways that faculty, units, and programs could simplify their assessment and still achieve actionable information to make changes.

Other recommendations to help assist units and programs in assessment might include with any of the steps of the assessment cycle. Think of the annual assessment report as a wellness checkup where many if not most will indicate a strong and sustainable process. In other cases there will be an opportunity to share suggestions with units and programs to help them do their work. This is a partnership designed to be helpful, informative, and positive.

Conclusion

The only thing you really need to remember about assessment are the three things listed below which were already discussed at the beginning of this plan. Those are shown again below.

1. What are you trying to do?
2. How well are you doing it?
3. Using the answers to the first two questions, how can you improve what you are doing?

The objective of this plan is to provide faculty with context for the work they do. This work is valued by the institution and critical to our mission.

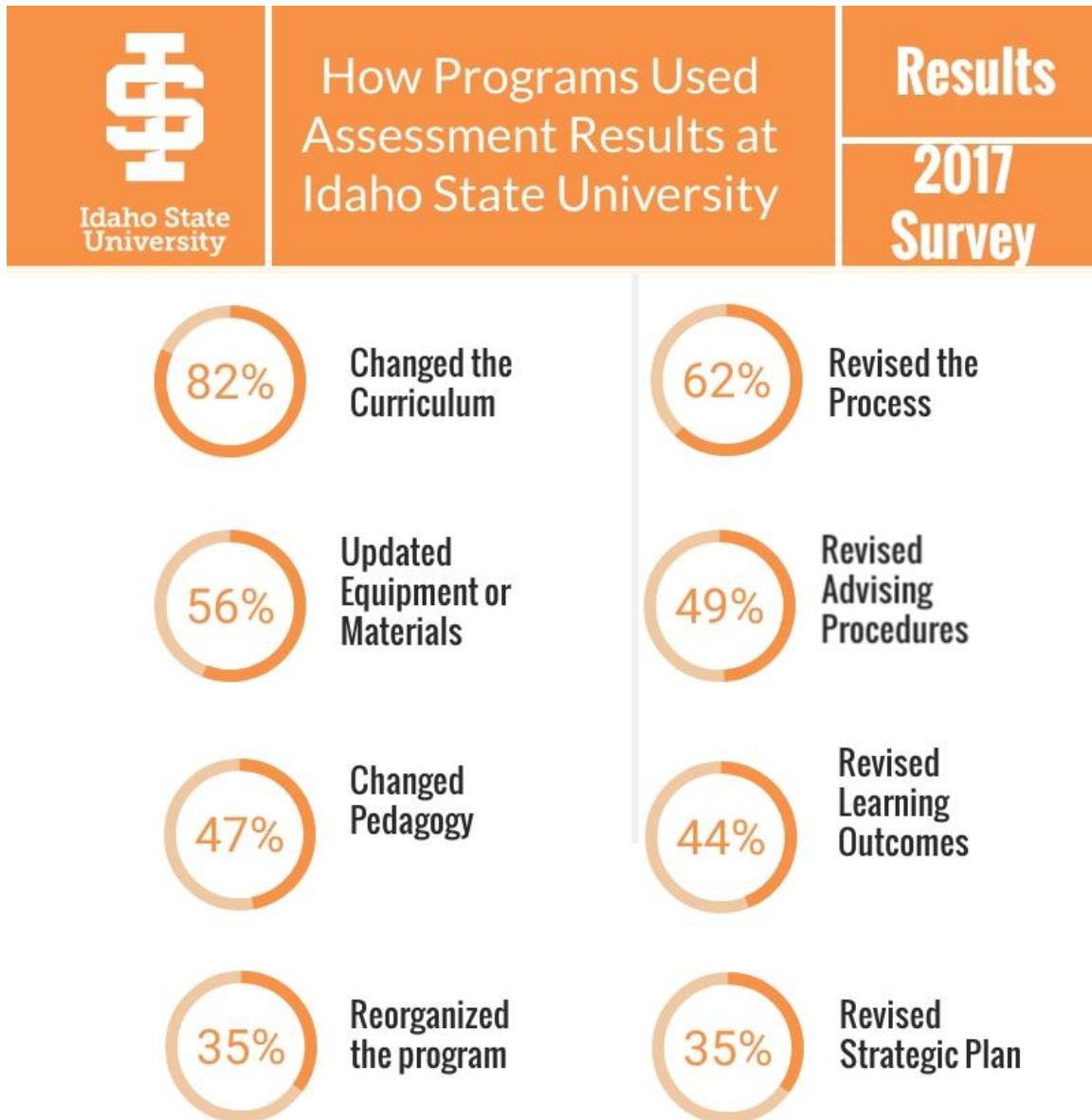
Appendix A: American Association on Higher Education Assessment

Listed below are key factors which support the assessment process. These are summarized from the source listed below.

- *Systematic*: The process of assessment is ongoing and continuous evolving as it repeats over time.
- *Mission Statement*: The assessment process uses the unit, department, or program's mission statement to define the goals and objectives.
- *Ongoing and Cumulative*: Over time, assessment efforts build a body of evidence to improve programs or services.
- *Multi-faceted*: Assessment information is collected on multiple dimensions, using multiple methods and sources from across campus.
- *Pragmatic*: Assessment is used to improve the campus environment, not simply collected and filed away.
- *Goal Oriented*: Clear, shared, implementable goals are the cornerstone for assessment.
- *Relevant*: The point of assessment is not to gather data and return "results"; it is a process that starts with the questions of decision-makers, that involves them in the gathering and interpreting of data, and that informs and helps guide continuous improvement whether it is focused on a program or a unit.
- *Tied to Decision-Making*: Assessment drives decision making throughout the University.
- *Accountability*: It fulfills the University's obligation of accountability to the public, but more importantly, it drives improvement.

Source: <https://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/AAHE-Principles.pdf>

Appendix B: How Programs Used Assessment Results



SOURCE: University Assessment Review Committee (UARC) Annual Report 2017 results from 68 programs <https://www.isu.edu/media/libraries/ieac/ieac-steering-committee/ieac-steering-committee-agenda-and-minutes/ay2018/feb-6-2018/1-UARC-Annual-Report-2017.pdf>

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Appendix C: Annual Assessment Report Google Form

Annual Assessment Report: visit isu.edu/assessment for assessment resources

Due December 1 for Prior Academic Year

1. Email address *

2. Submitted By: (Last Name, First Name)

3. Program Name, Department, or Unit:

4. College or unit

5. Secondary Contact Person name and email:

Refer to the action plan from your most recent accreditation on or program review.

Your action plan is the description of how you had plan to respond to the results you found when you did an assessment. Examples might include making curricular changes, finding ways to reinforce or provide additional learning activities for something you want student to do better on. When you examine assessment for your program reviews or external accreditation reports, these ideas will help you document how you used your results to make changes to enhance student learning and success.

6. Describe the progress your program made according to your action plan and timeline

Report even the things that did not work . Trying something and learning it didn't work is progress. Progress is how you view things . There is no right or wrong answers . Progress may be meeting with faculty to figure out next steps or realizing that since 95% or your students met your performance standard, you might be able to add more rigor to your assessment activity.

7. Describe your next steps for the upcoming academic year.

The prior question discusses what you did already. This question asks you to report what you plan for the next steps . It does not need to be elaborate. Indicate no more than 1 - 3 things you would like to do. Then when you do the report next year, refer back to your answer here.

Refer to your assessment plan Your assessment plan includes the program objectives, student learning outcomes to measure . Answer questions for the Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

You will typically assess 1 - 2 student learning outcomes in one year, make changes in the next year and then review the results again. You will likely have several program objectives that these student learning outcomes support, but your curriculum map and timeline for assessment scheduling will show you what you assessed in the last academic year.

Outcomes #1. Please answer the five questions about this student learning outcome. Outcomes typically begin with an action word from Bloom's taxonomy. <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/blooms-taxonomy/>

8. Student Learning Outcome for #1

9. Assessment Tool Used for #1

A tool just means the activity, assignment, homework, performance, test question or other method you used to collect and evaluate student work .

10. Data Analysis Method for #1

At a minimum you would have a standard of performance set for your Student Learning Objective, for example, that on a scale of 1 to 4 you would like to see 75% of your students have a 3 or better.

11. Results for #1

12. Action(s) Taken for #1

Outcome #2. Please answer the five questions about this student learning outcome. Outcomes typically begin with an action word from Bloom's taxonomy. <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/blooms-taxonomy/>

13. Student Learning Outcome #2

14. Assessment Tool Used for #2

15. Data Analysis Method for #2

16. Results for #2

17. Action(s) Taken for #2

Results discussion from your short answers for each of the two objectives assessed the last academic year.

18. Discuss the results and describe the actions your program will take.

Refer to last year's annual assessment report .

For the first reporting that occurs for 2020-2021 refer to your program review or accreditation report .

19. Identify changes you made because of your assessment results from the prior year.

20. Describe the impact of those changes.

Additional information

21. Describe any changes you made you didn't already discuss. These might involve advising, collaborating with another department or steps you took in response to your data collection and assessment.

22. Describe any problems or concerns you would like help with on assessment.

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