IDAHO STATE UNIVERSITY
COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT PLAN

www.isu.edu/institutionalresearch/isucomprehensiveassessmentplan
# Appendix 4. ISU Comprehensive Assessment Plan

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1. Background
Idaho State University (ISU) has had multiple academic assessment programs over the years, but they have not endured over time. Prior to the Northwest Commission of Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) Year Seven Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability Report findings in January 2015, ISU’s faculty and administration recognized the Institution was lacking a cohesive university-wide assessment plan. As a result of the Year Seven Comprehensive Self Evaluation, the Executive Vice President/Provost directed Institutional Effectiveness to establish a university-wide assessment program for evaluating academic programs and non-academic units. The NWCCU states on page 21 of its Accreditation Handbook (2015 Edition):

> The institution systematically applies clearly defined evaluation and planning procedures, assesses the extent to which it achieves its mission and core themes, uses the results of assessment to effect institutional improvement, and periodically publishes the results to its constituencies. Through these processes it regularly monitors its internal and external environments to determine how and to what degree changing circumstances may impact the institution and its ability to ensure its viability and sustainability.

Faculty, staff, and the administration at ISU have long recognized the need for and have embraced assessment. More than a third of ISU’s academic programs currently have assessment plans in place. Regarding non-academic assessment, Student Affairs has completed an evaluation of the student learning and the services it provides. Additionally, in Summer 2014, Program Review became fully integrated into the decision-making process. This plan formalizes a comprehensive assessment system within ISU. It is designed to further the evolution of academic program and non-academic unit assessment by providing guidance and tools to formalize the methods already in use to evaluate student learning and services at ISU.

Definitions
The following definitions apply to this plan.

- Program: a collection of academic courses leading to a certificate or degree
- Unit: a non-academic organization
- Service: an administrative function of a unit that supports a student or stakeholder

What is Assessment?
Assessment uses a systems approach to collect data through multiple and diverse methods, then analyzes the data to evaluate the effectiveness of ISU’s academic programs and non-academic services for the purpose of improving student learning outcomes and essential services. Assessment is not a tool used to evaluate faculty or staff, but to evaluate student learning and services that are essential elements of the institution’s mission.
Why is Assessment Important?
Assessment provides insight into how well ISU is achieving its mission. ISU’s mission reads:

Idaho State University is a public research-based institution that advances scholarly and creative endeavors through academic instruction, and the creation of new knowledge, research, and artistic works. Idaho State University provides leadership in the health professions, biomedical, and pharmaceutical sciences, as well as serving the region and the nation through its environmental science and energy programs. The University provides access to its regional and rural communities through the delivery of preeminent technical, undergraduate, graduate, professional, and interdisciplinary education. The University fosters a culture of diversity, and engages and impacts its communities through partnerships and services.

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.

Figure 1. Institutional Assessment Planning Process
Effective assessment programs should answer four questions (Hutchings and Marchese, 1990):

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?
4. What and how does the unit contribute to the development and growth of students?

Principles that affect assessing student learning and services come from a variety of professional education organizations including the American Association of Higher Education. Listed below are some of the key factors that have proven themselves over time, and should be incorporated into the academic program and non-academic unit assessments.

- **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.

2. ISU’s Assessment Framework

In 2015, ISU established the Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment Council (IEAC), with its primary purpose to set university priorities and to coordinate planning efforts across units as a means of eliminating planning silos. It is also an IEAC charge to develop a University assessment program. This charge falls to IEAC’s Accreditation, Assessment & Academic Program Review (AAAPR) subcommittee to carry out this requirement. The AAAPR coordinates efforts between permanent and Ad hoc organizations, and advises the IEAC on matters related to accreditation and assessment. The General Education Requirements Committee (GERC), University Assessment Review Committee (UARC) and the Non-Academic Assessment Review Committee (NAARC) all have responsibility for portions of the assessment planning process. All three committees have the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, who is responsible for the University assessment, serving as a member to maintain alignment and consistency. This structure ensures alignment throughout the organization.
An example of the institution’s commitment to assessment is the UARC. The Committee provides support for faculty involved in assessment processes. The UARC will recommend changes to program review that will streamline and improve the process, and will establish standards for student learning outcomes, and a structure for a bi-annual university assessment report. UARC is also reviewing assessment software and will make recommendations to Academic Affairs and the AAAPR committee regarding next steps later this summer. Once this recommendation is made, the University will determine next steps and timeline for purchasing an assessment software with the intent that it will be available to all academic programs and non-academic units as appropriate.
Non-Academic Assessment Review Committee (NAARC)
The NAARC has responsibility for assisting the non-academic units with developing their objectives and measures, establishing training for the units and evaluation teams, and providing oversight over the evaluation process to include establishing and maintaining the schedule and creating evaluation teams. The NAARC is composed of 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, Library, Human Resources, and Information Technology Services. Each member represents their area of responsibility and provides information to their subordinate organizations.

General Education and Requirements Committee (GERC)
The purpose of 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. The general education objectives are reviewed on a staged, 5-year cycle; not all of the objectives need be evaluated at once.

GERC is a subcommittee of the Undergraduate Curriculum Council (UCC). Although GERC has a direct reporting line to the UCC, the AAAPR has indirect oversight to ensure the state and ISU’s assessment standards are being met and alignment is occurring. 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 attend meetings but do not vote. Minutes from GERC meetings are posted on the University’s website.

GERC members also represent ISU’s interests by coordinating with representatives who serve on the State Board of Education’s General Education Committee. General Education in Idaho follows the Governing Policies and Procedures III.N. of the Idaho State Board of Education. SBOE policy mandates six objectives: written communication; oral communication; mathematical ways of knowing; scientific ways of knowing; humanistic and artistic ways of knowing; and social and behavioral ways of knowing. In addition, each Idaho institution must have six credits of general education in institutionally designated credits. ISU students take one course in cultural diversity, and one course in either critical thinking or information literacy. The nine objectives encompass 36 student learning competencies.

The General Education Program at ISU is diverse and includes courses from all academic programs. While the majority of general education courses are housed in the Colleges of Arts and Letters and Science and Engineering, the other academic programs are represented as well.

Consistent and regular assessment of general education courses is relatively new at ISU. Before 2015, some general education courses were assessed by their departments as a part of program review or specialized accreditation assessment, but were not part of a university-wide effort to evaluate the general education program as a whole. At ISU, GERC oversees the assessment of general education courses. GERC reviews courses that have applied for inclusion in the general education program and acts on the applications. An assessment plan is included in the application. Consequently, all general education courses submit assessment plans to GERC before beginning assessment activities; GERC reviews the assessment plans and either approves them or remands them back to the submitting departments with recommendations for improvement.
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A plan was developed for departments to design and submit assessment plans to GERC for approval, and then to submit annual assessment reports. This plan, approved by the Provost in April 2015, is shown in Appendix 1 (GERC Flow Chart) and the processes and resources are described on the GERC web page. GERC is currently on track to meet the deadlines shown in the plan; the first round of assessment reports were submitted in November 2016. Results for Year 2 of the reporting process are due on November 1, 2017; in addition, Objectives 1 (Written Communication) and 2 (Oral Communication) will be reviewed by the Objective Review committee in Fall 2018 as part of the overall objectives process.

As of April 17, 2017, assessment plans for all but one general education course were submitted to GERC for review, for a total of 159 courses. As of April 25, 2017, GERC had approved 144 plans. Additional information can be found at the GERC web site.

Institutional Research (IR)
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.

3. How ISU Assesses Programs and Services?
This part of the handbook outlines how ISU will assess both academic and non-academic units and programs across the Institution. It also breaks out academic assessment and non-academic assessment because, in many cases, academic assessment is specific to a department or program, whereas non-academic units can utilize standards established by nationally recognized professional organizations. Organizations will follow the assessment process below, regardless of whether the assessment is being completed by an academic program or non-academic unit. This four-step model supports both academic and non-academic units through the steps necessary to create an assessment plan of their own to identify outcomes in student learning or services.
Identify Goals: The first step for any program or unit is to set 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

Outcomes: Once a mission statement is complete, the program or unit will use its essential elements to create outcomes to form the objectives. The objectives will be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART). The objectives will have a single focus and not be bundled. The program or unit will provide a measure that is feasible, accurate, and reliable, utilizing quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods data collection techniques. The objectives will stretch the capabilities of
the program or unit while still being attainable and realistic. The objectives will occur over a defined timeframe. 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 will 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 performance measure, but up to three is best. There is a tendency to have too many performance measures, which can be as detrimental as having too few. Each performance measure needs to be defined, and the timing of the data collection must correspond to the timing the report is due.

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.

Examples of direct assessment measures include:

- Pre and post-tests
  - Multiple-choice test question
  - Essay test question
- Course-embedded assessment (e.g., homework assignment; essays, locally developed tests)
- Comprehensive exams
- Standardized test
  - National Major Field Achievement Tests
  - Certification exams, licensure exams
- Portfolio evaluation
- Case studies
- Reflective journals
- Capstone projects
- Class project (individual or group)
- Internship and clinical evaluation
- Performance piece (e.g., musical recital)
- Poster presentation
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Examples of indirect assessment measures include:
- Exit interviews
- Surveys
  - Departmental survey
  - Alumni survey
  - Employer survey
  - Survey of current students
  - Survey of faculty members
  - Survey of internship supervisors
  - Survey of graduates
  - Survey of employers
  - Survey of transfer institutions
- Focus groups
- Job placement statistics
- Graduation and retention rates
- Percentage of students who study abroad
- Classroom Assessment Techniques

The strategies to establish the measures include:
- At what point in the process will the methods for measurement be used?
- Who will be involved in the assessment plan?
- Who is the sample?
- What is the timeline?
- Who will collect the results?
- Who will tabulate the results?
- How will the results be disseminated?

Faculty or staff members perform many of these examples of assessment measures as part of their program or unit’s activities and can create objectives using existing assignments or activities to measure student learning and service effectiveness. If a faculty or staff member creates an objective that cannot be measured using an existing assignment or activity, then they will have to develop an assessment that supports measuring that objective. For the faculty member, another option to save time is to assign a term paper that measures a program goal instead of rating multiple assignments.

Measure Outcomes and Evaluate: At this stage in the process, the program or unit will begin assembling the assessment information based on the designated timeframe and other requirements identified upon acceptance of the objective. After assessment information is collected, the results should be aggregated, analyzed, and communicated in useful ways to the faculty or staff member who will decide whether expected levels of achievement have met the outcome’s goal.

Questions to Consider:
- What does the data indicate about the quality of services provided?
- What does the data indicate about the satisfaction of the client?
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- Are there specific areas where performance is outstanding or weak?
- Do you see specific areas where you would like or expect to see higher performance levels?
- What was the most valuable thing learned from the assessment results?
- Was the assessment tool sufficient or does it need revision?

**Improvements:** This step in the process closes the loop, but it is often overlooked because many times the assessment results are forgotten until it is time to conduct the next evaluation or complete accreditation. This step offers the faculty or staff member the opportunity to use analyzed data to drive decision-making and realize improvements through the creation of action plans.

Action plans are short-term operational plans used to facilitate change and could have an immediate impact on the outcome if properly implemented. Like the objectives, they are written using the acronym SMART and have associated performance measures to track their progress toward supporting the objective.

What action plans and closing the loop should accomplish:

- Provide data to base decision-making in the unit
- Provide a process to measure performance
- Address gaps or weaknesses with unit operations
- Set forth an action plan to improve unit operations
- Identify a process to assess the effect of changes to a unit
- Enhance or improve efficiency in the daily functions of the unit
- Provide a documented process of measuring performance against ISU’s mission

**Assessment Review Requirement**

Evaluating the quality of a program or units’ assessment plan is an ongoing practice. Programs and units will complete a review their assessment programs every three years. The review will ensure that their objectives and measures are still valid, informative, reliable, realistic, and familiar. Programs and units will document the changes made to their assessment program and include it as part of their evaluation.

**Utilizing Technology**

ISU is in the process of evaluating different enterprise assessment tools that will support both academic and non-academic assessment. Programs that do not currently utilize an automation tool and all non-academic units will use the enterprise assessment tool purchased by the University. The administration will provide training. Programs and units will have one year upon completion of their training to input their assessment programs into the tool and report their status to their assessment coordinator. Programs already utilizing an assessment tool do not have to transition to the University tool unless they chose to.
4. Academic Assessment

Who is Responsible for Academic Assessment?
Faculty members have something that few administrators have, direct influence and contact with students. That is why academic assessment planning starts with the faculty member in the classroom while administrators have the responsibility to coordinate it at the department, college and university levels. Putting together an assessment plan can be a time consuming task for faculty members, but without an assessment program, it is impossible to know if students are meeting course, program, or university learning expectations. Faculty members and administrators must work together to agree on what standards they should assess and how to implement improvements based on the evaluated outcomes.

Student learning Outcomes
Faculty members and administrators will use the information in Section 2 to establish an assessment plan for each of the programs within their colleges. The UARC will coordinate across the university to recommend university-wide student learning outcomes to evaluate students’ progress but the assessment experience should remain at the lowest levels to allow faculty the ability to evaluate the needs of their students and maintain course and program quality. Faculty members are best situated to design instruments for evaluating student performance, and to recommend solutions and implement curricular changes when assessment results identify gaps or issues in student learning.

Evaluations (Assessment reporting and recommended actions)
Currently, assessment is taking place across the University in a number of programs. Specialized accreditation standards typically require assessment, and consequently a large portion of our students, including all students in the Kasiska Division of Health Sciences and the College of Business and many students in other academic programs, are enrolled in programs that conduct extensive, comprehensive assessments. In addition, General Education courses are now undergoing regular assessment according to the timeline posted on the General Education Requirements Committee website. Finally, programs not covered by specialized accreditation are required to undergo regular program reviews. While assessment has been a part of program review in the past, the UARC plans to increase the role of assessment in these reviews and establish standards and templates for conducting assessment.

The program review process is being evaluated with the intention of streamlining and improving the process. Currently, review of programs without specialized accreditation takes place every five years, and the schedule for review is posted on the Academic Affairs website. Programs conduct a self-study and then undergo review by two reviewers, one external to ISU, and one from within ISU but outside the department being evaluated. The results of the external review, including an action plan, are submitted to the dean of the academic unit and to the Provost for final approval. If necessary, or if there are concerns, the Provost may refer reviews to the IEAC’s AAAPR subcommittee.

Timeline
Over the next twelve months, the UARC will identify and recommend for purchase assessment software that may be used across the institution; will establish standards for student learning outcomes; and will
establish a structure for an annual ISU assessment report, by specifying reporting times, templates, and standards.

Support
Faculty who need assistance creating their assessment plans can seek help from the UARC, until an assessment coordinator can be hired.

5. Non-Academic Assessment
The non-academic unit assessment plan’s primary focus is to improve organizational performance that is directly and indirectly tied to student success and stakeholder support. Units that provide services without an assessment program fail to recognize shortcomings and evolve.

Standards
Whenever possible, units will utilize national assessment standards to evaluate their organizations. Non-academic services are fairly standardized unlike academic programs that vary significantly between universities. An example of a national set of standards is those established by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS). CAS provides evaluation objectives for multiple areas within Student Affairs, Academic Affairs, and other student support areas. Additional non-academic units like Research, Facilities, Information Technology, or Finance may have standards available by national organizations.

If a unit does not have a national organization’s assessment standards to follow then they will establish their own objectives, measures, evaluations, and action plans using the guidance above in Section 2 and the in a document that the NAARC will develop fall 2017. Using these tools will ensure that they meet the assessment requirements and have a standard template to follow. When possible, units will create objectives that measure student learning outcomes, but it is recognized that the majority of the objectives will focus on services that the unit provides.

At a minimum, the non-academic unit assessments should focus on the following essential components:

- The unit’s Mission Statement, which should be aligned with ISU’s mission and core theme priorities
- The unit’s Objectives, which are aligned with the core themes and should reflect the essential functions or activities of the unit
- The Expected Outcomes, which may be learning and/or process outcomes
  - Focus on a current service, process, or instruction (Student Learning Outcome)
  - Be under the control of or responsibility of the unit
  - Be measurable/ascertainable
  - Lend itself to improvements
  - Be singular, not “bundled”
  - Be meaningful and not trivial
  - Not lead to “yes/no” answer
- Measurable Performance Criteria, which describe the desired result
  - Efficiency
  - Accuracy
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- Effectiveness
- Satisfaction
- Quality
- Comprehensiveness
- Compliance

- Assessment, the collection, and analysis of evidence
- Evaluation, the interpretation of evidence
- Planned Improvements, developed in response to assessment evidence and including an implementation timeline

Evaluations
Units will receive internal evaluations by an ISU evaluation team every five years. The evaluation team will be established in Fall 2017, and will be comprised of a broad distribution of stakeholders across the University. Units will receive notification a year before its evaluation to prepare its self-study for the evaluation team. The self-study will be a report describing strengths and weaknesses found during the unit’s evaluation of its objectives. The unit will provide an explanation of what action plans it implemented to address shortcomings and evidence of improvement. A unit will explain why if improvement to an outcome didn’t occur. Additionally, the unit will provide documentation that explains the changes made to the objectives or measures resulting from the annual reviews. The self-study is due four weeks before the evaluation.

The composition and training requirements of the evaluation team will be determined at a meeting in Fall 2017 and Institutional Effectiveness will provide updates to this document reflecting the change.

Non-Academic Unit Evaluation Calendar

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Appendix 1. GERC Flowchart.