Evaluation of Student Learning at Wake Forest College:
A step-by-step guide to the creation or modification and implementation of Academic Program Evaluation Reports

Program Mission & Goals

1. The purpose of each academic program must be defined in terms of the mission and/or goals of the program, which should stem from the mission/goals of the College and University.
2. The mission and goals should be written in terms that specifically address student learning and should lead an unfamiliar reader directly to the intended student learning outcomes.

Student Learning Outcomes

1. Student learning outcomes include changes in knowledge, skills, abilities, behavior, and values.
2. Each academic program evaluation plan should include between three and five Student Learning Outcomes. These are the specific results you expect your graduates to have achieved by completion of your program.
3. Common outcomes include: knowledge of theory and research in the field, ability to think critically about the field of study, and oral and written communication skills.
4. In order to gain the greatest insight from the evaluation results, the definition of an outcome will include specific, measurable criteria that comprise that outcome, as defined by the faculty of an academic program.

For example, the student learning outcome of critical thinking might include criteria such as the student’s ability to: (1) clearly describe an issue, (2) select and use information to investigate the issue, (3) thoroughly analyze assumptions and evaluate relevance, (4) present his opinion, and (5) derive logical conclusions (add reference for AAC&U VALUE Rubric).

Assessment Measures

1. The most powerful evaluations of student learning will thoroughly explore each student learning outcome by evaluating the criteria that comprise the outcome. At this level of evaluation, faculty will be in the position to accurately identify how students are developing in their program and where areas of potential improvement exist.
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For example, when assessing the critical thinking ability of students in a program, faculty can
design and use an assessment tool that considers the criteria comprising this rather broad
concept (e.g., deriving an opinion, drawing logical conclusions). By doing so, faculty can identify
more specifically where students are exhibiting great strengths and where there are areas for
enhancement of the curriculum.

2. Both direct and indirect assessment measures of student learning can be used to
assess the extent to which student learning outcomes have been achieved.
3. **Direct assessment measures** involve the evaluation of student work (most often
conducted by faculty) to establish the level of observed knowledge, skills,
abilities, behaviors, or values.

Common examples of **direct assessment measures** used in the evaluation of
academic programs include:
- a. Capstone projects evaluated by faculty using a faculty-designed rubric,
- b. Pre- and post-course or -program assessments,
- c. Questions designed by faculty to measure the specific student learning
criteria that are included on a test(s) in designated courses each time they
are taught, and
- d. Standardized, subject area tests accepted in the field of study as
representative of relevant criteria.

4. **Indirect assessment measures** involve the evaluation of the perception of
student learning outcomes from the perspective of student(s), instructors,
faculty in graduate programs in which alumni are enrolled, and/or employers.

Common examples of **indirect assessment measures** used in the evaluation of
academic programs include:
- a. Student surveys,
- b. Course evaluations (if they include relevant questions),
- c. End of course/degree focus groups,
- d. Employer surveys, and
- e. Rates of placement in jobs and graduate programs following graduation.
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5. A strong assessment plan will include two or three different measures of each outcome. At least one of the measures for each student learning outcome must be a direct measure.

6. When designed well, one measure of student learning can be used to assess more than one Student Learning Outcome.

For example:
- A rubric (i.e., direct measure) designed by faculty to assess a written capstone project could evaluate (1) written communication, (2) critical thinking, and (3) knowledge of theory and research in the field.
- The students’ perception of their ability level on these same student learning outcomes could be measured through an annual end of program focus group incorporating a few well-designed questions.

7. An initial commitment of time and resources to the design of assessment measures for the evaluation of student learning will yield long-term benefits in the form of (1) simplicity of annual data collection (i.e., by building the assessments into the annual departmental calendar) and (2) results that will be meaningful to the faculty and can assist in the continuous improvement of the student learning experience in your academic program.

Findings

1. Ideally, collected data will be analyzed and reported at the Outcome and Criterion levels, leading to the identification of specific strengths and areas for improvement.

2. When student demographic information is available, faculty also can consider whether certain groups of students within the program are experiencing different levels of success (e.g., first-generation students, international students, multi-lingual students, student athletes, students entering the program without previous exposure to the content of the field).

3. Results should be presented in a clear format with well-defined links back to the relevant assessment measure and student learning outcome(s).

4. When multiple years’ worth of data are available, results presented in a table format (e.g., with criteria by rows and years/semesters by columns) can simplify the interpretation process and will allow for the identification of trends in student learning over time. This will enhance the longitudinal-nature of your evaluation and increase the understanding – by all audiences – of the student learning experience in your program over time.
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Interpretation

1. Once analyzed, program faculty work together to interpret the findings in a format that tells the story of student learning in the academic program to the three audiences (i.e., Program Faculty, College and University Administration, SACS Review Committee Members).
2. Consider findings from the various measures used and how they relate to one another.

Questions to consider during the interpretation process include, but are certainly not limited to:
   a. What do the results mean at the criteria, outcome, and program levels?
   b. Are different groups of students achieving different levels of success?
   c. Do the results meet your expectations?
   d. What are the highlights of your findings?
   e. Based on the findings, what could be done to improve the student learning experience in your program?

3. The Interpretation should link directly back to the Student Learning Outcomes and lead to the development of Action Plans, highlighting the linear-nature of this process.

Action Plans

1. Action plans are specific plans for continuous improvement of the Academic Program that are the clear result of the evaluation process.
2. Description of action plans should describe the links from the action plans back to the mission, outcomes, measures, and findings in a way that will be clear to a reader not intimately familiar with the academic program.

Action plans include changes that should be made to:
   a. teaching methods,
   b. the curriculum,
   c. and the program

3. The impact of Action Plans must be considered and presented in the APE reports in subsequent years.