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# Syracuse University Guide for Developing an Assessment and Action Plan: Functional Areas

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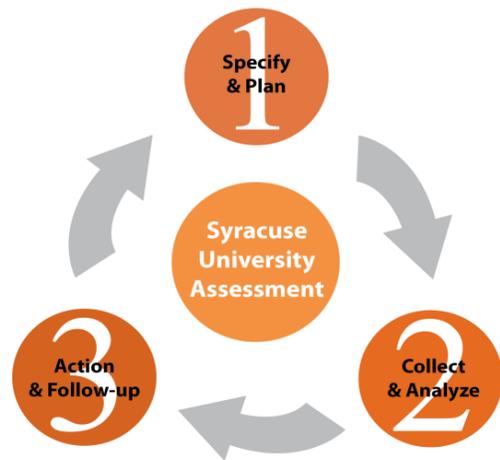
# Syracuse University Assessment

Syracuse University is accountable to a number of external stakeholders including New York State, various specialized accreditors, and the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE). Middle States accreditation operates on an eight-year self-study cycle with a periodic review report submitted in year four. In recent years, the accreditation landscape has changed to more centrally focus on the outcomes of student learning experiences and institutional effectiveness.

To demonstrate our commitment to not only meet standards set by accrediting bodies, but to provide our students with an outstanding educational experience in and out of the classroom, Syracuse University continues to enhance our culture of assessment and continual improvement.

Assessment is integral to maintaining quality and effectiveness at any institution of higher education. It relies on the contributions of all academic, co-curricular, and functional areas campus-wide in meeting Syracuse University's mission and goals. Within the culture of assessment, the mission and goals of each academic, co-curricular, and functional program/unit should align with the overall mission of the University and each program and unit has developed an assessment and action plan.

An assessment and action plan can be viewed as a process for continual improvement of the learning environment, products, processes, and services, as well as a tool for managing resources. It should be meaningful to its stakeholders and the results used to inform decision-making. From the results of assessment, each area determines what actions could be taken to improve the student experience, take those actions, and then measure whether the actions were effective.



## Assessment Working Team

Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment (IEA) has put together an Assessment Working Team (AWT) whose members are available to consult with and provide support and resources to academic programs, co-curricular programs/units, and functional areas as they develop and implement assessment and action plans. If you have assessment-related questions, or are interested in a consultation, department/unit meeting or workshop for your area, please contact the AWT at [assessment@syr.edu](mailto:assessment@syr.edu).

# Functional Areas

Functional areas are defined as units that provide the operational processes and services of the institution. The assessment focus for the functional areas is on developing unit goals and objectives that support improvements that are aligned with the unit’s mission.

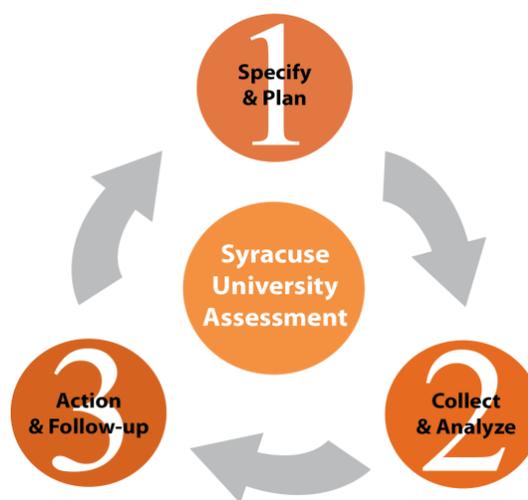
## Introduction to Assessment and Action Plans

This guide focuses on developing an Assessment and Action Plan for functional areas. The process for conducting assessment is organized into three phases:

**Phase 1—Specify and Plan:** Identify goals that align with the unit’s mission and strategic plan. For each goal, develop specific and measurable objectives and identify associated strategies that detail how the objectives will be achieved. Specify targets to measure each objective’s performance.

**Phase 2— Collect and Analyze:** Collect data for measures specified in Phase 1. Analyze and interpret results.

**Phase 3—Action and Follow-up:** Indicate actions to be taken to enhance the unit’s operations. After actions are implemented, determine and document the impact(s).



The **Functional Area – Assessment and Action Plan Rubric**, may serve as a resource when developing your plan. The rubric details SU expectations and characteristics associated with each component of the Assessment and Action Plan at various levels of proficiency.

The appendices at the end of this guide provide various resources that may be useful to you as you develop your Assessment Action Plan (AAP).

**Appendix A: Glossary**

**Appendix B: Support Outcomes Verb Wheel**

**Appendix C: Direct and Indirect Measures Examples**

The Assessment Working Team has also assembled other resources to support program/unit assessment efforts, which you can find at <http://assessment.syr.edu/>



# Phase 1—Specify and Plan

During this first phase, the focus is on identifying:

- Unit goals and objectives
- Strategies used to achieve the objectives
- Measures that serve as targets

## I. Goals

Goals should reflect the charge of the unit and align with its mission. Functional areas begin Phase 1 by identifying 2-4 unit goals.<sup>1</sup>

The unit’s goals should be broad statements focused on general components such as efficiency, effectiveness, communication, fiscal health, services, and support systems. These unit goals are operationalized into specific objectives.

Goals	
<b>Definition</b>	<b>Goals</b> are the general long-term aims or purposes of a unit that are consistent with its mission. Goals should be broadly stated, meaningful, achievable, and provide a framework for identifying objectives.
<b>Example</b>	Provide an efficient course registration process.

## II. Objectives

Effective goals provide a framework for the next step in developing an Assessment and Action Plan, articulating objectives. Each goal will typically have more than one objective.<sup>2</sup>

Objectives	
<b>Definition</b>	<b>Objectives</b> are concrete statements of tangible results the unit intends to achieve. Objectives should be written as statements that are specific, measurable, achievable, results-oriented, and time bound.
<b>Example</b>	During fall and spring registration, students will be able to register on their own, without needing help from the registrar’s office.

Objectives should be written using action verbs that describe what the unit will achieve or accomplish in light of comprehensive unit goals. **Appendix B** at the end of this guide provides a list of functional action verbs.

<sup>1</sup> 5-7 goals are suggested. The number of goals each unit identifies depends on the charge of that unit.

<sup>2</sup> The number of objectives identified for each goal depends on what must be accomplished to achieve that goal.

### III. Strategies

For each objective, specify strategies the unit will use to meet objectives. Implementing the listed strategies should facilitate the accomplishment of the associated objective.

Strategies	
<b>Definition</b>	<b>Strategies</b> are the specific processes used and services offered by a unit.
<b>Example</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct test of the system prior to opening the registration process.</li> <li>• Conduct a check of courses in the system to ensure the accuracy of the information.</li> <li>• Have a help line and live chat available 7AM to 10PM during peak registration weeks.</li> <li>• Have an email address for questions or to report registration issues.</li> <li>• Provide online video tutorials that detail the process.</li> <li>• Monitor help line and live chat requests/issues.</li> <li>• Monitor logins to the system and time to completion.</li> </ul>

To determine strategic capabilities available to your unit, generate a comprehensive list of services and processes that members of your unit are able to perform. Strategies should not be requests for additional funding, resources, or additional personnel.

### IV. Targets

Targets are numerical criteria that focus on the impact of objectives and success achieved through strategies. For each **Objective** listed, at least one target should be established. Targets measure how effectively and efficiently a functional unit is operating.

Targets	
<b>Definition</b>	A target should include three aspects: a <i>level</i> (e.g., prior year metrics or baseline data), a <i>subject/object</i> (e.g., students, faculty, staff, report, or satisfaction level), and a <i>modifier</i> (e.g., percentage increase, decrease, maintained performance, or timeframe).
<b>Example</b>	<b>Target:</b> Compared to previous year ( <i>level</i> ) a 10% reduction ( <i>modifier</i> ) in live chat, email help requests as well as trouble calls to help line ( <i>object</i> ) during course registration process.

Below is a completed Phase 1 using the examples provided, as it would appear in the **Functional Areas Assessment and Action Plan Template**.

Note that for each goal there will typically be more than one objective. For the sample goal, “ examples of two objectives are shown below. Each objective has listed strategies and at least one associated target.

PHASE 1			
Goals	Objectives	Strategies	Targets
Provide an efficient course registration process.	1. During registration, students will be able to register on their own, without needing help from the registrar's office.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have a help line and live chat available 7AM to 10PM during peak registration weeks.</li> <li>• Provide online video tutorials that detail the process.</li> </ul>	10% drop in trouble calls, help requests, and issues reported compared to previous year.
	2. During registration time, the system will be functional 100% of the time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct test of the system prior to opening the registration process.</li> <li>• Have monitoring system that alerts ITS to issues.</li> </ul>	Zero recorded alerts of system downtime.



## Phase 2—Collect and Analyze

Goals should be assessed a four-year annual assessment cycles. During the assessment process, functional units should assess 1 or 2 specific goals per annual cycle. Phase 2 should then be completed each year for the goals and objectives that are being assessed by the functional unit during the annual cycle.

The second phase consists of collecting and interpreting the target results. It is critical to have well-defined objectives, strategies, and targets that provide a roadmap for collecting meaningful data and analyzing the results.

To begin this phase:

- Determine the goals that will be the focus of the assessment cycle.
- Determine the unit’s plan for systematically collecting information.
- Specify the person(s) responsible for collecting information.
- Specify the person(s) responsible for analyzing information.
- Establish a timeline for completion.

### I. Collect and Record Results

Collect and record the results of your targets. Writing the results in detail increases the ability to interpret the information. For each target, include information regarding when the results were collected.

### II. Analyze and Interpret Results

Analyze and interpret what the results indicate about the unit’s progress towards meeting its objectives. This interpretation should be recorded in detail to help the unit make meaningful recommendations in Phase 3.

It is important to include as many members of a functional unit as possible in Phase 2. Staff members directly involved in a process or service are likely able to offer an insightful understanding of the implications of results and provide a more accurate interpretation.

When reviewing data consider the following questions:

- What are the strengths and weaknesses observed across the selected targets for the objectives being assessed?
- What processes and services are operating as expected?
- What can be improved?

This discussion will lead to phase 3 of the assessment process were actions may be identified.



## Phase 3—Action and Follow-up

Based on the results and interpretation, the unit can now determine whether or not to take action. The functional unit can decide what areas are in need of improvement, determine how processes or services should be modified, or conclude that the processes and services are operating as expected.

### I. Action

Specify what action will be taken to improve unit processes and procedures. Based on the interpretation, the unit should answer the following questions:

- What actions should the unit take, if any?
- How should any identified changes be made?

The assessment process should foster action. Focus on a few action items each year and decide who will be responsible for follow-up and determine target dates and priority levels in Tk20. As you implement your action plans, keep written records of activities (e.g. meeting minutes) related to the action as documentation of the process. Certain action items may be long term and results can be reported in subsequent years.

### II. Follow-Up

Follow-up refers to the unit plan for determining whether or not the action steps successfully improved unit operations. If actions have been taken and the impact of those actions have been studied, those findings can be documented here.

From this follow-up, a unit can determine the impact of operational changes, create action plans for maintaining efficiency, and establish new criteria for further improvement.

### III. Improving Unit Assessment Processes

After completing Phase 3, staff should be provided an opportunity to recommend improvements to the program or unit's assessment processes.

Possible recommendations could include:

- Identifying the need for more, or different, measures for specific objectives.
- Determining the need to streamline the process of collecting information.
- Identifying additional staff members who should be involved in assessment activities.

These recommendations should be documented in the Tk20 annual progress report form.

# Appendix A

## Glossary

**Academic Program**—Title of a given program within an academic department, usually resulting in a degree (e.g., Turkish, Health and Wellness Minor, Bachelor of Architecture, Master's in Media Studies, Certificate of Advanced Studies in Instructional Design Foundations, Doctorate in Geography, etc.).

**Accountability**—Using the results of assessment to demonstrate the quality of a program or university to concerned audiences. (Suskie, 2009)

**Action Research**—Purpose is to inform and improve one's own practice rather than make broad generalizations. Assessment is a form of action research. (Suskie, 2009)

**Assessment (of Institutional Effectiveness)**—Institutional assessments are essential to identifying gaps in performance of organizations that may be used to inform plans for improvements. Efforts to identify strengths and weaknesses within the organization of the institution via measures of performance will inform improvements to efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability of organizations.

**Assessment (of Learning)**—The ongoing process of: (1) establishing clear, measurable expected outcomes of student learning, (2) ensuring that students have sufficient opportunities to achieve those outcomes, (3) systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well learning matches our expectations, and (4) using the resulting information to understand and improve student learning. (Suskie, 2009)

**Criteria (as a standard for assessment)**—The values assigned to different levels of qualities, skills, and attributes found through the assessment, or how the work is valued and judged.

**Curriculum Map**—Shows the degree to which a program's student learning outcomes are addressed in the courses/experiences that make up the curriculum. The rating scale represents a continuum from the beginning of the curriculum to the end of the student's experience in the academic program.

**Degree**—Degree awarded to student of a given academic department (e.g., BS, BA, MS, MA, CAS, PhD).

**Direct Measure of Assessment**—Methods that involve direct display of knowledge and skills (test results, written assignments, presentations, classroom assignments) resulting from learning experience in the class/program. (Palomba & Banta, 1999)

**Evaluation**—The use of assessment findings (evidence/data) to judge program effectiveness; used as a basis for making decisions about program changes or improvement. (Allen, Noel, Rienzi & McMillin, 2002)

**Formative Assessment**—Assessment conducted during the life of a program (or performance) with the purpose of providing feedback that can be used to modify, shape, and improve the program (or performance). (Banta & Palomba, 2015)

**Goals**—The general aims or purposes of a unit that are consistent with its mission. Goals should be broadly stated, meaningful, achievable, and provide a framework for identifying outcomes.

**Grading**—The process by which a teacher assesses student learning through classroom tests, assignments, observations, interactions, performances and other forms of work; the context in which teachers establish that process; and the dialogue that surrounds grades and defines their meaning to various audiences. (Walvoord, 1998)

**Indirect Measure of Assessment**—Methods that involve perceptions of learning or improvement rather than actual demonstrations of outcome achievement (alumni surveys, employer surveys, exit interviews)

**Institutional Effectiveness**—The degree to which an institution successfully achieves its mission and goals and is in compliance with accreditation standards. The effectiveness of an institution rests upon the contribution that each of the institution’s programs and services makes toward achieving the goals of the institution as a whole.<sup>3</sup>

**Learning Objectives**—Statements that specify what learners will comprehend or be able to demonstrate as a result of a study activity or course or program. Learning objectives help instructors convey more distinctly to students what is expected of them. Objectives also help instructors develop effective strategies for evaluating student work and study. Objectives are usually stated, using action verbs, as knowledge, skills, and/or attitudes. They should be demonstrable and measurable. (University Senate Committee on Curricula)

**Objectives**—Statements of what a functional unit strives to achieve. They are specific, measurable, achievable, results-oriented, and time bound.

**Operational Objectives**—Statements associated with a unit goal indicating what the goal is intended to achieve. Objectives should be written using active verbs that describe what unit will do to ensure the goal is attainable.

**Program Review**—Comprehensive evaluation of an academic degree program that is designed both to foster improvement and demonstrate accountability. (Suskie, 2009)

**Rubric**—A scoring tool that lays out the specific expectations for an assignment or activity. (Stevens & Levi, 2013)

**Standard**—The minimal level elements, characteristics, and qualities that must be followed. In the context of curriculum, standards are the minimal level of material within a curriculum that must be taught to students. An accrediting body typically develops standards.

**Student Development Outcomes**—Statements describing the affective dimensions to be instilled or enhanced; assess affective dimensions or attitudes and values (not cognitive abilities); and consider growth in ethical, spiritual, emotional, and social responsibility dimensions (Bresciani, 2001; Denny, 2009 as cited in Culp & Dungy, 2012). These outcomes may detail how students exhibit an increase in self-discipline, become more respectful of others’ values, involve themselves in community service, engage in reflective spirituality, etc.

**Student Learning Outcomes**—Statements describing specific student behaviors that evidence the acquisition of desired knowledge, skills, abilities, capacities, attitudes, or dispositions. They should be written using active verbs that describe what students should be able to do, know, or produce over time as a result of participation in the program.

**Summative Assessment**—Assessment conducted after a program has been in operation for a while, or at its conclusion, to make judgments about its quality or worth compared to previously defined standards for performance.

**Target**—A measure of how effectively and efficiently a functional unit is operating. A target should include three aspects: a level (e.g., prior year metrics or baseline data), a subject/object (e.g., students, faculty, staff, report, or satisfaction level), and a modifier (e.g., percentage increase, decrease, maintained performance, or timeframe).

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<sup>3</sup> Encouraging and supporting campus wide involvement in improving instructional effectiveness. Presented by Andrea A. Lex, Ph.D., Vice President, Middle States Commission on Higher Education, April 2014, Philadelphia, PA.

# Appendix B

## Functional Outcome Verbs

This functional outcome verbs table is adopted from “Support Outcome Verb Wheel” developed by the Borough Manhattan Community College<sup>4</sup>. The table is categorized in to six domains of the functional areas from delivery to analysis depending on the complexity of the task/function. Each section of domain contains appropriate list of verbs (additional resources can be found at <http://assessment.syr.edu/resources/>). **The verbs listed here can be used for any objectives or outcomes developed for an Assessment and Action Plan.**

Delivery	Maintenance	Management	Development	Integration	Analysis
Allocate	Administer	Approve	Arrange	Advise	Analyze
Communicate	Check	Advocate	Acquire	Assist	Appraise
Deliver	Collect	Align Appoint	Advance	Collaborate	Audit
Designate	Compile	Assign	Build	Connect	Compare
Distribute	Comply	Authorize	Compose	Consult	Edit
Implement	Conduct	Coordinate	Construct	Cooperate	Evaluate
Inform	Ensure	Designate	Create	Counsel	Examine
Install	Execute	Determine	Design	Demonstrate	Forecast
Issue	Expedite	Direct	Develop	Encourage	Interpret
Offer	Inspect	Navigate	Devise	Engage	Investigate
Perform	Maintain	Organize	Establish	Explain	Measure
Present	Obtain	Plan	Generate	Guide	Monitor
Provide	Operate	Respond	Grow	Instruct	Predict
Report	Prevent	Select	Identify	Motivate	Project
Submit	Procure	Supervise	Initiate	Protect	Research
Transfer	Receive	Utilize	Institute	Serve	Review
Transmit	Regulate	Verify	Integrate	Support	Summarize
	Schedule		Originate	Train	Survey
	Secure		Produce		Test

<sup>4</sup> Borough Manhattan Community College. (2017). *BMCC support outcomes taxonomy*. Retrieved from: [https://www.bmcc.cuny.edu/iresearch/upload/AESTaxonomy\\_Aug2017.pdf](https://www.bmcc.cuny.edu/iresearch/upload/AESTaxonomy_Aug2017.pdf)

# Appendix C

## Direct and Indirect Measures Examples

### Direct Evidence of Operational Outcomes

Some direct evidence of operational outcomes are listed below:

- staff time
- cost
- materials
- equipment
- other resources
- cost per unit output
- reliability
- accuracy
- courtesy
- competence
- reduction in errors
- audit, external evaluator

### Indirect Evidence of Operational Outcomes

Some indirect evidence of operational outcomes are listed below:

- written survey and questionnaires:
  - Students
  - Administration and staff
  - Faculty
  - Stakeholder perception
- interviews
- focus groups

## References:

Lex, A.A. (2014, April). Encouraging and supporting campus wide involvement in improving instructional effectiveness. Middle States Commission on Higher Education, Philadelphia, PA.

Suskie, L. (2009). *Assessing student learning: A common sense guide* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). CA: Jossey-Bass.

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