UNC Learning Outcomes Assessment Standards of Practice

Overview

UNC's program review process requires the documentation of assessment planning and practice for both accredited and non-accredited academic programs. Explicit standards of practice support this work by articulating institutional expectations and promoting assessment processes rooted in inquiry and focused on student learning. Accredited academic programs provide extant assessment-related accreditation documentation to address these institutional expectations while non-accredited programs develop and implement an assessment plan to collect program learning outcomes data, analyze the results, and develop and implement strategies to address any gaps or deficiencies encountered. The standards of practice also guide the UNC Assessment Council in its review of assessment documentation and its efforts to provide feedback and support. As a body that serves in a review and support role, the Assessment Council works to promote effective assessment practices intended to document and improve student learning. The standards of practice inform and support the development, evaluation, and maintenance of learning goals in academic programs, the liberal arts curriculum, and other areas of the institution with explicit learning outcomes. They are intended to guide effective learning outcomes assessment while empowering academic areas to shape their assessment planning, implementation, data collection, and analysis processes.

Strategic Alignments

The standards of practice are aligned with UNC's Rowing, Not Drifting 2030 outcomes including the delivery of the highest quality student experiences through a personalized approach to instruction, meeting students where they are and nurturing their academic growth, and providing distinctive educational experiences that address workforce, environmental, and societal opportunities and challenges. The standards of practice also ensure that all UNC academic and co-curricular units satisfy the Higher Learning Commission's (HLC) 4.B. criteria for accreditation:

> 4.B. The institution engages in ongoing assessment of student learning as part of its commitment to the educational outcomes of its students.
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> 1. The institution has effective processes for assessment of student learning and for achievement of learning goals in academic and co-curricular offerings.
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> 2. The institution uses the information gained from assessment to improve student learning.
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> 3. The institution's processes and methodologies to assess student learning reflect good practice, including the substantial participation of faculty, instructional, and other relevant staff members.

The Standards of Practice

To fulfill the HLC expectations that UNC has effective assessment processes and that its methodologies reflect good practice, academic areas should document the following:

- a program mission statement and learning outcomes (PLOs) that differentiate the degrees, certificates, and concentrations offered by the program
- the alignment of the curriculum with the articulated PLOs
- the alignment of PLOs to institutional and course-level outcomes
- valid and reliable measures to assess the PLOs
- assessment of all PLOs within a reasonable timeframe which reflects the time necessary to complete the credential
- analysis of learning outcomes data to evaluate whether students are achieving learning goals
- collaboration to implement strategies for learning improvement predicated on the analysis of the assessment data
- evaluation of the impact of the implemented changes on student learning
- efforts to close the loop by using the assessment information to improve student learning

Examples of using assessment findings to improve student learning may include but are not limited to:

- adjusting or developing curricula to address observed learning deficiencies or weaknesses
- applying pedagogical strategies informed by the assessment data to engage students more effectively or activate learning
- designing research to investigate questions posed by assessment findings and to discover generalizable principles or practices to promote and improve student learning
- implementing technology and/or learning support tools to improve student learning outcomes and assessment processes
- engaging in program tuning to align curricula and/or learning outcome goals to external frameworks or workforce, environmental, and/or societal needs

Assessment Reporting Structure

The structure for assessment reporting operates in parallel with the program's accreditation or program review timelines. Accredited academic programs maintain their accreditation timeline while non-accredited programs use the five-year timeline established by the program review process. The Assessment Council will review the program's initial assessment plan in the first year and a brief progress report mid-cycle (year 3 for non-accredited programs), offering feedback and any needed support after each review. The cycle culminates in the inclusion of the program's assessment plan, assessment findings, documentation of the actions taken, and their impacts into the program review documentation for non-accredited academic programs or the accreditation review documentation for accredited academic programs. This reporting process is intended to provide the necessary documentation of and support for assessment processes to meet accreditation criteria while avoiding a burdensome annual reporting requirement for all programs.