PLANNING EFFECTIVE MEASURES

Regardless of whether you are assessing a Student Learning Outcome (SLO) or Administrative Outcome, the quality of the assessment depends on the quality of the measure.

The measure of your assessment helps the assessor quantify the sometimes-abstract concepts targeted in the outcome process. It is sometimes used synonymously with the instrument, which is the actual tool used to collect the data. The instrument can be a rubric, a satisfaction survey, a portfolio, or anything that allows for the reliable collection of data.

When measuring an SLO, the measure defined by the assessor usually includes the Ideal and Acceptable Targets, which are the thresholds that determine if the outcome was achieved. The assessor should set realistic, attainable goals that are simultaneously challenging. The spirit of formative assessment holds that improvement is the aspirational ideal of the process: it is not the intent of administration to penalize departments that do not hit their stated goals. Rather, a department that doesn’t make a goal is afforded a perfect opportunity to improve and meet a need of the university. An Administrative Outcome usually contains the threshold within the outcome itself, and the measure is primarily used to detail the instrument and data collected.

While indirect assessments can provide an insightful glimpse on the perception of your success, every outcome assessed should include a direct measure. Both of these types of measures are covered in other white papers.

Within the Shorter University assessment cycle, measures are submitted to the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research (OIER) at the same time as outcomes. However, within instructional departments, measures are not established at Program Review, and thus are not necessarily retained year over year through the entirety of a five-year cycle. Assessors are encouraged to use their best judgment in establishing a measure for the year, although considering prior-year measures and results is always recommended.

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