

# Academic Program Assessment Manual

---

PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES

The Office of Assessment & Academic Program Review  
UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO | DANE SMITH HALL 220  
2021 REVISION

## Contents

<b>Introduction: Overview of Assessment and this Manual</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Who We Are &amp; What We Do</b> .....	<b>2</b>
A Note on Accreditation .....	2
<b>Introduction to this Manual</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Contributing to General Education Assessment</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Artifact Selection</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Assessment Cycle</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Analysis and Reporting</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Developing an Academic Unit Assessment Plan</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Program Goals</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Student Learning Outcomes</b> .....	<b>8</b>
SLOs and External Accreditation.....	8
Guidelines for effective SLOs.....	8
Examples .....	9
UNM's Student Learning Goals.....	9
<b>Assessment Measures</b> .....	<b>10</b>
General Guidelines when developing measures .....	10
Examples .....	11
<b>Benchmarks and Sample Populations</b> .....	<b>12</b>
Benchmarks.....	12
Sample Populations.....	12
<b>Planning to Analyze and Communicate Assessment</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>Creating an Assessment Report</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>Follow Up on the Previous Year's Assessment</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>Assessment Results</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>Analysis and Use of Assessment Results</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>The (Optional) Program Level Assessment Maturity Rubric</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>The College/School/Branch Maturity Rubric</b> .....	<b>15</b>

## Introduction: Overview of Assessment and this Manual

### Who We Are & What We Do

In commitment to the academic success of our students, and in compliance with the Higher Learning Commission's (HLC) standards, the University of New Mexico established an assessment infrastructure that spans the college, school, and branch campus levels. This infrastructure includes:

- The Office of Assessment & Academic Program Review (OA). The OA supports all types of assessment at the University of New Mexico, monitors participation, and offers guidance where necessary to those working through the assessment processes. The OA philosophy is to assist units in creating meaningful and useful assessment processes that will help contribute to continuous improvement to curriculum, instruction, and student learning. The OA receives guidance and support from the following:
  - College Assessment Review Committees (CARC), or equivalent, to monitor, guide, and manage assessment activities and practices within colleges/schools/branches. These committees consist of faculty and staff representatives from degreed programs. They serve as assessment experts and liaisons with OA.
  - A Provost's Committee on Assessment (PCA). The PCA acts as the leading body of assessment stewards at UNM, meeting monthly to review and update assessment processes and procedures. Deans, Associate Deans of Curriculum & Instruction, Assessment Directors, Faculty appointees, and Assessment Coordinators, Provost Office representatives, and Student Affairs Directors make up the composition of this committee.

### A Note on Accreditation

The OA complies with the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) assessment and Academic Program Review guidelines by fostering continuous improvement and meaningful assessment practices. Among its principles for identifying an appropriately accredited institution, the HLC puts strong emphasis on effective academic programming. Within the HLC's [five criteria](#), criterion 4 focuses on the evaluation and improvement of academic programs, asserting that an accredited university “demonstrates a commitment to educational achievement and improvement through ongoing assessment of student learning.”

## Introduction to this Manual

The purpose of this manual is to help navigate the Academic and General Education assessment processes at UNM, and to assist in developing assessment processes that are useful, meaningful, and appropriate for each unit.

Each unit is responsible for their program's Academic and General Education assessment processes, which include the following:

- **For *General Education Assessment*:**
  - Selection of a sample of general education course sections to represent the unit in essential skill attainment.
  - Submission of student work to the OA for review for evidence of the five (5) essential skills.
- **For *Academic Unit Assessment*:**
  - **Academic Unit Assessment Plan/Report:** The OA has a fillable PDF plan/report template (also available in a Word.doc version for those who prefer that). While the *assessment plans* are updated every 3-5 years, a *report* is submitted every year. This document can be found here: <http://assessment.unm.edu/assessment-types/academic-degree/index1.html>
    - An **Assessment Plan** is a document that contains the program goals, student learning outcomes, and the proposed measures that will be used to perform assessment, as well as the plan to analyze the results from the academic unit. In order to address evolving curriculums and assessment processes, plans *are updated every 3-5 years*. Please find a video tutorial of how to complete the assessment plan section of the document at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D8jpb1iSRg&feature=youtu.be>
    - An **Assessment Report** is a document produced annually that contains the results of the previous academic year's assessment efforts, analysis of those results, and ideas for how the unit may implement changes based on those results. Please find a video tutorial of how to complete the assessment report section of the document at: <https://youtu.be/bkiefi4leuU>
  - A **Maturity Rubric/Narrative** is a document produced annually that includes an area for rating the program's/college's/school's/branch's assessment maturity and an area for a narrative response. This instrument is designed to promote reflection and dialogue around the assessment cycle and continuous improvement. Additionally, it allows the OA to contextualize assessment patterns at the institutional level. This document can be found here: <http://assessment.unm.edu/assessment-types/academic-degree/index1.html>

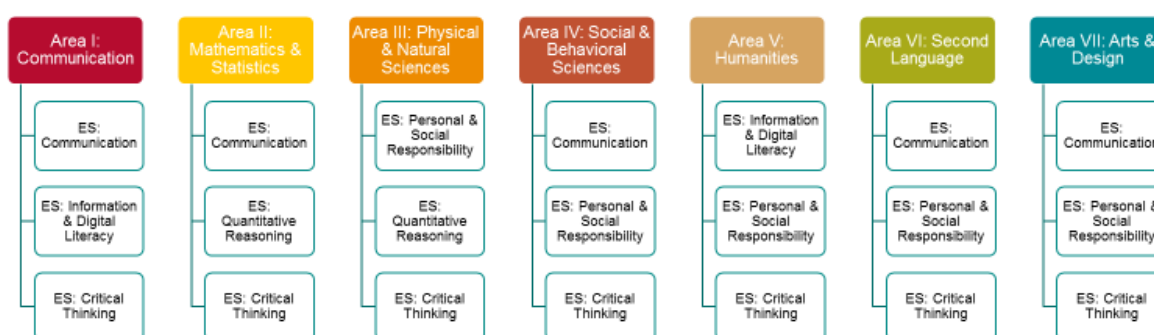
The OA collects and archives these documents through UNM's Digital Repository system, and information on how to submit is [available](#) online.

## Contributing to General Education Assessment

The UNM General Education (GE) program highlights five essential skills, which students are expected to develop following the successful completion of their GE Curriculum. Those five skills are:

1. Communication
2. Critical Thinking
3. Personal & Social Responsibility
4. Information & Digital Literacy
5. Quantitative Reasoning

During the statewide GE revision, NMHED aligned each essential skill to a UNM content area as follows:



General Education analysis and reporting are done **by the OA**, not by instructors, or college/school/branch representatives, which makes the process very different from the academic unit assessment cycle.

### Artifact Selection

Each college/school/branch is required to select 5-10 sections of GE courses they offer in the designated content area (dependent on the size of the college/school/branch). Unit leadership and assessment committees should choose which 10 course sections will submit data, inclusive of both 1000 and 2000 level courses.

**Instructors of each of the selected course sections provide a minimum of four student artifacts per class and submit them to the OA by the end of the fall or spring semester each academic year. To help with random sampling, artifacts collected could come from the first and last students on the class roster and two from the middle.**

Before submitting artifacts, selected instructors should review the essential skill rubrics for definitions and dimensions to align their course assignment with the essential skill. Rubrics can be found here: <http://assessment.unm.edu/assessment-types/gened-assessment/essential-skills.html>

Student artifacts should be submitted along with:

- Instructor Name
- College/School/Branch
- Course Number
- Student ID
- Assignment Type (written, oral, lab report, visual work or representation, etc.)
- Assignment Description (however the assignment was described to students)
- Essential Skill and Dimensions

Note: The form can take many different artifact types (Excel, Word, PDF, PowerPoint, etc.) with file sizes up to 25 mb. However, video recordings must be uploaded to YouTube/equivalent and shared via a URL or link.

## **Assessment Cycle**

UNM has a 3-year GE assessment cycle, that requires units who teach GE courses to collect data pertaining to one essential skill each year, mapping to their content area. Unlike academic unit assessment where student learning outcomes, measurement tools, analysis, and reporting are completed by instructors, general education assessment outcomes, measures, analysis, and reporting are completed by the OA staff. The sole responsibility of instructors in the General Education assessment process is to collect and submit student artifacts. These artifacts are submitted with a GE submission form found at:

<http://assessment.unm.edu/assessment-types/gened-assessment/deadlines.html>

Years one and three of the cycle assess all essential skills except for Critical Thinking, while year two focuses solely on the Critical Thinking essential skill. Please note that since each UNM content area has three essential skills mapped to it, in the first and third years of the assessment cycle, there is a choice between two essential skills. In the third year, units will provide student artifacts for the skill they did not submit for in year one.

Curriculum and Content Areas	NMHED General Education Essential Skills Assessment		
UNM Core Curriculum Areas	Year 1 (2019-2020)	Year 2 (2020-2021)	Year 3 (2021-2022)
Area I: Communication	Communication OR Information & Digital Literacy	Critical Thinking	Communication OR Information & Digital Literacy
Area II: Mathematics and Statistics	Communication OR Quantitative Reasoning	Critical Thinking	Communication OR Quantitative Reasoning
Area III: Physical and Natural Sciences	Personal & Social Responsibility OR Quantitative Reasoning	Critical Thinking	Personal & Social Responsibility OR Quantitative Reasoning
Area IV: Social and Behavioral Sciences	Communication OR Personal & Social Responsibility	Critical Thinking	Communication OR Personal & Social Responsibility
Area V: Humanities	Information & Digital Literacy OR Personal & Social Responsibility	Critical Thinking	Information & Digital Literacy OR Personal & Social Responsibility
Area VI: Second Language	Communication OR Personal & Social Responsibility	Critical Thinking	Communication OR Personal & Social Responsibility
Area VII: Arts & Design	Communication OR Personal & Social Responsibility	Critical Thinking	Communication OR Personal & Social Responsibility

## Analysis and Reporting

To reiterate, GE analysis and reporting are done **by the OA**, not by instructors, or college/school/branch representatives. Each year, the OA analyzes submitted student artifacts. Staff and hired graduate students undergo FERPA, rubric norming, and GE assessment training. The results are presented in an institutional report in aggregate. Additionally, each college/school/branch that submits GE student artifacts receives a customized report for their submissions to discuss curriculum and instruction implications.

For additional information or answers to the most frequently asked questions, please visit: <http://assessment.unm.edu/assessment-types/gened-assessment/index.html>

## Developing an Academic Unit Assessment Plan

Each UNM academic program is required to develop an assessment plan. It outlines practices, intentions, and processes for demonstrating program effectiveness. Programs are accountable for providing information in their assessment plan on the student learning outcomes (SLOs) associated with each degree they offer. Assessment plans are developed for a three-to-five-year span. This cycle assures a continuous re-evaluation of goals and allows programs to adapt to assessment findings and issues.

All UNM colleges/schools/branches are responsible for publishing program assessment goals and student learning outcomes for each academic program on the assessment page of their website.

### Program Goals

The first component of an academic program assessment plan is creating at least one program goal. Program goals are broad statements that describe the academic program's long-term objectives or directions. Goals provide the basis for decisions about the nature, scope, and relative priorities of various activities in a program. They help guide the program in attaining its overall mission and vision.

Program goals commonly articulate important overarching concepts of the discipline, rather than specific behavioral markers of a given curriculum or course (which will be the case for student learning outcomes, see below). For programs that offer more than one certificate or degree, they should consider developing more than one program goal to clearly distinguish between the certificates or degrees they offer.

Consider a few examples of program goals, note the language of "Students *will*", and the generality of these goals.

*"Students will develop a breadth and depth of expertise appropriate to their career goals in the languages, literatures, and cultures of the Luso-Hispanic world."*

*"Students will exhibit critical thinking skills to address diverse business challenges and opportunities."*

*"Students will find and participate in professional activities such as colloquia, conferences, and workshops."*

*"Possess practical and theoretical knowledge of computer science and software engineering sufficient to earn a living and contribute to the economic development of the region, state and nation."*



## Student Learning Outcomes

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) are specific statements that describe desired student learning behaviors. They articulate what will be measured, analyzed and communicated to the department in an assessment cycle. SLOs should be connected to the Academic Unit Program Goals. When creating SLOs, think of them as stepping-stones to achieving the broader Program Goals.

Behaviors defined in the SLOs can be measured at any point during a student's trajectory in earning a degree, in such activities as: classroom assignments, capstone projects, exit exams/interviews, theses and dissertations, etc.

All academic programs are required to provide three (or more) SLOs. In accordance with the HLC's Criteria for Accreditation, student learning outcomes should be different for each undergraduate and graduate degree/certificate program (*HLC Criteria 3.B.2*). For instance, a program may develop three SLOs for its certificate track and two separate SLOs designated for its bachelor's degree, or a graduate program may develop two SLOs for the master's track and two different SLOs for the doctorate degree.

### SLOs and External Accreditation

If the program is accredited by a professional agency, the OA recommends taking the criteria and/or outcomes delineated in the accreditation/reaccreditation processes into close account when forming SLOs. Often, these outcomes come with ready-made tools for measuring the behaviors in question, such as standardized exams or other professionally recognized measures, and should be closely aligned already with program goals.

### Guidelines for effective SLOs

- **A given SLO should address a single measurable outcome.**
- **SLOs should be stated simply.** Avoid joining, listing, or adding elements in one outcome statement.
- **Focus on no more than three to five SLOs** over the next three years (unless required by an accrediting body).
- **SLO statements should be unique to the assessment purpose.** Some SLOs can be generic in nature (ex. Students will effectively communicate in a written manner) while others should be more contextualized to the program (ex. Students contextualize primary texts or data within a broader knowledge of Iberian, Latin American or Southwest Hispanic literature).
- Outcomes **clarify the knowledge and/or skills that instructors want students to learn.** By using active verbs that yield measurable behavior or activity, SLOs focus on *how* students can demonstrate their learning rather than what faculty will deliver/teach. **"Students can..."** or **"Students will..."** are simple wording to start each learning outcome.
- When developing SLOs, the **language/terms used should be aligned** with the instruction of the content.

The OA recommends considering *Bloom's Taxonomy Action Verbs* when formulating the language for SLOs. This resource provides a reliable and valuable place to assure that behaviors or actions described in SLOs are measurable. It also differentiates between lower and higher ordered thinking, making it easier to align outcomes with the student population (graduate vs. undergraduate) and the highest level of learning expected of the students.

## Examples

Consider these example SLOs, note the specificity of their language the verbs being used:

*"Students can describe the major theoretical approaches used by at least two social science disciplines."*

*"Students can analyze the quality of the argumentation provided in support of a position."*

*"Students can contextualize primary texts or data within a broad knowledge of Iberian, Latin American or Southwest Hispanic literature and culture or Hispanic language and linguistics."*

*"Students will intervene and stabilize patients while in transport to an advanced care facility."*

## UNM's Student Learning Goals

SLO's need to align with the University of New Mexico learning goals. These learning goals are defined by three key areas: (1) Knowledge, (2) Skills, and (3) Responsibility, defined in the figure below (and also available at [assessment.unm.edu](http://assessment.unm.edu)).

University of New Mexico students will develop the following aptitudes and habits of mind in the course of their general and major study at UNM:

*KNOWLEDGE of human cultures and the natural world, gained through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages and the arts.*

*SKILLS, both intellectual and applied, demonstrated in written and oral communication, inquiry and analysis, critical and creative thinking, quantitative literacy, information literacy, performance, teamwork and problem solving.*

*RESPONSIBILITY, both personal and social, that will be manifested in civic knowledge and engagement, multicultural knowledge and competence, ethical reasoning and action, and foundations and skills for lifelong learning.*

## Assessment Measures

Assessment measures are tools used to collect data throughout yearly assessment cycles. As noted in the previous section, SLOs must contain measurable behavior. Clear and specific assessment measures are highly conducive to facilitating a streamlined assessment process. The measurability of the SLO is reasserted by defining and explaining assessment measures in exact detail.

SLOs may share the same measures: e.g. an SLO that measures communication and another SLO that measures research skills, may both garner data from the same student assignment.

### General Guidelines when developing measures

- **Determine if there are already resources available for the collection of data for a specific SLO.** Does the data already exist or is a new data collection process required?
- **Capstone projects, senior projects, class assignments such as essays, designated exam questions, and observations of presentations** are standard assessment measures. They provide students an opportunity to demonstrate the ability of absorbing, applying, and integrating skills, academic experiences, and knowledge.
- **When possible, use methods and techniques that are already in use for accreditation.** This is especially advised if SLOs come from outcomes defined in accreditation processes.
- **Match the assessment method to the SLO.** Successful and useful assessment is achieved when the assessment method is aligned with the outcome being assessed. Ask the questions, “Will this measure provide the student behavioral information I am looking for?” and “Will I collect adequate information/data that will inform continuous improvement for curriculum, instruction and/or student success?”

**NOTE: Course grades and GPA are not an effective measure of student learning outcome attainment.** They do not highlight specific learning as indicated in SLOs unless the course has only one project and the project grade is the same as the course grade. It is difficult to indicate what areas of curriculum students are struggling with or are excelling in with an overall grade. It is also difficult to determine where to focus instruction if specific learning measures are not measured and only an overarching grade is obtained.

### Commonly Used Assessment Measures

Once SLOs are aligned with the content of courses, much of the potential assessment measures can be found in assignments and other student work already collected for class(es). However, new measures are also acceptable and appropriate. Here are a few frequent choices:

- *Capstone experience*—reflected in student products such as projects, papers, theses, dissertations, presentations, performances, portfolios or research evaluated by faculty or external review teams)
- *Exams*—course examinations, comprehensive exams, certification or licensure exams, professional exams, or locally developed tests
- *Clinical, Internship or Practicum*—evaluations of specific student knowledge or skills from internship supervisors or faculty overseers based on stated program objectives and structured observation of student performance
- *Portfolios*—reviewed by program faculty, outside faculty, professionals, visiting scholars or industry boards
- *Student Assignments*—student projects, papers, reflections, presentations, exhibits, portfolios, auditions, performances, etc.
- *Student publications/research*

## Examples

Consider a few examples of SLOs and their accompanying measures:

SLO	Possible Measures
<i>“Students contextualize primary texts or data within a broad knowledge of Iberian, Latin American or Southwest Hispanic literature and culture or Hispanic language and linguistics.”</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A rubric that concerns specific performance indicators on an assigned essay in a required course for the degree; the essay asks students to argue a certain point that requires the kind of “broad knowledge” referenced in the SLO.</li> <li>• Collecting the average score of a shared exam given in a required course for the degree; the exam asks students questions meant to measure their knowledge of Latin American or Southwest Hispanic literature.</li> </ul>
<i>“Students engage in scholarly or professional communities through attendance at or leadership in workshops, talks, or other events related to their area of study.”</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tracking students in a program who attend workshops throughout a semester/school-year/career by making sign-in sheets.</li> </ul>
<i>“Students will intervene and stabilize patients while in transport to an advanced care facility.”</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collecting observations of instructors or resident technicians during required practicums.</li> <li>• Collecting the results of quizzes meant to inquire on a student’s knowledge of the proper protocol.</li> </ul>

## **Benchmarks and Sample Populations**

Before beginning the data collection stage, benchmarks and sample populations for the outcome(s) in question should be identified/defined.

### **Benchmarks**

Benchmarks are a performance standard of student success: not an evaluation of teaching, curriculum, or a program's performance. When defining a benchmark, consider external information such as disciplinary and professional standards, student populations and the expectations of them, and course level. To define benchmarks, review student evidence from the assessment tool. Looking at various samples of student work can inform the standard of student success as it pertains to a particular outcome.

Previous assessment results can be used to evaluate a benchmark, where it is currently in comparison to the students' performance. These pieces of evidence will help: (1) define strategies/short-term targets to assist students in achieving the long-term benchmark and/or (2) decide if the benchmark should be revised altogether.

### **Sample Populations**

Decide whether the program's assessment will include evidence from all students in the program or a sample – by student amount, by course section, by milestone or other. When possible, it is best to study the entire population of students in the program. However, in larger programs it may be more pragmatic to study a sample instead.

If sampling is the better fit for the program, consider sampling based on student demographics (student level, gender, ethnicity), course sections (x number of students from each one), milestone (e.g., only who students who have reached their thesis proposal), or some other criteria. When deciding on sample criteria, remember to gather the most representative data from the population for the SLO in question.

## **Planning to Analyze and Communicate Assessment**

Communicating expectations, data collection, and analysis to all stakeholders and program staff/employees is a very important element to support continuous improvement in the unit. How will assessment process/results communicated each year (faculty meetings, retreats, particular workshops, email, etc)? Where will results be communicated in a manner that leads to discussion about continuous improvement and changes to sticking points in the program (website, curriculum and assessment committees, advisory groups, etc.)?

## **Creating an Assessment Report**

This chapter provides guidelines for writing an assessment report that aligns with the assessment plan in the OA template. The OA highly recommends that the data analysis/interpretation, report writing, and results use be a collaborative effort within academic units. Assessment reports are submitted on an annual basis to the OA via college/school/branch internal reporting structures. Programs can utilize the report process to reflect on results of the data collected via the assessment plan. Ideally, results will inform continuous improvement within student learning, curriculum & instruction, and programmatic services.

### **Follow Up on the Previous Year's Assessment**

In the first section of the report, reflect on how changes were implemented - or not - to programming or to assessment process, based on the results of the previous year's assessment for the academic unit.

### **Assessment Results**

Using the grid in the assessment report template, provide the SLOs from the assessment plan, results for each SLO, and describe the sampled student population (the students and classes assessed). Use the text space to indicate which SLO benchmarks were met/not met and elaborate on the factors that contributed to this.

### **Analysis and Use of Assessment Results**

In this section, questions will guide an analysis of the assessment results. Along with reporting who participated in the assessment processes, the report should include information about the interpretation of the data collected throughout the cycle. This interpretation can cover various areas, such as student population, curricular impacts, strengths and weaknesses of programming, assessment practices, instructional strategies, etc. The goal of the data analysis is to provide supporting evidence for recommendations, either for potential changes or to maintain current programming and assessment processes.

The next question within the report template asks for a description of those recommendations for program and/or assessment changes. Detail the plan to communicate assessment results and recommendations in a meaningful way. For example, perhaps results will be marketed to parents, potential students, etc. and/or communicated within the department to staff and faculty.

## **The (Optional) Program Level Assessment Maturity Rubric**

As a part of the academic unit assessment process and in addition to the report and plan requirements, each program can complete a self-assessment of their “assessment maturity” using a Maturity Rubric. Broken down into four dimensions (student learning objectives; program assessment measures/methods; assessment results; and analysis & interpretation) and using a 0-3 rating scale (where 0 is No Evidence and 3 is Exemplary Evidence), this rubric is meant to provide programs an opportunity to reflect on the strengths and areas for improvement within their program level assessment processes. As such, these rubrics are collected only by the CARCS at the college/school/branch level (not by the OA) and they are entirely optional based on the internal reporting structure of each college/school/branch.

## **The College/School/Branch Maturity Rubric**

The annual Maturity Rubric/Narrative is the final assessment task. This is to be completed by the College/School/Branch level Assessment Coordinator or CARC Chair and is submitted to the Office of Assessment repository.

This assessment document includes specialized knowledge of the entire college/school/branch assessment process and maturity of it. Overall ratings should be provided for:

- Student Learning Outcomes
- Program Assessment Methods (Measures/Instruments)
- Assessment Results
- Analysis and Interpretation

The narrative portion provides an opportunity for reflection and description/rationale for the reported ratings in the maturity rubric. It is also a vehicle to define needs and convey desired assessment support from the OA. Additionally, the narrative is used in the annual Institutional State of Assessment Report and HLC Report and is dispersed to the PCA and university leadership.