

ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION	ACAF Academic Affairs
POLICY NUMBER	ACAF 3.00
POLICY TITLE	Assessment of Student Learning
SCOPE OF POLICY	USC Columbia and Palmetto College
DATE OF REVISION	April 12, 2024
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE	Office of the Provost

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to clarify the processes and responsibilities for the assessment of student learning within educational programs at the University of South Carolina. The assessment of student learning is a quality assurance process aimed at continuous improvement. As such, it is required by the institution’s regional accrediting body, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC).

DEFINITIONS

Combination Degree: A degree where the same institution awards more than one degree from an overlapping course of study.

Educational Programs: Educational programs are certificates, undergraduate and graduate degrees by major and the undergraduate general education curriculum known as the Carolina Core, offered by the institution.

Joint Degree: A joint academic award where students study at two or more institutions and are awarded a single program completion credential bearing the names, seals and signatures of each participating institution.

Dual Degree: An academic award where students study at two or more institutions, and each institution awards a distinct program completion credential bearing only its own name, seal, and signature.

Learning Outcomes: Learning outcomes are statements that describe, in measurable terms, the knowledge, skills, values, and/or abilities that students are expected to demonstrate upon completion of the educational program. Learning outcomes should clearly support the overarching goals of the educational program.

Learning Outcomes Assessment: Learning outcomes assessment is an on-going process aimed at understanding and improving student learning. This process includes establishing outcomes for student learning, setting expectations for those outcomes, systematically gathering, analyzing and interpreting evidence of how well student performance matches those expectations, and most importantly, using the resulting information to improve performance.

POLICY STATEMENT

The University of South Carolina requires that each educational program develop student learning outcomes and establish ways to evaluate students’ performance on those outcomes. By measuring

performance against learning outcomes, examining the results, faculty can discern what strategies or techniques are working well and what needs to be changed or modified. The University's assessment activities are mandated by its regional accrediting body, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) as well as, in some fields, by discipline-specific accrediting agencies.

A. Policy Oversight

The Provost is responsible for ensuring that the learning outcomes for all educational programs are assessed. The responsibility for learning outcomes assessment is primarily borne by faculty because faculty are the experts in their disciplines and know best how to evaluate student mastery of program learning outcomes.

The Office of Institutional Research, Assessment and Analytics (OIRAA) is responsible for supporting good assessment practices and documenting assessment processes for institutional external reporting needs. OIRAA oversees the assessment of learning outcomes for all educational programs to ensure that quality assurance procedures are built into the process at the institutional level. In other words, OIRAA ensures that the institution can identify expected outcomes for all its educational programs, assess the extent to which it achieves those outcomes, and provide evidence of seeking improvement based on the analysis of the results of student learning.

It is critical that each educational program assess its student learning outcomes and report assessment results as outlined in this policy. Exceptions to this policy include combination degree programs, certificates embedded in existing educational programs, or for online versions of traditional programs. A combination degree program does not need a separate assessment plan because its learning outcomes are assessed at the individual program level. The same is true for certificates embedded within an existing educational program. Lastly, since an online version of a traditional program share the same learning outcomes, only one assessment report covering both delivery modes is required.

A program is non-compliant if it fails to develop an assessment plan, submit an assessment report, or revise and resubmit an unacceptable report returned by OIRAA by the deadline. If a program is non-compliant, OIRAA notifies both the department or program chair and the dean of the relevant school or college. OIRAA and the relevant administrators then develop a mutually satisfactory timetable for reporting of an acceptable program assessment. If a satisfactory resolution cannot be achieved among the parties, OIRAA will ask the Office of the Provost to intervene.

B. Policy Implementation

Faculty responsible for educational programs design and execute program assessment. They report results periodically and make changes that improve programs in areas including but not limited to assessment, curriculum design processes, and delivery of the educational program and services. Each unit uses a variety of measures to determine the extent to which its outcomes are achieved. OIRAA facilitates a systematic assessment process that directs and

guides decision-making, strategic planning, program evaluation, and improvement for all educational programs.

1. General Education (Carolina Core) Assessment

The general education curriculum for all undergraduate students is expressed in the university's [Carolina Core](#). The assessment of the Carolina Core is collectively managed by faculty, the Office of the Provost, and OIRAA. Visit OIRAA's [Carolina Core Assessment Resources](#) homepage for detailed information on assessing the learning outcomes of the Carolina Core.

Results of the assessment of general education learning outcomes are reported by OIRAA to the Office of the Provost. The Office of the Provost distributes the results to the department chairs and deans. Department chairs with courses in general education component areas are responsible for working with the relevant faculty in the department to review the assessment results and make recommendations for improving student learning based on the results of the assessment. Recommendations from the departments are sent to the Carolina Core Approvals committee and then to the Faculty Senate's Committee on Curricula and Courses to determine how the assessment results can be leveraged for improvements to the general education curriculum.

2. Academic Program Assessment

Faculty supporting educational programs must assess student learning in those programs. Programs are asked to establish student learning outcomes and evaluate the performance of their students against those outcomes. Department chairs are responsible for working with the relevant faculty in the department to review the assessment results and make recommendations for improving student learning based on the results of the assessment. Results of the assessment of the learning outcomes are reported to OIRAA and then to the Office of the Provost.

For additional information see OIRAA's [Academic Program Assessment homepage](#).

3. Interpretation

Questions about the interpretation of this policy should be directed to the Office of Institutional Research Assessment and Analytics (OIRAA); in ambiguous, controversial or unprecedented cases, OIRAA will consult with the academic official for the unit or with the Provost before rendering an opinion.

RELATED POLICIES

[ACAF 2.00 Creation and Revision of Academic Programs](#)

[ACAF 3.50 Academic Bulletins and Planning Calendar](#)

[SACS Commission on Colleges, Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement, 2012 Edition, Comprehensive Standards 3.3.1.1 and 3.5.1](#)

HISTORY OF REVISIONS

DATE OF REVISION	REASON FOR REVISION
January 26, 2017	New policy approval
April 12, 2024	Policy reformatted and updated to reflect current procedures