

USC's Draft Response to Standard 3.3.1.1

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Standard: 3.3.1 The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results in each of the following areas (Institutional Effectiveness):

3.3.1.1 educational programs, to include student learning outcomes.

The well-established culture of assessment at the University of South Carolina underscores our dedication and commitment to enhancing student learning. Talented faculty and staff campus-wide have worked together to develop student learning outcomes and expected outcomes for all educational programs and administrative and educational support services. All outcomes support and advance the broader goals and the mission of the University. Student learning outcomes are shared with our stakeholders through quality enhancement plans called [Blueprints for Academic Excellence](#), [assessment documents](#), [undergraduate](#) and [graduate](#) bulletins, and through [course syllabi](#). Expected outcomes for administrative and educational support services are presented in quality enhancement plans called [Blueprints for Service Excellence](#). Each academic and administrative and educational support unit uses a variety of measures to determine the extent to which these outcomes are achieved. Results of such systematic assessment direct and guide decision making, strategic planning, program evaluation and improvement across the University.

All academic programs engage in the University's annual assessment process. Every spring, academic deans submit an [executive summary](#) and the assessment documents (i.e., assessment plans and reports) from the degree-granting programs within their respective college to the Office of the Provost. The executive summary highlights the major results and use of results of their college's program assessment, and demonstrates how assessment activities have budgetary effects. Assessment plans describe in detail how the program will assess students' performance during the upcoming academic year. An assessment plan includes a program's mission statement and goals, which describe the general aims of the program, and hence dictate intended learning outcomes for students or graduates of the program. As a group, faculty within each degree-granting program are required to identify and articulate at least three measurable learning outcomes to examine during the upcoming academic year. It is often the case that faculty consider several (more than 3) learning outcomes to be very important as they describe the skills, knowledge, and/or attitudes the faculty believe all students should possess upon graduation from a particular program. With numerous, substantial learning outcomes, faculty within some programs decide to assess sets of outcomes on a rotating cycle, while others prefer to assess all learning outcomes annually. Given that the University of South Carolina is a comprehensive research university with degree programs at the bachelors, masters, and doctoral levels, faculty take care in developing learning outcomes that are unique and more advanced for higher degree-level programs.

Within the assessment plan, faculty must also specify where in the curriculum students will be exposed to the necessary materials which allow them to meet the outcomes (e.g., specific courses or co-curricular activities such as internships). Faculty are encouraged to link curriculum to

specific learning outcomes. Another required component of the assessment plan relates to measures and criteria. Faculty must describe the relevant direct and indirect measures that will be used to collect data for the purpose of measuring achievement of the established outcomes. Multiple measures must be utilized, one of which must be a direct measure of student performance. Accompanying the description of each measure, the criteria statement defines an acceptable level of performance. Faculty are encouraged to select measures and set criteria so that the data collected will be helpful in pinpointing the strengths and weaknesses in the program and for use in ongoing decisions about program improvement. To further ensure that each degree-granting program is assessing student learning at the program level, faculty are required to include their methods for each measure. The methods should describe in detail how the assessment will be performed. More specifically, the methods specify who is responsible for conducting the assessment and who is responsible for collecting, aggregating, analyzing, and disseminating the results to faculty and staff as appropriate. Details also are required to explain how and when decision makers meet to discuss students' overall strengths and weaknesses, and to suggest and implement changes. When all the assessment procedures have been completed, faculty then write the assessment report. Each assessment report presents data pertaining to the program's strengths and weaknesses garnered from the previous year's assessment activities, and delineates how the findings will be used to improve the program and ultimately student learning.

The University of South Carolina expects faculty of all ranks to be involved in the process of assessing student learning. As part of their orientation, new faculty members attend sessions where they learn about assessment of student learning at USC. Engaging programs and convenient resources on assessment are also available for novice to veteran faculty (including graduate teaching assistants) and staff through the [Center of Teaching Excellence](#) and the [Office of Institutional Assessment and Compliance](#). With such a knowledgeable community of faculty and staff, everyone can contribute and be a part of the assessment process.

Each college and department has developed its own approach to best manage assessment. For instance, some colleges have created assessment committees, comprised of at least one representative from each department within the college. Committee members coordinate assessment activities with faculty within their respective departments. Moreover, members of these committees evaluate each other's departmental assessment plans and reports, offering feedback and advice as needed. In other colleges and departments, often those smaller in size, all faculty members act as assessment committee members. Regardless of the approach, every college has an appointed assessment coordinator, typically a tenured faculty member or an assistant dean. This structure allows communication to easily flow to each college from the Office of Institutional Assessment and Compliance (IAC).

A designated faculty member, typically the assessment coordinator, submits his or her program's assessment report and plan electronically through Assessment Plan Composer. Assessment Plan Composer is an online system that allows faculty to develop and submit assessment documents in the desired format. As previously mentioned, when all degree-granting programs within a college have completed their assessment documents, the college's dean notifies the Office of the Provost and the Office of Institutional Assessment and Compliance (IAC). The IAC then reviews and evaluates the assessment documents with an established rubric. Assessment involves continuous improvement, and so the feedback from the scored rubrics help in

demonstrating how each program can improve upon their assessment activities and procedures. The IAC makes sure to meet with each assessment coordinator in order to return the scored rubrics and to discuss the quality of assessment within his or her college. The assessment coordinator distributes the rubrics appropriately. Sometimes, it is the case that a program's assessment document needs to be revised to ensure the program has a realistic, feasible strategy for assessing student learning. In these cases, the IAC and/or the assessment coordinator meets with the responsible faculty to help them improve the assessment plan. The IAC is available to assist and advise all faculty at any time during the assessment process. Assessment documents are available on the [Assessment Plan Composer](#) web site.

The University of South Carolina also completes comprehensive self-assessments as part of state-required accountability and reporting mandates. Specifically, the University uses the [Baldrige Education Criteria for Performance Excellence](#) to assess student learning and to measure achievement of our University's strategic goals and initiatives. In this way, outcomes relating to our general education assessment, the success of our academic support services, and our graduation and retention rates, among numerous others can be reviewed and monitored. Every year, the University submits a [Baldrige report](#) to the South Carolina State Budget and Control Board. Additionally, the University submits an [Institutional Effectiveness report](#) to the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education, as mandated by Act 629. Each year, this report summarizes academic assessment outcomes and plans for improvement for departments on a rotating cycle, programs eligible for accreditation and programs accredited, student involvement in sponsored research, and the results of professional examinations. Several additional topics are addressed on a rotating cycle. These topics include the assessment of our academic advising, library resources, general education, and student development, along with an assessment of the success of our transfer students and of the results from our alumni/placement surveys.

Supporting Documentation

- Blueprints for Academic Excellence
- Assessment Documents (APC)
- Undergraduate Bulletin
- Graduate Bulletin
- Course Syllabi
- Blueprints for Service Excellence
- Academic Deans' Executive Summaries
- Office of Institutional Assessment and Compliance
- Assessment Document Instructions
- Center for Teaching Excellence
- Assessment Rubric
- Mission Statement
- Institutional Effectiveness Report
- Baldrige Education Criteria for Performance Excellence
- Baldrige Report