

## 8.2.a

### Student Outcomes: Educational Programs

The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of seeking improvement based on analysis of the results in the areas below:

- a. student learning outcomes for each of its educational programs

### Judgment

Compliant  Non-Compliant  Not Applicable

### Narrative

The University of South Carolina has a history of commitment to student learning and the student experience. All student learning outcomes support and advance the broader goals and the mission of the University. Over the last five years, the University of South Carolina has made changes to our assessment processes for educational programs in order to better serve our students, faculty and to make assessment results more meaningful for academic programs. This narrative will be used to identify the progress the university has made with respect to standard 8.2.a since our last review in 2016.

Regardless of the mode of delivery (face-to-face, hybrid, or online) or location (Columbia, the regional Palmetto College campuses, or off-campus sites) all academic programs are included in the program assessment process. The university was approved by SACSCOC to offer fully online degree programs on 12/5/2003.

### Identifying Student Learning Outcomes

The responsibility for identifying student learning outcomes for educational programs is primarily borne by program faculty, experts in their disciplines who understand what knowledge, skills and competencies are valued by professionals their specialty areas. In 2016, the Office of Institutional Research, Assessment and Analytics (OIRAA), in collaboration with the College of Arts and Sciences, formalized use of the [SMART learning outcomes model](#) by including it in the review of program learning outcomes for approximately 300 educational programs. This review focused on whether existing program learning outcomes were able to be assessed using the methods proposed by the academic program. While programs were not obligated to change their learning outcomes based on OIRAA's review, the feedback was useful for many programs and resulted in program administrators paying more careful attention to a) the nature of their outcomes; b) whether the existing program curricula supported those outcomes; and c) in some cases, re-aligning learning outcomes to better fit student learning experiences.

The University of South Carolina understands the importance of making external stakeholders and prospective students aware of what students will learn in each of its academic programs. The University publishes the learning outcomes for all educational programs in its academic bulletins ([Columbia](#) | [Lancaster](#) | [Salkehatchie](#) | [Sumter](#) | [Union](#)). Because each academic program is encouraged to regularly review and rethink learning outcomes, it is imperative that the most current versions of learning outcomes are reflected in the online academic bulletins; bulletin updates are governed by [ACAF 3.50 Academic Bulletins and Planning Calendar](#).

Over the last five years, as the Office of the Registrar has transitioned to a new online bulletin software system, the university has improved collaboration among OIRAA, the Office of Academic Programs and the Office of the Registrar to [enable more frequent updates](#) to learning outcomes in the bulletins. Student learning outcomes are also shared with stakeholders through the university's [Blueprints for Academic Excellence](#).

### Assessing Student Learning Outcomes

All academic programs on the Columbia and regional Palmetto College campuses engage in the University's annual assessment process. An effective assessment process--ongoing and aimed at understanding and improving student learning--involves making student learning expectations explicit and public; setting appropriate criteria and high standards for learning quality; systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well performance matches those expectations and standards; and using the resulting information to document, explain, and improve performance. With this in mind, it was determined that programs needed more than one academic year order to effectively carry out the work of assessing student learning. In the summer of 2017, the University of South Carolina adopted a new two-year assessment reporting schedule within which colleges are allowed six terms to collect assessment results and report on their use of assessment results to improve programs. Four assessment schedules, referred to as assessment "Groups," were developed by the Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School; colleges could select among four schedules for degree program assessment reporting. The four schedules require each degree program to complete and report on all steps of the

assessment process for each of its learning outcomes twice in a five-year period. The first completion of all assessment stages (years 1-2) are referred to as Cycle 1 with years 3-4, comprising Cycle 2. Regardless of the schedule selected, all programs began Cycle 1 in the Fall of 2017; alternating end dates for assessment reporting began in the Fall of 2018. To assist programs in meeting the new reporting deadlines, OIRAA publishes a [calendar of report due dates](#) and provides [templates and other assessment resources](#) through the OIRAA website.

In order to accommodate the new two-year reporting requirement, the university modified its home-grown, online assessment reporting system, [Assessment Plan Composer \(APC\)](#). APC acts as a repository for assessment activities carried out by degree programs. APC employs a static template for programs to use for reporting assessment activities and has been extremely useful to the degree program assessment process because it serves as a single site accessible by all colleges for use in the assessment documentation process. The uniformity results in reports that remain comparable across degree programs. Another key benefit of Assessment Plan Composer (APC) is that it offers various levels of access to university administrators; this helps OIRAA administrators manage and track the progress colleges are making toward completing assessment reports. APC requires a login; please login with username **XXXX** and password **XXXXXX**. A [Quick-Start Guide to APC](#) has been created for this review.

To ensure data integrity and appropriate responses by program administrators to student performance on learning outcomes, quality assurance procedures are built into the degree program assessment process at the institutional level. OIRAA reviews all assessment report components (Mission, Goals, Curriculum, Learning Outcomes, Assessment Measures and Criteria, Methods, Results and Uses of Results) for each degree and certificate offered by the Columbia and two-year regional Palmetto College campuses. OIRAA promotes a culture of continuous improvement of student learning and assessment by providing feedback regarding the strengths and weaknesses of each assessment report to report writers. This feedback is provided via an "Assessment Report Feedback Form" in APC. This form was revised in 2017 and in 2019 to increase efficiency and improve communication about strategies programs can employ to improve their assessment activities. Additionally, the Assessment Feedback Form is used objectively by OIRAA to ascertain the quality of the assessment reports submitted by academic programs; this information is helpful in OIRAA's design and delivery of assessment training and consulting activities. To that end, OIRAA assessment staff have consulted with over 100 faculty and program administrators and assisted in the development of numerous assessment reports. In the spring of 2019, a series of assessment report work groups were held for the College of Arts and Sciences; in these sessions, assessment resources and training on all elements of the assessment of student learning, including navigating APC assessment reporting system, were provided. In the fall of 2019, the Assistant Director of Assessment [delivered a session](#) in the university's Center for Teaching Excellence on [using assessment results to improve programs](#). Additionally, OIRAA has recently updated [its website](#) to provide another resource for all interested and involved in assessment. The goal of this website is to equip faculty with the tools they need to conduct quality assessment of student learning.

A significant step in the university's progress toward establishing a culture of assessment was achieved in 2019 in the form of a [Business Process Document \(BPD\)](#) for degree program assessment. The Business Process Document outlines the university's approach to degree program assessment and serves as a guide for faculty and staff with interests in and responsibilities for assessment of educational programs. The document assists those at the university new to assessment in understanding the importance of assessing student learning, how to draft an assessment report, the roles and responsibilities for those engaged with assessment and the penalties for programs that fail to comply with the university's assessment policy, [ACAF 3.00 Assessment of Student Learning](#). The Business Process Document was not developed to be punitive in nature for programs, but was instead created as an initiative to promote the benefits of and need for greater participation in assessment by increasing transparency about assessment process while also establishing a university-wide standard for effective assessment of student learning.

### **Providing Evidence of Seeking Improvement**

Each academic unit uses a variety of measures to determine the extent to which program learning outcomes are achieved. The University of South Carolina employs a systematic assessment process that directs and guides decision making, strategic planning, program evaluation and improvement across the University. In other words, programs are expected to not only *participate* in assessment and report results periodically, but also to *actively engage* by continuously improving educational programs in areas including, but not limited to: assessment, curriculum design, and delivery of educational programs.

Documentation of the university's commitment to assessment as an activity that drives program improvement is evidenced by practices requiring programs to complete both a "Results" and "Use of Results" section are part of the assessment report. In the "Results" section, programs indicate whether or not targeted measures for student performance were met; the "Use of Results" section describes the program's response to the assessment results. The "Use of Results" section of the assessment report is drafted as a result of implementing the stages of analysis, and the section shares assessment results and active engagement in program oversight. Program administrators are expected to meet with program faculty and external advisory groups to discuss assessment results, determine what impact(s) the assessment results have on student learning outcomes, and recommend needed changes to courses or curriculum. The University of South Carolina encourages programs to take detailed notes during these meetings as documentation of actions planned in response to assessment results. A [template](#) for capturing future program actions is available for use from OIRAA.

Assessment staff in OIRAA carefully review the contents of both the "Results" and "Use of Results" sections of each assessment report to gauge whether programs met their intended performance targets and subsequently performed any actions toward program improvement as a result of assessment. In cases where programs do not address the use of

assessment results to improve the program, OIRAA uses the aforementioned assessment report review process to prompt the program to comment on its use of assessment results. In this case, a comment would be added to the "Assessment Feedback Form" in the "Use of Results" section and the report and feedback would be sent back to the program for revisions. The assessment report will not be approved until the necessary revisions to "Use of Results" section is made. Documentation of this requirement is evidenced in the report and associated feedback forms contained in Assessment Plan Composer.

During an initial audit of over 300 assessment reports in 2017, we discovered that almost one half of academic programs had difficulty managing and responding to assessment results and using results to improve educational programs. In response, the Assistant Director of Assessment delivered two 2019 workshops specifically dedicated to [collecting and using results for program improvement](#) and [closing the assessment loop](#).

Institutional progress toward ensuring student learning for all academic programs would not be possible without talented faculty and staff across the University who working together to enhance and modify the university's approach to student learning assessment. Oversight of assessment of student learning outcomes is directed by the Office of the Provost. The Office of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Analytics coordinates assessment of student learning for academic programs under the direction of the Director of Institutional Effectiveness and SACSCOC Liaison. The Assistant Director of Assessment in the Office of Institutional Research, Assessment and Analytics serves as co-chair of the University's Assessment Advisory Committee (AAC).

The Assessment Advisory Committee (AAC) functions as a learning community of educators and is comprised of [representatives](#) from each college and school, along with the Associate Vice President for Planning, Assessment and Innovation Council (PAIC) in Student Affairs/Academic Support. As expressed in the [Assessment Advisory Committee's Charge](#), the committee serves as a channel of communication among faculty and OIRAA. AAC members make recommendations regarding assessment-related policies and assist faculty within their respective college in the development and implementation of meaningful assessment initiatives.

In the spring of 2020, an ad-hoc committee comprised of AAC members made a significant recommendation to change how the university reports how assessment results have been used to improve student learning. In previous years, academic deans were asked to submit an executive summary (i.e., assessment plans and reports) from the degree-granting programs within their respective college to OIRAA that would highlight the major results of program assessment, and the budgetary effects of assessment activities. However, over time, it became difficult to standardize across the various colleges and thus evaluate what programs were to include in the executive summary. Typically, the executive summary was simply a repeat of the items previously submitted in assessment reports. Additionally, the link to the budgetary implications specifically for assessment on the overall college's budget was nebulous. Most importantly, the AAC believed it was more beneficial for the institution to tackle a more pressing concern-- how to address programs that propose little or no changes to their programs as a result of assessment activities. To spur conversation and action in this area, the AAC proposed a survey of assessment report writers to be launched in the fall of 2020, in lieu of the executive summary, that addresses the inertia experienced by some programs with regard to making programmatic changes in response to assessment results. The table below highlights only a few examples among many at our university, where assessment results have fostered improvements to educational programs.

College	Program	Learning Outcome	Results that prompted change	Program Change
College of Pharmacy	Pharm.D.	<b>Problem solving</b> - The graduate is able to identify problems; explore and prioritize potential strategies; and design, implement, and evaluate a viable solution.	As noted in the care plan rubric reports for 760 and 761 courses, students continue to struggle with the plan portion of the assignment	For the upcoming academic year, the clinical applications courses in the P3 year will look to incorporate additional graded cases, in-class review sessions to highlight common deficiencies, as well as self-and peer- assessments to increase feedback. This will give students additional opportunities to improve on this section of the care plan

College of Arts and Sciences	French B.A.	Students will demonstrate the ability to speak French in interpersonal interactive and presentational modes.	For the period covered, 10 students took the OPIc portion of the Senior Exit Exam, achieving scores as follows: Seven Advanced-Mid, One Intermediate -Mid, one Intermediate-High	While on the surface this is a felicitous set of results, it has prompted the program to review all data since the addition of the OPIc to the Senior Exit Exam (the 2014-15 academic year) to consider whether it cannot reasonably set a higher bar, likely IH (Intermediate High). At any rate, this is reassuring confirmation that we continue on the right track, all the more so as not all tested students had the opportunity to study abroad. (Another sidenote: there has been an uptick in interest from our particularly advanced students to prep for the official French equivalent to the OPI series, the DELF and the DALF, both of which require extensive targeted training. One faculty member in the French program has already designed and executed an independent study to prep a student for the DALF C2, spring 2019, and is discussing with another a possible DALF C1 preparation for the 2020-21 academic year.)
Arnold School of Public Health	B.S. Athletic Training	Students will demonstrate the knowledge and skills necessary for entry-level athletic trainers to use a systematic approach to ask and answer clinically relevant questions that affect patient care by using review and application of existing research evidence.	All criteria for this learning outcome were except for the following:  For the Abstract assignment, the low class average and low percentage of students above 80% is due to 5 students failing to submit the assignment which resulted in a grade of 0/10 which therefore drove down the class average. It was also a result of not understanding the assignment requirements and submission of below average work.  For the Introduction assignment, the rationale behind the low percentage of students above 80% for the assignment is 6 students failed to turn in the assignment which resulted in a grade of 0/10.	We are trying to integrate evidenced-based medicine into all aspects of our AT program. Part of the requirement for the research abstract assignments is for students to discuss the article with their clinical site preceptors. The success of these assignments has resulted in us integrating more "research" into our preceptor training modules. When our program trains preceptors each year, integrating research will be included as well as feedback from preceptors on how to increase the quality of the assignment. The key is to link the research articles (discussed in class) with students' clinical sites where they actually see patients. We are considering including clinical preceptors in an "online" discussion as part of the assignment. We need to do a better job of linking some of these assignments to the clinical sites where students apply the information.

School of Medicine	Rehabilitation Counseling - MRC	Students will demonstrate an understanding and skills in group and family counseling appropriate for beginning counselors at the training level.	The instructor noted that students were strongest in competencies related to developing relationships, but did occasionally struggle with confrontation and in allowing disagreements among group members, which is developmentally appropriate at this stage. A relative area of weakness was accepting that as a group facilitator, the leader is not responsible for doing the group members' work for them. Developmentally, this is consistent with counselor skill acquisition at the graduate level of study.	To address these areas moving forward, increased emphasis was placed upon the development of Effective Group Leader Dispositions as well as student-based ranking of skill development over time. This approach was initialized in the Fall of 2016 and continued into the Spring of 2017. Students evidenced increased awareness of personal developmental dispositions as well as skill development. It is hoped that this will continue into Practicum and Internship experiences.
School of Library and Information Science	Ph.D.	Students will identify, adapt, and apply key elements of the theory, practice, resources, and technologies of college-level instruction specific to library and information science pedagogy.	Based on this year's annual reports, we did note low rates for both conference presentations and journal manuscript submissions. Further, this year's annual review process noted that our PhD students taught 11 courses total during this academic year (several taught by the same student) and served as GAs on 6 courses. 8 progress reports were deemed exemplary, and 2 reports were deemed proficient.	The methods, criteria, and process for assessing our PhD program continues to be a work in progress. We have created an evaluation form that is used in the annual review process for all of our PhD students; that form is being submitted with this report. We have also used these results and feedback from previous reports and future assessment plans to continue revising our assessment process, and these changes are reflected in the new future assessment plan below. In summary, we will continue with the annual review process but will include PhD students GA and teaching evaluations as part of the progress report. We will also be adding rubrics and methods for assessing students' progress through their qualifying exams, comprehensive exams, dissertation proposals, publications, conference presentations, and their final dissertation defense. These changes are a crucial part of a larger review of the PhD program that will likely include a revised mission, goals, and learning outcomes (revised learning outcomes have already been submitted to OIRAA and are reflected in the future assessment plan below).

A university of our size and scope must also assess student learning in traditional and distance education courses to ensure that it is equivalent across all methods of instruction. As previously mentioned, learning outcomes are established for all academic programs. If learning outcomes differ for distance education and traditional courses, such distinctions are noted within the program's assessment report. Academic programs rely on comparisons of student work products, such as assignments, exams, and portfolios, to demonstrate that students enrolled in distance education courses perform at a level that equals or exceeds the level of performance of students enrolled in traditional courses. Faculty include these comparative data in their annual assessment reports.

### Quality Assurance Committee

All programs in the Professional Education Unit, to include the entire College of Education, and approximately twelve programs located in the College of Arts and Sciences, are reviewed by the Quality Assurance Committee (QCom) on an approximate three-year cycle. The Qcom team is comprised of members from the College of Education, the College of Arts and Sciences, a PK-12 administrator and teacher from an area school district and a member of the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education. The [operational goals of QCom](#) are to assist programs in documenting successes, recognizing deficiencies, and creating data-driven strategic plans that address areas of weakness or recognized needs in order to further enhance the quality of programs and assessment activities. Approximately one month after the meeting, the program receives a letter detailing their rating, strengths, areas for improvement, and items for further consideration. The review includes an evaluation of assessment activities and general practices within each program. Reviews are conducted in a manner mirroring an accreditation review. For the "off-site" review prior to the meeting, the committee reviews materials provided by the program, then submits questions to program representatives. During the "on-site" review at the meeting, the program presents additional information, addresses the committee's questions, and responds to any follow-up questions. At the conclusion of the meeting, the committee meets to determine a rating for the program. In 2018, QCom adopted the same [rating criteria](#) as that contained in the "Assessment Feedback Form" for areas specifically related to assessment of student learning outcomes, thus making the standards for quality assessment of student learning standard practice across the university.

### State Accountability Reports

The University completes comprehensive self-assessments as part of state-required accountability and reporting mandates. Both Columbia and the regional (Palmetto College) campuses provide an annual state Accountability Report to the South Carolina Budget and Control Board. This report outlines the institution's "mission", objectives to accomplish the mission, and performance measures that show the degree to which objectives are being "met" in accordance with the [South Carolina provision 1-1-820](#). The Accountability reports the University's performance for review by the Governor and the General Assembly. The report provides for both a discussion of prior year expenditures and associates expenditures with prospective goals, strategies and objectives to move the University forward in future years. The discussion and analysis section of the report provides University leadership with the opportunity to comment on internal and external factors affecting the University's performance in the past year, the University's current efforts and the associated results, and any plans under development to introduce additional changes. Copies of archived State Agency Accountability Reports for Columbia and the regional Palmetto College campuses are available on the [OIRAA Website](#).

### South Carolina Commission on Higher Education Institutional Effectiveness Reports

Additionally, the Columbia and regional (Palmetto College) campuses also submit an Institutional Effectiveness report to the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education, as mandated by Proviso 89.121. Each year this report summarizes the results of professional examinations. Copies of archived Institutional Effectiveness Reports for Columbia and the regional Palmetto College campuses are available on the [OIRAA Website](#). Of the four regional Palmetto College campuses, only the Lancaster campus has an associate degree program (nursing) for which professional exam results are reported and these results are reported below. The other regional Palmetto College campuses submit an IE Report Transmittal Form only, with this form requesting only website URL and mission statement information.

### Sources

-  [ACAF 3.00 Assessment of Student Learning](#)
-  [ACAF 3.50 Academic Bulletins and Planning Calendar](#)
-  [APC Quick start guide](#)
-  [Assessment Action Plan Form](#)
-  [Assessment Advisory Committee](#)
-  [Blueprints for Academic Excellence](#)

-  Closing the Loop
-  Code of Laws - Title 1 - Chapter 1 - General Provisions
-  Collecting and Using Assessment Results Slides
-  Columbia Bulletin
-  DegreeProgramAssessmentBusinessProcess
-  Institutional Effectiveness Reports
-  LO Update Process
-  Lancaster Bulletin
-  QCom Procedures - August 2018
-  QCom Rubric\_CAEP Programs
-  QS 2017 Rubric
-  QS 2019 Rubric
-  SMART Los
-  Salkehatchie Bulletin
-  State Accountability Reports
-  Sumter Bulletin
-  Union Bulletin