

Office of Academic Planning and Assessment

Assessment FAQ's

Question: What is the OATDB?

Answer: OATDB stands for "Online Assessment Tracking Database" and is the online assessment management system utilized by Sam Houston State University to track and document the annual assessment processes conducted by the University's various programs, offices, and departments.

Question: What is assessment?

Answer: Assessment is an internally driven process of self-reflection for the purposes of self-improvement. In this process units identify objectives they wish to accomplish, measure their attainment of those objectives, and use the collected results to develop actions for self-improvement.

Question: Who benefits from assessment?

Answer: Everyone benefits from assessment. Students benefit when the degree programs, co-curricular activities, and student services are continuously improved. Departments and programs benefit by identifying areas for improvement and taking needed actions. The University benefits by being able to show its internal and external stakeholders that we are serious about ensuring that our students are receiving the best possible educational experience.

Question: What impact does low quality assessment have on the program/department/college/university?

Answer: Poor quality assessment primarily hurts the unit conducting it. If a unit's assessment plan is not meaningful or useful, then it will not provide informative data that can be used to drive continuous improvement. In addition, poor quality assessment may reflect negatively upon a college, department, or the University, especially as assessment is often a part of programmatic and institutional accreditation.

Question: Who should be creating the assessment plan?

Answer: The responsibilities of assessment should not be placed on one person alone. The creation of assessment plans, gathering data, and development of actions for improvement should be a group effort, with participation of all people involved with the unit. Assessment is always more meaningful when it's a collaborative effort.

Question: What is a Goal? What is a reasonable number to have?

Answer: A "Goal" is a broad statement of mission or purpose that serves as the guiding principles of a unit. By their nature, Goals are not necessarily directly measurable. While there is not "magic" number of Goals, most units will probably find 3-5 Goals to be reasonable.

Questions: What is an Objective and how is it different from a Goal?

Answer: An "Objective" is a specific and detailed statement of intent or purpose that a unit expects to achieve. Objectives **MUST** be measurable and are aligned with a unit's Goals. As

with Goals, there is no “magic” number, but most units will probably find 2-4 Objectives, per Goal, to be reasonable.

Question: What is the difference between a Learning Objective and a Performance Objective? Can academic and non-academic departments have both?

Answer: Learning Objectives are specific, and detailed, expressions of the expected knowledge or skills someone should gain as a result of receiving instruction or training. Generally, Learning Objectives are utilized by degree programs, where they focus on the specific student learning outcomes associated with a degree.

Performance Objectives are specific, and detailed, expressions of the expected level of attainment of non-learning tasks (i.e. satisfaction with service, attendance/participation levels, student recruitment and enrollment, general administrative functions, etc.). Generally, Performance Objectives are found within all units not directly engaged with student instruction.

Both Learning and Performance objectives CAN be used by a unit as appropriate; although, this is rare. Generally, a combination of Learning and Performance Objectives are seen in co-curricular areas where there is a blending of learning and administration. That said, the **PRIMARY FOCUS** for the degree programs should always be on student learning objectives.

Question: What is the difference between direct and indirect measures?

Answer: Direct measures are instruments, processes, or mechanisms used by a unit to determine whether an objective was actually met, and provide concrete evidence of the actual level of attainment of an objective. Examples of direct measures include a quiz or test given to a student to measure their actual mastery of a Learning Objective.

Indirect measures are instruments used to determine whether an objective was perceived to have been met, and provide indirect evidence of the level of attainment of an Objective. Examples of indirect measures would be satisfaction surveys, or student perceptions regarding their mastery of a learning objective.

While direct measures are generally superior to indirect measures, **BOTH** types are valid and useful when assessing an objective. Units are encouraged to utilize both as part of their assessment plans; however, when possible, at least one direct measure should be used to assess each objective.

Assessment measures should be described in detail. It should be clear what the instrument/process is, how it was developed, how it was implemented, and how it is being used to gather assessment results that are useful to the program.

Questions: What is an Indicator?

Answer: Indicators are the instruments, processes, or evidence, both direct and indirect, used by a unit to assess a learning objective. Indicators should be described in detail. It should be clear what the instrument/process is, how it was developed, how it was implemented, and how it is being used to gather assessment results that are useful to the program.

Question: What is a Criterion? Is it okay if the Criterion is not reached?

Answer: Criterion are utilized with Indicators to assess learning objectives. Criterion are the specific, and detailed, level of expected attainment for an Objective. The Criterion description should include all relevant information about how that Criterion was established and determined to be appropriate. If the Criterion is derived from professional standards, required licensure passage rates, etc., then those standards should be referenced as part of the Criterion description.

It is perfectly ok if a Criterion is not met. Assessment is not about punishing units when they do not meet their objectives; rather, it is about identifying areas for continuous improvement. If a Criterion was not met it just means that a unit has identified an area in which they should take action.

Question: What are KPIs?

Answer: KPIs stand for “Key Performance Indicators” and are the instruments, processes, or evidence, both direct and indirect, used by a unit to assess a performance objective. KPIs should be described in detail. It should be clear what the instrument/process is, how it was developed, how it was implemented, and how it is being used to gather assessment results that are useful to the program. KPI descriptions should also include information that outline expected levels of attainment/success.

It is perfectly ok if a KPI is not met. Assessment is not about punishing units when they do not meet their objectives; rather, it is about identifying areas for continuous improvement. If a KPI was not met it just means that a unit has identified an area in which they should take action.

Question: What are Findings and Results?

Answer: Findings (for Learning Objectives) and Results (for Performance Objectives) are essentially the same thing. They are the data resulting from the unit’s assessment measures and are used to determine whether an Objective was successfully met. Findings and Results should be detailed, breaking down what a unit has discovered as a result of its assessment, in order to identify areas for potential improvement.

Question: What are Actions?

Answer: Actions are the next steps to be taken by a unit in response to specific assessment Findings or Results. Actions are associated with specific Objectives. A unit’s Actions should be clearly driven by assessment results for that particular objective, and should clearly relate to improving that Objective.

Question: What if all my Objectives were met? Do I still need Actions?

Answer: Yes. Assessment is not a self-congratulatory process through which units document only those areas in which they are exceeding expectation; rather, it is a process of reflection for improvement. Units are expected to ask important, and tough, questions about what is most important to them and the level to which they are accomplishing them. Within meaningful, mature, and well-developed assessment plans it is very rare for a unit to meet all its Objectives and have nothing on which it can improve. Even when an Objective is met, units may find some reason for action when they analyze their assessment results.

Question: What is a Plan for Continuous Improvement?

Answer: The Plan for Continuous Improvement consists of two separate elements within the OATDB. The first part provides the unit a chance to provide an update to their progress towards completing the action-items identified in their previous year's Plan for Continuous Improvement. The second part is the unit's new Plan for Continuous Improvement.

While the Actions represent specific steps to be taken for a single Objective, the Plan for Continuous Improvement provides units with an opportunity to roll all these Actions together into a coherent and detailed plan. The action-items included within the Plan for Continuous Improvement should be clearly based on a unit's assessment results, and should include details about what they are, how and when they will be implemented, and who will be responsible. The Plan for Continuous Improvement also provides a mechanism for providing context around the finding, result, or action item.

Question: What are the various deadlines for assessment plan submission?

Answer: The Office of Academic Planning and Assessment maintains all due dates for OATDB elements on their website:

<http://www.shsu.edu/dept/academic-planning-and-assessment/assessment/oatdb.html>

Question: Who should I contact if I have any more questions about assessment, accreditation, or the OATDB?

Answer: You should always feel free to contact the Director of Assessment, Jeff Roberts, if you have any assessment related questions. He can be reached by email at jeff.roberts@shsu.edu, by phone at extension 4-1859, or in person at the Bobby K. Marks Administration Building, Room 208C