College of Fine Arts – Institutional Assessment and Accreditation  
(September 2014)

Annual program assessment for all degrees offered at the University of Texas is overseen by the Office of Institutional Accreditation and Program Assessment (IAPA). The College of Fine Arts must comply with institutional requirements established by the University, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB).

Assessment, at its core, involves faculty participation and departmental support. The language and structuring of assessment, however, can be confusing for those being asked to provide assessment data.

This document seeks to:
1. Provide a Best Practice framework for COFA academic units to facilitate and comply with institutional assessment
2. Provide helpful information and links for faculty and other stakeholders, aimed at streamlining the process and facilitating continuity of process

The COFA Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and Accreditation will provide coordination and guidance for all assessment and accreditation requirements of programs within the College of Fine Arts and centralize helpful information on the COFA website.

Basic information about institutional assessment is provided on the IAPA website: http://www.utexas.edu/provost/planning/assessment/iapa/

**COFA best practice recommendations:**
To create a checks-and-balances system that will facilitate the assessment process and prevent data management falling to one person, the College Of Fine Arts recommends the following:

1. Each academic unit should designate a STAFF person whose portfolio of responsibility includes Institutional Assessment/SACS. This person will be responsible for:
   a. Creating deadlines for 1) Assessment Plans, 2) collection of data
   b. Attending needed Assessment workshops
   c. Entering collected assessment plans, results and actions into TracDat at the end of each semester or as required by the University of Texas
   d. Maintaining timely and accessible departmental records on past assessment procedures and data collection
   e. Maintaining an ongoing Assessment Calendar for the department

2. Each academic unit should also designate a tenured FACULTY familiar with all departmental programs and degrees to communicate with program heads and other faculty stakeholders. This person will be responsible for:
   a. Working with faculty/program leaders as a liaison with IAPA for assessment culture, language and implementation
   b. Working with program leaders to modify and update assessment plans
   c. Working with program leaders to implement Action items
   d. Working with designated assessment staff to support data collection and facilitate date upload into TracDat

Additional information/links are on the downloadable document College of Fine Arts – Institutional Assessment and Accreditation and COFA Annual Program Assessment Template
Glossary of Terms and other Helpful Information
(from Institutional Accreditation and Program Assessment – IAPA – website:

http://www.utexas.edu/provost/planning/assessment/iapa/)

Writing Program Learning Outcomes

Program Learning Outcomes or Program Outcomes (PO's) describe the measurable knowledge, skills, abilities, or behaviors that faculty want students to be able to demonstrate by the time they graduate. Your PO’s should apply to your discipline and include competencies considered critical to your field.

Outcomes answer the question: *What will students be able to do or demonstrate as a result of their studies?*

Writing outcomes

1. Every outcome should align with the departmental mission.
2. Every outcome should be *measurable*, written so that the student demonstrates, applies, or performs a visible activity, e.g., “Students will be able to...”.
3. Every outcome needs at least three methods linking to a specific curricular or extra-curricular task such as a class project, an exam, a homework assignment, or a field activity. The method uses a metric, tool, or instrument (a rubric, a checklist, etc.) to measure student competence. Having three methods shows that key outcomes receive attention in multiple classes.
4. Each method requires a criterion. This identifies the target or minimum performance standard for each student assignment (e.g., 75% of students will achieve a ‘satisfactory’ rating on a rubric).

Selecting methods

- Remember that one method does not fit all, so choose carefully based on specific needs
- Capitalize on what you are already doing or collecting
- Be pragmatic in terms of time and resources
- Don’t try to measure everything or everybody—you can sample students and classes
- Remember that quantity of data does not equate to quality

KEY TERMS

**Outcome/Learning Outcome**: The specific, measureable knowledge, skill, or ability that students should be able to do or demonstrate as a result of their studies or co-curricular activities.

**Criterion**: Identifies the target or minimum performance standard. For outcomes, it states the percentage of students who are expected to achieve the acceptable score or complete the required process.

**Method**: Describes the procedures used to collect data for assessing a program, including identifying the artifact, assignment, or activity and the process for collecting it, and measuring or scoring it.
**Data Sources for Outcomes Assessment**

Direct data sources measure actual student work to determine whether the students have learned what instructors intend.

- **Capstone Experiences**: Capstone experiences most often occur in a specific course students take toward the end of their academic program, but could also be part of a senior level course. Capstone experiences require students to demonstrate their accumulated knowledge and skills through creative products, research projects, written work, performance, or presentation.

- **Embedded Questions**: Questions related to program learning outcomes can be embedded within course assignments or exams. For example, all sections of a course could include questions relating to a specific program learning outcome. Faculty score the exams as usual and provide anonymous copies of the embedded question responses to the assessment team for analysis.

- **Internships and Field Experiences**: Internships and field experiences provide opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning outside the classroom. Observation of student activity within such experiences often provides valuable information on whether the students are able to apply classroom learning in real-world situations.

- **Observations**: Directly observing student performances, speeches, role plays, lab work, skills demonstrations, or job performance is an excellent way to record their learning. Observation data can be recorded as a narrative, using a rubric, or as a checklist.

- **Portfolios**: Portfolios typically include a thematic collection of student work across courses. Students assemble information based on criteria established by the faculty and may include research papers, essays, recorded performances, creative work, or laboratory research. A particularly valuable component of student portfolios is the reflective essay, in which students reflect on their growth in scholarship or creative efforts and draw conclusions about their strengths and weaknesses.

- **Standardized Exams**: Culminating examinations may be constructed by program faculty or purchased from national testing services. Constructing examinations is time-consuming, yet they generally provide a better measure of student learning than purchased exams that may not align with learning outcomes. Standardized exams work best as part of program graduation requirement. They also may be given to students upon program entry and exit to provide documentation of learning.

- **Student Products**: Individual student products (e.g., reports, essays, homework) from a particular course that represent a specific learning outcome are an excellent data source. The instructor uses the student work to provide grades while the assessment team examines the work with a focus on program learning outcomes.

Indirect data sources require inferring actual student abilities, knowledge, and values rather than measuring them directly.

- **Document Analysis**: Systematic reviews of course syllabi, course assignments, and program documents may uncover information about program curriculum that is only evident once all the documents are collected. While a document analysis does not indicate what students have learned, it can help to identify potential sources of direct data and the relationships among courses.

- **Exit Interviews**: Program graduates can participate in interviews or surveys to provide feedback.
Data obtained can identify program strengths and weaknesses and offer students the opportunity to reflect on their learning. Students may not have an incentive to respond honestly or fully at graduation, however, and there are ethical concerns if providing assessment data at an exit interview is made a criterion for graduation. Generally, it is better to have someone from outside the program gather this type of data.

**Focus Groups:** Focus groups are a series of carefully planned discussions among homogeneous groups of 6-10 respondents who are asked a carefully constructed series of open-ended questions about their beliefs, attitudes, and experiences. The session is typically recorded and transcribed for analysis. The data are studied for major issues and reoccurring themes along with representative comments. Students, however, may not respond honestly while still in the program, and ethical concerns can arise when program staff or faculty facilitate the focus group. Like exit interviews, it may be better to have someone from outside the program gather the data.

**Surveys:** Surveys of students, alumni, and employers are limited in that they offer only opinions, can change over time, and rarely provide direct evidence of learning. While surveys have limitations, they are easy to administer, can supplement and contextualize direct measures, and may be the only way to gather data from alumni or geographically dispersed groups.

Adapted from: