Formative and Summative Assessment Guidelines

Our SACS-COC Vice President recently informed us of new program assessment requirements to maintain institutional accreditation. In addition to assessing student mastery of program learning outcomes, faculty must also assess student learning at a formative level and make program improvements based on the results of these formative assessments.

Formative assessments are conducted at a point in the curriculum where students are developing, but have not yet mastered, the knowledge/skills/values described in student learning outcomes. These assessments are used to identify students’ strengths and weaknesses mid-way through the program and to make changes to improve student learning in courses in which students are introduced to and develop knowledge and skills related to the learning outcomes.

Summative assessments, on the other hand, measure students’ knowledge/skills/values at or near graduation, when students should have achieved the highest level of knowledge and skills in the program.

Basic requirements for annual assessment of student learning:

• The complete list of student learning outcomes for a program should describe the key skills, knowledge, and values students are expected to obtain in the program.
• Each learning outcome does not need to be assessed every year, but all of a program’s learning outcomes must be assessed over a 3-year period.
• Each year that you measure a student learning outcome, you should conduct multiple formative assessments and multiple summative assessments of the learning outcome.
• At least one formative assessment and at least one summative assessment must be a direct measure of student learning.
• Formative assessments should be conducted in courses designated in the course alignment matrix as courses that develop students’ knowledge and skills. (For undergraduate programs, these will typically be 200- and 300-level courses.)
• Summative assessments should be conducted at points in the curriculum where students are expected to show mastery of the learning outcomes. (For undergraduate programs, these will usually be 400- or 500-level courses, though students might master aspects of outcomes in 300-level courses.)

• Suggested direct, formative assessment:
  o You can take advantage of existing course assessments by using embedded course assignments and exams as direct, formative assessments.
  o A single exam or assignment can be used as a direct measure of multiple learning outcomes, but the parts of the assignment or exam related to each learning outcome should be scored separately. For example, if a class paper is used to measure students’ writing skills as well as their understanding of core concepts in your discipline, rate the writing quality and discussion of core concepts separately and report the results separately. (Rubrics are useful for this type of scoring.)
• Suggested indirect, formative assessment:
  o A short survey to measure faculty’s perceptions about mid-level students’ development of the knowledge and skills described in your programs’ student learning outcomes is a good, indirect, formative measure.
  o A sample survey is available on the Office of Institutional Effectiveness library guide website: http://libguides.murraystate.edu/assessment
  o MSU recently added a new survey tool to Blackboard that may be useful for distributing surveys to faculty and collecting survey data.