



**Academic Assessment Handbook  
2020  
Revised 8.2021**

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## **Purpose of the Academic Assessment Handbook**

This ***Salus University Academic Assessment Handbook*** serves as an introduction to institutional, programmatic, and course assessment and has been developed as a reference tool for colleges and programs to utilize as they develop their assessment plans, program goals, and student learning goals. The *Academic Assessment Handbook* includes the Salus University template document for completing the 5 year assessment plan and annual report.

The word “assessment” has taken on a variety of meanings within higher education. For example, assessment may refer to the process used to grade student course assignments, to standardized testing used by institutions or professions as part of external accountability, or to activities designed to collect information on the success of a program, course, or curriculum. Most simply, assessment is the process of gathering and documenting information to improve institutional practice. Assessment is not an end in itself, but rather provides a foundation for further planning and decision making.

Salus University’s philosophy on assessment emphasizes continuous review and improvement of our educational programs. Our goal is to provide an environment that is receptive, supportive, and enabling of the changes necessary to promote improvement of future outcomes. The University is committed to an ongoing process of assessment that is transparent and inclusive of all stakeholders and that includes students, faculty, administrators, staff, alumni, and the public as appropriate.

At Salus University, assessment occurs at three levels: institutional, programmatic, and course. Institutional assessment initiatives involve the evaluation of the university's mission, goals, and objectives and begins with the strategic planning process. Each program also engages in a strategic planning process to ensure that its efforts are working to meet the university’s mission. All programs, activities, and educational initiatives are expected to include an assessment component which involves the identification, dissemination, and periodic review of the program goals and objectives. These goals and objectives are derived from and are consistent with the university’s mission and strategic goals, and are reviewed by program stakeholders. Emphasis is placed upon capturing the work that programs are already engaged in to continually evaluate the success of their educational and operational efforts. There is no expectation that programs create additional organizational structures for the purposes of assessment only.

Assessment findings should be used to support data-driven planning and decision-making processes in response to continuous program improvement goals, as well as to carefully monitor the effectiveness of any implemented changes. Faculty within the program are responsible for planning and implementing assessment activities. The program should seek technical advice, support, and/or training, when necessary, from within or outside of the university. Stakeholders (faculty, staff, students, alumni, employees, community members, and others) should be consulted and, when appropriate, involved directly in the assessment activities, within time and resource limitations.

## **Academic Assessment Committee**

The Salus University's Academic Assessment Committee is comprised of representation from each educational program and is tasked to provide a consultative role related to the area of assessment. The aim of the Committee is to provide a supportive environment that is collegial, receptive, and facilitates programmatic and institutional modifications intended to improve outcomes.

### **Accreditation at Salus University**

Accreditation is an accountability driven, peer review process that functions to ensure the quality of higher education institutions and to ensure compliance with established standards. As such, assessment is an integral part of the accreditation process. Accreditation affords the following opportunities:

- accredited institutions of higher education are eligible for federal grants, loans, and other federal funds;
- serves as a benchmark for students, families, and employers to determine the quality of a degree; and
- is a requirement for students to sit for licensing or certification examinations in many professional fields.

There are three types of accrediting organizations: institutional, programmatic and faith-related. Salus University, as a whole, is accredited by the [Middles States Commission on Higher Education](#). Programmatic accreditation is a process of peer reviewed quality assurance on specialized or professional programs. Salus programs also require the following programmatic accreditations:

#### **Pennsylvania College of Optometry:**

Doctor of Optometry (OD): [Accreditation Council on Optometric Education](#)

#### **George Osborne College of Audiology:**

Doctor of Audiology (AuD): [Council on Academic Accreditation in Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology](#)

[Accreditation Commission for Audiologic Education](#) (pending)

#### **College of Health Sciences, Education, and Rehabilitation:**

Physician Assistant (MMS): [Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant](#)

Orientation and Mobility (MS): [Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired](#)

Vision Rehabilitation Therapy (MS): [Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired](#)

Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments (MEd): [Pennsylvania Department of Education Approved Certification Programs](#)

Occupational Therapy (MSOT): [Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education](#)

Speech-Language Pathology (MS): [Council on Academic Accreditation in Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology](#)

### **Salus University Strategic Planning**

The university has developed its mission and vision statements which stand independent from individual program mission and vision statements. The University Strategic Plan is reviewed on a regular basis by university leadership and various stakeholders. In 2018- 2019, the university engaged in a strategic planning process called “scenario planning.” By definition, scenario planning is a structured way for organizations to think long-term, making assumptions about what the future may look like through different scenarios, and how the organization’s environment will change overtime in light of each possible outcome. This was an inclusive process that involved all levels of the university and included students, staff, faculty and Board of Trustees members.

The current strategic plan, adopted by the Board of Trustees on May 23, 2019, is an evolutionary document that embodies the institutional planning process. Building off of the 2015 strategic plan theme of “Consolidating the Gains,” Salus turned its focus to the enhancement and growth of the university’s offerings. The 2019-2020 Salus University Strategic Goals are the following:

- Quality: Fundamental in everything we do
- Innovation: Salus setting the pace
- Value/Fiscal Responsibility: Excellence requires good stewardship

For more information on the university’s priorities and goals, please see:

<https://www.salus.edu/About/Strategic-Planning/University-Priorities.aspx>.

Linking to the university’s mission and vision, each Salus program or college has developed its own mission that is in alignment with the university’s strategic plan. Program academic assessment plans are linked to each college or program-level mission, which in turn ties back to the university’s strategic plan.

### **Assessment: Language Differences**

Program level accreditation requirements and/or a review of assessment literature may reveal that various terminology is used to define the same assessment terms. For example, the terms “objectives,” “goals,” and “outcomes” are often used interchangeably. However, the overall definitions of the levels of assessment (i.e., goals are broader than objectives) should not change. It is more important to understand the logic behind assessment than to adhere to any particular terminology.

The *Academic Assessment Plan Template* is designed to be modified to meet program accreditation requirements and can be customized as needed. Programs can add in their specific assessment-related terms, using parentheses, required by their accrediting bodies, but must utilize the Salus language as well. The purpose of this is to develop a shared language at Salus with regard to assessment, promote constructive dialogue around assessment, and facilitate the process of generating university feedback.

### **Academic Assessment Plan Overview**

All programs at Salus University should have their own [assessment plan](#) that includes program goals and student learning goals. These goals are identified by the program and are driven by

program accreditation standards, faculty input, and logistical programming needs. As programmatic competencies change, the assessment plan should be updated to reflect the changing goals.

The *Academic Assessment Plan* functions on a five year cycle. Programs are asked to assess each goal, program and student learning, at least once during each five year cycle. As such, programs may choose to assess all of their goals annually or periodically for each cycle. The *Academic Assessment Plan Calendar* may be utilized to map out when each goal and objective will be assessed during the five year period.

Each program at Salus should submit an initial plan of action by filling out the “program Academic Assessment Plan” worksheet. The initial plan of action submission should include filled out fields for the following: *Program/Student Learning Goals, Objectives, Assessment Measures, Direct/Indirect, Planned Data Collection Date, and Target*. Subsequent years after the initial plan of action is submitted should include an update of the worksheet based on which goal(s) were assessed in a given year. The remaining categories of *Results, Actual Data Collection Date, Program Modifications, and Data Dissemination Process* should be updated annually based on data collected.

Each program at Salus should intend to update the “program Assessment Plan” once every cycle. The “program Assessment Plan” is meant to be a fluid report that can require updating as programmatic competencies change. It is the responsibility of each program to complete timely updates to the “program Assessment Plan” document as needed.

Feedback will be provided to programs by the Academic Assessment Committee using a rubric (see Appendix 1.1 - separate tab in the *Academic Assessment Plan Template*). The Academic Assessment Committee will review the submitted work for areas of strength and provide comments on areas for improvement in the following categories:

- Program Goals
- Student Learning Goals
- Objectives
- Assessment Measures (Direct and Indirect)
- Data Collection Dates (Planned and Actual)
- Targets
- Results
- Program Modifications
- Data Dissemination Process

The Academic Assessment Committee’s role is to be collegial and supportive to programs. If, after several submissions and revisions with little evidence of progress, the Academic Assessment Committee determines the program requires additional support in the development of their assessment plan, it will share this with the Provost. All programs are required to submit annually.

### **Assessment Timeline and Calendar**

Programs are not expected to evaluate every goal and objective each year. Instead, programs should determine the timing for the assessment of each goal based upon their resources and needs and then establish a time-frame around which data collection will occur. This includes the dissemination of results as well as any modifications made based upon the assessment findings. Assessment is a dynamic process and should be an on-going process within each

program. Practical assessment is simple and is not meant to create additional work, but should enhance the work already being done by making it more effective.

Programs are asked to submit their five year assessment plan to the Academic Assessment Committee by utilizing the provided *Academic Assessment Plan Template*. Each program goal and student learning goal must be assessed at least once during each five year cycle. However, programs may choose to assess all of their goals annually or periodically over a five year period. Programs are encouraged to utilize the *Academic Assessment Plan Calendar* (found as a separate tab in the *Academic Assessment Plan Template*) to map out when each goal and objective will be assessed during the five year cycle. Programs should utilize the *Annual Report* template to document assessment results, possible program modifications, and dissemination and should submit this report annually to the Academic Assessment Committee. During the first year of the cycle programs may choose to submit the *Academic Assessment Plan* with data (via the *Annual Report*) or the *Academic Assessment Plan* only.

### **Annual Report to Academic Assessment Committee**

All Salus programs are responsible for providing updates to the Academic Assessment Committee regarding their program and student learning goal assessment progress annually via the *Annual Report*. The *Annual Report* can be found as a separate tab in the *Academic Assessment Plan Template*. It functions to report a program's assessment activities for selective objectives in a given year. Each program's accreditation due dates were taken into account when devising the schedule below:

January:	Optometry (Traditional & Scholars)
March:	Blindness & Low Vision Studies
June:	Speech-Language Pathology Audiology
September:	Biomedicine Post-Baccalaureate Program
November:	Physician Assistant
December:	Occupational Therapy

### **Academic Assessment Plan Template: Definitions & Descriptions\***

(\*Examples of all elements in the template are found in the sample 5-year assessment plan.)

**Academic Assessment Plan Template:** Structure used by programs to develop the assessment plan

**Academic Assessment Plan:** A five year document that outlines and provides a high level view of a program's mission, program and student learning goals, objectives, methods and timeline for assessment and dissemination.

**Annual Report:** A report submitted once a year to the Academic Assessment Committee that provides in depth data, analysis, dissemination of results, and process for closing the loop on select objectives.

**Mission Statement:** Insert program or college mission statement exactly as written.

**Program Goals:** Program goals should stem from the program's mission statement; however, these are more specific than the mission. Program goals are broad statements that aim to define what a program intends to accomplish across a long range of intended outcomes. They often define the major activities and initiatives of the program. Goals are intended to provide a framework for determining more specific educational objectives and measurable outcomes of a program.

**Student Learning Goals:** Student learning goals focus on overarching areas of knowledge, conceptual understanding, thinking process, or behaviors that are important for students to achieve by the end of their program. Student learning goals should aim to focus on the end target (what the student should be able to do) rather than the means (what is taught). Clearly articulated goals allow for a more structured roadmap for curricular planning, course design, and assessment.

Please note, other institutions and/or assessment plans may use the language “Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)” in lieu of “Student Learning Goals.” For the purposes of this document, these hold the same meaning.

**Objectives:** Goals become measurable through the use of discrete objectives. Multiple objectives may be needed to achieve one goal. It is important that objectives are realistic, specific, and measurable with thought being given to current levels of resources available to the program.

**Assessment Measures:** Two different types of assessments can be used when collecting data on student learning: direct and indirect. Each objective used to assess student learning should have at least one direct method of assessment to ensure that student learning, rather than student perception of learning is assessed. The distinction between direct and indirect assessment measures is not applicable for program goals.

**Direct assessment measures** provide for the direct examination or observation of student knowledge or skills against measurable learning outcomes/goals. Examples include:

- Course-level: course & homework assignments; examinations and quizzes; standardized tests; term papers and reports; observations of fieldwork; internship performance or clinical experiences; research projects
- Program-level: capstone projects; theses; exhibits; pass rates of certification exams; student publications or conference presentations; employer and internship supervisor ratings of student performance
- Institutional-level: Performance on achievement tests; explicit self-reflections on what students have learned related to institutional program such as service learning.

**Indirect assessment measures** of student learning ascertain the perceived extent or value of learning experiences. They assess opinions or thoughts about student knowledge, skills, or experiences. They can provide information about student perceptions of their learning and how this learning is valued by different stakeholders. It is important to note that indirect and direct measures provide different types of data; for indirect measures, assumptions must be made about what exactly the self-report means.

For example, students may think that they learned well or say that they did in a survey or course evaluation, but that does not necessarily mean that their perceptions are accurate or correct. That said, indirect assessments provide information quickly, help complement direct assessments, and provide useful feedback to help make educational practice and policy changes.

Examples include:

- Course-level: course evaluations; final course grades; percent of class time spent in active learning; number of student hours spent on service learning; number of student hours spent at intellectual or cultural activities related to the course
- Program-level: focus groups or interviews with students, faculty members, or employers; registration or course enrollment information; department or program review data; job placement rates; employer or alumni surveys; student perception surveys
- Institutional-level: locally-developed or national surveys of student perceptions or self-report of activities; transcript studies that examine patterns and trends of course selection and grading; annual reports including institutional benchmarks, such as graduation and retention rates, GPAs of graduates, etc.

**Planned Data Collection Date** (Semester/Year): Indicate here the planned date that data is projected to be collected during each five year cycle. The *Academic Assessment Plan Calendar* (found as a separate tab in the *Academic Assessment Plan Template*) can be utilized to map out the date (semester/year) of each planned data collection. Programs should determine which goal(s) will be assessed each year based on the available resources and needs of each program. It is important to note that not every goal needs to be assessed each year.

**Target:** Setting a target to help track each written objective helps colleges/programs attain a tangible measure of each outlined goal. Additionally, if a target and intended goal is not being met as outlined, targets allow programs to close the loop via the implementing of appropriate modifications. This process of review and feedback ensures that what was intended to be measured was actually measured.

Targets should be selected based on the program goals. The target can be a concrete threshold of achievement or a general level of improvement of a particular competency. Targets should be defined in a manner that they can be measured. It is important to inquire prior to setting a target, “can this be measured”?

It is important to note that grades should not be used as data for assessment of student learning, rather, grades should be utilized to provide feedback to a student about their overall performance on an activity or course. Course grades do not provide useful data for programmatic or student learning improvement.

**Results:** This is where programs document how the students or program performed on the assessment activity. As this links to the target, the units of measurement should be exactly the same as in the previous column.

**Data Collection Date** (Semester/Year): Indicate here the actual date that data were collected.

**Program Modifications Based Upon Analysis of Data:**

The first step in determining modifications to a program should include a thorough analysis of data collected. Data analysis is more than a summary of the collected data. It instead looks for



contributing variables and asks the question “why” to explain findings. It looks to establish cause/effect relationships and correlations with other data (triangulation of data) before drawing any final conclusions or making any modifications. It evaluates for trends over time which may initiate further review or prompt action. Finally, conclusions and devised action plans for program modifications are not only linked to data analysis but are logical in nature. A summary narrative of the program’s data analysis and decision making process should be included in the annual *Academic Assessment Plan Template*.

Program modifications should be based on the analysis of assessment results. They should include changes the program has made or actions the program plans to take to improve its efforts to achieve the target set for the next cycle. These modifications should target results to improve the program, curriculum, or student experience. This may include steps the program has already taken to remediate issues which should be listed under “Program Modifications” or actions the program is planning to undertake in the future which should be listed under “Future Action Planned”. The program modifications should include dates or a timeline for each discrete step taken or planned.

- Describes how data collected through direct and indirect measures was used to affirm or enhance the existing program;
- Describes how changes in curriculum, pedagogy, or other aspects that affect learning will be documented;
- Specifies how recommendations will be reviewed and decisions made to affect student learning in the future.

**Data Dissemination Process:** The results of each cycle should be shared with key stakeholders. The dissemination plan should include the following information:

- How are the results shared?
- With which key stakeholders are the results shared?
- What is the date of dissemination?

Options for stakeholder dissemination include, but are not limited to the following: publish them on an ‘assessment’ or program website, report to Academic Assessment Committee, presentation to faculty, report to faculty, published for students to see, report to program’s Advisory Board, report to Salus’ Board of Trustees.

It is important to note that disseminating some useful feedback, even if imperfect, is better than providing no feedback at all.

**Calendar:** Each program should complete a calendar indicating the years during which each Goal/Objective will be assessed. While it is expected that data may be collected annually and reported in the Assessment Plan, the Assessment Calendar indicates the year of assessment for data collected. It is important to note that the timeline for assessment for each Goal/Objective can be spread throughout the five year assessment cycle based upon program needs and resource availability.

## **Student Course Evaluations**

### **Purpose of Student Course Evaluations**

Student Course Evaluations (SCEs) function as an indirect method of assessment. SCEs allow students to provide meaningful feedback on the course design and implementation as well as

on course instructor efficacy. For the majority of programs, except for physician assistant studies, course evaluations are completely anonymous.

### **Development of Student Course Evaluations**

All course evaluations are reviewed and vetted by the Academic Assessment Committee at Salus, made up of faculty across all colleges. In Fall 2017 pre-existing course evaluations went through a re-evaluation process to determine efficacy, appropriateness to all programs, and effectiveness. Course evaluations from approximately 10 universities, both graduate and undergraduate, including academic medical institutions were reviewed. The committee then used a set of newly developed criteria to determine which content questions and items were most appropriate for didactic and clinical course evaluations, which are used across Salus programs. Some additional course evaluations were created for programs that could not use the didactic or clinical course evaluations. For example, the Department of Blindness & Low Vision Studies (BLVS) requested a Fieldwork & Internship course evaluation be created, *in order* to gain useful data for their four programs' internships and fieldwork experiences. The Osborne College of Audiology also had a series of course evaluations, that specifically met their accreditation requirements, for courses that did not fall within didactic methods. All of these course evaluations were vetted and approved by the committee and then approved at Academic Council and Dean's Council for the university. The following is a list of course evaluations currently approved by Salus' Academic Assessment Committee:

- *Didactic*. This measures the effectiveness of class instruction and instructor for traditional instructional courses across the university.
- *Clinical*. This measures the effectiveness of clinical courses and the instructor across the university.
- *Fieldwork & Internship*. This course evaluation specifically measures students' experiences during their fieldwork(s) and/or internship(s). While it was specifically designed for BLVS, it can be used across other programs.
- *Program-Specific Course Evaluations*. For some programs (e.g., audiology and physician assistant studies) there are course evaluations that are aligned to their respective accreditation requirements.

### **Cycle of Dissemination of Student Course Evaluations**

By around the mid-point of the term (i.e., semester or quarter), all Salus program directors and their respective Deans receive an Excel spreadsheet that lists all courses provided by the Registrar's Office. They are asked to review courses and provide pertinent course information (e.g., all course instructors, any missing courses, and which class of students it pertains to). For each term, course evaluations are then disseminated using EvaluationKIT, a contracted course evaluation vendor. Dissemination of course evaluations occur at approximately three different times throughout a traditional semester, given that some courses end earlier than others. Course evaluations are disseminated near or at the end of each course. The window for students to complete their course evaluations in EvaluationKIT is approximately 14 days.

For the physician assistant program only there is a unique dissemination cycle. Immediately following an instructor, course, or facilitator-instructional related event, a course evaluation is disseminated to all students. From that point the student has a total of 21 days to complete the evaluation. At 14 days they receive a reminder email, if they have not completed the course evaluation, reminding them they have 7 more days to complete it. Upon completion of the evaluation, students receive a certificate of completion.

### **Use of Student Course Evaluations**

SCEs can provide useful information for faculty and deans/program directors. This information can be used to inform future iterations of the course and can be one data source for modifications and improvements of teaching. It should be noted, however, that data gleaned from SCE is on student perception of teacher efficacy and not a measure of student learning. Moreover, there is significant evidence that indicates that there is bias against women and people of color in SCEs. It is recommended that data from SCEs be used to improve teaching but should not be used as a sole source of data for high stakes evaluations of faculty.

### **Closing the Loop**

Collecting data and reporting on it is not enough to “close the loop.” Closing the loop encompasses analyzing results from assessments, using results to make changes to improve programmatic function and/or student learning, and finally, re-assessing outcomes in order to determine the effectiveness of those changes. This final step also includes dissemination of information to affected stakeholders.

Thus, it is important that programs focus on a few objectives and conduct measurements during each assessment cycle and then describe the results of each measurement. The assessment plan will require that programs report on the implications of the results collected and identify what they have learned from the data collected. Without reporting on the actions taken to address assessment results, there is no feedback loop by which improvements are made. The results may indicate a need for change, or they may indicate a need for further study and evaluation. They also may indicate a need for a modification of program/student learning goals or objectives. Even if no changes are indicated, this should be stated explicitly in the documentation of assessment.

For examples of how programs can use results to improve student learning and report on these improvements, see Sample Entries <https://www.nvcc.edu/assessment/Improve%20.html>

### **Resources & References**

#### **Web Links**

- [Swarthmore University Assessment](#)
- [Council on Higher Education Accreditation](#)
- [Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching](#)
- [University of Florida: Developing Program Goals & Student Learning Objectives](#)

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