



# **Academic Assessment 101: Workbook**

February 2017

## Academic Assessment 101: Workbook

The goals of this workbook are:

- to provide an overview of academic program assessment at Nazareth College, in accordance with our accreditor, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.
- to guide you through the process of creating an assessment plan and completing your academic program assessment report.

The Academic Assessment Committee encourages you to take the following steps:

1. Read and work through this guide and/or view Assessment 101 video
2. Consider where you could use additional support or guidance
3. Set up an appointment with SLO Assessment Coordinator

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The purpose of assessment is to use data in order to better understand a program's strengths and weaknesses and to have a system for making improvements to the program, curriculum and pedagogy. **Assessment should not be a solitary activity that occurs at your desk simply for the purpose of annual reporting.**

Please engage program faculty in ongoing conversations that help you to collaboratively create a meaningful assessment plan and to analyze student work so that you can make informed, well-considered improvements to your academic program.

## Part I: Creating an Assessment Plan

An “assessment plan” is just that: a plan for how you will assess and analyze the effectiveness of your academic program. Components A-D below describe important steps in creating an assessment plan.

### A. Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

A **student learning outcome (SLO)** is a clear statement of your course or program objectives, including, though not limited to, the following: expected knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation skills, attitudes, or competencies that students are expected to acquire in a course or program.

SLOs at Nazareth are assessed at three different levels:

<b>Institution</b>	<p>College-level SLOs are assessed by the <b>SLO Assessment Coordinator</b>.</p> <p>SLOs: Students who graduate from Nazareth College will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Have demonstrated a broad and deep understanding of themselves and the world through the multiple perspectives of the liberal arts and sciences (UG)</li> <li>2. Have demonstrated critical thinking and knowledge pertinent to their respective degree program and the demands of their discipline</li> <li>3. Be prepared to engage as informed members of the local and global community</li> </ol> <p>These SLOs are assessed based on outcomes of student learning assessment at the program level.</p>
<b>Program</b>	<p>Program-level SLOs are assessed by <b>program faculty</b> each year with the purpose of using assessment data to inform curricular decisions and improve program quality.</p> <p>SLOs at this level are both more specific than, and aligned to, institutional SLOs.</p> <p>Each program develops its own SLOs.</p> <p>Program SLOs are made available publicly on the Academic Assessment website and should be updated and revised as necessary for continuous improvement of program.</p>
<b>Course</b>	<p>Course-level SLOs are assessed by <b>individual course instructors</b>.</p> <p>SLOs at this level are the most specific and are aligned to program SLOs.</p> <p>Outcomes of student learning in courses are often the data used in program assessment.</p>

**NOTE:** Annual reporting that is due on October 1 each year is concerned primarily with **program-level assessment**. While all levels are important for course, program and institutional improvement, the remainder of this workbook deals primarily with **program-level assessment**.

SLOs should always be written in terms of what students will be able to do. This format will best enable you to identify evidence to later analyze in order to determine whether your goal has been met. Framing your SLO statements in this way helps to ensure that your SLOs are **measurable, attainable, and focused on results**.

Acceptable SLOs:

**Students will be able to** identify the four dimensions of literacy and explain how they relate to classroom instruction.

**Students will** demonstrate understanding of tonal and post-tonal music.

Unacceptable SLOs:

The curriculum emphasizes X, Y or Z

The program prepares its students for X, Y or Z

Students participate in X, Y or Z

**Practice:** In the space below, use the **students will** or **students will be able to** format to draft an SLO:

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**Reflect:** Take a look at the practice SLO you wrote above. Is it measurable? Why or why not?

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While actions like “appreciate,” “value” or “understand” are difficult to measure, there are certain verbs you can choose to include in your SLO statements that ensure your SLOs are measurable.

### Examples\* of Measurable Verbs for SLO Statements

**Knowledge:** *Define, Describe, Recall, Reproduce, Select*

**Comprehension:** *Explain, Translate, Identify, Compare, Summarize*

**Application:** *Apply, Use, Demonstrate, Construct, Solve*

**Analysis:** *Analyze, Calculate, Diagnose, Theorize, Debate*

**Synthesis:** *Develop, Create, Design, Integrate, Compose*

**Evaluation:** *Justify, Defend, Assess, Evaluate*

\*You are not limited to using only these verbs in your SLOs. These are examples. You should, however, attend to various levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy, listed above.

This does not mean that you cannot have words like “appreciate” in your SLO statements. It just means that you need to think carefully about how students will *demonstrate* these less actionable words in order to provide you with evidence you can analyze. For example:

*Instead of:* Students will **be inspired by** a passion for intellectual engagement with others

*Consider this:* Students will **analyze their understandings and beliefs** about intellectual engagement with others.

If you would like to understand something about students’ inspiration, make sure that your assignment guidelines and rubric (i.e., evaluation criteria) include a component related to their inspiration for their understandings and beliefs.

Programs at Nazareth typically have between 3 to 6 SLOs.

The number of SLOs your program has will depend upon many things, such as professional standards in your discipline, requirements of accreditors, or your own goals for students’ competencies. **There is no “right” number of SLOs that your program should have.** The number will look different from program to program.

**Reflect:** Take a moment to think about the students in your program. What kinds of discipline-specific things do you most hope that they will know and/or be able to do upon graduation? What are the things your professional standards and/or accrediting body say your students should know/be able to do?

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**Consider:** Circle competencies you wrote down that seem to be the most important. Consider which of these should be represented by overarching SLOs for your program.

**Write your SLOs:** In the space below, draft some SLOs for your program based on the most important competencies you described above. If appropriate, you may also wish to look at the SLOs currently in place for your program and make any needed revisions to style, language or content.

SLOs for \_\_\_\_\_ (program)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

## B. Curriculum Mapping

A **curriculum map** is a useful tool in assessment planning. It usually looks like a matrix that displays the relationship between a program's SLOs and the courses in that program. This document allows a program to articulate how/whether each course is addressing or assessing each SLO.

It is important that each program maintains a curriculum map so that learning outcomes are clearly linked from the course to the program level. This will help you to ensure that program-level SLOs are, in fact, assessed at the course level. A curriculum map should be submitted (or updated) each October along with assessment results.

**Complete the Map:** Using the template below, draft a curriculum map for your program.

LEARNING OUTCOMES (I = Introduce; R = Reinforce; M = Mastery and A = Assessment Opportunity)	REQUIRED COURSES and EXPERIENCES												

(I = Introduce; R= Reinforce; M = Mastery; and A = Assessment Opportunity)

**Reflect:** To what extent is creating a Curriculum Map useful for you? What does it allow you to do or think about that you may not otherwise? If you have not yet created a curriculum map, what barriers exist or do you anticipate?

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A Curriculum Map template that you can edit and save can be found on our **Academic Assessment website** here: <https://www2.naz.edu/academic-affairs/academic-assessment/workshop-materials-and-resources/>

### C. Evidence

Each SLO should have particular pieces of **evidence** associated with it. Evidence is data that you will collect that will help you to analyze students' progress toward an SLO. For example:

If one of my SLOs is:

***Students will be able to identify the four dimensions of literacy and explain how they relate to classroom instruction***

I need to identify sources of evidence that I can rely upon to tell me whether or not students are, in fact, able to do these things.

I will look at two sources of evidence:

1) a final paper in a course mid-program where students describe and analyze the four dimensions of literacy (**direct evidence**), and

2) a survey at the end of the program that includes a question about how well they think they understand the four dimensions (**indirect evidence**)

By analyzing outcomes on both of these assessments, I can get a good sense of whether and how well students have met the goal I set.

There are two different types of evidence: **Direct evidence** and **Indirect evidence**.

- **Direct evidence** is an assessment that is a direct demonstration of students' ability or knowledge. Their ability is *observed* through direct sources of evidence.

Examples of **direct evidence** include (but are not limited to) exams, essays, course projects, performances, portfolios, or quizzes.

- **Indirect evidence** is an assessment where the student determines what or how well they have learned. Their skills/abilities are *inferred* through indirect evidence.

The most commonly used **indirect evidence** is survey data where students respond to questions about what they believe they have learned. They may also do this through reflective writing.



If one of your evidence sources is indirect (e.g., a survey), you should also have a direct source of evidence in place.

**Practice:** Using one of the SLOs you drafted in the previous section, come up with two sources of evidence you might analyze to help you understand whether or not students have achieved the outcome you desired:

**SLO:**

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**Evidence Source #1 – Direct**

**Evidence Source #2 – Indirect**

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Consider how you might use evidence from various points in a program together in order to best understand what students know/are able to do.

One could easily look at outcomes at completion to figure out whether students have achieved a program's SLOs (e.g., capstone project, certification exam, thesis project, etc.). However, once students are done with a program, it's too late to go back and address weaknesses for *those* students.

Across all of your SLOs, we recommend looking at evidence that represents students' knowledge/abilities at various different points in your program. After all, you are not simply assessing *students*, **you are assessing the strengths and weaknesses of your entire program**. Looking at evidence produced in various courses and program experiences gives you the ability to make data-driven improvements at various points in the program and see almost immediately if they are working. After all, *improvement* is the whole purpose of assessment!

#### D. Criteria

Each evidence source you include should have some criteria associated with it. The **criteria** are what you will look for in order to know whether or not the SLO has been met. For example:

**If my SLO is:** *Students will be able to identify the four dimensions of literacy and explain how they relate to classroom instruction.*

**And my Evidence Source #1:** a final paper in a course mid-program where students describe and analyze the four dimensions of literacy

**Criteria may be:** All students will earn a score of 3 (proficient) or higher on the assignment rubric row “Knowledge of the Dimensions”

**Or criteria may be:** All students will earn a 25/30 or higher as a total grade on the assignment rubric

Having criteria linked to your evidence tells you what to look for and facilitates the analysis of your data.

**Practice:** Based on evidence sources you listed above connected to one of your SLOs, what criteria would you look for in order to feel satisfied with your result?

**Evidence Source #1 – Direct**

**Evidence Source #2 – Indirect**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

**Criteria:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Criteria:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## E. Summary

Before you begin assessing an academic program, you first need to come up with an **assessment plan**. Components of the assessment plan include the following:

<b>Student Learning Outcomes</b>	<p><i>Clear statements of expected knowledge, skills, attitudes, competencies that students are expected to acquire.</i></p> <p><i>SLO Statements begin with “Students will...” or “Students will be able to...”</i></p>
<b>Evidence</b>	<p><i>Specific data source intended to indicate students’ progress toward an SLO.</i></p> <p><i>It’s useful to have more than one evidence source per SLO.</i></p>

	<i>Remember, indirect evidence alone is rarely sufficient in telling you whether an SLO has been met! If you are using indirect evidence, choose a direct source as well.</i>
<b>Criteria</b>	<i>A goal or performance standard which will inform you on whether or not an SLO has been met for a given piece of evidence.</i>

As you formulate your plan, the guiding questions should always be: *What do I want my students to learn in this program? How will I know they have learned it?*

## Part II: Reporting on Assessment Results

Once you have an assessment plan in place and have had at least an academic year to collect your evidence, the college asks that you report annually on your assessment **findings** and **actions**. Annual assessment reports are required from all academic programs in order to remain in good standing with our accreditor, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. The ultimate goal of assessment reporting, however, is that it **facilitates data-based improvements to your program**.

### A. Findings

Each year you will be asked to report your findings. **Findings** are based on analysis of evidence. As you look at student work that you collected during the year, what themes and trends are you noticing? Are students meeting the criteria you set? Why or why not?

The example below is based on the SLO: *Students will be able to identify the four dimensions of literacy and explain how they relate to classroom instruction.*

**Evidence Source #1:** Final paper in a course mid-program where students describe and analyze the four dimensions of literacy

**Criteria:** All students will earn a score of 3 (proficient) or higher on the assignment rubric row “Knowledge of the Dimensions”

**Findings:** **Out of 14 students, only 6 met the target of 3 or higher on “Knowledge of the Dimensions” rubric row.**

The findings need not be long-winded explanations but simply a brief description of what you found when you analyzed your data, as in the example above.

We recommend making data analysis a **scheduled part of a department or program meeting** each year. Reporting findings is far more meaningful when you can discuss them with your colleagues and work together to understand what students are (or are not!) learning.

You need not assess **every single SLO** each year. Many programs put their SLOs on a cycle so that assessment work remains manageable. Consider assessing one or two SLOs for two or three years and then moving on to different ones. Determining your assessment cycle should be part of your assessment plan.

Neither the college or nor our accreditor have the expectation that your assessment results should reflect success all of the time. The most important aspect of assessment is making improvements to strengthen programs. In this sense, it is **expected** that you will not always meet your goals.

## B. Actions and Closing the Loop/Follow Up

This is the whole reason we do assessment: to take informed **actions** that make our programs stronger by helping our students to learn better. If we are not taking actions based on our data, there is really no reason for collecting it!

Each year, you will be asked to report actions that you plan to take based on your findings. Your actions should be in response to this question: **Based on our findings and potential problems identified, what can we do as a program to help our students perform better?** Or, if you are consistently meeting your target, you might ask: **What else might we assess in the future? What might we assess differently in order to more fully understand our students' knowledge/abilities?**

Based on my findings, here are some examples of actions I might take:

**Findings:** Out of 14 students, only 6 met the target of 3 or higher on "Knowledge of the Dimensions" rubric row.

**Possible Action #1:** It seems that students may benefit from more class time spent reviewing each dimension of literacy as we move through them. Beginning in the fall, we will add systematic review of each dimension throughout the semester before moving on to the next one.

**Possible Action #2:** While we will need to continue to monitor this, we suspect that limited writing proficiency is as much of a problem as the knowledge deficit. First, we have set up a meeting with the director of the Writing Center to discuss strategies for support. Second, we will implement

an optional office hours writing conference with the instructor one week before the paper is due and encourage students who appear to be struggling with the content and/or writing to attend.

As you can see from the examples above, actions need not be difficult or time consuming. With your colleagues, consider reasons for your findings and then, together, think about what the program can do to increase students' success.

The assessment reporting form will also ask you about **Closing the Loop** or **Follow Up** on your actions. This asks you to think not about what you are *going to do* based on findings, but what you *have done* in the past year based on *previous years' findings*.

As you respond to this prompt consider the following question: **What work have we done in the past year to improve our program based on previous years' assessment?** Again, these do not need to be major, time-consuming or expensive actions. Think about the "small things" and talk to your colleagues to make sure you're not missing anything!

- Have you changed any assignments or grading criteria linked to any of your SLOs?
- Have you begun to offer review classes or additional one-on-one meetings with struggling students?
- Have you modified lectures, readings, instructional techniques or other resources to help you to deliver stronger instruction?
- Have you or other faculty in your program attended workshops or seminars related to improving quality of teaching?
- Have you begun to implement mid-semester feedback forms to better understand students' experiences in class prior to the end of the semester?

If linked to your SLOs, these are all part of an important story that should be shared in your assessment work each year!

### **C. Role of the Academic Assessment Committee**

Each year on October 1, you are asked to submit an academic assessment report to the college. These reports are compiled by the Coordinator of SLO Assessment and shared with the elected Academic Assessment Committee. The committee reviews a sample of assessment reports each year and provides feedback to program faculty based on the rubric below:

1. Program Name: _____	
2. Reviewer Names(s): _____	
Assessment Plan Areas	Status
<b>3. Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) 2015-2016</b>	
Has the program developed SLOs that are defined in terms of what students will know or be able to do?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>4. Evidence and Criteria 2015-2016</b>	
Has the program defined evidence (at least one direct source) to be used in assessing each of the learning outcomes?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Has the program specified performance criteria for each of the learning outcomes?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>5. Findings 2015-2016</b>	
Has the program documented findings stemming from specific sources of evidence?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>6. Actions 2015-2016</b>	
Has the program described ways they will act to improve student learning based on analysis of the findings? OR if all outcomes are achieved, responds to findings in some way (e.g., continued monitoring, revision of goals, etc.)	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>7. Follow-Up/Closing the Loop (from 2014-2015 and earlier)</b>	
Has the program articulated action(s) taken in the past year based on previous years' findings?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>8. Curriculum Map</b>	
Does the program have a current Curriculum Map attached to the report?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>9. Overall</b>	
Does the assessment plan appear to be meaningful and sustainable?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

In addition to auditing our institutional learning outcomes assessment system, the goal of the committee is **to provide program faculty with feedback on their assessment work that may help to strengthen their processes**. The feedback you receive is **not** intended to be evaluative or punitive.

#### D. Recommended Assessment Resources

Middle States Commission on Higher Education – Publications:  
[https://www.msche.org/publications\\_view.asp?idPublicationType=5](https://www.msche.org/publications_view.asp?idPublicationType=5)

Nazareth College Academic Assessment Website:  
<https://www2.naz.edu/academic-affairs/academic-assessment/>

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment:

<http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/>

Walvoord, B. E. (2010). *Assessment clear and simple: A practical guide for institutions, departments, and general education (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Please also make use of the **Teaching Integration and Innovation Lab**, which supports meaningful use of assessment data through opportunities for teaching development!