FSU Assessment System:
Outcomes, Assessment, Analysis and Follow Through System

1. **What is the FSU Assessment System?**

The FSU Assessment System is a means by which we identify mission statements and associated outcomes for each academic department and non-academic or administrative unit to act as the basis for progress and improvement. These elements along with their assessments allow for systematic review of the effectiveness of our teaching, research and other activities that support our educational mission.

Our assessment system is composed of the development of distinct steps, all directed toward continuous improvement of our teaching, research and supportive and administrative efforts.

2. **Why does FSU maintain and implement an assessment system?**

The information and analysis gathered as part of our assessment requirements provides us with knowledge that will allow us to improve the education of our students and the support services that are needed by the University to:

- Respond to institutional effectiveness requirements for SACS accreditation;
- Comply with the Board of Governor’s requirements for State Mandated Academic Learning Compacts (SMALCs);
- Assist FSU with external reviews—the Quality Enhancement Reviews conducted for the Board of Governors; and
- Support accreditation reviews that are specific to various disciplines such as Engineering, Public Administration and Music.

3. **How is the information in the assessment system collected and recorded?**

The university will use its institutional effectiveness portal (IEP) to enter the information and data with which to assess, analyze, review and approve department and program assessment efforts. The IEP is the record of our assessment system and our efforts showing continuous improvement over time. This information, university-wide, is updated and revised as needed on an annual basis. Information in each step in the assessment process is included in the assessment system.
4. What are the Steps in the Assessment Process?

The steps in the Assessment Process include:

- Writing a mission statement or goal
- Writing a Student Learning Outcome
- Writing a Program Outcome
- Writing an Assessment Statement
- Collecting data based on assessment statement
- Analyzing the data to determine next steps
- Implementing steps to achieve continuous improvement

**NOTE:** The assessment steps proceed in the order they are listed. However, our timetable is such that over the summer, data from the previous (2006-2007) academic year is collected, analyzed and improvements and/or action plans are put into place.

At the same time, outcomes and assessment measurements are developed for the coming year (2007-2008). This timetable is appropriate to keep FSU’s assessment system current with planned improvements and changes in outcomes established at the beginning of the upcoming academic year. This manual presents the assessment system in this manner.

5. What is a mission statement/goal?

A mission statement is designed to communicate an organization’s or unit’s reason for being or purpose to all those who have some stake in its performance. The mission of a unit or program should identify how the unit or program supports the overall mission of the university. It often does so quite succinctly, and should be comprehensive and memorable. The key is to think deeply about purpose. This includes:

- The purpose of the program
- The stakeholders of the program
- The activities of the program

Your department’s or program’s mission statements have been approved previously so you do not have to develop one. However, it is important to note that every part of your assessment efforts must be tied toward progress to this goal/mission statement.

6. What are outcomes?

Outcomes identify what improvements you expect to achieve as a result of changes and enhancements in your program that will guide you toward your stated goal or mission
statement. They must not be processes and must be tied toward attainment of your goal. The student learning outcomes of each educational program will be clearly related to the mission and goals of that degree program and clearly tied to course or other requirements necessary for graduation. The student learning outcome statement should not describe either educational processes or outputs.

Examples of processes and outputs include:
- Processes are a series of operations or activities that result in a program output. For example, the number of courses taken or the prerequisite courses satisfied.
- Outputs are the products and services delivered by the program or department. They include the quantity of units, services provided and people served (such as number of graduates or number of articles).

7. **What kinds of outcomes are there?**

There are two types of outcomes that are used in the FSU Assessment System:

- Student learning outcomes and
- Program outcomes.

8. **Writing a Student Learning Outcome (SLO)**

Did you clearly indicate what learning you expect, from who and by when?

Simply stated, a student learning outcome should indicate what a student will be able to do at the end of a course of study that she or he couldn’t do at the beginning of that course of study. It is the knowledge, skills, and abilities that a student has attained at the end (or as a result) of his or her engagement in a particular set of higher education experiences.

Student learning outcomes must be framed as specific, measurable and achievable results. The student learning outcome answers the following questions:

- **Who** or what group you will be including in the expectations of the outcome;
- **What** specifically do you expect the student to be able to do at the end of a course of study that he or she could not do at the beginning of the course;
- **When** do you expect the attainment of additional knowledge, skills and abilities; and
- **Where** will the higher education experiences occur.
9. How many outcomes do I have to submit?

The following chart shows the minimum number of outcomes that must be submitted by various entities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Learning Outcome and Program</th>
<th>Outcome Requirements</th>
<th>Student Learning</th>
<th>Program Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Departments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baccalaureate</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Academic Departments</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Departments</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10. How do I respond differently as a result of the State Mandated Academic Learning Compact (SMALC) requirements?

All public universities in Florida are required by the Board of Governors to develop, implement, make available to the public and update a series of outcomes that are the State Mandated Academic Learning Compact between an undergraduate student and the university. SMALCs consist of a set of student learning outcomes and their assessment.

According to the Board of Governors, a SMALC is comprised of the identification, for each academic Bachelor’s program, of what it is that students will have learned by the end of the program, and how that learning will be measured and validated above and beyond course grades. The compact for each degree program identifies clearly articulated core student learning outcomes in three areas:

- content/discipline knowledge and skills,
- communication skills, and
- critical thinking skills.

Communication Skills generally involve the ability to conduct written and oral communication in different modes with different audiences.

Critical thinking skills generally describe reasoning that involves framing a situation or problem and supporting the solution.

Content/discipline knowledge and skills generally describe the concepts, ideas, principles, relationships and information a student emerging from a program of study is expected to know and be able to use.
Each compact must contain at least one of each of the above skills to be measured. The University has selected three student learning outcomes which satisfy the requirements for demonstration of communication skills. You may add additional outcomes demonstrating communication skills if they are critical to your program but they are not necessary if you wish to focus your seven student learning outcomes on content/discipline knowledge and critical thinking skills.

Additional policies and guidelines containing information and processes regarding SMALCs are contained in the SMALC Policies passed by the Board of Trustees and SMALC Guidelines passed by the Faculty Senate. Both can be found on the Provost’s website at http://www.fsu.edu/~acaffair/. Our current SMALCs can be found at http://provost.fsu.edu/smalcs/.

11. What is a Program Outcome?

Program outcomes identify progress toward a goal that is non-academic or administrative in nature. The same criteria and the same process of identification of assessment method, gathering results, analysis and action plan for improvement is followed for a program outcome. The only difference is that neither their goals nor their outcomes measure activities related to educational goals.

Program outcomes are defined in terms of specific objectives toward goals that a unit intends to achieve. Program outcomes can refer to programmatic, operational, and administrative activities as well as support to educational and academic programs.

Administrative and support services, along with the non-degree elements of academic entities, conduct programs whose outcomes should be tied to the mission of the unit. Program outcomes are the result of processes and outputs of the unit designed to achieve its mission and goals. Program outcomes reflect what a unit accomplishes and captures the most important results or impacts of a unit’s activities.

Each university program that is non-academic or administrative is required to have at least two program outcomes.

12. Writing a Program Outcome (PO)

• Did you clearly state how you support the University’s mission and what you wish review?

Simply stated, a program outcome should indicate what a unit has accomplished in realizing its goals at the end of a course of set of activities.

Program outcomes must be framed as specific, measurable, and achievable results whose attainment can be assessed after undertaking a set of program activities.
A Program Outcome answers the following questions:

- **Who** is responsible for conducting the activities you include in your outcome;
- **What** specifically will be the measurable results of your activities;
- **When** do you expect the attainment of your outcome; and
- **Where** will the program activities occur which will assist you in meeting your outcome.

13. **What comprises a good assessment?**

- How do you know that progress is or is not being made?

In order to meet expectations by accrediting bodies, it is necessary to state clearly how you will assess progress in meeting student learning and program outcomes. It is necessary to record precisely what you will measure to establish performance, how the information will be collected, from whom it will be gathered, when it will be collected, and who will be responsible for collecting the information. It must also state the specific expectation or level of performance (standard) that the program has for establishing that the student learning has been successful. These standards are the point of comparison against which the actual evidence of student learning will be judged once it is collected.

In your most skeptical mood, what sort of evidence would convince you that progress is being made toward the goal?

The assessment and evaluation process statement identifies the:

- **Specific behaviors** you are looking for as evidence of the learning outcome and indicate what information you will seek;
- **Standard or criterion** against which the outcome will be judged successful;
- **Measure and method** by which the assessment will occur;
- **Validity** of the measure and method used in the assessment;
- **Time frame** indicates when the assessment will occur;
- **Responsibility** indicates who is to conduct or store the assessment; and
- **Conditions** in which the assessment will occur and the reasons why the specific conditions were chosen.

As a rule, the accrediting bodies are suspicious of methods whose validity has not been established. As a result, course grades cannot be an assessment tool for student learning outcomes. Grades, the argument is, do not provide enough information on the overall success in attaining specific learning outcomes.

14. **What must be included in the results and analysis statement?**
The importance of analysis in the Institutional Effectiveness process cannot be overstated. Please remember that your results should inform decisions that lead to continuous improvement of your program. It forms the link between your data and your action plan and must lead the reader from one to the other.

- Did you or did you not make progress toward your goal?

The results statement should contain enough detail to corroborate your assessment. It is not enough to collect information. It must also be analyzed. In particular, it must be considered against the standards you have set. Analysis should be used to identify ways in which performance could be improved or, if needed, additional examinations conducted.

Generally, your analysis should state its most valuable finding. It should attempt to explain any deviation from the established standards. It might also report other insights that you have uncovered. It should indicate how such findings might or will be used in making improvements or how it leads to further analysis. It may want to highlight areas of success in addition to areas needing improvement. It is worth remembering that the findings you report should be linked both to the outcomes you anticipated and the goals you set. Importantly, you must not forget to provide some evaluation of the method you used and its continuing status as a tool for assessment of outcomes.

The results statement should address the following requirements:

- **Results** should be summarized and related to the content of the outcome;
- **Relationship to Standard** should be specifically noted;
- **Analysis** includes more than reporting of results. It should include the results of internal discussions regarding the data and which changes could be made to improve the program;
- **Deviation from Standard** clearly indicates to the reader or reviewer whether or not the standard was met;
- **Responsibility** for collection of the data at the correct time from all data sources;
- **Insights Uncovered** include findings from the analysis of your data and will likely be your most significant finding; and
- **Evaluation of assessment method** to ensure it is providing the information needed.

The file bank associated with each outcome in the IE portal allows you to upload copies of the assessments you used, including examination items, rubrics, judging criteria. It also lets you store copies of results and analyses that you perform. This is the documentation required by accrediting bodies. We encourage you to include background information into the file bank if it is available and provides additional pertinent information.

**Considerations of privacy**

Under state and federal law, the information that can be legally included in the portal is rigorously restricted. Federal and state privacy laws protect student educational records. A university found in violation is subject to severe penalties, including the loss of federal
funding. You must be exceptionally careful about the information you submit for entry into the Institutional Effectiveness Portal.

*When in doubt, do not enter or upload information that provides information on specific students.*

15. **What must be present in an acceptable improvements made/action plan description?**

- What are you going to do to improve learning or the program? Alternately, what are you going to do to keep your department or program operating at its high level? Who is responsible?

The results and analysis statement should spur some action to continue improvement. Such improvements might include the need to make changes in the student learning or program outcomes. More typically, they will include changes ranging from curricula refinements to proposed new educational tracks to enhancements in support services. They may also require new or modified assessment practices or special attention by the program faculty. Please remember if your program or students are already performing at a high level, you should state how you expect to retain that level of performance. Your statements will provide a record over time of your efforts to improve the learning experiences of students and programs. They should be documented carefully and fully. Our record of institutional effectiveness efforts for SACS must show continuous improvement. If your prospective improvements or action plan requires additional resources, their potential budget impact should be noted.

- **Improvement envisioned** should be specifically stated;
- **Time Frame** should be indicated within which the improvement will be implemented;
- **Responsibility** will identify who should ensure implementation or planning for the improvement is complete (or on schedule);
- **Actions to retain results** are required even if you are already performing at a high level;
- **Resources** should be identified if necessary; and
- **Budgetary Implications** should be noted if warranted.

16. **How do you know if each step has been executed well?**

There are two methods to determine the completeness and quality of your submissions. Instructions are included in this guide, along with an example available by clicking the question marks at the upper left of each section within the Institutional Effectiveness (IE) Portal. In addition, standard rubrics have been developed to assist you with your preparation and submission.
Links to the rubrics can be found at [http://provost.fsu.edu/smalcs/rubrics.html](http://provost.fsu.edu/smalcs/rubrics.html). A copy of the level 1 rubric is attached at the end of this document.

17. Who is responsible for each of the steps?

Since our demonstration of institutional effectiveness and continuous improvement is important for many purposes, reviews of this information involve many levels, up to the Provost.

The following table illustrates the subsequent levels of review for information in the IE portal. Level 1 is the person who enters the data. The rubric that follows is a suggested rubric for the Level 1 review prior to review by your Chair or Unit Director.

### Institutional Effectiveness Reviewer By Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2006-2007</th>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>level 2</th>
<th>level 3</th>
<th>level 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Program Outcomes</strong></td>
<td>Faculty or other person assigned</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Dean</td>
<td>Provost [VPPP]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Units: Degree Offering</td>
<td>Program Director</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Assoc. VP</td>
<td>Provost [VPPP]</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
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<table>
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<tr>
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<th>level 4</th>
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**Student Learning Outcomes**

**St. Mandated Acad. Learning Compact**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** A Reviewer can be assigned by the appropriate higher level Administrative unit upon contacting APPS for inclusion in the IE Portal.

* The Chair will certify the status and validity of the SMALCs as determined and reported by
18. What are the message board comments sometimes found on an outcome page?

Typically, they are notes from reviewers, designed to explain why some aspect of an outcome assessment has been approved or disapproved. As these reviews occur, notes to the previous reviewers can be found on the message boards. Please don’t forget to check them if necessary.
**Self Assessment Rubric Suggested questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluating the Outcome Statement:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Does the <strong>student learning</strong> outcome indicate specifically what a student will be able to do at the end of a course of study that she or he couldn’t do at the beginning of that course of study? Does it state the knowledge, skills, and abilities that a student has attained at the end (or as a result) of his or her engagement in a particular set of higher education experiences?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Does the <strong>program</strong> outcome indicate what specific, measurable and achievable results can be assessed after undertaking a set of program activities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Are you satisfied with the way in which the outcome is stated?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Is the outcome clearly related to the mission or goal of the degree program?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Is this outcome significant enough to warrant the time, energy and commitment needed for continued assessment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Has the outcome been agreed upon by the appropriate set of faculty or program staff?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Has the expected core student learning outcome been categorized into one or more of the following areas?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Content/discipline knowledge and skills;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Communication skills; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Critical thinking skills.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Do your outcomes include at least one for each area listed above? (For State Mandated Academic Learning Compacts only)
Evaluating the Assessment Statement:

1. Does the statement identify the specific results you are looking for as evidence of performance on the student learning outcomes or program outcomes?

2. Does the statement contain a specific indicator or measure together with the method by which the assessment will occur?

3. Does the specific indicator measured in the assessment capture the outcome adequately?

4. Does the specific indicator capture the competency areas that you have identified as associated with the outcome?

5. Has a standard for achievement on the outcome indicators been established?

6. Is the standard set appropriately and at the right level?

7. Does the standard provide evidence as to the percentage of students that have met the standard or criterion of each core learning outcome?

8. Is the assessment method feasible? Can it be implemented?

9. Does the assessment provide enough information to analyze the results? (e.g., not just a yes or no answer, which often leads to difficulty in determining appropriate steps for improvement)

10. Has the assessment method been reviewed and recommended by faculty or program staff and not just an individual?

11. Has the time frame for accomplishing the outcome been set appropriately?

12. Has responsibility for the outcome or assessment been assigned correctly?

13. Is the assessment specified in sufficient detail to provide clear instructions on the method that is used to conduct the assessment, when the assessment will occur, the conditions under which it will occur, and who will be responsible for its administration, collection, reporting and analysis?

14. Can the validity of the assessment measurement be corroborated by internal and external means? (Student Learning Outcomes only)
Evaluating the Results and Analysis Statement:

1. Are the results of the assessment stated clearly?
2. Are the results summarized in a fair and representative fashion?
3. Is it clear how the results compare to the standards set in the assessment statement?
4. Have you provided the required analysis of the results?
5. Does the analysis identify why students performed as they did on the learning outcome?
6. Does the analysis consider all the concerns raised by the results?
7. Are there insights that can be drawn from the results that appear to have been overlooked?
8. Is the evaluation method satisfactory? Is some change in evaluation needed in order to provide additional information that will lead to an appropriate action plan?

Evaluating the Improvements Made/Action Plan Statement:

1. Does the statement identify the proposed improvement or plan of action to make or sustain improvements in student performance on the learning outcome or support services in the program outcomes?
2. Does the statement include improvements or actions such as changes in the educational program, changes in teaching methods, changes in the assessment method, changes in the learning outcome, or changes in departmental or program processes?
3. Do the results and analysis of the assessment identified earlier support the recommended improvements?
4. Is the recommended improvement or action plan feasible?
5. Is the timetable outlined in the recommendation acceptable?
6. Is the recommended improvement or action plan specific?
7. Have any unintended or adverse consequences of the plan been identified?
8. Will the recommended improvements help ensure continuous improvement or sustained high performance on the student learning outcome?

9. Have budgetary implications been identified in the IE Portal?

10. Has responsibility for the improvements been assigned correctly?

11. Do the budget recommendations merit further attention and forwarding?

12. Do the results of analysis merit greater attention than called for in the improvement or plan? If so, is your plan for further analysis and proposed solutions specific, including parties responsible for developing the more detailed plan of action?