



How to Create an Assessment Plan Academic Programs

Before You Begin

It is strongly recommended to complete your assessment plan in a word processor or use the Office of Assessment's planning template before entering it into Blackboard Planning. Developing the plan as a whole allows you to review alignment, make revisions, and collaborate with colleagues easily. Blackboard Planning works best as a repository for your finished plan rather than a rough drafting space. Once your plan is complete, simply copy and paste the components into the system template.

Note: When copying content into Blackboard Planning, paste as plain text. Bullets, tables, and other formatting may need to be recreated manually.

Step 1—Plan to Collaborate

Assessment should reflect the collective work and priorities of the program rather than the work of a single individual. Although one person may coordinate the assessment process or enter information into the assessment plan management system, faculty and other appropriate program personnel should participate in the development, review, and use of the assessment plan.

1. Ensure that faculty and staff are aware of the assessment plan and understand its purpose.
2. Identify who will participate in developing, reviewing, and implementing the assessment plan.
3. Establish opportunities to review assessment results and discuss student learning.
4. Determine how improvement decisions will be made and communicated.

Step 2—Review the Program Mission or Purpose

The program's mission or purpose provides the foundation for the assessment plan. Before developing Goals, review what the program is intended to accomplish and the broader purpose it serves.

1. Review the program's mission or purpose and identify its major priorities or intended contributions.
2. Consider other program, disciplinary, accreditation, or institutional priorities that should inform the assessment plan.
3. Identify the major areas to be assessed and use them as the foundation for developing the program's Goals.

Step 3—Develop Goals

A **Goal** is a broad statement of mission or purpose that serves as a guiding principle of the academic program. Goals describe the program's larger intentions, aspirations, or ambitions and provide direction for the Learning Objectives that will be developed in the next step.

1. Review the program's mission or purpose and identify the major areas that should be reflected in the Goals.
2. Develop more than one Goal, with the number appropriate for the size and scope of the program.
3. Ensure that each Goal broadly states an intention, aspiration, or ambition of the program and addresses its larger impact.
4. Review the Goals together to ensure they appropriately represent the overall purpose of the program.

Step 4—Develop Learning Objectives

A **Learning Objective** is a specific, measurable statement of the knowledge, skill, or ability students are expected to gain or demonstrate as a result of instruction or training.

1. Review each Goal and identify the knowledge, skills, or abilities students should gain or demonstrate in support of the Goal.
2. Develop more than one Learning Objective for each Goal.
3. Ensure that each Learning Objective focuses on a single behavior and clearly states the knowledge, skill, or ability students are expected to gain or demonstrate.
4. Use one precise, measurable, and observable action verb (e.g., analyze, create, identify, solve) rather than verbs that are not observable (e.g., understand, know, be familiar with).
5. Review each Learning Objective to ensure that it clearly aligns with the related Goal and meets the definition of a Learning Objective.

Step 5—Develop Indicators

An **Indicator** is the method, instrument, process, or technique used to measure and evaluate a Learning Objective and gather evidence of student learning.

Note: Direct methods measure actual student learning by requiring students to demonstrate the knowledge, skills, or abilities they have gained. Indirect methods provide evidence of learning through perceptions, opinions, or other indicators, rather than through direct demonstration of student performance.

1. Review each Learning Objective and identify appropriate methods for measuring the knowledge, skill, or ability students are expected to demonstrate.
2. Develop more than one Indicator for each Learning Objective, using direct measures as the primary source of evidence and indirect measures to complement them.
3. Ensure that each Indicator clearly aligns with the related Learning Objective and will provide data that can be used to improve student learning.
4. For each Indicator, identify:
 - the source of the data;
 - how the data will be gathered, by whom, and from whom;
 - when or how often the data will be gathered;
 - who will evaluate or score the assessment;
 - the rubric or evaluation scale that will be used; and
 - who will review the results and when they will be reviewed.
5. Review each Indicator to ensure that it meets the definition of an Indicator and contains sufficient information for someone to understand how the assessment will be conducted and evaluated.

Step 6—Develop Criterion

A **Criterion** is the benchmark, value, or result that will represent success in achieving a Learning Objective as measured by an Indicator. Each Indicator should have one corresponding Criterion.

1. Review each Indicator and determine the level of performance that will represent successful achievement of the related Learning Objective.
2. Develop a Criterion for each Indicator that is measurable and quantifiable (e.g., a percentage, score, rating, or amount of increase).
3. Ensure that the Criterion represents a feasible and reasonable level of success that is ambitious but achievable.
4. Include contextual information explaining why the Criterion was selected and demonstrate that it is ambitious yet achievable. Context may include:
 - prior assessment results;
 - disciplinary norms; or
 - institutional benchmarks.
5. Review each Criterion to ensure that it clearly aligns with the related Indicator and Learning Objective and meets the definition of a Criterion.

Step 7—Report Findings

Findings are a clear and concise summary of the results gathered from an Indicator and evaluated against its corresponding Criterion.

Write the Findings after the Indicator has been implemented and the assessment data have been collected and analyzed, and write them in the past tense.

1. Review the data collected through the Indicator and compare the results to the corresponding Criterion.
2. Clearly state whether the Criterion was met, partially met, or not met.
3. Summarize the Findings in a concise and well-organized manner, providing enough information to clearly inform decisions about improvement.
4. Compare the current Findings to past trends, previous results, and/or existing standards, as appropriate.
5. Include supporting documentation (e.g., completed rubrics or survey results), when applicable.
6. Review the Findings to ensure that they clearly align with the related Indicator and Criterion and meet the definition of Findings.

Note: It is acceptable for a Criterion to be partially met or not met. These results provide opportunities to identify areas for improvement. Any assessment data submitted as supporting documentation must be anonymized.

Step 8—Develop Actions

An **Action** is a specific step the academic program will take to improve student learning or the assessment process based on analysis of the Findings. Actions describe what the program will do during the next assessment cycle.

Note: An Action should be included for every Finding. If the program explains why the Finding will not be assessed in the future. Write Actions in the future tense because they describe what the program will do during the next assessment cycle.

1. Review each Finding and identify an area that should be monitored, remediated, or enhanced.
2. Develop an Action that clearly follows from the Finding and describes the logical next step the program will take.
3. Focus Actions related to student learning primarily on pedagogical and/or curricular changes designed to improve student learning. Changes to the assessment process may also be appropriate when supported by the Findings.
4. For each Action, identify:
 - the specific improvement or change that will be made;
 - the person or group responsible for implementation; and
 - the anticipated completion date.
5. If the program decides that a Finding will not be assessed in the future, then the Action should explain why.
6. Review each Action to ensure that it clearly aligns with the related Finding and meets the definition of an Action.

Step 9—Update the Previous Cycle’s Plan for Continuous Improvement

The **PCI Update** is a narrative describing the program’s progress in completing the previous cycle’s Plan for Continuous Improvement (PCI).

Note: Write the PCI Update in the **past tense** because it describes what occurred during the current assessment cycle. New programs that did not have a PCI from the previous cycle will not complete a PCI Update.

1. Review the previous cycle’s PCI and identify all Actions, initiatives, and other items that were planned for implementation.
2. Provide a progress update for each item included in the previous PCI.
3. Clearly indicate whether each item was completed, partially completed, or not completed.
4. Provide relevant contextual information explaining the progress made on each item.
5. Include specific details about implementation, as appropriate, such as who was involved, what was accomplished, when and where implementation occurred, and why decisions or changes were made.
6. Review the PCI Update to ensure that it addresses all items from the previous PCI and provides a clear and accurate account of the program’s progress.

Step 10—Develop the New Plan for Continuous Improvement

The **New Plan for Continuous Improvement (PCI)** is a narrative that brings together all Actions identified in the current assessment plan into one coherent plan for the next assessment cycle.

Note: Write the New PCI in the **future tense** because it describes what the program intends to implement during the next assessment cycle.

1. Review all Actions identified in the current assessment plan.
2. Summarize all Actions in the New PCI, explaining how they will contribute to continuous improvement.
3. Include any new initiatives or other items the program plans to assess during the next cycle.
4. Provide relevant contextual information about each Action or initiative, including:
 - what will be implemented;
 - how it will be implemented;
 - when it will be implemented; and
 - who will be responsible.
5. Review the New PCI to ensure that it includes all Actions and other initiatives the program intends to implement and assess during the next cycle and provides a clear, coherent plan for improvement.