

Assessment Notice 2.0
VCU Assessment Policy Implementation

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Assessment Notices

Assessment Notices are periodic updates that provide information for administrators, department chairs, faculty and staff about learning outcomes assessment policy and practice at Virginia Commonwealth University. Previous *Assessment Notices* have provided guidelines and clarifications for working with Taskstream-AMS (Accountability Management System) to complete annual assessment reporting, documenting uses of assessment findings, and preparing for upcoming assessment cycles. Assessment notices can be accessed on the [student learning outcomes assessment webpage](#).

Assessment Notice 2.0

In spring 2020, revisions to VCU’s assessment policy were approved by all specified governing bodies per VCU’s [Policy on Creating and Maintaining Policies and Procedures](#). *Assessment Notice 2.0* is a guide for implementing the revised assessment policy, [Assessing Student Learning Outcomes in Degree and Certificate Programs](#).

VCU’s Assessment Policy

VCU’s assessment policy outlines expectations and standards for learning outcomes assessment in degree and certificate programs. The policy contains continuing and new standards and expectations. The purpose of the new policy elements is to reinforce a documented practice of learning outcomes assessment that will deepen student learning and improve student success. The table below highlights the assessment policy elements to be implemented (both those previously identified and new elements per the revised policy). The complete policy can be accessed in VCU’s [Policy Library](#).

Continued Assessment Policy Elements	New Assessment Policy Elements
Mission statement	Operational Plan for annual assessment
Expected learning outcomes	Assessment planning for concentrations
Assessment measures	Multi-year assessment cycle*
Performance targets	Small-enrollment threshold planning*
Curriculum map ¹	Using Assessment Findings: Closing the loop Action Plan
Assessment findings report	Assessment informed justification for course/curriculum proposals
Closing the loop discussion summary	*optional

¹ A curriculum map identifies which courses address the program-level student learning outcomes.

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Policy Implementation Schedule

Assessment Notice 2.0 concerns implementing the new policy elements during three succeeding academic cycles: 2019-2020 through 2021-2022.

Policy Element	Implementation Period
Using Assessment Findings: Action Plan	2019-2020 Assessment Cycle
Annual Operational Plan	2020-2021 Assessment Cycle
Assessment Evidence for Curriculum Changes	2020-2021 Assessment Cycle
Assessment Plan for Concentrations	2021-2022 Assessment Cycle
Multi-Year Assessment Cycle (optional)	2021-2022 Assessment Cycle
Low-Enrollment Threshold (optional)	2021-2022 Assessment Cycle

Implementation Guides

Each of the following pages is organized similarly: relevant policy language is cited, a rationale for the element is presented, actions to be completed are outlined, and the target date for implementation is identified. Because this is a guide for implementation of new policy elements, elements are presented in the order of the implementation schedule and not in the order of their appearance in the policy.

Policy Outline

Below is an outline of the policy. Policy items highlighted are new and need to be implemented.

[Assessing Student Learning Outcomes in Degree and Certificate Programs.](#)

- I. Responsibilities
 - a. VCU faculty members
 - b. Academic departments, via department chair and/or designees
 - c. VCU Assessment Council
 - d. The Office of the Provost
- II. Creating and Maintaining a Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan
 - a. Assessment plans in VCU's assessment management system (AMS)
 - b. Assessment plan elements: **annual operational plan**
 - c. **Assessment plans for concentrations**
 - d. Assessment and teach-out plans for program closures
 - e. **Assessment plans and multi-year cycles**
 - f. **Assessment reporting for small enrollment programs**
- III. Annual Reporting Schedule
- IV. Using Student Learning Outcomes Assessment to Promote Program-Level Quality, Effectiveness and Continuous Improvement
 - a. Documenting the use of assessment findings/analysis in AMS (**i.e., Closing the Loop Action Plan**)
- V. **Using Assessment to Inform Course and Curriculum Proposals**

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Using Assessment Findings: Closing the Loop Action Plan

Policy Element

IV Using Student Learning Outcomes Assessment to Promote Program-Level Quality, Effectiveness, and Continuous Improvement

Departments are required to have a process in place for using student learning outcomes assessment data to promote program-level quality, effectiveness and continuous improvement. The department chair or designee is responsible for this.

- 1. The process, including plans informed by assessment findings, must be documented in the AMS.*

Rationale

The purpose of learning outcomes assessment is to inform action to improve student learning. However, though plans for improvement are often developed they are not always documented. An action plan that documents who is responsible and who is affected, milestone activities, and expected outcomes can enable follow-through on the use of assessment findings.

Implementation Actions

The department chair designates a person or persons who are responsible for reporting faculty members' decisions for using assessment findings to prepare action plans and status reports in Taskstream -AMS.

Implementation Date

Fall 2020: First Friday in October (This action plan for 2020-2021 is informed by the 2019-2020 assessment cycle report.)

Planning Notes

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Annual Operational Plan

Policy Element

- II. Creating and Maintaining a Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan*
 - 2. The assessment plan must include the following:*
 - f. An operational plan that includes roles, responsibilities and a schedule of activities and deliverables for each year's assessment plan.*

Rationale

Preparing an operational plan annually has been identified by leaders in learning outcomes assessment as a best practice. An operational plan supports consistent and responsible conduct of assessment. It ensures that at the start of each assessment cycle essential questions about the administration of the assessment plan are answered. These essential questions regarding the current assessment cycle include what needs to be prepared, how the assessments will be administered, when and where will they be administered, and who needs to be informed and involved.

Implementation Actions

Use Appendix A to draft an operational plan. Enter the plan into Taskstream-AMS - Annual Operational Plan, effective for the 2020-2021 assessment cycle. The plan will be reviewed by the appropriate Assessment Council representative for feedback and documentation no later than the first Friday in October.

Implementation Date

Fall 2020: First Friday in October

Planning Notes

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Assessment Informed Course and Curriculum Proposals

Policy Element

V Using Student Learning Outcomes Assessment to Inform Course and Curriculum Proposals

- 1. Proposals for new courses, course modifications and changes to curriculum must provide in the Curriculum Inventory Management (CIM) system a curriculum map that illustrates the alignment of the proposed change to the student learning outcomes. This applies to degree and certificate programs.*
- 2. Proposals for new courses, course modifications and changes to curriculum must present in CIM a rationale for change that is aligned to and/or informed by assessment.*

Rationale

Changes to the curriculum, including adding and deleting courses, should be in alignment with the expected outcomes for student learning and/or informed by assessment findings that warrant the change.

Implementation

Proposals for new courses, course modifications, and curriculum changes must include a copy of the program's curriculum map and an explanation of how the change will enhance student learning.

Curriculum maps are a standing requirement for assessment plans and maintained in Taskstream-AMS. Curriculum maps are modified and updated to reflect the proposed changes.

Department and school or college curriculum committees will need to be apprised of this policy element to ensure that curriculum and course change requests are not returned for assessment documentation.

Implementation Date

Fall 2020: immediate

Planning Notes

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Assessment Plans for Concentrations

Policy Element

- II. *Creating and Maintaining a Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan*
- 3. *Programs with concentrations (tracks) will create and assess learning outcomes specific to the concentration. The department chair or a designee is responsible for this.*
 - a. *Assessing a concentration can be a stand-alone assessment plan or embedded within an existing plan.*
 - b. *Concentration assessment plans embedded within an existing plan must clearly identify which learning outcomes are specific to the concentration.*

Rationale

A concentration is a set of courses that provides structured study in a topic within the major. Concentrations require a minimum of nine credits in addition to the specified core curriculum requirements (as defined by SCHEV policy) in the major. The department or program administering the concentration specifies required and optional courses. The concentration may be used to fulfill career needs or to facilitate in-depth investigation in a topic related to an area of interest to the student. The concentration becomes official only after the Office of Records and Registration has received the change of major/concentration approval by the appropriate school dean or designee. A concentration will appear on the student's permanent record at the time of graduation.

VCU Bulletin

Because a concentration is a specialized area of study within a degree program, students deserve to understand the goals for their learning that drive the core curriculum² and the concentration curriculum. This knowledge can enhance their ability to communicate with potential employers, funding agencies, and with prospective graduate programs. For faculty, assessing the learning that is specific to the concentration will contribute to understanding the distinctiveness of the concentration in relation to the parent degree.

Implementation

For degree programs with concentrations, complete the steps in Appendix B— Concentration Assessment Plan Worksheet. The department chair or designee completes the following:

1. Enter into Taskstream-AMS assessment plans for concentrations.
2. Complete request for changes to VCU Bulletin for 2022-23 publication.

Implementation Dates

Spring 2021: May 15 for changes in Taskstream-AMS.

Fall 2021: October 15 for changes to be submitted via the Curriculum Inventory Management (CIM) system for VCU Bulletin.

Planning Notes

² Each degree program must have a common core as per policy of the State Council for Higher Education in Virginia (SCHEV). Bachelor's degree: 25% of total credit hours, excluding general education; Master's degree: 50% of total credit hours; Doctor's degree: 25% of total credit hours, excluding dissertation.

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Multi-Year Assessment Cycle

Policy Element

- II. Creating and Maintaining a Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan
 - 5. Programs may set a two- or three-year cycle for assessing the student learning outcomes. The department chair or a designee is responsible for this.
 - a. The two- or three-year schedule for assessing learning outcomes must be documented in the AMS; e.g., nine learning outcomes may be assessed in a three-year cycle of three outcomes each year.
 - b. All learning outcomes must be assessed within the two- or three-year cycle.

Rationale

Less can be more. Focusing on a few learning outcomes each year can enable assessment work to be more thoughtful, meaningful, and thorough. Assessing a few outcomes each year also makes feasible the implementation and documentation of action plans. A program must assess all outcomes in no more than three years.

Implementation

Programs implementing a multi-year assessment cycle need to explain the cycle that will be used as part of the annual operational plan in Taskstream-AMS. See Part B in Appendix A.

Implementation Date

Fall 2021: First Friday in October

Planning Notes

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Small-Enrollment Thresholds

Policy Element

- II. Creating and Maintaining a Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan
 - 6. Degree and certificate programs that do not meet enrollment thresholds for assessment reporting will be exempted from reporting during the current assessment cycle.
 - a. Enrollment thresholds for assessment will be established by the deans' office that oversees the academic programs.

Rationale

In cases when there are too few students to report meaningful assessment findings, the assessments are administered and combined with assessments from subsequent years until a meaningful analysis of the data can be reported. This policy item provides accommodations for specialized certificates and concentrations that, despite enrolling a few students, serve the University's mission.

Implementation

Department chairs or designee consult with their assessment council representative to establish enrollment threshold for exemption from reporting every assessment cycle. Plans for small-enrollment threshold standards and the provisions for administering and storing assessment data are recorded as part of the Operational Plan. These plans are reviewed and documented by the program's assessment council representative. See Part C in Appendix B.

Implementation Date

Fall 2021: First Friday in October

Planning Notes

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Appendix A - Operational Plan for Learning Outcomes Assessment

The template below (parts A, B, & C) is identical to the template to be completed in Taskstream-AMS: *Annual Operational Plan*, effective for the 2020-2021 assessment cycle. Use this appendix to prepare responses for the template in AMS. Once the template is completed, choose the SUBMIT option upon conclusion.

Submit the operational plan no later than the first Friday each October. The plan will be reviewed by your Assessment Council representative for feedback and documentation.

Part A: Annual Operational Plan for Student Learning Outcomes Assessment

An operational plan supports consistent, ethical and responsible conduct of assessing student learning.

Use the prompting questions to prepare and document the logistics of what people need to do, who is responsible, and who needs to be kept informed.

Share this plan with faculty members and others impacted by assessment activities.

Responsibility for Planning

1. When does planning for the upcoming assessment cycle occur?
2. Who is responsible to see that planning for the upcoming cycle takes place?
3. How is the operational plan for the upcoming year communicated to the faculty?

Administering Assessments

1. Which outcomes are being assessed this cycle?
2. Which assessments need preparation? What needs to be done and who is responsible?
3. Who else needs to know this and what will they be asked to do?
4. Who is responsible for seeing this preparation is completed?

Collecting and Storing Assessment Data

1. What measures are taken to keep assessment data secure?
2. Who is responsible for the collecting and storing of assessment data?

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Analyzing and Interpreting Assessment Findings

1. What is the process for analyzing and interpreting the assessment findings?
2. Who is responsible for this activity?

Discussing Student Learning & Assessment Processes

1. When and how are faculty convened to review assessment findings, discuss student learning, and recommend any actions?
2. What is done to prepare faculty for this activity?
3. Who is responsible for seeing that faculty discuss assessment findings and make recommendations?

Documenting Assessment Efforts in Taskstream-AMS

Documentation of assessment efforts (aka assessment reporting) is due annually, on the first Friday in October.

Who is responsible this cycle for documenting assessment efforts in AMS? (i.e., assessment findings, recommendations, action plans, status reports.)

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Part B: Multi-Year Assessment Cycle

Programs that use a multi-year assessment cycle provide the following information.

Multi-Year Assessment Cycle

Choose one from below.

If you select "Other" above, please complete the following:

Multi-Year Assessment Schedule

For each year of a multi-year cycle, list the learning outcomes scheduled to be assessed.

To illustrate:

Year One: outcome xxxxxxx; outcome yyyyyyy

Year Two: outcome zzzzzz; outcome qqqqqq

Year Three: outcome www; outcome nnnnnn

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Part C: Small-Enrollment Threshold

This policy item provides accommodations for specialized certificates and concentrations that, despite minimal enrollment, serve the University's mission.

Programs implementing this must policy item must maintain a plan to administer and combine assessments from subsequent years. Once sufficient assessment data are collected, an analysis and recommendations for action are reported.

Small-Enrollment Assessment Plan

Provide answers to the following questions.

1. What are the previous three years of enrollment data for this certificate or concentration?
2. Based on this, what is the threshold for annual reporting of findings and recommendations for action?
3. What are the provisions for administering and storing assessment data until the analysis and recommendation for action can be prepared.
3. Who (or what position in the department) is responsible annually to ensure that the provisions are met for assessment in low-enrollment programs?

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Appendix B - Concentration Assessment Plan Worksheet

Process for implementing assessing student learning in concentrations:

- Confirm the official name of the degree program and each concentration in VCU Bulletin.
- Confirm the learning outcome/s for the concentrations. Most concentrations can be represented with one or two outcome statements except when a program accreditor provides the learning outcomes.
- Select/identify measures for the learning outcomes.
- Analyze the courses for the concentration with a curriculum map: do the courses provide students opportunities to learn, practice, and receive feedback on the expected learning? Use the worksheet below to map the alignment of courses to learning outcomes in the concentration.
- Vet the plan to assess the concentration/s with faculty and students who will be impacted.
- Once feedback from faculty and student are incorporated, enter outcomes and assessment measures into Taskstream-AMS for the 2021-2022 assessment cycle.
- Submit (via curriculum approval processes) proposed changes to the VCU Bulletin in time for the 2022-23 academic year.

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Concentration Assessment Plan Worksheet (cont.)

Use this worksheet to align learning outcomes, courses, and assessment measures.

Use the information from the worksheet to prepare updates to the degree program's assessment plan in Taskstream-AMS and to prepare a program edit proposal to enter into CIM (Curriculum Inventory Management).

Worksheets are for internal planning and do not need to be submitted. Add tables and rows as necessary.

Degree Program Name:		Concentration Name:	
Learning Outcome/s	Courses	Assessment Measures	

Degree Program Name:		Concentration Name:	
Learning Outcome/s	Courses	Assessment Measures	

Degree Program Name:		Concentration Name:	
Learning Outcome/s	Courses	Assessment Measures	

Degree Program Name:		Concentration Name:	
Learning Outcome/s	Courses	Assessment Measures	

Degree Program Name:		Concentration Name:	
Learning Outcome/s	Courses	Assessment Measures	