



## Assessment Process Guide

**Purpose.** The Northwestern State University Strategic Plan 2016-2021 describes our Institutional Effectiveness Assessment Process (IEAP) at the strategic (University) level over the 2016-2021 timeframe. This document further guides the assessment process at the College, Program, and Division level. It identifies the desired outcomes for both academic programs and administrative support services while assessing attainment and allowing for evidence-based analysis for improvement. Northwestern will initiate this process in a deliberate manner while capturing and capitalizing on the lessons learned along the way.

This document reflects the initiation of Level 3 in our maturity process, understanding it will require modifications as we discover more efficient and effective techniques specific to how Northwestern operates (see enclosure 1). We should expect to move expeditiously through maturity Level 4, reaching Level 5 by spring 2018. Like the Strategic Plan, this document will serve as a tool and guide, not as a rigid bureaucratic process. We will mature the process in line with our lessons learned.

**Applicability.** All University employees will support the IEAP. The quantitative and qualitative data resulting from this process is critical in underpinning and ensuring we make the best strategic decisions and associated resource allocations in the future in line with our Strategic Plan.

**Background.** On August 17, 2015, by approving the Strategic Framework, then President Henderson laid the foundation for a new five-year Strategic Plan. Three months later, on November 16, 2015, President Henderson approved the Strategic Budgeting Committee's recommendation to implement the Planning, Programming, and Budget Execution model (PPBE) as a key component of our Strategic Plan. To better support innovation and entrepreneurship, the PPBE model will utilize data from our IEAP to drive data-based decision making. Prior to leaving office, President Henderson endorsed the then Draft 2016-2021 Strategic Plan, and on 27 January 2017, Acting President Dr. Chris Maggio approved the 2016 – 2021 Strategic Plan. On January 27, 2017, Acting President Maggio approved Northwestern's Institutional Effectiveness Assessment Policy. In this document, we are leveraging the products and methodology developed by the University of Central Florida (UCF). UCF used this approach with much success over the past two decades.

In today's environment of fiscal scarcity, institutions of higher learning must articulate assessment results to better inform their decision-making process. We must assess everything we do in terms of value added to our core mission to support of our overarching vision. It is critical to know how well the institution, colleges, divisions, and academic programs are doing in their core missions and, more importantly, how to improve areas that reflect a need for increased attention. We can expect to continue to face internal and external pressures to increase quality even with further potential resource reductions.

The Louisiana Board of Regents and the Board of Supervisors of the University of Louisiana System increasingly hold institutions accountable for achieving positive academics and support services outcomes. Our ability to offer Students federally-based financial aid depends on our accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). In part, this requires us to demonstrate an active assessment process that examines the services and programs that lead to improvement. According to SACSCOC, “The institution identifies expected outcomes for its educational programs and administrative and educational support services; assesses whether it achieves these outcomes; and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of those results.”

Despite having assessment pockets of excellence in Nursing, Education, and Music, largely driven by governing bodies or accreditation agencies, the current assessment process as a whole is ad hoc, inconsistent, unpredictable, and fails to drive the University toward achieving its strategic goals and objectives. We must harmonize an approach that is relevant, comprehensive, systematic, continuous, documented and verified.

Our strategic goals and initiatives demand a focus on operational and academic excellence and continuous quality improvement. The university’s faculty and staff own this process. Our commitment to excellence will ensure we achieve our vision to “become the nation’s premier regional university through the innovative delivery of transformative Student learning experiences that prepare graduates for life and career success.”

### **New Approach.**

**Academic Programs.** In coordination with the University Provost, College Deans will review, amend, or revalidate their respective missions. They will determine which degree awarding programs (diplomas, certificates, undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral) will develop, review, amend, or revalidate their respective missions. All identified academic programs will then develop their program specific Student Learning Outcomes (SLOSs), two of which are directed by our Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), *Learning for Life: Experience Your Future*. Lastly, they will develop the associated assessment methodology. The two prescribed QEP SLOs are designed for those programs whose curriculum incorporates at least one of three selected high-impact experiential learning activities, their curriculum has been approved by the Curriculum Review Council, and their program has been accepted for QEP transition (see enclosure 2).

**Administrative Units.** All university Vice Presidents will determine which of their administrative units will review, amend, or revalidate their respective missions. Those selected will develop their Service Outcome Measures (SOMs), and their assessment methodology (see enclosure 2).

By 15 April 2017, each academic program and administrative unit will submit their assessment plans for the coming year through their respective Review Committee (RC) (see enclosure 3). The respective Dean or Vice President will review and approve their respective assessment plans before submitting them to the office of the Executive Director of Institutional Effectiveness (EDIE) and Human Resources for accounting as part of the university’s assessment process. Intent is to develop a process within Taskstream to allow for this approval process.

Each subsequent year, faculty and staff will collect data, compare results of the previous year's assessment, and develop plans for the upcoming year. This repetitive process includes the annual submission of a report made up of the following components:

- 1) results of the previous year's assessment,
- 2) proposed or actual changes based on these results, and
- 3) a new assessment plan to measure the impact of these changes, including an analytical assessment of the effects of the changes made.

The University Assessment Committee (UAC), the Academic and Administrative Review Committees (ARCs), and the EDIE will work together to provide support for faculty and staff, promote timely submission of results and plans, and ensure that an effective review process is implemented (see enclosure 3).

### **Review Committees (RC)**

The appropriate college dean or vice president will determine the composition and length of service for its RC members. However, typically Academic RC members are the Program Assessment Coordinators of their respective degree awarding programs. The typical Administrative RC are the respective division or department heads. The chair of the each RC will serve as a member of the UAC. As of fall 2016, there are 15 Academic/Administrative Review Committees:

#### **Academic Review Committees (ARC):**

- College of Arts and Sciences
- Gallaspy College of Education and Human Development
- College of Nursing and School of Allied Health
- College of Business and Technology

#### **Administrative Review Committees (ARC):**

- Athletics
- Institutional Effectiveness and Human Resources
- The Student Experience
- Technology Innovation and Economic Development
- External Affairs
- University Affairs
- Business Affairs & Police
- Informational Technology Services
- Registrar
- Library
- Support Services

**RC duties:**

- Assist faculty and staff in adhering to specific review criteria
- Review and evaluate the quality of program or unit results in reports and plans
- Compare the results, reports, and plans to those of the previous year

**Program Assessment Coordinator**

For each degree-awarding program or administrative unit, participating in the IEAP, at least one faculty member or staff member will be assigned to serve as the Program Assessment Coordinator. For academic programs, department chairs appoint an experienced faculty member who is familiar with the program. For administrative areas, the assessment coordinator is experienced in the unit mission and functions.

**Program Assessment Coordinator responsibilities.**

- Enters assessment results and new plans in Taskstream (when the capability is available).
- Coordinates data collected by the faculty and staff responsible for implementing the assessment measures.
- After faculty or staff develop the program or unit outcomes and measures, collect data and examine it in terms of the original outcomes.
- Lead the faculty or staff in a group review of the results of their annual assessment and in making changes to the new assessment plan.
- Submit reports and plans to department or program chairs for review prior to submission to the ARC.

**University Assessment Committee**

**Purpose.** The UAC provides leadership while assisting and overseeing the ongoing assessment with the intention of improving Student learning and university services and operations.

**Appointments.** The appropriate college dean or vice president will select and appoint their respective review committee chair to serve as a UAC member (twelve total). The university president, through consultation with appropriate administrators and the UAC, appoints the chair of the UAC.

**Term of Service.** Each UAC member shall serve at the pleasure of their college or division administrator for a period of no less than one year. The normal length of service on the UAC is three years and a member can succeed himself/herself. The chair will serve for a specific term, typically two years.

**UAC Charge. (*Fifteen Members plus Chair*)**

- Define and implement university institutional effectiveness assessment policy and procedures;
- Oversee and review the quality of the divisional review committees' reviews of program and unit assessment results in reports and plans;
- Provide an annual report to the president documenting strengths and weaknesses of the university's overall effort in assessment and institutional effectiveness;
- Provide feedback to EDIE regarding the development and improvement of Taskstream.

**UAC Member Duties.**

- Serves as the chair of their respective academic or administrative review committee (ARC) and organizes the committees review of assessment results and assessment plans;
- Apprises the college dean or appropriate vice president of issues and updates related to the continuous quality improvement process;
- Provides assistance and guidance to the unit and department heads on the IE assessment policies and procedures;
- Provides timely communication of all UAC mandates, instructions, and deadlines to assessment coordinators and others as appropriate;
- Maintains a current list of assessment coordinators and review committee members in respective colleges and divisions and updates these with EDIE as necessary;
- Establishes internal submission deadlines for initial and final submissions of assessment results reports and plans;
- Reports the ARC consensus reviews to the UAC at the close of the assessment cycle;
- Serves as the liaison for any unit or program in their college or division that requires assistance in the development of plans, analysis of collected data, documentation of assessment results, and navigation of Taskstream;
- Works with the EDIE to coordinate training for assessment coordinators and other appropriate groups.

**UAC Meetings.** The UAC meets each fall and determines a tentative meeting schedule for the academic year, with more frequent meetings during times of greater need such as the period of review of ARC reports. The UAC sets the final due date for presentation of ARC results and plans reviews to the UAC.

- The chair may call additional meetings as necessary.
- One-half of the UAC membership plus one, not counting the chair, constitutes a quorum.
- A representative from the respective UAC member's college or division may vote by proxy representation at a UAC meeting.

- The UAC chair will be a voting member in the case of a tied vote.

**Exemptions.** The UAC will collaborate with administrative unit heads and vice presidents to determine if a unit is exempt from participating in the assessment cycle. The UAC will consider only written requests for exemption. Reasons for exemption may include, but are not limited to the following:

- Reorganization
- Unusual affiliation with NSU
- Mission of unit does not lend itself to assessment efforts

## **UAC Chair**

### **Responsibilities.**

- During the spring semester, the chair sends a memorandum to deans and vice presidents summarizing the status of the submission of assessment plans and results of the respective college or department, with copies sent to UAC representatives.
- The chair sends a memorandum to academic programs and departments that do not comply with requirements at least 30 days prior to the annual report (early to mid-June). He or she sends copies of this memorandum to supervisors and UAC representatives.
- The chair sends a final update on the status of programs or units that fail to complete all required assessment tasks to the appropriate deans or vice presidents at the end of the summer semester.
- The UAC chair will convene ad hoc groups as needed to discuss special issues in university assessment and to bring those issues to the full UAC.
- The UAC chair will meet with EDIE personnel as necessary to discuss administrative issues and concerns, prepare for the first meeting of the academic year, prepare for the institutional effectiveness assessment annual report to the president, and when otherwise deemed necessary.

## **Office of Executive Director for Institutional Effectiveness (EDIE) and Human Resources**

**Survey Support:** The office of Executive Director for Institutional Effectiveness (EDIE) conducts all institutional-level surveys and makes results available for IE assessment. These include the *NSU End of Semester Student Survey*, the *NSU Graduating Graduate Student Survey*, and the *NSU Alumni Survey*. Periodically, we will administer other surveys and disseminate results through EDIE, including the *National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)*. In addition, we will provide individual support for program or unit specific surveys.

**Training:** EDIE, potentially in partnership with the Center for Teaching Excellence, or the soon to be Faculty Success Center will provide training and support for faculty and staff involved in all aspects of IEAP. The UAC provides suggestions and feedback to IEAP personnel for these and other training as needed. Examples are:

- Best practices in assessment
- Development and implementation of Student learning outcomes for academic and Student support units
- Development and measurement of operational and process outcomes for academic and administrative units
- Development of appropriate assessment tools
- Assessment coordinator training and use of Taskstream
- Divisional review committee training and use of Taskstream

Much of this assessment process is already well underway across the University. By standardizing our approach, we can better nest it with the other components of the IE process. Like the Strategic and Quality Enhancement Plans, this process is flexible in that it allows us to review, edit, adjust or modify it as needed to facilitate continued improvement and progress toward our vision.

***Enclosures:***

- 1 – Characteristics of Maturity or Maturation Levels
- 2 – Planning Flowchart of NSU Assessment Process Planning Flowchart
- 3 – Assessment Process
- 4 – Organizational Responsibility Flowchart of NSU Assessment Process

***References:***

*Guidelines for Planning and Implementing Quality Enhancing Efforts of Program and Student Learning Outcomes.* (2008, February). (UCF) Program Assessment Handbook, 1-58. doi:15 July 2016 accessed at [http://www.oas.ucf.edu/doc/acad\\_assess\\_handbook.pdf](http://www.oas.ucf.edu/doc/acad_assess_handbook.pdf)

*University Institutional Effectiveness Assessment Policies and Procedures:* UCF Institutional Effectiveness Assessment Process. (2008, February). University of Central Florida Assessment, 1-6. doi:15 July 2016 accessed at <http://www.ucf.edu/strategic-planning/strategic-planning-assessment-process/>

*Resource Manual for the Principles of Accreditation: Foundation for Quality Enhancement.* (2012). SACSCOC Resource Manual, 2nd Edition (2012), first printing, 1-146. doi: 22 January 2017