

Syracuse University Guide for Developing an Assessment and Action Plan

Functional Areas

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Office of the Associate Provost for Academic Programs

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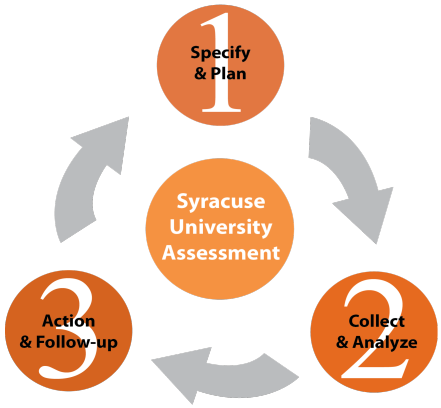
Syracuse University Assessment

Syracuse University is accountable to a number of external stakeholders including New York State, various individual program accreditors, and the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (Middle States). Middle States accreditation operates on a ten-year self-study cycle with a periodic review report submitted in year five. Since Syracuse University's last self-study in 2008, the accreditation landscape has changed to more centrally focus on the outcomes of student learning experiences.

To demonstrate our commitment to not only meet standards set by accrediting bodies, but to provide our students with an outstanding educational experience in and out of the classroom, Syracuse University will enhance our culture of assessment and continual improvement.

Assessment is integral to maintaining quality and effectiveness at any institution of higher education. Institutional assessment relies on the contributions of all academic, co-curricular, and functional areas campus-wide in meeting Syracuse University's mission and goals. Within the culture of assessment, the mission and goals of each academic, co-curricular, and functional area should align with the overall mission of the greater institution. From their individual mission and goals, each area will develop an Assessment and Action Plan.

An Assessment and Action Plan should be viewed as a process for continual improvement of products, processes, and services, as well as a tool for managing resources. It should be meaningful to its stakeholders and the results used to inform decision-making. From the results of assessment, each area should be able to determine what actions could be taken to improve the student experience, take those actions, and then measure whether those actions were effective.



Assessment Working Team

The Office of the Associate Provost for Academic Programs has put together an Assessment Working Team that is available for consultation. Team members can help you determine which type of Assessment and Action Plan should be developed, meet with departments and units, and provide workshops on assessment-related topics.

If you would like assistance, contact Gerald Edmonds, Assistant Provost for Academic Programs, at assessment@syr.edu.

Introduction to Assessment and Action Plans

This guide focuses on developing an Assessment and Action Plan for functional areas. Functional areas are defined as units that provide the operational processes and services of the institution. The process for conducting assessment is organized into three phases:

Phase 1 – Specify and Plan:

Specify goals and objectives. For each objective, specify strategies, and determine key performance indicators (KPI).

Phase 2 – Collect and Analyze:

Collect the data for KPI's specified in Phase 1. Analyze and interpret the results.

Phase 3 – Action and Follow-up:

Indicate what actions will be taken and determine the impact of those actions.

The **Functional Area – Assessment and Action Plan Rubric**, may serve as a resource when developing your plan. The rubric details SU expectations and characteristics associated with each component of the Assessment and Action Plan at various levels of proficiency.



Phase 1—Specify and Plan

During this first phase, the focus is on identifying:

- Unit goals and objectives
- Strategies used to achieve the objectives
- Measures that serve as key performance indicators

I. Goals

Goals should reflect the charge of the unit and align with its mission. Functional areas begin Phase 1 by identifying 5–7 unit goals.[1]

The unit's goals should be broad statements focused on general components such as efficiency, effectiveness, communication, fiscal health, services, and support systems. These unit goals are operationalized into specific objectives.

Goals	
Definition	**Goals** are the general long-term aims or purposes of a unit that are consistent with its mission. Goals should be broadly stated, meaningful, achievable, and provide a framework for identifying objectives.
Example	Provide an efficient course registration process.

[1] 5-7 goals are suggested. The number of goals each unit identifies depends on the charge of that unit.

II. Objectives

Effective goals provide a framework for the next step in developing an Assessment and Action Plan, articulating objectives. Each goal will typically have more than one objective.[2]

Objectives	
Definition	**Objectives** are concrete statements of tangible results the unit intends to achieve. Objectives should be written as statements that are specific, measureable, achievable, results-oriented, and time bound.
Example	During fall and spring registration, students will be able to register on their own, without needing help from the registrar's office.

Objectives should be written using action verbs that describe what the unit will achieve or accomplish in light of comprehensive unit goals. The **Appendix** at the end of this guide provides a list of action verbs. Some examples of action verbs include:

Apply	Examine	Modify
Choose	Identify	Provide
Demonstrate	Interpret	Schedule
Describe	Model	Use

III. Strategies

For each objective, specify strategies the unit will use to meet objectives. Implementing the listed strategies should facilitate the accomplishment of the associated objective.

Strategies	
Definition	**Strategies** are the specific processes used and services offered by a unit.
Example	• Conduct test of the system prior to opening the registration process. • Conduct a check of courses in the system to ensure the accuracy of the information. • Have a help line and live chat available 7AM to 10PM during peak registration weeks. • Have an email address for questions or to report registration issues. • Provide online video tutorials that detail the process. • Monitor help line and live chat requests/issues. • Monitor logins to the system and time to completion.

To determine strategic capabilities available to your unit, generate a comprehensive list of services and processes that members of your unit are able to perform. Strategies should not be requests for additional funding, resources, or additional personnel.

[2] The number of objectives identified for each goal depends on what must be accomplished to achieve that goal.

IV. Key Performance Indicators

For each **Objective** listed, at least one key performance indicator (KPI) should be established. KPIs should measure how effectively and efficiently a functional unit is operating. By looking at KPIs, we get a sense of "it's a good year or it's a bad year."

A KPI should include two aspects: a measure of what should be achieved, and criteria that indicate unit expectations for performance.

Key Performance Indicator	
Definition	A **key performance indicator** (KPI) is a metric that provides an indication of performance of a specific objective. It can be used as a driver for improvement. Included in each KPI should be the criteria for measuring success.
Example	**Measure:** Reduction in live chat and email help requests, as well as a reduction in trouble calls to help line. **Criteria:** 10% drop.

Below is a completed Phase 1 using the examples provided, as it would appear in the **Functional Area Assessment and Action Plan Template.**

Note that for each goal there will typically be more than one objective. For the sample goal, "Provide an efficient course registration process," examples of two objectives are shown below. Each objective has listed strategies and at least one associated KPI.

PHASE 1			
Goals	**Objectives**	**Strategies**	**Key Performance Indicator**
Provide an efficient course registration process.	1. During registration, students will be able to register on their own, without needing help from the registrar's office.	• Have a help line and live chat available 7AM to 10PM during peak registration weeks. • Provide online video tutorials that detail the process.	10% drop in trouble calls, help requests, and issues reported compared to previous year.
	2. During registration time, the system will be functional 100% of the time.	• Conduct test of the system prior to opening the registration process. • Have monitoring system that alerts ITS to issues.	Zero recorded alerts of system downtime.



Phase 2—Collect and Analyze

Goals should be assessed over a number of annual assessment cycles. During the assessment process, functional units should assess 1 or 2 specific goals per annual cycle. Phase 2 should then be completed each year for the goals and objectives that are being assessed by the functional unit during the annual cycle.

The second phase consists of collecting and interpreting the results of the key performance indicators. It is critical to have well-defined objectives, strategies, and key performance indicators that provide a roadmap for collecting meaningful data and analyzing the results.

To begin this phase:

- Determine the goals that will be the focus of the assessment cycle.
- Determine the unit's plan for systematically collecting information.
- Specify the person(s) responsible for collecting information.
- Specify the person(s) responsible for analyzing information.
- Establish a timeline for completion.

I. Collect and Record Results

Collect and record the results of your key performance indicators. Write the results with as much detail as possible. This will increase the ability of the unit to interpret the information. For each KPI, include information regarding when the results were collected.

II. Analyze and Interpret Results

Analyze and interpret what the results indicate about the unit's progress towards meeting its objectives. This interpretation should be recorded in detail to help the unit make meaningful recommendations in Phase 3.

It is important to include as many members of a functional unit as possible in Phase 2. Staff members directly involved in a process or service are likely able to offer an insightful understanding of the implications of results and provide a more accurate interpretation.



Phase 3—Action and Follow-up

Using the information and results from Phase 1 and Phase 2, the unit can now determine whether or not their processes and services are performing as effectively and efficiently as the unit expected. In the third phase, the functional unit can decide what areas are in need of improvement, determine how processes or services should be modified, or conclude that the processes and services are operating as expected.

I. Action

Specify what action will be taken to improve unit processes and procedures. Based on the interpretation, the unit should answer the following questions:

- What can be improved?
- What processes or services are operating as expected?
- How should these changes be made?

The assessment process should foster action. Focus on one or two action items each year and decide who will be responsible for follow-up. As you implement your action plans, keep written records of activities (e.g. meeting minutes) related to the action as documentation of the process. Certain action items may be long term and results can be reported in subsequent years.

II. Follow-Up

Follow-up refers to the unit plan for determining whether or not the action steps successfully improved unit operations. This section of the Assessment and Action Plan documents the impact of previous assessment cycles.

From this follow-up, a unit can determine the impact of operational changes, create action plans for maintaining efficiency, and establish new criteria for further improvement.

Improving Unit Assessment Processes

After completing Phase 3, staff should be provided an opportunity to recommend improvements to the unit's assessment processes.

Possible recommendations could include:

- Identifying the need for more, or different, measures for specific objectives.
- Determining the need to streamline the process of collecting information.
- Identifying additional staff members who should be involved in assessment activities.

These recommendations should be included at the end of the Assessment and Action Plan.

Appendix
Objective Action Verbs

This list of action verbs is adapted from Kemp's "Shopping List of Verbs" (2014) and based upon Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning. The list should be used to help specify actions and measures used for assessment. **The verbs listed here can be used for any objectives developed for an Assessment and Action Plan.** Each column includes (1) category from Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning, (2) definition of the category, and (3) action verbs associated with that category.

Application	Analysis	Evaluation
Use of knowledge, problem solving, etc.	Examination of parts of information.	Forming judgments based on criteria and evidence.
Apply Change Choose Compute Demonstrate Discover Dramatize Employ Interpret Manipulate Model Modify Operate Practice Predict Prepare Produce Relate Schedule Show Sketch Solve Use Write	Analyze Appraise Breakdown Calculate Categorize Compare Contrast Criticize Diagram Differentiate Discriminate Distinguish Examine Experiment Identify Illustrate Infer Model Outline Point out Question Relate Select Separate Subdivide Test	Appraise Argue Assess Choose Compare Conclude Contrast Defend Describe Discriminate Estimate Evaluate Explain Interpret Judge Justify Predict Rate Relate Select Support Value