

## **Detailed Instructions for the Completion of the 2023 CATS Reports**

All of the subparts for each of the six phases of the SLO assessment process listed below are expected to be addressed in each program's 2023 CATS report as numbered below (i.e., Phase 1.1.a, 1.1.b,...1.2.a, 1.2.b,...Phase 2.1.a,...etc.). If a particular subpart of a phase of the SLO assessment process is not applicable for the program completing the CATS, simply respond with, "Not Applicable."

### **Under Phase 1.1 of CATS:**

- a. Acknowledge the deficiency that the program's past annual assessment reports were not exclusively focused on Student Learning Outcomes as expected in Standard 8.2.a. since they included operational program outcomes (OPOs) and other forms of program evaluation outcomes which were not SLOs and not pertinent for compliance with Standard 8.2.a.
- b. If applicable, acknowledge the deficiency that the program's past annual assessment reports did not explicitly label their learning outcomes as "Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)" which can be confusing to review committees looking for the identification of expected SLOs and the assessments of SLOs.
- c. If applicable, acknowledge the deficiency of having worded one or more of the expected SLOs incorrectly in the past because that SLO focused more on how the educational program or curriculum operated to engage students than on what the student learned as a function of completing the program (i.e., the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes gained by the student).
- d. If applicable, acknowledge the deficiency of having worded one or more of the expected SLOs in ways that were unmeasurable, unclear, and/or overly complex. An SLO is probably unclear in its focus and too broad in its content if it mentions key aspects of expected student learning which are not all subsequently assessed in Phases 2 and 3 of the expected SLO assessment process.

### **Under Phase 1.2 of CATS:**

- a. Cite as the corrective action taken the program's adoption of an exclusive focus on SLO assessments when demonstrating compliance with Standard 8.2.a beginning in the 2023 CATS report. As evidence of

that, cite the program's current list of expected SLOs which now excludes OPOs and other forms of program evaluation which are not SLOs.

- b. If the learning outcomes in past assessment reports were not explicitly called SLOs because they are labeled differently for a program accreditor or for other reasons, cite as the corrective action taken the program's labeling and numbering of them as SLOs (i.e., SLO 1, SLO 2, etc.) in reports used to satisfy SACSCOC accreditation requirements going forward including this one so that there is no confusion as to whether the program has identified SLOs and subsequently assessed all of them for compliance with Standard 8.2.a. Whatever term a program accreditor may prefer to use instead of SLO is certainly appropriate to be used in reports for that accreditor, but the intent here should be to clearly address this SACSCOC accreditation requirement and its focus on SLOs.
- c. If this deficiency existed, cite the program's corrective action taken as the rewording of the expected SLO such that it now focuses on what the student learned and not on how the program or curriculum operates to engage students. Cite that rewording here as evidence that the corrective action was implemented in 2023.

- (For 1.2.c) Note that some programs in the past identified expected SLOs which did not qualify as SLOs because they focused on how the program operates or what the student experienced in the program rather than on what the student learned from completing the program. They were fundamentally OPOs labeled incorrectly as SLOs. It is important that such errors be corrected in the program's 2023 CATS report so that the expected SLOs for the program's 2023-2024 SAIR which will be used to demonstrate compliance with Standard 8.2.a during UAH's subsequent reaffirmation reviews for SACSCOC accreditation do not reveal such deficiencies and raise a non-compliance concern with Phase 1 of the expected SLO assessment process. For example, the BA and MA programs in English were notably weak in this regard with their focus in SLOs on assessing the content of course syllabi (a form of program review) to determine what students

experienced in the curriculum instead of assessing what the students in those programs had learned. Another example was present in the SLO in the BA in Elementary Education that focused on students completing the 4x12 coursework with a 2.75 GPA which did not focus on assessing what students learned but on how well they complied with completing this particular program completion requirement.

- d. If this deficiency existed, cite as the corrective action taken the program's revisions of the wording of the affected SLOs such that they are now expressed in measurable, clear, and uncomplicated terms and cite that revised wording of the affected SLOs here. If a program accreditor requires a different wording for those expected learning outcomes, use those wordings in the program's compliance reports for program accreditation, but do not fail to satisfy SACSCOC requirements here for institutional accreditation with measurable, clear, and uncomplicated expected SLOs.

- (For 1.2.d) There are quite a few expected SLOs which appear to be unmeasurable (and/or are not measured in Phase 2), unclear or vague, and overly complex or convoluted. It is important that such deficiencies be corrected in the program's 2023 CATS report so that the expected SLOs for the program's 2023-2024 SAIR which will be used to demonstrate compliance with Standard 8.2.a during UAH's subsequent reaffirmation reviews for SACSCOC accreditation do not reveal such SLO deficiencies and raise a non-compliance concern with Phase 1 of the expected SLO assessment process. Examples of such deficiencies can be seen in the stated SLOs for UAH's half dozen different undergraduate engineering programs which shared the same, vague, and overly-complex SLO that makes no distinction between the specific knowledge and skills that majors in the different specialty areas of engineering are expected to use to "identify, formulate, and solve complex engineering problems by applying principles of engineering, science, and mathematics" or the same SLO that calls for applying

“engineering design to produce solutions that meet specified needs with consideration of public health, safety, and welfare, as well as global, cultural, social, environmental, and economic factors.” While those two outcomes may have been formulated to match the new ABET criteria for accreditation of engineering programs, they lack the clarity and specificity which SACSCOC expects to see in Phase 1 of an acceptable SLO assessment process for each undergraduate engineering program. To satisfy SACSCOC evaluators, two alternate, clear, specific, and measurable expected SLOs for the B.S.Che.E. degree program could be worded, “SLO 1. By the end of this program, students appropriately identify and solve complex chemical engineering problems,” and “SLO 2. By the end of this program, students design a chemical production system which is viable, cost-effective, and ethically responsible.”

**Under Phase 2.1 of CATS:**

- a. If applicable, acknowledge the deficiency that the program’s past annual assessment reports have not described in sufficient detail the measurement methods and actual measurement instruments used to assess SLO achievement.
- b. Acknowledge the deficiency that the program’s past annual assessment reports have not addressed the appropriateness of those measurement methods and instruments to properly and validly determine the SLO achievement levels of the program’s students near the completion of the program.
- c. If indirect measures of student self-reported SLO achievement were used, acknowledge their potential weaknesses in validity compared to direct measures, especially when student surveys are used with low response rates. There is a commonly held expectation that direct measures of SLO achievement should be used and are typically stronger than indirect measures. There is no expectation from SACSCOC that indirect measures must or should be utilized.

- d. If applicable, acknowledge the deficiency that the methods and instruments used to measure the extent to which SLOs were achieved by students were not designed or used to produce informative categorical results of the extent to which SLOs were achieved at several different levels of student performance (i.e., 3-5 levels of SLO achievement ranging from exceptionally strong SLO performance to exceptionally weak SLO performance).

**Under Phase 2.2 of CATS:**

- a. If such deficiencies existed, cite the corrective action taken that the program's measurement methods and instruments have been sufficiently described in 2023, and those descriptions are included here.
- b. Cite the corrective action taken in 2023 to produce detailed descriptions of the appropriateness of the measurement methods and instruments used to determine SLO achievement levels. Cite those descriptions here. Note in this regard that since SLOs are typically stated in terms of what the student has learned by the time the program has been completed, it is not appropriate to measure the student's SLO achievement in introductory courses or early stages of the program's completion. It is more appropriate to conduct such assessments near the end of the program, especially in capstone courses, experiences, or projects where the cumulative effects of what the student has learned by completing the program are better demonstrated and more appropriately evaluated.

- (For 2.2.b) Having two different assessment methods for each SLO is not a SACSCOC requirement. Do not feel obligated to keep a second method in the 2023 CATS report, especially if the second method relies on student self-reported SLO achievement and appears weaker, less appropriate, and less valid than a stronger direct method for measuring SLO achievement levels. Having a strong direct measurement method for each SLO that is soundly designed, aligned well with the content of the SLO, and is utilized to assess students near the end of the program is all that is needed to demonstrate compliance.

- (For 2.2.b) Note that using course or project grades to assess the extent to which an SLO was achieved is typically considered inappropriate since grades often are comprised of more factors than SLO achievement alone. Instead, SACSCOC expects to see measurement methods used that are specifically designed to assess SLO achievement levels, and rubrics are commonly developed for that purpose.
- c. If such deficiencies existed, cite the corrective action taken to discontinue the use of indirect measurement methods including surveys of student self-reported SLO achievement when the validity of such measurement methods and their results appear low or highly questionable.
  - d. If that deficiency existed, cite the corrective action taken to ensure that measurement methods used can produce meaningful and informative categorical distributions of the extent to which SLOs were achieved across 3-5 levels of student performance ranging from exceptionally strong SLO achievement to exceptionally weak SLO achievement. The importance of having this measurement capability is apparent below in Phase 3.

**Under Phase 3.1 of CATS:**

- a. Acknowledge the deficiency that the program's past annual assessment reports did not sufficiently describe the where, when, and for how many students the SLO assessments of expected SLOs were conducted.
- b. If applicable, acknowledge the deficiency that the program's past annual SLO assessments included setting low and easily met assessment targets.
- c. If applicable, acknowledge the deficiency that the program's past annual assessment reports did not describe assessment results in much or any detail beyond reporting that an assessment target was met.
- d. If applicable, acknowledge the deficiency that the program's past annual assessment reports did not describe or report in sufficient detail the extent to which an expected SLO was achieved within each of 3-5 categorical levels of student performance ranging from exceptionally strong SLO achievement to

exceptionally weak SLO achievement. Note too the related deficiency when such categorical data were captured by the measurement instruments used but were simply collapsed or averaged to determine whether a single assessment target was met rather than totaled for each of the 3-5 levels of SLO achievement in ways that would have better described how assessment results were distributed along a continuum of different SLO achievement levels.

- e. If applicable, acknowledge the deficiency in the program's past annual reports that Phase 3 appeared incomplete when a program reported having conducted no SLO assessments of expected SLOs that year but would do so in the following year with no rationale provided as to why such SLO assessments did not take place annually.

**Under Phase 3.2 of CATS:**

- a. Cite the corrective action taken in 2023 to produce the missing information describing the nature of the conducted assessments. Include those descriptions here which were missing from the program's 2022-2023 assessment report.
- b. Cite the corrective action taken to discontinue the program's practice of setting and using low or easily reached assessment targets that resulted in no further analysis of assessment results and no pursuit of program improvement. State that going forward, all or nearly all students nearing completion of the educational program, not just 70-80% or fewer, will be expected to perform at a satisfactory or better level of SLO achievement for each expected SLO.
  - (For 3.2.b) Delete references to past assessment targets and state instead that the expected SLOs for program graduates or students nearing program completion apply to all program graduates/students. Note that this corrective action has been taken by the program in its 2023 CATS report.
- c. If this deficiency existed, cite the corrective action taken to discontinue in 2023 the past practice of only reporting that a target was met in assessment results. Discontinuing past uses of assessment targets in the SLO assessment process will help ensure that such deficiencies are rectified.

- (For 3.2.c) Report assessment results as the numbers and percentages of students assessed whose performance fell into each of 3-5 categories of SLO achievement ranging from exceptionally strong SLO achievement to exceptionally weak SLO achievement (or similarly named categories of SLO achievement levels) for each expected SLO. Describing the frequency and percentage distributions of assessed students along that continuum of SLO achievement levels is much more informative and useful for subsequent analysis of the meaning of assessment results in Phase 4 than collapsing the assessment data into a single percentage or average as was done previously to determine whether an assessment target was met. Overall percentages or averages say very little about how the SLO achievement levels were distributed for each SLO and are less useful for identifying the strengths and weaknesses in SLO assessment results. Note that this corrective action has been taken by the program to produce more detailed and informative reporting of assessment results in the 2023 CATS report than was available in previous annual program assessment reports.

d. If this deficiency existed, cite the corrective action taken going forward to present assessment results within 3-5 different levels of SLO achievement ranging from exceptionally strong SLO achievement to exceptionally weak SLO achievement. If data were collected on the different SLO achievement levels of the program's students for the 2022-2023 program assessment report, summarize them here accordingly to show the total number and percentage of assessed students whose performance was judged to be in each of the 3-5 different levels of SLO achievement for each SLO such that the distribution of the SLO achievement results can be easily observed, described, and interpreted.

- (For 3.2.d) Where previous assessment data were captured at 3-5 different levels of SLO achievement but were not clearly labeled or summarized by SLO achievement level, take corrective action to do so using the data captured in the 2022-2023 program assessment



report. Cite those revised and more detailed distributions of SLO assessment results for each SLO achievement level in the 2023 CATS report. If previous 2022-2023 assessment data were not captured at 3-5 different levels of SLO achievement but could be broken out into 3-5 different SLO achievement levels after the fact, take that corrective action to produce frequency and percentage distributions for 3-5 different levels of SLO achievement for inclusion in the 2023 CATS report. If the assessment data collected in 2022-2023 cannot be converted into such frequency and percentage distributions for 3-5 different levels of SLO achievement, note that and report in the 2023 CATS how the measurement methods used to assess SLO achievement in the program's 2023-2024 SAIR have been changed to produce such assessment results.

- (For 3.2.d) When rubrics were used to assess student work products/artifacts, they often captured SLO achievement data on 3-5 different levels ranging from exceptionally strong SLO achievement to exceptionally weak SLO achievement (or similarly named categories of SLO achievement levels). Rubrics also sometimes measured separately different components of a student's performance on the SLO in question. Rather than collapse the data collected for the different SLO components into overall totals for the SLO at each SLO achievement level, keep those distribution summaries by component of the SLO separate from one another to generate a richer and more detailed presentation of assessment results which would show the relative strengths and weaknesses of the different SLO components measured. Such breakouts of the data by SLO components could be informative for the analysis of the meaning of assessment results and the identification of a specific program improvement to be pursued based on SLO assessment results in Phase 4.

- e. If this deficiency existed, provide a reasonable rationale as to why SLO assessments were not conducted or reported in the program's most recent assessment report for 2022-2023. If a program's SLO assessments were being intentionally conducted on a staggered basis every two years and 2022-2023 was the off year for assessing SLO achievement levels in the program, indicate whether that should and will continue going forward. Above all, it is important to avoid giving the impression that Phase 3 was not completed at all for this program. Certainly the 2023 CATS report can help do that when the program cites in its 2023 CATS report all of the expected corrective actions taken to improve the alignment of the program's most recent SLO program assessment report in 2021-2022 with SACSCOC's current expectations for compliance with the expected six-phase SLO assessment process going forward.

**Under Phase 4.1 of CATS:**

- a. Acknowledge the deficiency that the program's past annual assessment report template did not include a section or phase that called for analyses of the meaning of assessment results and their implications for possible program improvement as Standard 8.2 now expects in Phase 4 of the expected SLO assessment process.
- b. Acknowledge the deficiency that little or no analyses of assessment results of their meaning for potential program improvements were reported previously, confirming that Phase 4 was missing and incomplete in the program's past SLO assessment reports.
- c. Acknowledge the deficiency that the program's past use of assessment targets typically indicated that further analysis of assessment results was not needed when targets were met, thereby contributing to the absence of analyses of results in past assessment reports.
- d. Acknowledge the deficiency that because analyses of assessment results were absent in the program's past assessment reports, those reports also lacked any explicit consideration given to potential program improvements based on analysis of assessment results for the identification of the program improvement that would be pursued in Phase 5 of the expected SLO assessment process.

- e. If applicable, acknowledge the deficiency in past assessment reports in which a specific program improvement based on analyses of assessment results was not identified because the assessment results in Phase 3 were expected to be shared next instead with others who would determine the disposition and use of those results at a later date. Such practices clearly left Phase 4 of the program's SLO assessment process unfinished and incomplete.

**Under Phase 4.2 of CATS:**

- a. Cite the corrective action taken by the institution for all educational programs to complete CATS reports in Fall 2023 and SAIRs in the 2023-2024 assessment cycle, the templates for both of which are organized to be tightly aligned with the six phases of an acceptable SLO assessment process, including Phase 4 on the analysis of what assessment results mean and their implications for potential program improvement, as expected in current SACSCOC guidance for achieving compliance with Standards 8.2 and 8.2.a.
- b. Cite the corrective actions taken by the program in 2023 to prepare analyses of assessment results not previously included in the 2022-2023 program assessment report for each expected SLO. Those analyses which included interpretations of the meanings of the SLO assessment results and their implications for potential program improvements should be reported here as evidence that those corrective actions were implemented.

- (For 4.2.b) This is a critically important and expected phase of an acceptable SLO assessment process which has received little or no attention in past annual program assessment reports at UAH. Showing evidence in the CATS report that Phase 4 is functioning appropriately is essential for demonstrating compliance with Standard 8.2.a. Once single assessment targets have been replaced in assessment results with the greater detail of the frequency and percentage distributions across different levels of SLO achievement as described in Phase 3, it should be easier to interpret the meaning of assessment results for each SLO and identify differences in the strengths and weaknesses

of student performance among the different levels of SLO achievement as well as among the different expected SLOs. Those interpretations of the SLO assessment results should enable the program's faculty to draw reasonable conclusions about where a program improvement may be needed most for ultimately improving the program's achievement of its student learning outcomes. Such potential program improvements need not be aimed only at reducing the number and percentage of students performing at an unsatisfactory level on a specific expected SLO but could also be aimed at increasing the number and percentage of the program's graduates performing at an exceptionally strong level of SLO achievement. Such analyses of assessment results along with their implications for possible program improvements should be reported here in Phase 4 of the program's CATS.

- c. Cite the corrective action taken by the institution and its educational programs going forward to discontinue the use of assessment targets that do not lead to analyses of SLO assessment results and continuous program improvement.
- d. Cite the corrective action taken by the program going forward to require in Phase 4 the collective consideration of all potential program improvements based on the completed analyses of SLO assessment results and the subsequent selection of at least one program improvement to be pursued in Phase 5 of the program's SLO assessment process. Cite here the particular program improvement selected in 2023 to be pursued in Phase 5 going forward based on the collective consideration of all of the analyses of assessment results completed and reported above.
  - (For 4.2.d) Discontinue past practices of concluding in annual program assessment reports that no improvements are needed in the educational program based on having met assessment targets. Replace that past practice with a new practice of annually reviewing all of the analyses of SLO assessment results for the year and identifying at least one

- high-priority program improvement to be actively pursued based on those analyses in Phase 5. Identify that program improvement in the program's 2023 CATS.
- (For 4.2.d) Discontinue past practices of concluding annual SLO assessment reports by saying that the interpretation of assessment results and their possible use for improvement will be referred to others for their determination at a later date. Replace that past practice with a new practice of consulting with those other colleagues to analyze assessment results and their meaning for potential program improvement and use those analyses to select at least one program improvement to be pursued in Phase 5 as an integral part of completing the expected Phase 4 and 5 of an acceptable SLO assessment process.
- e. If that deficiency was present, cite the corrective actions taken subsequently in 2023 to complete Phase 4 in that program's SLO assessment process by conducting appropriate analyses of SLO assessment results, collectively considering their potential implications for program improvement, and selecting at least one program improvement to be initiated and actively pursued in Phase 5. Report evidence of having completed those corrective actions taken here.

**Under Phase 5.1 of CATS:**

- a. Acknowledge the deficiency that the program's past annual assessment reports rarely if ever cited evidence of the pursuit of a program improvement based on analyses of SLO assessment results which is clearly not in compliance with current SACSCOC Standards 8.2 and 8.2.a for the expected SLO assessment process in educational programs.
- b. Acknowledge the deficiency that the program's past use of assessment targets typically indicated that program changes or improvements were not needed when targets were met, thereby contributing to the absence of reported program improvements being actively pursued in past program assessment reports.
- c. If applicable, acknowledge the deficiency that the program's past reporting of the use of assessment results for improvement did not include an improvement aimed at changing the educational program

based on an analysis of SLO assessment results. That deficiency would exist if the cited use of results focused instead on improving the assessment process or measurement instruments used rather than improving the educational program. It would also exist if the cited program improvement was initiated as a consequence of program evaluations or circumstances other than an analyses of SLO assessment results. Neither of those improvements is considered sufficient to offset a lack of attention given to pursuing an improvement of the educational program that is based on an analysis of SLO assessment results in compliance with Standard 8.2.a.

- d. Acknowledge the deficiency that the program’s past annual assessment reports rarely if ever cited evidence of the pursuit of “continuous program improvement” from year to year which is now clearly also not in compliance with SACSCOC Standards 8.2 and 8.2.a.

**Under Phase 5.2 of CATS:**

- a. Cite the corrective action taken by the program to demonstrate that it has initiated, is actively pursuing, or has completed at least one proposed program improvement resulting from the analyses of SLO assessment results in 2023. Typically, that program improvement would be the one selected in Phase 4 to be pursued in Phase 5 of the expected SLO assessment process.

- (For 5.2.a) This is not a new phase of the expected SLO assessment process, but its expected commitment to and demonstration of continuous program improvement based upon analysis of SLO assessment results is relatively new and is a current expectation for compliance with Standard 8.2.a. Consequently, all educational programs should be reporting a specific program improvement emerging from the analyses of SLO assessment results which either has been completed in this assessment cycle or has been initiated and is being actively pursued.
- (For 5.2.a) Standard 8.2.a specifically calls for “evidence of seeking improvement” to indicate that the selected program improvement to be pursued has been initiated and is

actively underway. Cite in the 2023 CATS evidence such as departmental meeting minutes or email announcements confirming approval to initiate the proposed program improvement and/or describing the changes underway (or completed) to improve the educational program as proposed.

- b. Cite the corrective action taken by the program going forward to discontinue the use of assessment targets that do not lead to analyses of SLO results and continuous program improvement.
- c. If this deficiency existed, note which improvements were not aimed at program improvement or were program improvements not initiated as a result of an analysis of SLO assessment results and provide evidence that another use of results aimed at improving the educational program based on an analysis of SLO assessment results was initiated in 2023.
- d. Cite the corrective action taken by the institution to require that all SLO assessment reports going forward include evidence of the active pursuit of at least one program improvement based on analysis of SLO assessment results each year beginning with the 2023 CATS reports and going forward with the SAIRs in the 2023-24 assessment cycle and every annual set of SAIRs thereafter. Implementing that corrective action campus-wide demonstrates and documents that UAH is now clearly committed to using its improved six-phase SLO assessment process to support continuous improvement of its educational programs in compliance with Standard 8.2.a.

**Under Phase 6.1 of CATS:**

- a. Acknowledge the following: No deficiencies were cited by SACSCOC committees in recent years about UAH's lack of commitment to produce regular reports of SLO assessments for all educational programs. Although UAH's SLO assessment process fell out of compliance and was deficient in several ways once Standard 8.2.a replaced Standard 3.3.1.1 several years ago, UAH has engaged in repeated and ongoing SLO assessment processes in all educational programs before and after that change became effective. Corrective actions were taken in 2023 to remedy past deficiencies as described and documented above in Phases 1-5 of UAH's SLO assessment process, but UAH's longstanding practice of conducting annual

SLO assessment process reporting for all educational programs in Phase 6 remains unchanged and strong. The substantive corrective actions taken and implemented in 2023 at the institutional and program levels in Phases 1-5 of UAH's improved six-phase SLO assessment process now demonstrate compliance with Standard 8.2.a in many distinctive and compelling ways.

**Under Phase 6.2 of CATS:**

- a. Assert that no corrective actions are needed in this phase of the SLO assessment process at UAH.