

Supplemental Training Materials for Student Assessment Improvement Report (SAIR) Preparations

Reorientation of the Purpose of Annual Outcomes Assessments in Educational Programs (Background)

- It is obvious that past annual program assessment reports were focused primarily and sometimes solely on meeting assessment targets and when doing so, concluding that there was no need to conduct further analysis of the meaning of the assessment results or to pursue any related program improvements. That singular focus on meeting assessment targets has undermined UAH's ability to comply with SACSCOC Standard 8.2.a which currently calls for annual SLO assessment processes in educational programs that support and advance "continuous program improvement" based on analysis of the meaning of SLO assessment results. The primary purpose of outcomes assessment at UAH must shift away from merely meeting assessment targets to analyzing SLO assessment results on an in-depth basis for the purpose of pursuing related continuous program improvements going forward, beginning in the 2023 CATS reports and extending into the subsequent 2023-24 SAIRs. To do that effectively, past usage of assessment targets should be discontinued.
- Of the six phases of an acceptable SLO assessment process which SACSCOC review committees expect to see operational in educational programs for compliance with Standard 8.2.a, the most deficient at UAH presently are: Phase 3, presentation of SLO assessment results and the degree to which they describe in informative detail the extent to which each expected SLO was achieved by students completing the program within the different SLO achievement levels measured; Phase 4, a thoughtful analysis of what those assessment results mean and their implications for potential program improvement; and Phase 5, evidence that at least one high-priority program improvement based on the analyses of SLO assessment results has been identified and either completed or is actively being pursued in each SLO assessment cycle. Consequently, the specific guidance below focuses first on taking corrective action in those three phases (3-5) followed by additional guidance for phases 1 and 2 of each educational program's expected SLO assessment process.

Additional Guidance for Reporting Actions in Phase 1 of the SAIR: Identification of the Unit's Expected Learning Outcome

- Make sure all outcomes are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound objectives that contribute to goals. Each item plays a role in achieving a learning goal that will be practical, attainable, and aligned with overall educational content within the degree program.
- If you have changes to make beyond your prior CATS document, make sure to notate those changes in section 1.2.2 in the SAIR report and follow these guidelines for implementing a change.
 - 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.
 - 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

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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.

- 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.
- 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."

Additional Guidance for Reporting Corrective Actions Taken in Phase 2 of the SAIRs on the Reporting of the Program's Methods for Measuring SLO Achievement Levels and their Appropriateness.

- 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.

Additional Guidance for SAIRs in Phase 3 of the SAIRs on the Reporting of Detailed and Informative Assessment Results

- Here and elsewhere in the SAIR report, be sure to describe the corrective actions taken in a past tense (e.g., "the corrective action has been taken"). Promises or plans to take or implement a corrective action at some point in the future are generally not regarded as sufficient for demonstrating current compliance with SACSCOC requirements. Providing in the SAIR reports not just a description of the corrective action taken but also evidence of how the corrective action

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taken remedied a previous compliance weakness in the SLO assessment process helps ensure compliance with the standard.

- 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 2023-2024 SAIR report.
- 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 2023-2024 SAIR report than was available in previous annual program assessment reports.
- 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 program assessment report. Cite those revised and more detailed distributions of SLO assessment results for each SLO achievement level in the SAIR report. If previous 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 SAIR report. If the assessment data collected cannot be converted into such frequency and percentage distributions for 3-5 different levels of SLO achievement, note that and report in the SAIRs how the measurement methods used to assess SLO achievement in the program's SAIR have been changed to produce such assessment results.
- 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.

Additional Guidance for Reporting for Phase 4 of the SAIR on the Reporting of In-depth Analysis of the Meaning of Assessment Results and Their Implications for Identifying Program Improvements to be Pursued.

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- 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 SAIR 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 SAIRs.
- 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 SAIRs.
- 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.

Additional Guidance for Reporting Phase 5 of the SAIR on the Reporting of Evidence that at Least One Program Improvement Based upon Analyses of SLO Assessment Results is Completed or Being Actively Pursued

- 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.
- 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 SAIR evidence such as departmental meeting minutes or email announcements confirming

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approval to initiate the proposed program improvement and/or describing the changes underway (or completed) to improve the educational program as proposed.

Additional Guidance for Reporting Phase 6 of the SAIR on the Reporting of Evidence of Repeated and Ongoing Assessment for Continuous Improvement:

- This is not a new phase of the expected SLO assessment process, restate that the department has a history of continuously assessing its academic programs on an annual basis.