Step 1. Creating an Assessment Plan

Tips:
- Plan to assess no more than 1 or 2 PLOs in a given semester or year for each degree offered.
- Aim to assess all PLOs over a 5 to 7 year period for non-accredited programs and over the accreditation cycle for accredited programs.
- There are faculty-created rubrics available from the AAC&U and linked in the resources area that can be used as is or as a starting point to assess the big themes in program learning outcomes.
- Use the curriculum map to identify courses where students are expected to demonstrate mastery of a PLO. Use student work from this course for the assessment.
- In addition to samples of student work and the rubric, the prompt or description of the requirements for the student work and representative examples of work that demonstrate high achievement, moderate achievement and low achievement of the PLO are needed for the assessment work.
- The number of samples and size of the committee should be optimized to allow the work to be done in 1 to 2 days, including calibration and practice with the rubric, assessment, compiling and discussing results.   The time between the rubric calibration process and the assessment of the work should be minimized.

Timeline: Early in the fall semester, develop the plan (PLO, course, assignment, number of samples to collect, members of the assessment team, identification of the rubric) with the goal of getting the work from the instructor of the course at the end of the term.
- During the semester, the assessment team should identify/develop, discuss and modify the rubric to use for the assessment.
- When the student work is collected, set aside a day or two (depending on the complexity of the student work, the number of samples and the number of people on the team) to do the work, including rubric calibration and discussion, and actual assessment.
- Time will be needed to analyze and interpret the data, to identify findings and make recommendations.
- During the spring semester, discuss the data with faculty, develop some conclusions and recommendations, celebrate achievements, and devise a plan to address any challenges identified from the assessment. Write up the annual assessment report, due in April.

Communicate the assessment plan widely to all faculty, but especially to faculty teaching the course that is used to assess the PLO.
- Advance notification and agreement about which assignment to collect and how those assignments are selected needs to be communicated to faculty teaching the course that is being used for assessment.
- In addition to the assignment, the assignment prompt and any guidelines provided to students should be made available to the assessment team.

How to frame an assessment conversation. It should be emphasized that the purpose of the assessment is to determine how well students have learned a particular PLO.
- Keep the assessment process focused on how well students demonstrate what they have learned and on using the findings to suggest ways in which students can be better supported to learn.
- Remember that each PLO is supported by multiple courses in the curriculum (see your curriculum map). A mismatch between the course and PLO anywhere along the path could show up as poor results when assessment of that PLO is done.
- It is important to stress the collective responsibility of the curriculum (all courses that support a PLO) in helping students achieve expected levels of learning.

- Keep the focus on meeting students where they are and supporting them to achieve desired levels of achievement.
- Ask not only how to get the students ready for the degree. Ask also about how the degree can get ready for the students.

Engage faculty on the assessment team. The length and complexity of the assignment to be used and the number of artifacts to evaluate should be taken into account to determine the number of faculty on the team. It's good to have at least two people independently assess each piece of student work.
- Consider having a standing assessment committee or recruit people on an ad hoc basis. Should assessment be rotated through faculty to even the load, or would it be more advantageous to have people who are more specialized in assessment?
- Consider recognizing participation in program assessment and curricular improvement as contributing favorably towards tenure and promotion. While inclusion of assessment work can be part of the service expectations, explicitly addressing the work of assessment in RTP can be a way to encourage more robust participation.
- Faculty and lecturers teaching courses that are used to assess PLOs need to be aware of their responsibilities for the assessment work, including any decisions about the student work to be used for the assessment and about providing student work for the project.
- Is there a mechanism to engage lecturers in the assessment process either on the assessment team or as part of the discussion of the findings?
- If assessing work from a particular class, it can be a good practice to invite the instructor of the course to participate in the assessment, to minimize any possible feeling that they are being assessed, to take advantage of their expertise in the course content and approach, and because they are likely to be the most direct beneficiary of what is learned during the assessment process.

Identify the assignment or instrument that will be used to assess each PLO. Aim to assess students who are close to graduating.
- Direct measures are works completed by students, such as written reports, embedded assignments, capstone projects, ePortfolios, poster or oral presentations.
- If there is a capstone project that will be used for assessment, take some time to evaluate the prompt and requirements of that project to make sure the assignment will align with the PLO being measured. If this is done early in the semester, changes to the requirements can be made in time to optimize the match between assignment and assessment.
- Agreements about assignment requirements for assessment need to be clearly communicated with the instructors of a course.
- Indirect measures include surveys that ask students to self-report on competencies and skills gained. Graduation surveys work well for this. Self-reflection papers asking students to write about what they've learned and how they've learned it can also be valuable indirect assessment for departments.

Develop a rubric to assess student work. Write or adapt a rubric to be used to assess the PLO. AAC&U has a series of VALUE rubrics which are available on the annual assessment help site (where this document was found) that cover big topics like critical thinking. Disciplinary-specific topics may require original work, though there may be examples out on the internet somewhere that will turn up with a search. The faculty engaged in assessment should review and adapt the rubric.
- The creation of the rubric should be done before looking at any assignments so that the rubric represents more objectively the desired levels and dimensions of learning associated with the PLO.
- Rubrics should have an even numbered scale (e.g. 1 to 4) to assess the level of achievement to avoid a tendency to assign the middle score when there is an odd numbered scale (e.g. 1 to 5).

- A 4 point rubric is preferred to a 5 point rubric to reduce the tendency to think of the rubric scale as corresponding to letter grades.
- Discuss and resolve any ambiguous language or possible subjective interpretations of the rubric. Modify as needed.

During the rubric normalization process, the rubric can be tweaked based on an evaluation of an initial set of assignments.

How many sample assignments to select? Most guidelines recommend evaluating assignments from 10% of the students or 10 students, whichever is more.
- The length and complexity of the assignments and the size of the committee should be taken into account for the sample size.

Selecting samples of student work to assess. If classes are small, then assignments from all students can be evaluated (census sampling).   If assessment is being done from a large class, there are four ways that samples can be selected:
- Simple random sampling: Order the roster by ID and randomly select assignments from students in the course using a random numbers table or random number generator or drawing IDs from a hat.
- Stratified sampling: sort students into groups and then select randomly from those groups. This approach is useful to make sure that all groups are represented in the population, such as selecting from sections that are taught in a different format (online vs in person) to make sure the representation from each format is present.
- Systemic Sampling: select the nth student from a list. For example, if you have 100 students and want 20 artifacts, select every 5th student from a list alphabetized or ordered by student ID.
- Cluster Sampling: randomly select sections from a multi section course and evaluate all assignment in that section. For example, if you have 15 sections of 30 students and want to evaluate 90 assignments, randomly select 3 sections for the assessment and assess work from all students in those 3 sections.

Prepare student work for assessment.
- Redact student names and IDs from the work. If using student work from multiple sections of a course, redact any information about the section of origin. Redact course information and instructor names if this information is not known to the team doing assessment.
- Assign a letter or number to the paper so that the papers can be easily referred to by letter or number.
- Make copies of work for reviewers as needed.

Next: Step 2 – Assessing a PLO