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Office of Assessment & Evaluation Handbook

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ULM Office of Assessment and Evaluation Handbook

Introduction

Since the mission of the Southern Association for Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges "is to assure the educational quality and improve the effectiveness of its member institutions," it is clear that this organization which accredits ULM cares greatly about the quality of our programs and services. In fact, the *Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement*, the document which outlines the standards to which accredited institutions are held, contains three particular standards that relate specifically to assessment and evaluation.

The Office of Assessment administers three processes in order to continually improve the institution. Improvement in student learning is pursued through assessment on two separate levels: in the general education core curriculum and in degree programs while improvement in unit services and administrative performance is pursued through unit assessment and evaluation. All of these processes, however, are designed to function as closed-loop feedback systems that ensure a continuous cycle of improvement.

Student learning and student success are at the core of the mission of all institutions of higher learning. Effective institutions focus on the design and improvement of educational experiences to enhance student learning and support student learning outcomes for its educational programs. To meet the goals of educational programs, an institution provides appropriate academic and student services to support student success.

Standard 8.2.a states the institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of seeking improvement based on analysis of the results in student learning outcomes for each of its educational programs. *(Student outcomes: educational programs)*

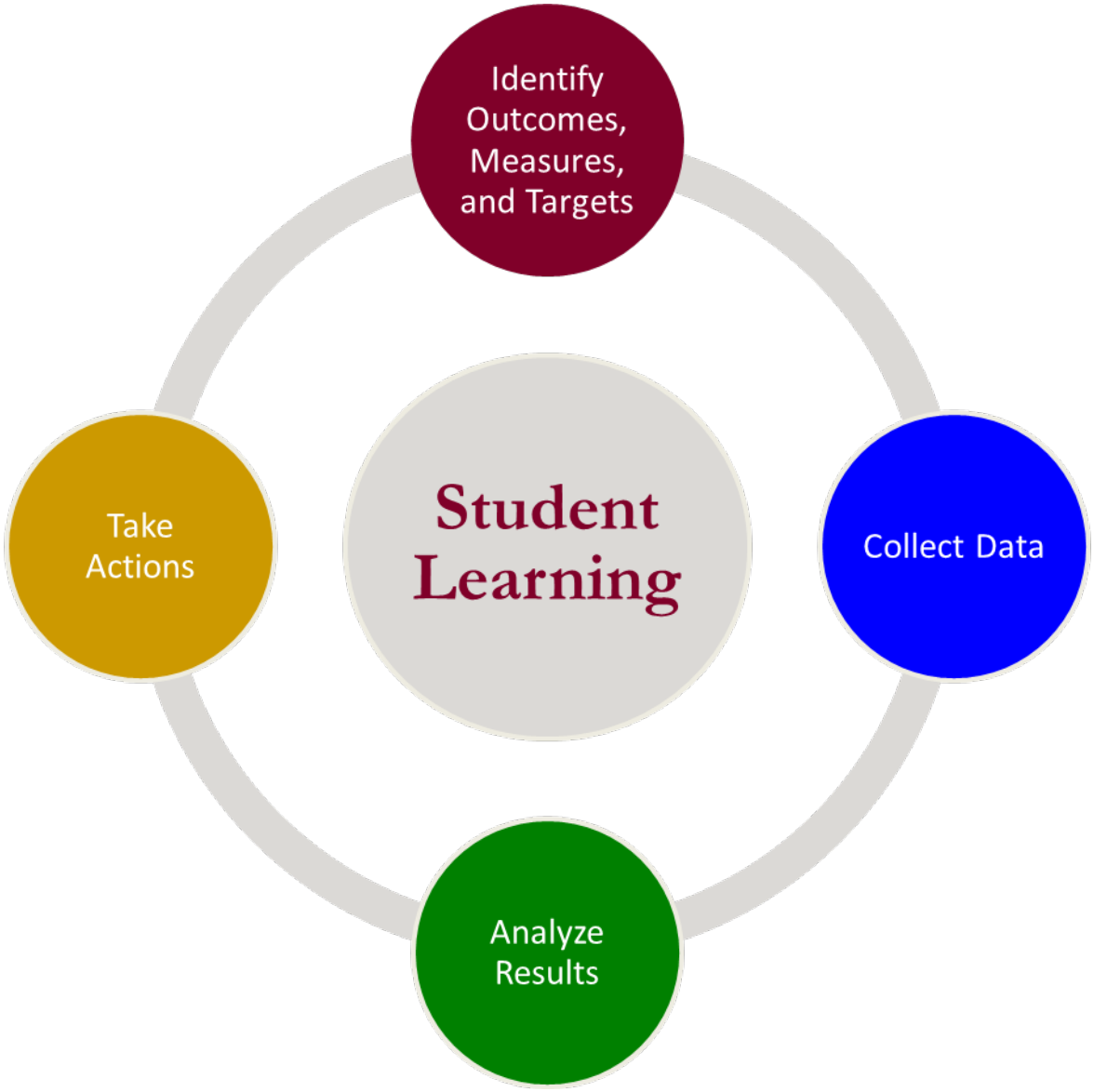
Standard 8.2.b states that, for every degree program, the institution must identify expected outcomes, assess the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provide evidence of seeking improvement based on analysis of the results in student learning outcomes for collegiate-level general education competencies of its undergraduate degree programs. *(Student outcomes: general education)*

Standard 8.2.c asks specifically that the institution evaluate the performance of academic and student support units in order to gain evidence on which to base decisions toward improvement *(Student outcomes: academic and student services)*, and **Standard 7.3** states that the institution must identify expected outcomes of its administrative support services and demonstrate the extent to which the outcomes are achieved. *(Administrative effectiveness)* For this reason, the Office of Assessment and Evaluation administers the unit assessment and evaluation process in which all administrative organizational units participate from the School of Humanities to the Registrar to the Physical Plant.

These standards asks that the institution plan its future and evaluate progress made on an overarching scale, but it also implies that the institution should engage in processes which evaluate programs and services in order to ensure that the institution's mission is being fulfilled.

Continuous Assessment Cycle

This annual continuous cycle for continuous improvement at its most basic level can be illustrated as shown below:



This handbook includes short introductions and overviews, policies and procedures, and guidelines for each of the three processes. For more information, please contact the Office of Assessment and Evaluation and remember that office staff is available campus-wide for the following services:

- Group informational or workshop sessions
- Individual consultations
- Feedback and suggestions

Student Learning Assessment in Degree Programs

Introduction

Because student-centered learning is the top priority of ULM and at the core of each academic program's mission, faculty must ensure that students are receiving a quality education. Additionally, because the amount and quality of research on student learning increases annually, programs can strive for continual improvement in a variety of areas whether they be curriculum and course sequencing, pedagogical techniques, technological advances, or even in the assessment methods used to identify areas for improvement. At its most basic, the idea is to identify what we expect our students to learn, to create ways to measure the concepts that we have identified against our expectations of performance, and to use the resulting information in ways that can improve our programs in meaningful ways in terms of student learning.

Overview

Student learning assessment in degree programs begins with **student learning outcomes** statements which identify the faculty's expectations for the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that students should have attained through the course of the program. For program improvement to occur, faculty must have a clear understanding of how well students can perform in the context of those outcomes and evidence on which to base programmatic changes; so, faculty must define methods to **measure** student performance and **targets** by which success can be determined for each outcome. Once these measures have been implemented or carried out, the **results** are reported annually along with the faculty's analysis of why the particular results were achieved.

Determining and analyzing the results of student learning assessment measures, however, is not the point of this effort; assessment of student learning in degree programs is carried out so that programs can continually improve for our students. With this fact in mind, the program reports the **actions taken to seek improvement or to maintain success** which validates the efforts expended in the planning stages and enables and documents the continuous cycle of improvement.

Policy for Student Learning Assessment in Degree Programs

In accordance with ULM's dedication to continuous improvement, the faculty of instructional units engage in student learning assessment for each degree offered in a systematic and cyclical fashion. The program administrator for each unit is responsible for the timely completion of all forms associated with the student learning assessment in degree programs and compliance with due dates as announced by the Office of Assessment and Evaluation.

Procedures for Student Learning Assessment in Degree Programs

The procedures for documenting student learning outcomes assessment in degree programs takes place in two distinct phases: plan creation and documentation completion.

Assessment plan creation:

To create a plan, the following must be completed during this phase:

- Identify student learning outcomes (3-4 typically)
- Define measures
- Set targets

Administrators of academic departments or programs, together with program faculty, should create the assessment plan(s) for their discipline's degree program(s) at the beginning of each academic year. These plans will often remain largely unchanged from academic year to academic year, but the completion of a plan document every year is imperative. The official due date for the completion of this task will vary, but it will generally fall in mid to late September (see http://www.ulm.edu/assessment/ for current deadlines). The program administrator may designate a faculty member to submit the plan(s) to the Office of Assessment and Evaluation's web-based reporting system (often

the chair of the departmental assessment committee), but the administrator is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the submission is made. All program administrators should have access to the system, and faculty members can be granted access at the administrator's request; if access changes are needed, OAE staff can assist you.

Submitted assessment plans are reviewed for completion, clarity, and thoroughness by the appropriate college-level assessment committee or academic dean's office. Reviewers access the online submission(s), make determinations, and either recommend approval by the dean or revision by the program faculty. Once approval is obtained, the measures used to assess student learning in the context of the defined outcomes should be implemented over the course of the academic year.

Note: All program faculty, not just the program administrator, should be well aware of **all assessment-related expectations to ensure that appropriate data can be and is gathered in a timely fashion. If you need assistance with this, contact an OAE staff member who can provide suggestions and processes that work for other disciplines on campus.*

Assessment plan completion:

The "Results and Analysis" and "Actions to seek improvement or maintain success" portions of the form must be completed during this phase. Program administrators or their designee should update the degree program assessment document before the end of the academic year to report the results of all measures listed in the plan(s) and the actions taken based on these results. Again, the official due date for this task will vary from year to year, but it will generally fall in mid to late September. Reviewers will examine the submissions for completion and either recommend approval by the dean or revision by the department. Once approval is obtained, the document for that academic year is considered complete.

Guidelines for Student Learning Assessment in Degree Programs

Student learning outcomes (SLOs) are specific statements that describe the required learning competencies that students should attain before obtaining their degrees.
Student learning outcomes should be:

Specific

- Define student learning outcomes that are specific to your program. Include in clear and definite terms the expected abilities, knowledge, values and attitudes a student who graduates from your program is expected to have.
- Focus on intended student learning outcomes that are critical to your program. When the data from the assessment process are known, these outcomes should create the opportunity to make improvements in the program offered to your students.

Measurable

- It should be feasible to collect accurate and reliable data for the intended student learning outcome.
- Consider your available resources (e.g., staff, technology, assessment support, institutional level surveys, etc.) in determining whether the collection of data is a reasonable expectation.

Examples

Example 1:

Poor: <u>Students completing the undergraduate program in Hypothetical Engineering will have knowledge of engineering principles</u>.

This is a weak statement because it does not specify which engineering principles a graduate from the program should know. Also, it does not define what is meant by "have knowledge." Are they supposed to be able to simply define the principles, or be able to apply the principles, etc?

Better: Graduates will be competent in the principles of engineering design, formulating requirements and constraints, following an open-ended decision process involving tradeoffs, and completing a design addressing an aerospace engineering need.

This statement is better because it lists the specific areas in hypothetical engineering that a student must be competent in. However, it is still vague, as the level of competency is not stated, and the outcome is compound in that it cover several areas.

Best: Graduates will be able to complete a design addressing an aerospace engineering need.

This is a much better learning outcome statement for two reasons. First, the specific requirement are listed and second, the level of competency is also stated. A student must be able to apply and to demonstrate the listed engineering principle.

Example 2:

Poor: Students should know the historically important systems of psychology.

This is poor because it says neither what systems nor what information about each system students should know. Are they supposed to know everything about them or just names? Should students be able to recognize the names, recite the central ideas, or criticize the assumptions?

Better: Students should understand the psychoanalytic, Gestalt, behaviorist, humanistic, and cognitive approaches to psychology.

This is better because it says what theories students should know, but it still does not detail what exactly they should know about each theory, nor how deeply they should understand whatever it is they should understand.

Best: Students should be able to articulate the foundational assumptions, central ideas, and dominant criticisms of the psychoanalytic, Gestalt, behaviorist, humanistic, and cognitive approaches to psychology.

This is the clearest and most specific statement of the three examples. It provides even beginning students an understandable and very specific target to aim for. It provides faculty with a reasonable standard against which they can compare actual student performance.

Example 3:

Poor: Students should be able to independently design and carry out research.

The problem with this is that the statement does not specify the type or quality of research to be done.

Better: Students should be able to independently design and carry out experimental and correlational research.

This specifies the type of research, but not the quality students must achieve. If a student independently does any research that is experimental or correlational, it would be viewed as acceptable.

Best: Students should be able to independently design and carry out experimental and correlational research that yields valid results.

Here the standard for students to aim for is clear and specific enough to help faculty agree about what students are expected to do. Therefore, they should be able to agree reasonably well about whether students have or have not achieved the objective. Even introductory students can understand the sentence, even if they do not know exactly what experimental and correlational research methods are.

(Portions of the above material on student learning outcomes were taken from or adapted from the University of Central Florida Program Assessment Handbook: http://oeas.ucf.edu/doc/acad_assess_handbook.pdf)

Measures

Measures of assessment refer to the methods or processes or tools used to evaluate students' performance in context of intended student learning outcomes.

While course grades should not be used as measures of student learning, student work that is completed in a class can be used as part of the assessment process. That is to say, if the instructor creates a mechanism for verifying that the grades mean the same thing among all those who assign them for a given assignment or course, then the same piece of student work that the instructor assigns for a grade also can be used as part of the assessment procedures.

This process is called "norming." Usually it involves the creation of a scoring rubric, and the targets or performance standards are described in the rubric. Then the piece of student work may be used for assessment as well as be assigned a grade.
(Adapted from http://www.hpcnet.org/assessmentfaqs)

Assessment measures are often categorized as direct and indirect methods. **Direct measures of assessment** are those in which the products of student work are evaluated in light of the learning outcomes for the program. Evidence from coursework such as projects or specialized tests of knowledge or skill are examples of direct measures. In all cases, direct measures involve the evaluation of demonstrations of student learning.

Indirect measures of assessment are those in which students judge their own ability to achieve the learning outcomes. Indirect measures are not based directly on student academic work but rather on what students perceive about their own learning. For example, alumni may also be asked the extent to which the program prepared them to achieve learning outcomes, or people in contact with the students, such as employers, may be asked to judge the effectiveness of program graduates. In all cases, the assessment is based on perception rather than direct demonstration.

Thorough program assessment combines both direct and indirect measurement methods accompanied by challenging yet realistic standards or criteria for success.
(Adapted from http://academic-affairs.csusb.edu/progs/assessment/forumf98.htm and http://www.bridgew.edu/AssessmentGuidebook/chapter5.cfm#direct)

When choosing **multiple measures** to evaluate student learning outcomes, the following principles should be applied.

1. Use assessment measures that make sense in your discipline. Deciding on a means of assessment is a creative process. It can be approached in different ways, and all may be effective. One authority suggested that faculty approach this process as they would approach any significant problem in their own discipline. Assessment methods for English Department faculty will probably look very different than those in Engineering. The English professor may approach assessment as the task of identifying symbols or themes in student work that relates to program outcomes. Engineering faculty may look for more objective quantitative evidence that their students meet their outcomes. Faculty should approach assessment by building on what they already know how to do well. Differences across programs are to be expected and valued.

2. Choose assessment measures that evaluate the intended student learning outcomes. The outcomes for the program must govern the search for the measure. This is an obvious point, but one that can certainly be a pitfall. Sometimes people grab the nearest measure because it seems popular, it is easy to administer, or because it is used by other programs. This may be a mistake. This allows the measure to dictate what faculty members discover about students. Assessment measures should align with the outcomes.

3. Choose tools that yield manageable information. Don't let the tools you choose make you an assessment slave. If you have little time, choose instruments that take little time to administer, score, and evaluate. If you have relatively few quantitative skills, choose measures that require little statistical knowledge. If a program is employs a high number of part-time faculty, choose instruments that can be readily administered without much explanation. The choice of a comprehensive battery of tests, surveys, focus groups, and interviews is wonderful only if the assessment plan is manageable. It is far better to start with two or three simple measures than with five ideal but complicated ones.

4. Use or modify existing course assignments. Conduct an audit of assignments to see what existing classroom measures could be plugged into your assessment plan. You do not need to find all new measures. Chances are extremely good that you are already requiring students to do papers, projects, or senior seminar assignments that measure outcomes you care about. Identify and use them as a starting point in this process.

5. Use information that other people gather. Databases on campus may have information that will help you assess. Knowing when students enter into a major, what their academic aptitudes are, when they drop out of a major, what courses are historically difficult for them, and more could be available from other offices on campus.

6. Choose tools that assess more than one outcome at a time. Surveys, tests, interviews, and focus groups (as well as most other types of measures) may provide good information about multiple program outcomes. For examples, a research project scored on a rubric might yield discreet assessment scores for different outcomes, or the Major Field Tests from ETS provides sub-scales that indicate student performance in multiple areas. Strive for measures that can do a lot for you.

(Adapted from http://www.geneva.edu/academics/assessment/oaguide.pdf)

Examples of Measures
Direct Methods:

Course-embedded assessment

In course-embedded assessment, student work in designated courses is collected and assessed in relation to the program learning outcomes, not just for the course grade. The products of student work need to be considered in light of the learning outcomes. Products may include final exams, research reports, projects, papers, and so on. The assessment may be conducted at specific points (e.g., introductory course and upper-level course) in a program.

Benefits include the fact that assessment is conducted as part of the normal workload of students and faculty, although additional work may be needed to incorporate program assessment into the course. Disadvantages include the potential for a faculty member to feel that her or his work in a particular course is being overseen, even if it is not. Also, rubrics may need to be chosen or developed that are associated with the particular learning outcomes, increasing the preparation time.

Standardized tests

The Educational Testing Service and other companies offer standardized tests for various types of learning outcomes, such as critical thinking or mathematical problem solving. Scores on tests such as the GRE or the Major Field Achievement Test (MFAT) may be used as evidence of student learning.

Benefits include the reliability and validity of an assessment instrument that is commercially developed, eliminating the arduous process of developing an instrument in-house; simplicity in administration and evaluation of test results; and the potential for cross-institutional comparisons of results. Disadvantages include the generic nature of standardized tests and their potential lack of fit with a particular program; a possible lack of motivation by students to take the test or do well on it; and the debatable question of whether a standardized test gives a true measure of student learning. Also, ETS and other services charge substantial fees for these tests, which is an added administrative cost or possibly a cost to the students.

The Web provides an easy way to locate off-the-shelf tests. The Buros Institute and ERIC have combined their efforts to put searchable databases of tests, references of test reviews, and test publishers online. They are located at http://ericae.net/testcol.htm . When searching for tests or reviews, one can enter a word, (e.g. "biology") and get back a number of names and tests or a list of reviews of tests. Furthermore, ERIC has teamed up with Amazon.com to provide an online assessment bookstore for additional resources.
(Taken from http://www.geneva.edu/academics/assessment/oaguide.pdf)

Locally developed tests
Faculty in a program may decide to develop a test that is reflective of the program's mission and learning outcomes. Multiple evaluators usually grade the test. Locally developed tests are less costly than a standardized test, but require work by the program's faculty in test development and scoring.

Benefits include the ability to tailor a test to a specific program. Disadvantages include the challenge of developing a test with proven reliability and validity, the potential need to develop rubrics and train multiple test evaluators in the use of these rubrics, and the need to develop a new test periodically.

Portfolio evaluation
A portfolio is a compilation of student work that, in total, demonstrates a student's achievement of various learning outcomes. Portfolios can be created for a variety of purposes aside from program assessment, such as fostering reflection by students on their education, providing documentation for a student's job search, or certifying a student's competency. Portfolios created over the span of a student's academic career, compared to those consisting of a student's work only at the end, provide the basis for a developmental assessment.

Portfolios may combine multiple types of evidence and are not necessarily limited to classroom work. For example, portfolios may contain research papers, presentations, videos, audio recordings, work done through employment, or journal entries discussing co-curricular activities or programs. Once the material is collected, it falls upon an individual or group to establish a system by which to evaluate the contents of the portfolio in terms of a program's learning outcomes.

In some schools of education, portfolios are used to document each student's competence in teacher preparation. This is a different purpose from that for program assessment. In program assessment, a cross section of students may be sampled to evaluate student learning outcomes, but in teacher preparation, the intent is to validate every student's competence.

A key question in portfolios arises in the collection of evidence. In teacher preparation, students themselves collect and save the material, and online systems are now available to assist in that process. But for program assessment, the department itself may have to assemble the student portfolios; in this case, issues must be considered about how the students are to be informed of the fact that their work is being assessed for programmatic reasons. Some faculty ask students to sign consent forms to copy work products and to use student work products in accreditation reports.

Benefits of portfolios include the ability to document student development over time, and the potential benefit to the students of seeing their own development and in collecting material that may support their career goals. Thus, program assessment becomes an integral part of the learning process. Disadvantages include a labor-intensive process in the evaluation of evidence in student portfolios. Also, there is an expense in storing and organizing the evidence.

(Text taken from http://www.bridgew.edu/AssessmentGuidebook/chapter5.cfm#direct)

Indirect Methods:

Surveys
Surveys, the primary indirect assessment measure, are a systematic means of collecting data from a group of people in order to describe some aspects, characteristics, or perceptions of the population in question.

(Adapted from http://www.tamu.edu/marshome/assess/HTMLfiles/Outcomes.html)

Student self-efficacy surveys
Students have a sense of their own competence. Student self-efficacy involves the rating by students of their perception of their own achievement in particular learning outcomes. Research shows a significant, although imperfect, correlation between actual and perceived competence. What can be problematic are gender and demographic differences in the accuracy of self-efficacy. For example, certain groups of students may rate their quantitative skills at a level below that indicated by standardized tests. Also, unless the answers are anonymous, students will be likely to overrate their abilities. The same is true if students perceive they can be penalized by their answers.

Self-efficacy as an assessment tool is relatively simple. For example, a researcher/assessment expert at Clemson University has designed a test that asks students to rate the perceived importance and self-efficacy of leadership skills, communication skills, interpersonal skills, analytical skills, decision-making skills, technological skills, the global economy, ethics, and business practices.

Benefits include the inexpensive nature of the tool. A relatively simple survey can be constructed which simply asks students to rate their competence in different areas. Also, pre- and post-test assessment can be conducted to examine changes both in self-efficacy and perceived importance of a topical area. Another benefit is that all learning outcomes can be assessed simultaneously, in one test. Disadvantages include an imperfect relationship between self-efficacy and actual competence; student self-reporting may not always be congruent with their actual level of achievement.

Student attitudinal surveys
If learning outcomes include elements of appreciation or understanding of particular issues of concern, student attitudinal change can be measured as part of the assessment program. For example, informed appreciation for the arts may be assessed using an attitudinal survey. Another example may be students' empathy toward disadvantaged groups, which can be measured in an attitudinal survey. A further example would be attitudes toward learning or toward the profession before and after completion of the program. Both standardized tests and locally designed surveys can be used for this purpose, although the responses are very sensitive to the wording of the questions.

Benefits include the simplicity of administering the system. Disadvantages include the challenge of determining student attitudes in a reliable manner.

Exit interviews
Rather than assess students' attitudes, self-efficacy, or satisfaction through the use of surveys, students may be interviewed directly in individual or focus-group settings. Such interviews allow a more thorough, free-form exploration of the issues through the use of follow-up questions that depend on students' responses. To encourage this open exchange in a controlled setting, a mix of both structured and open questions is suggested.

Benefits include the depth and richness of information that can be obtained through interviews. Disadvantages include the time- and labor-intensive nature of conducting such interviews and in analyzing the information obtained from interviews for comparison across multiple interviews. Also, student anonymity needs to be protected in this tool, and stray comments about individual faculty must not become part of the assessment data.

Alumni surveys
The perspective that students have on their education may change significantly after time away from school. Some learning outcomes lend themselves more naturally to questions posed some time after graduation. For example, an outcome involving preparation for professional practice can best be assessed after the student has graduated and been employed in the job market.

Benefits include the real-world perspective that can be obtained from alumni. Disadvantages include the difficulty of finding and reaching alumni, the possibly self-selective nature of those who choose to respond, and the relatively narrow scope of learning outcomes that can be assessed in this manner.

Employer surveys
It is possible that some of the students' knowledge and skills are evident to the employers who rely on these characteristics. Thus, some accrediting bodies either require or encourage programs to perform an assessment through the major employers of their students. These may range from information as basic as hiring data, to site supervisor evaluations, to detailed surveys of the characteristics that the employers perceive in program graduates.

Benefits of this tool include the real-world perspective that employers might be able to provide. Disadvantages include the potentially limited ability of employers to assess their employees' characteristics in terms of specific learning outcomes, or the inability of employers to assess graduates only from a particular school. Also, this tool depends on surveying employers with sufficient numbers of graduates. In large corporations, it may even be difficult to find the right person to contact for this information. In addition, former students may object to having their employers surveyed in this way.
(Text adapted from http://www.bridgew.edu/AssessmentGuidebook/chapter5.cfm#direct)

Targets:
Targets reflect the level of performance to which the program aspires for each student learning outcome assessment measure. They should set a standard or criterion which reflects the desired competency level of students assessed. These performance indicators should be:

- Specific (usually containing a numerical value) and precise
- Challenging
- Realistic

Examples
Example 1:
Target for an employer survey:
At least 75% of the employers who complete a survey about the knowledge of ethical conduct and standards of our students will indicate that they are satisfied or highly satisfied.

Example 2:
Target for a standardized test:
The average score for all of our students who take a standardized test will equal or exceed the national average for that test.

Example 3:
Target for an exit survey:
At least 90% of our students who complete a survey about their knowledge of professional ethics will indicate that they are knowledgeable or very knowledgeable about ethics.

(Adapted from http://iaaweb.ucf.edu/oeas2/pdf/acad_program_assessment_handbook_rev022704.pdf)

Results and Analysis
Once assessment data has been collected, the **results** must be **analyzed** and then used in order to ensure the application of a closed-loop feedback system that will result in each program being constantly and consistently improved. The faculty of the program should analyze the data, review the results, and make changes to seek

improvement or maintain success. For assessment to be worth the necessary effort, the information gained must be used and shared. This requires condensing the data into usable summaries, developing conclusions, reporting the findings, and taking action on the information. Where possible, dates when faculty met to discuss the assessment results and to plan for improvement should be listed; this allows the demonstration of collaboration towards improvement.
(Adapted from http://www.cameron.edu/~vswinney/results.htm)

Actions to Seek Improvement or Maintain Success
This section is the fundamental demonstration that the process of assessment is cyclical and authentic, and it is essential that this section be completed annually. To both those within and those outside each academic degree program, the information contained here establishes the dedication to excellence and student-centeredness of our faculty and our administration.

Assessment plan results should lead to actions designed to seek to improve the program. For this reason, the **actions to seek improvement or maintain success** must be completed. The activities described in this explanation generally fall into the following categories: changes in assessment plans, changes in the academic process, and changes in curriculum.

Changes to the program assessment plan might involve:
- Revising the program mission or goals
- Revising program objectives or student learning outcomes
- Changing the number or type of measures used to evaluate outcomes

Changes in the academic processes might include:
- Modifying the frequency or schedule of course offerings
- Making technology related improvements
- Making personnel related changes
- Implementing additional training
- Revising advising standards or processes
- Revising admissions criteria (if applicable)

Changes to the program curriculum might include:
- Revising or enforcing pre-requisites
- Revising course sequences
- Revising course content
- Adding courses
- Deleting courses

(Adapted from http://iaaweb.ucf.edu/oeas/results/sample_results_acad.htm)

Student Learning Assessment in General Education

The distinguishing quality of a university education is the intersection and blend of career preparation and life enrichment. Through the general education core curriculum, ULM joins these two purposes together, and both of these aspects of a valuable university experience were uppermost in the minds of the faculty and academic administrators when they established the current core curriculum.

Rationale

Pursuant to its charge of ensuring the quality of the core curriculum, ULM's General Education Committee conducted a comprehensive review of the program in 2015-16 guided by the following principle: any consideration or recommendation regarding the core should consider what is best for the education of our students first and logistics, cost, and potential disruption to prior ways of doing things secondarily. The draft document that the committee produced was based largely on weekly deliberations by the ten members. The committee also held two open meetings in late March of 2016 to solicit faculty input. This inclusive process lead to an updated purpose and rationale statement which is published in the Undergraduate Catalog:

> *The General Education Core Curriculum was established to serve the long-term educational needs of ULM students; it provides students with broad-based knowledge and transferrable skills applicable to all majors and careers, teaches students to understand and value learning, and encourages students to recognize their ability to affect change in their communities and a diverse world.*

This rationale aligns with ULM's mission to prepare students "to compete, succeed, and contribute in an ever-changing global society through a transformative education" by ensuring that undergraduate students will be intellectually well-equipped to complete their chosen programs of study, as well as to find a meaningful place in today's integrated world.

Learning Domains

In conjunction with the comprehensive review of the general education program, the General Education Committee devised learning domains with specific student competencies to align with the updated rationale:

- Quantitative literacy and scientific reasoning (applying mathematical reasoning and problem-solving skills; supporting arguments with quantitative evidence; understanding and applying statistical information; understanding the scientific method, laboratory techniques, and experimental design)
- Communication (creating written, oral, and visual presentations of ideas to inform or persuade using text, data, and/or images as appropriate to audience and purpose)
- Critical thinking (recognizing ambiguity, exploring assumptions, and understanding context to create a reasoned, logical analysis)
- Independent and collaborative problem-solving (demonstrating personal effectiveness skills including managing time and resources, focusing through distractions, and contributing positively to team efforts where applicable)
- Civic and ethical awareness (considering multiple perspectives and beliefs; evaluating various consequences of actions; and understanding the individual's role as a member of local, national, and global societies)

General Education Curriculum Content

The General Education Committee reviewed the content of the core curriculum in 2016-17 to ensure alignment with the updated rationale and learning domains and applied the following criteria to determine course inclusion:

- The courses must meet three of the learning domains through assignments and activities.
- The courses must provide broad-based knowledge as described by the Louisiana Board of Regents (see below) and should be broadly applicable to students outside of the major.

All School Directors were consulted for input about courses before the Committee deliberated, and the updated core curriculum was submitted and approved by the University Curriculum Committee and is published in the Undergraduate Catalog.

Above all, the core curriculum has been established to serve the long term educational needs of ULM students. Accordingly, we offer our undergraduate students this broader, stronger educational foundation that was created and adapted from the general education requirements of the Louisiana Board of Regents General Education guidelines, but we must also determine to what extent our students achieve the goals and learning objectives set forth for them through this comprehensive curriculum if we are to further refine and improve our offerings to the students.

Policy for Student Learning Assessment in General Education

In accordance with ULM's dedication to continuous improvement, the faculty of instructional units which offer courses listed in the general education core curriculum must engage in student learning assessment in a systematic and cyclical fashion. The administrator for each unit which offers general education courses is responsible for the timely submission of information associated with the assessment of student learning in general education and compliance with due dates as announced by the Office of Assessment and Evaluation.

Procedures for Student Learning Assessment in General Education

Administrators and faculty of academic programs which offer courses included in the general education core curriculum should, according to institutional policies, include appropriate learning outcomes or objectives on course syllabi and embed appropriate assessment of learning within the courses.

All courses included in ULM's core curriculum were approved for inclusion based on, among other factors, faculty assertions that they map to at least three general education learning competencies. Faculty should compile assessment data on relevant assignments to be included in the assessment process.

Based on recommendations from the General Education Committee and collaborations between the OAE staff and program faculty, OAE staff members will request and collected student learning assessments from general education courses which are mapped to specific student competencies; see the complete set of courses mapped to the learning competencies posted to the OAE website for more detail.

Assessments will be scored on the competency rubrics modified by the General Education Committee from AAC&U VALUE rubrics. If possible, OAE staff will collect existing student scores as assigned by the instructor of record if provided a translation guide between assignment score and rubric from the program administrator and/or assigned faculty contact. If the existing student score structure is not translatable to a rubric score, members of the General Education Committee will conduct full re-scoring on the rubric through the General Education Moodle page.

Rubric scores of student work collected from all courses mapped to a specific competency are compiled to represent the overall general education competency performance level. The General Education Committee defines success as having 70% of student work scored as "meets expectations" or better.

Results from the prior year's general education student learning assessment will be compiled and presented by OAE, with assistance where needed from University Planning and Analysis, to the General Education Committee each fall semester for review, analysis, and recommendations for improvement in student learning.

Unit Assessment and Evaluation

Introduction

Every unit, whether administrative or academic/student support, that comprises the University of Louisiana at Monroe must play a part in moving the institution toward fulfilling its vision and mission and achieving its goals. For this reason, it is of utmost importance that these units, whether academic and student support-related or administrative in nature, maintain a focused effort to plan development and growth in a thoughtful manner and in alignment with the University's strategic plan. In order to gauge the effectiveness of each unit's performance in ensuring that both its own mission as well as the University's mission is achieved, unit plans and their implementation must be evaluated. Through this process of planning and evaluation, progress toward goals will be evident, and the University, along with all of its constituent parts, can maintain a continuous cycle of improvement.

Overview

Unit evaluation begins with strategic planning elements. Each unit documents a **mission statement** which addresses the purpose(s) and constituencies of the unit and is shown to be in **alignment** with the mission of the University and/or with a supervisory unit. **Goals, intended outcomes/objectives**, and **tactical steps** by which to fulfill the unit's mission are listed. The goals in each plan should address applicable aspects of the unit, whether strategic or operational, including areas such as student learning, faculty and/or staff development, student recruitment and retention, facilities and technology, etc.

Units must then ensure that their goals and intended outcomes /objectives are continually pursued and that progress towards fulfillment of the mission and improvement are documented. For this reason, **measures**, explicit **targets for success**, and **timeframes** and **person(s) responsible** for planned actions and assessments are listed for each objective or outcome.

The **results** of assessments are analyzed by appropriate faculty or staff groups and reported annually, but most importantly, units report **actions taken to seek improvement or maintain success**. This crucial step validates the efforts expended in the planning stages and enables and documents the continuous cycle of improvement.

Policy for Unit Assessment and Evaluation

In accordance with ULM's dedication to continuous improvement, the faculty and staff of institutional units engage in strategic planning and evaluation processes in a systematic and cyclical fashion. The administrator for each unit is responsible for the timely completion of all forms associated with the academic strategic planning and evaluation process and compliance with due dates as announced by the Office of Assessment and Evaluation.

Procedures for Unit Assessment and Evaluation

The procedures for documenting unit evaluation take place in two distinct phases: plan creation and plan completion. Typically, once a year at the end of each cycle, units should complete the previous year's plan by documenting results and explaining changes and then use that information to create the plan for the upcoming year.

Unit evaluation plan creation:

The following portions of the document must be completed during this phase:

> "Unit mission statement," "Alignment with University Mission," "Goals," "Outcomes/Objectives," "Measures," "Targets," "Timeframe for Evaluation," and "Responsible Persons"

Administrators of units or divisions should create an evaluation plan at the beginning of each fiscal year. Many of the elements in these plans may remain largely unchanged from year to year, but the completion of a plan document every year is imperative. The official due date for the completion of this task will vary, but it will generally fall in July/August

(see www.ulm.edu/assessment for current deadlines). The unit administrator may designate a faculty or staff member to submit the plan(s) to the Office of Assessment and Evaluation's web-based reporting system, but the administrator is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the submission is made. All unit administrators should have access to the system, and faculty or staff members can be granted access at the administrator's request.

Submitted evaluation plans are then reviewed for completion, clarity, and thoroughness by divisional committees or the head of the division. Reviewers access the online submission(s), make determinations, and either recommends approval or revision by the unit. Once approval is obtained, the measures used to evaluate unit performance in the context of the defined outcomes should be implemented over the course of the year.
*Note: Faculty and staff should be well aware of **all** evaluation-related expectations to ensure that appropriate data can be and is gathered in a timely fashion.

Evaluation plan completion:

The following portions of the document must be completed during this phase:

"Results and Analysis"
"Actions to seek improvement or maintain success"

Unit administrators or their designee should update the unit evaluation document before the end of the fiscal year to report the results of all measures listed in the plan(s) which were implemented in the previous year. Again, the official due date for this task will vary from year to year, but it will generally fall in July/August. The reviewers will examine the submissions for completion and either recommends approval by the appropriate division head or revision by the unit. Once approval is obtained, the document for that fiscal year is considered complete.

Guidelines for Unit Assessment and Evaluation

Each unit's evaluation plan consists of multiple elements grouped into four main parts: **elements of strategic planning**, **assessing**, **analyzing**, and **improving**. The elements involved in each part are described in detail below.

A **mission statement** is very broad and usually brief. It tells people why you exist, and it defines your challenge in the most general, yet clearest terms possible. It tells others the essential reason for your unit's existence while establishing a common understanding of, and ambition for, your work. It provides a declaration of intentions, hopes and expectations. A good mission statement crystallizes and focuses the purpose, vision, and direction of your unit. Essentially, it communicates what you do, and how and why you do it, to both the people working within and those outside of your unit.

Every unit should play a part in the successful attainment of the University's goals and intended outcomes/objectives as well as those of the unit above. In order to ensure this unity of purpose, strategic **alignment** must take place. Strategic alignment occurs when the mission and goals of your unit contribute to the achievement or fulfillment of the university's or your supervisory unit's mission and goals. In this way, every unit, college, and department is working toward fulfilling not only their own vision and mission, but those of their supervisory unit and the university at large as well.

For example, the Office of Assessment and Evaluation would explain how its mission supports the mission(s) of the university and/or the Office of Academic Affairs. The School of Humanities would explain how its mission supports the mission(s) of the university and/or the College of Arts, Edcuation, and Sciences.

Goals are broad statements that describe what the department or unit wants to accomplish or maintain over the next several years. They state long-term targets or directions of development in general terms.

Goals, which are logically associated with the fulfillment of the unit mission, provide the basis for the decisions about the nature, scope, and relative priorities of various activities in a department or unit. They are used in planning and should help move toward attaining the vision.

The goals of a department or unit must be consistent with those of its college or its vice-president, and ultimately, with the goals of the institution. It is necessary to ensure that agreement is reached on the mission statement before developing departmental or unit goals.

Intended outcomes/objectives are brief, clear statements that describe the tasks or projects that must be undertaken or a condition that must be met in order to accomplish a goal.

Tactical steps are specific actions and deeds used to achieve intended outcomes/objectives; they keep the unit moving toward the fulfillment of intended outcomes/objectives. While documenting tactical steps is often a necessary step in clarifying a unit's planned path to fulfilling particular a goal, their documentation is optional; if a unit's faculty or staff determine that specificity and clarity are obvious without listing tactical steps, this section can be bypassed.

In order to gauge the effectiveness of each unit's performance and ensure that its mission is achieved, the progress made towards goals and intended outcomes/objectives must be periodically evaluated. Therefore, each unit must choose no fewer than two intended outcomes/objectives listed in its evaluation plan to assess, but two is **strictly a minimum**. Most units should be able to adhere to a more rigorous evaluation schedule, and all units should make every effort to evaluate progress on all intended outcomes/objectives listed in the plan over an approximate five-year time period.

Measures are the methods or processes used to evaluate the unit's performance in context of an intended outcome/objective. These can be thought of as the tools a unit uses to determine its level of performance on a particular intended outcome/objective.

Targets for success are the standard or target level the unit hopes to reach. Criteria will be specific to the type of intended outcome/objective and measure, from numeric values of success to documentation of completion of a task. **please note that criteria or target statements that involve completion of a task should explicitly state where documentation or evidence of completion is available.*

Examples

Goal – Provide service to the community.
Intended Outcome/Objective – Departmental faculty will promote an understanding of the earth and atmospheric sciences among the general public.
Measure – Percentage of departmental faculty listed on the "University Speakers" webpage
Criteria - 50% of department faculty will be listed

Goal – Student Health Services will utilize available technology to maximize efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of health care.
Intended Outcome/Objective – Establish additional functionalities for patients on web page.
Measure – Completion as determined by functioning link and as reported in annual report.
Target
– Completion

**please note that while only one intended outcome/objective is listed here for demonstration purposes, there are typically multiple intended outcomes/objectives associated with each goal.*

Units also list a **timeframe** for when each measure will be implemented and which faculty or staff member(s) will be designated as the **responsible person(s)** for that measure's implementation and the resulting information or data.

For assessment to be worth the necessary effort, the information and knowledge gained must be shared and used. After implementing assessment measures, faculty and/or staff analyze the data, review the results, and make changes toward improvement as needed.

The **results and analysis** section addresses each measure implemented in a given year, condensing the resulting data into usable summaries, developing conclusions, reporting the findings, and taking action on the information. Also, dates when faculty and/or staff met to discuss the assessment results and to plan for improvement should be listed; this allows the demonstration of collaboration towards improvement within a unit.

The **actions to seek improvement or maintain success** section contains information on all improvements or adjustments by the unit stemming from any of the processes associated with or performance documented during the previous evaluation cycle. A unit should include information on improved unit operations or performance as well as developments associated with the planning and evaluation process itself.

This section is the unit's fundamental demonstration that the process of planning and evaluating its own performance is cyclical and authentic. To both those within and those outside of a unit, the information contained here establishes a unit's dedication to excellence and student-centeredness. Hence, entering "no changes" or leaving the field blank is unacceptable.

Surveys

Student Satisfaction Inventory

The Student Satisfaction Inventory gives [the university] a powerful tool to improve the quality of student life and learning. It measures student satisfaction and priorities, showing how satisfied students are as well as what issues are important to them. The University of Louisiana Monroe uses this data to:

- Guide strategic action planning
- Strengthen student retention initiatives
- Meet accreditation requirements
- Identify areas of strength for institutional marketing
- Chart progress toward campus and unit goals

The results of ULM's participation in this survey can be found on the OAE website.

National Survey of Student Engagement

According to the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) website, "Through its student survey, *The College Student Report*, NSSE annually collects information at hundreds of four-year colleges and universities about first-year and senior students' participation in programs and activities that institutions provide for their learning and personal development. The results provide an estimate of how undergraduates spend their time and what they gain from attending college."

The results of ULM's participation in this survey can be found on the OAE website.

Great Colleges to Work For

According to the editor of The Chronicle of Higher Education, "'Great Colleges to Work For® looks at employee perceptions of the quality of their work environment. It examines aspects of the worker experience in a quantifiable and measureable way. This allows you to act on your faculty's and staff's feelings about job satisfaction, interdepartmental collaboration, pride in work and other important areas.'"

The results of ULM's participation in this survey can be found on the OAE website.

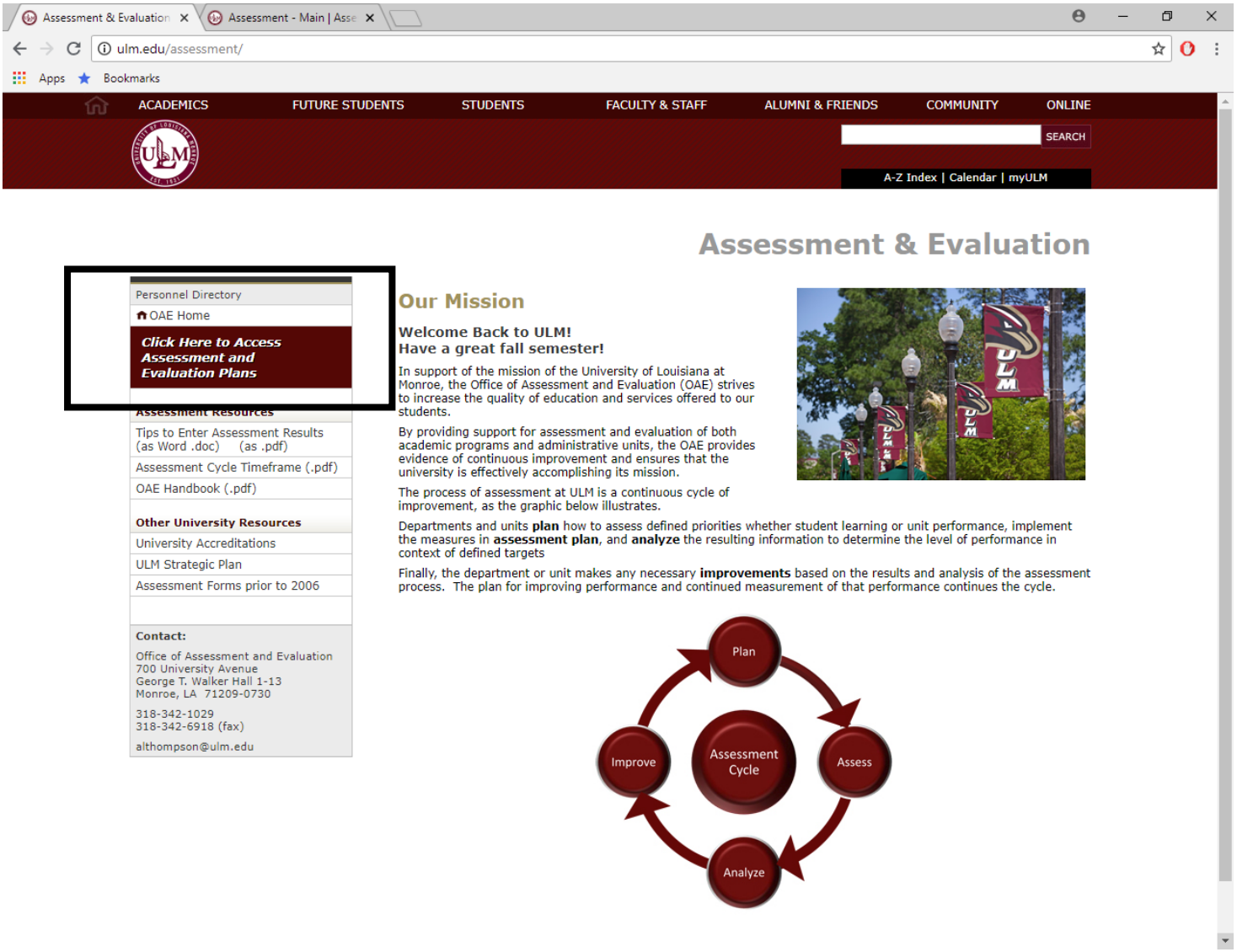
Using Web-based Data Entry System

Introduction

The Assessment and Evaluation's web address is http://www.ulm.edu/assessment/. To locate this from the ULM homepage, first click on faculty/staff, next click on Assessment and Evaluation, which is the second clickable link on the left side of the page. If at any time you have a question, you may contact either Allison Thompson or Kelli Cole at the following: assessment@ulm.edu, althompson@ulm.edu, kcole@ulm.edu, or by phone at 342-1029. If you need access to a form that you currently do not have access to, please contact the Office of Assessment and Evaluation. Below you will find details on how to enter information for Unit Evaluation, Degree Program Evaluation, and General Education Evaluation. Depending on your role in your program or division, you may have access to one, two, or all three forms.

How to Log On to the OAE's Web-based Data Entry System

Once on the OAE homepage, click on the link that says, "Click Here to Access Assessment and Evaluation Plans." This is located at the top left of the screen.

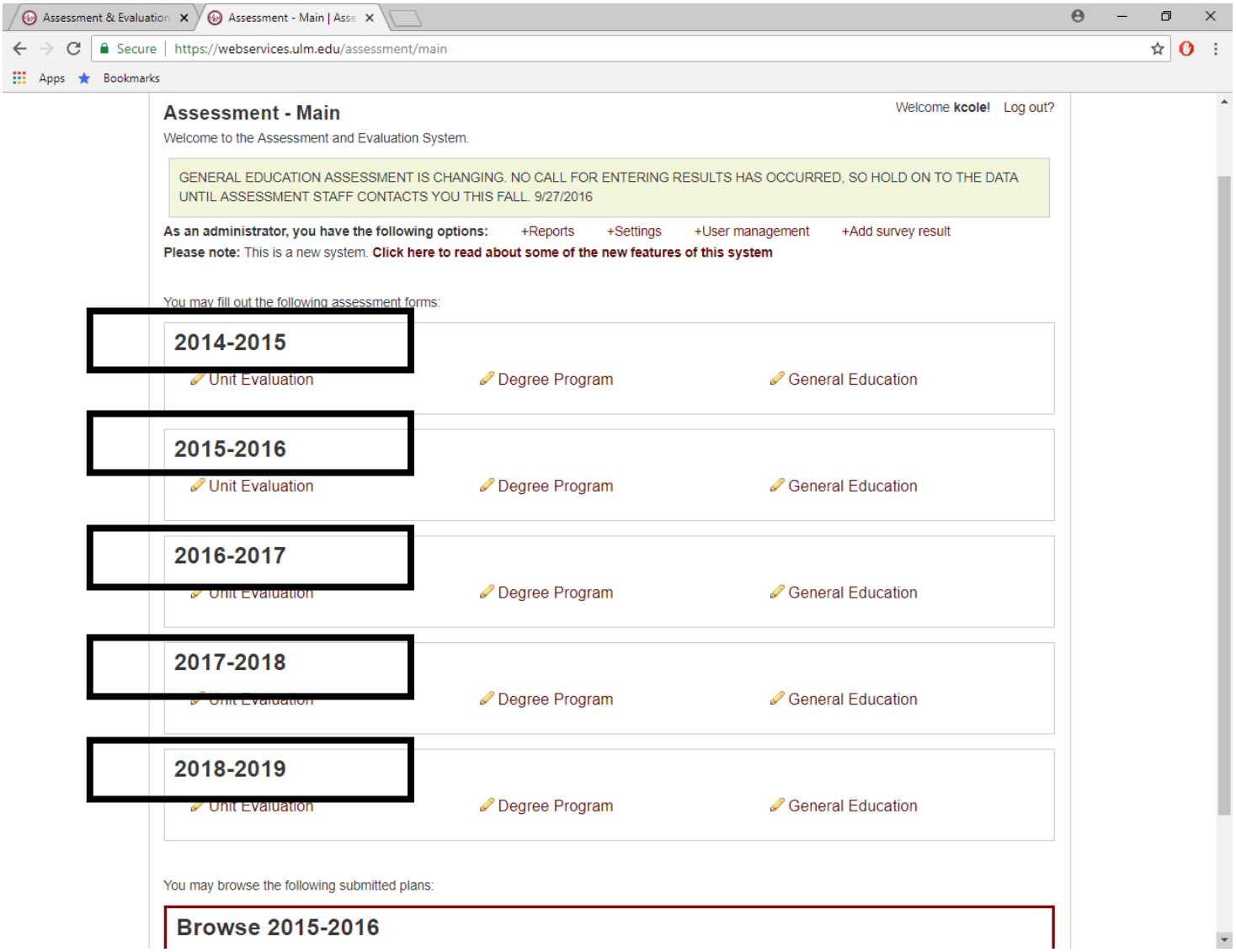


Next, enter your campus wide id and the password that you use for Web-for-Faculty and Employee Self-Service.

How to Create an Assessment Report

Choose the Appropriate Year

Find the appropriate year and choose the type of evaluation plan that you are filling out (unit, degree, or general education). See screenshot below, which is showing where the dates that you will be choosing from are shown. Depending on which form you will need, you will choose Unit Evaluation, Degree Program, or General Education.



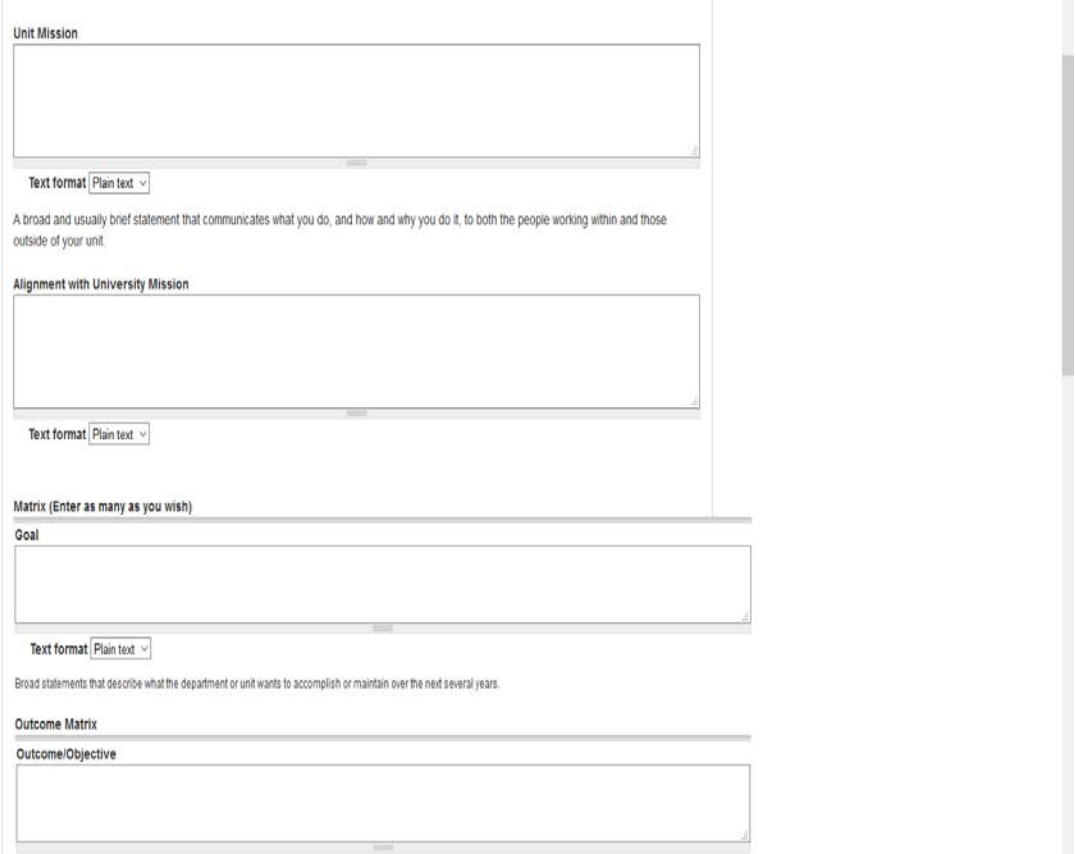
Choose the appropriate category

Depending on what you have access to, you will either see the option for Unit Evaluation, Degree Program, and/or General Education. You may have access to one, two, or all three. To create a report, you will click on the appropriate form: Unit Evaluation, Degree Program Evaluation, or General Education.

Unit Evaluation

Unit administrators or their designee should update the unit evaluation document before the end of the fiscal year to report the results of all measures listed in the plan(s) which were implemented in the previous year. The official due date for this task will vary from year to year, but it will generally fall in late June.

The blank Degree Program Evaluation form will look like this:



Text format Plain text

ULM Strategic Long-term Objective and/or Guiding Principle

- [ ] 1.a. Internal Organizational Structure: Determine the optimal financial organizational structure for ULM and implement
- [ ] 1.b. Financial Stability for the Academic Program Mix: Develop and implement a Financial Sustainability Review process
- [ ] 1.c. Institutional Authority and Control for Tuition: Report on tuition rates throughout the region and on differential tuition rates
- [ ] 1.d. New Revenue Streams: Develop strategies to expand all revenue streams
- [ ] 1.e. Athletics: Promote attendance and support of ULM athletic teams while maintaining a balanced budget
- [ ] 2.a. Academic Program Portfolio: implement an academic program review process

Measure(s)

Text format Plain text

Target(s)

Text format Plain text

Tactical Steps (optional)

Text format Plain text

Timeframe for Evaluation

Text format Plain text

Responsible Persons

Text format Plain text

Results and Analysis

Text format Plain text

Explanation of changes made based on these results

Text format Plain text

Remove outcome section (cannot undo)

Add another outcome

Remove goal (cannot undo)

Add another goal

Does the unit have any partnerships or provide services for the public or community? *

- (•) No
- ( ) Yes

▪ Public services

Notes (optional)

Text format Plain text

Attach files (optional)

Optionally attach files to this submission. To save space, please limit to 3 or fewer files, if possible.

Add a new file

Browse... No file selected. Upload

Save as...

- (•) Save as DRAFT [default]
- ( ) Save as ACTIVE, and make visible on the site to non-admins

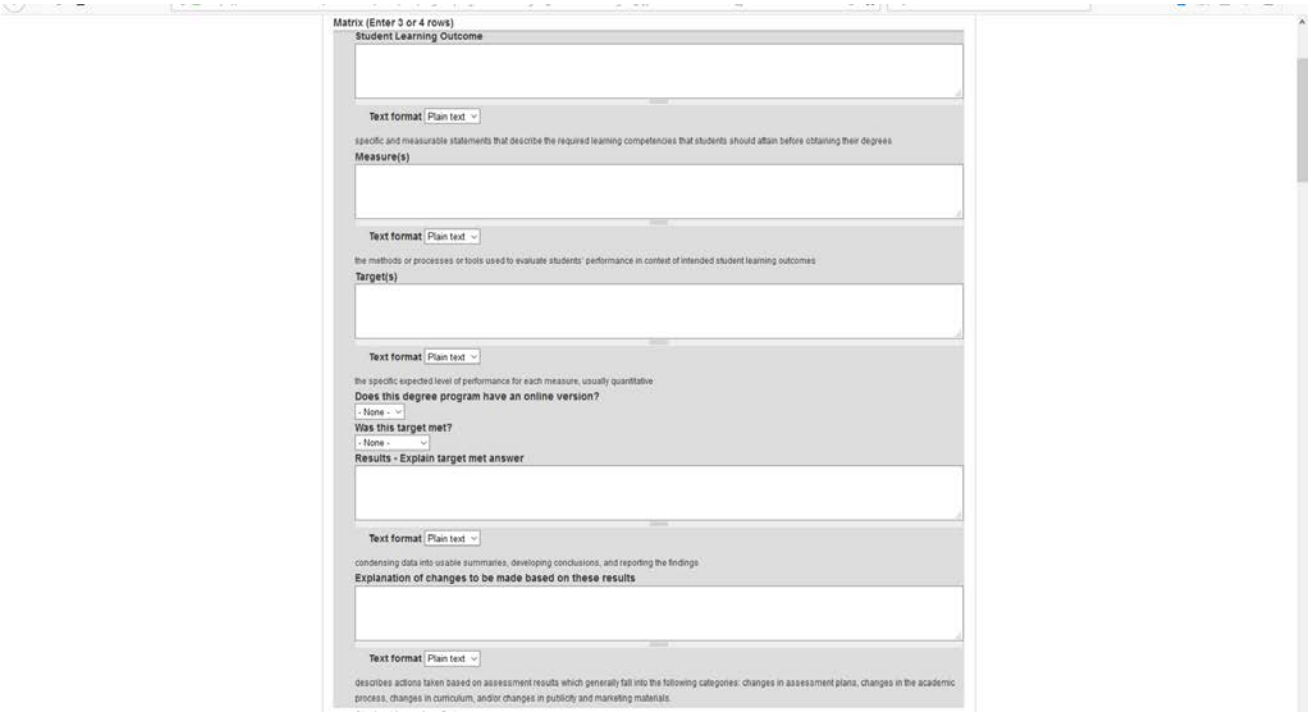
This option is for when you are working on your plan but are not ready to submit the form for review.

You will submit your form when you are finished and ready for it to be reviewed for approval.

Degree Program Evaluation

Department administrators or their designee should update the degree program assessment document before the end of the academic year to report the results of all measures listed in the plan(s). The official due date for this task will vary from year to year, but it will generally fall in late September.

The blank Degree Program Evaluation form will look like this:

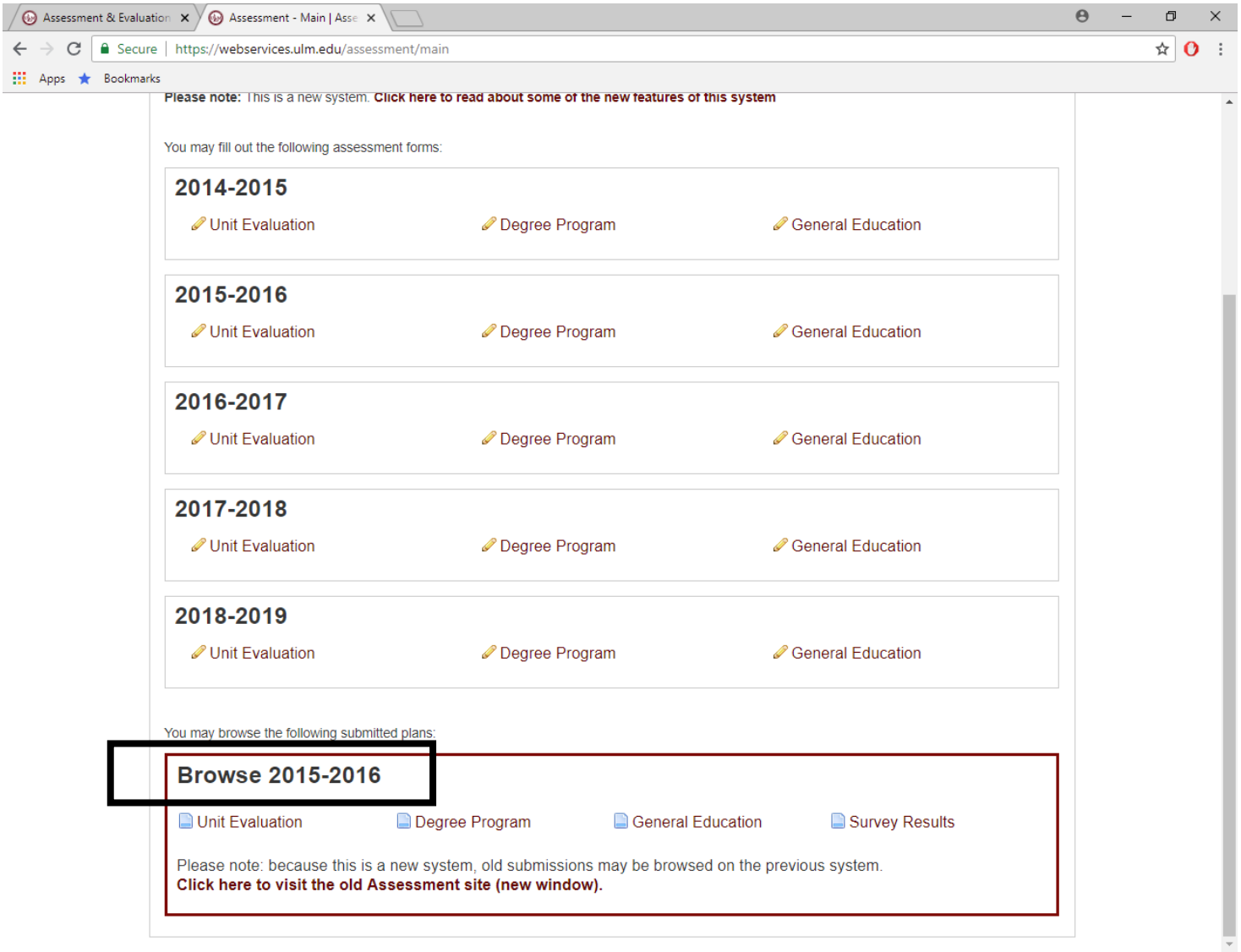


Reporting the Results

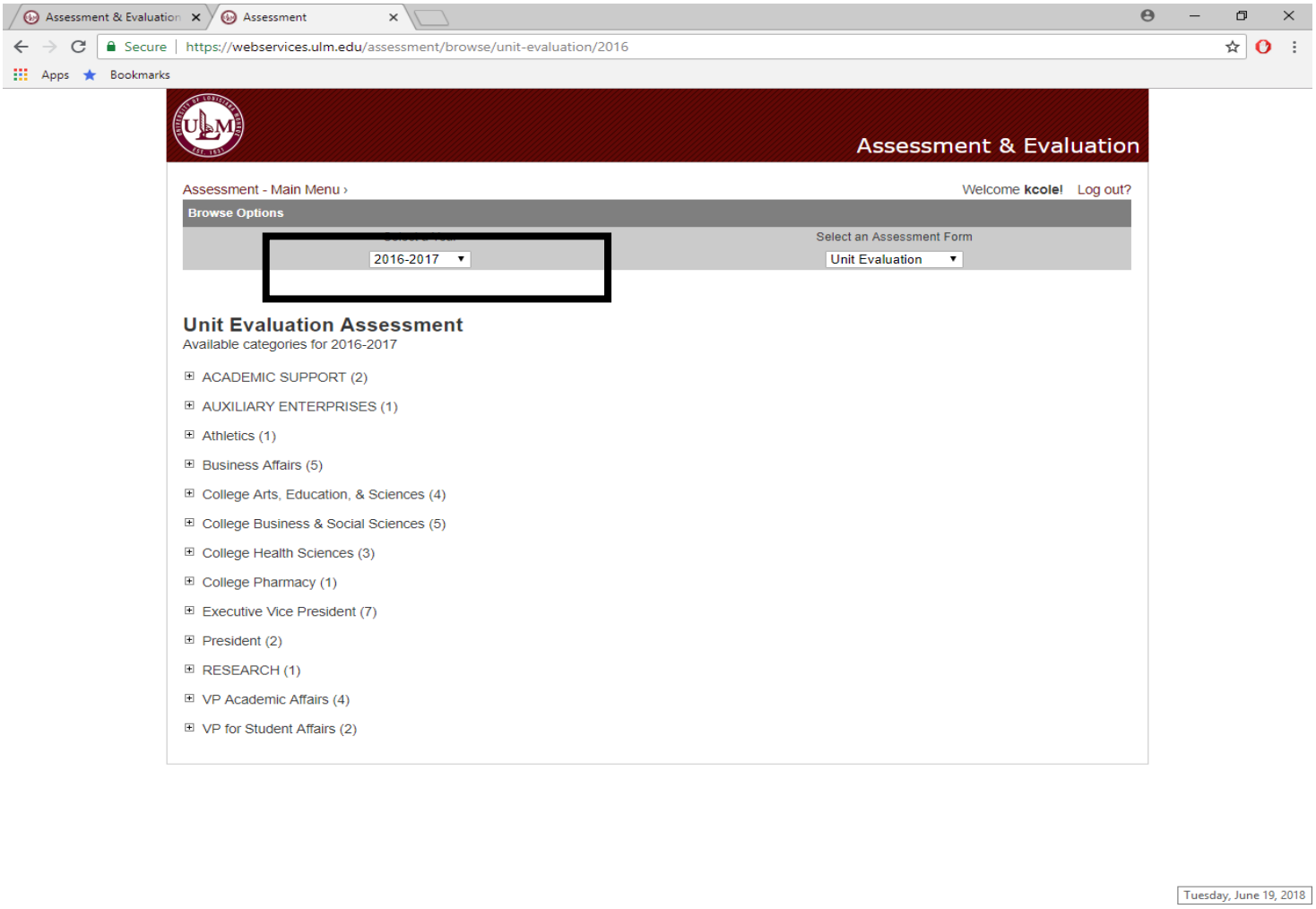
Once assessment data has been collected, the results must be reported and analyzed. This requires condensing the data into usable summaries, developing conclusions, and reporting the findings. Also, dates when faculty met to discuss the assessment results and to plan for improvement should be listed if possible; this allows the demonstration of collaboration towards improvement.

Browse Feature

You may look at finished plans that have been **submitted** through our browse option, rather it be your own plan or another plan of a faculty of staff member of ULM. Below you will find a screen shot illustrating where the browse option is located on the Office of Assessment and Evaluation's website (you must be logged in).

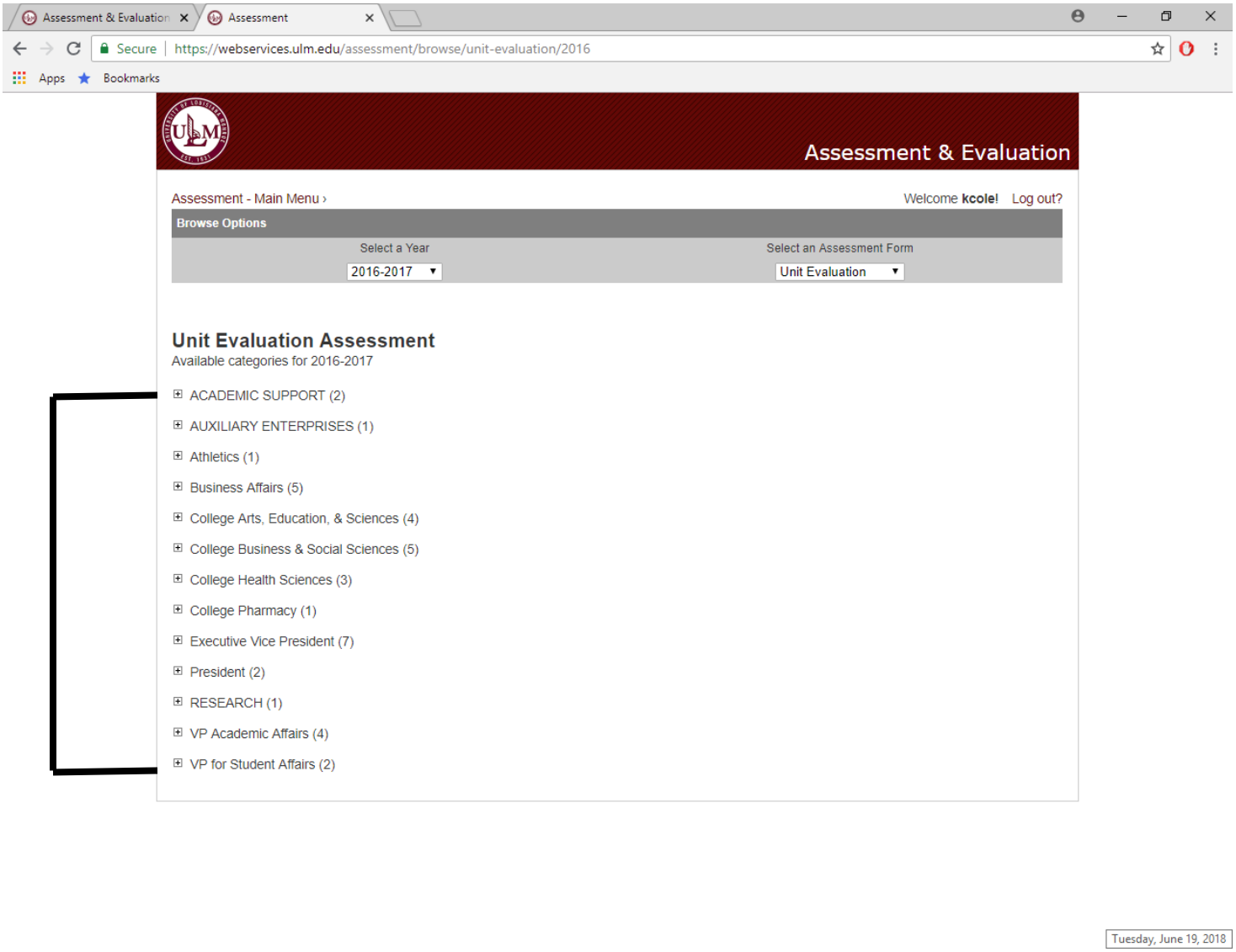


Once you click on Unit Evaluation or Degree Program, a new window will open. You will then need to select a year.



Tuesday, June 19, 2018

Next, click on whichever division that you would like to expand.

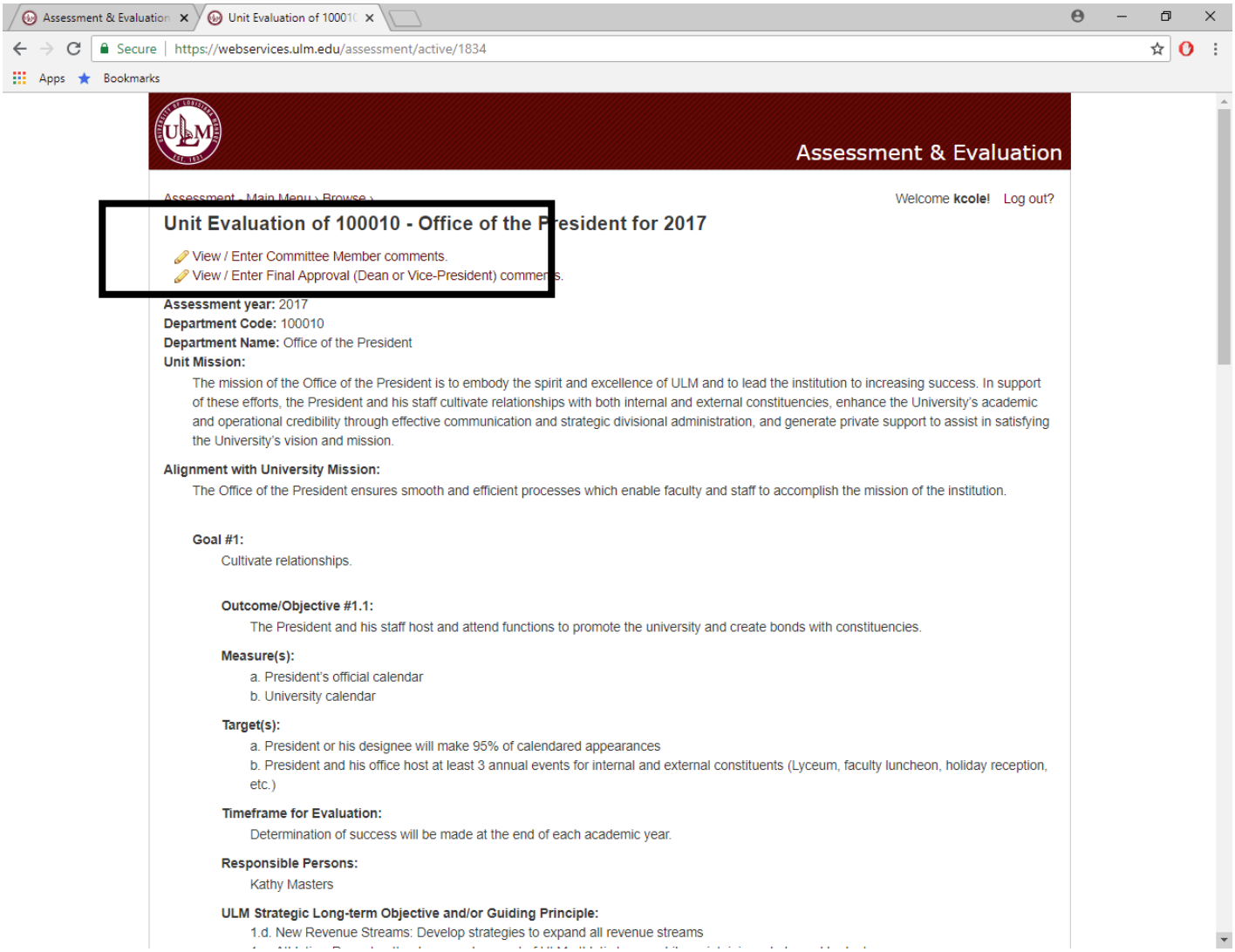


Tuesday, June 19, 2018

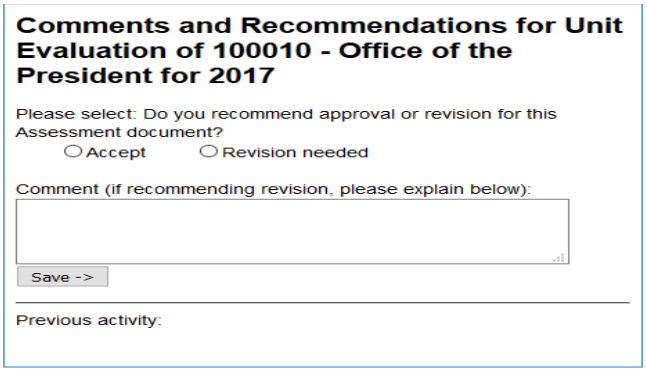
Committee Members and Reviewers

In order to review a plan, you must first choose Unit Evaluation, Degree Program, or General Education from the Browse section (for help using the Browse section, please refer to p. 26 of the handbook).

Once you have opened the plan to be reviewed, click on the link that says, "View / Enter Committee Member comments."



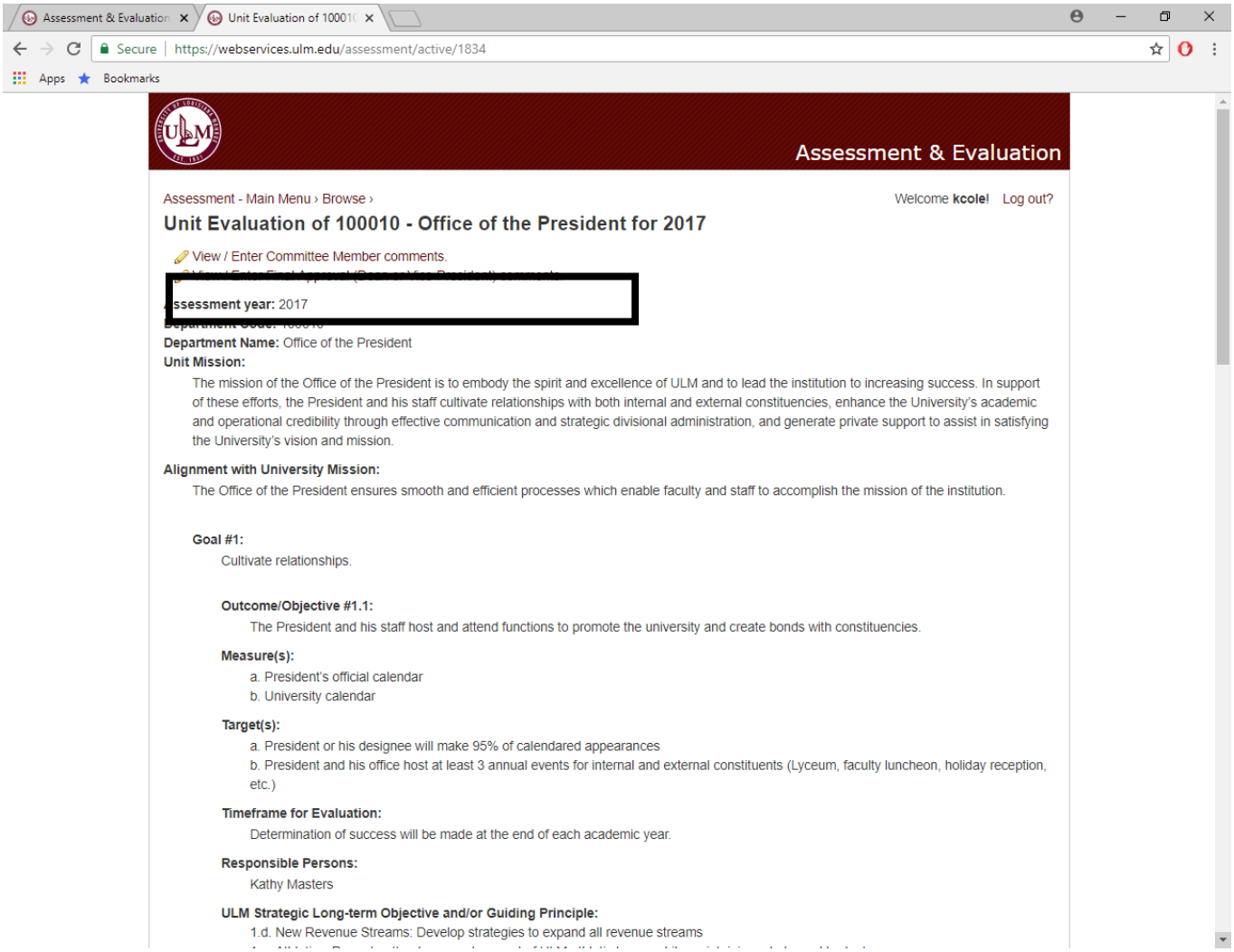
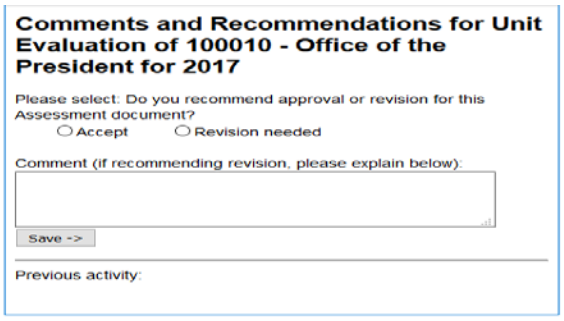
A pop-up screen will show any comments made for this plan. You may choose either "accept" or "revision needed." Make sure to click on save when you are finished.



Deans or Division Heads

In order to review a plan, you must first choose Unit Evaluation, Degree Program, or General Education from the Browse section (for help using the Browse section, please refer to p. 26 of the handbook).

Once you have opened the plan to be reviewed, click on the link that says, "View / Enter Final Approval (Dean or Vice President) comments."



A pop-up screen will show any comments made for this plan. You may choose either "accept" or "revision needed." Make sure to click on save when you are finished.