



A GUIDE TO CO-CURRICULAR ASSESSMENT

Office of Institutional Effectiveness

The mission of Goodwin University is to educate a diverse student population in a dynamic environment that aligns education, commerce, and community. Our innovative programs of study prepare students for professional careers while promoting lifelong learning and civic responsibility. As a nurturing university community, we challenge students, faculty, staff, and administration to fully realize their highest academic, professional, and personal potential.

Introduction

Co-Curricular assessment encompasses the annual evaluation of programs and operations within all co-curricular units, which we define as any unit not serving in a strictly academic capacity.

The Office of Institutional Effectiveness will lend our expertise to other units to help in making better-informed and more effective decisions. The goal of this program is to provide unit managers with data and tools to assist them in managing and improving their units.

The data, dashboards, and reports produced by this process help unit managers to:

- Figure out what works and what does not
- Make better-informed decisions
- Present evidence when someone asks *why* they made those decisions
- Debate ideas for improvement based on that evidence instead of guesswork
- Defend requests for resources needed to meet the goals that they have set
- Demonstrate their unit's contribution to the college

The Process

The process of co-curricular assessment consists of the following four stages:

1. **Plan:** Planning the assessment
2. **Implement:** Conducting the assessment
3. **Assess:** Review the data
4. **Revise:** Closing the Loop and Ongoing assessment

The assessment coordinator will be available to provide guidance and assistance at all stages of the process, though the degree of that involvement will vary from step to step. The coordinator's involvement in each unit's process will also likely decrease somewhat from year to year as individual managers become more comfortable with the process and can complete more steps independently. Conversely, the coordinator's level of involvement will be high if the unit manager is new to the position or to the assessment process. A list of questions for guiding assessment planning is provided below (Appendix A).

Stage 1: Planning the assessment

1. *Objectives*: Each manager identifies the major objectives of their unit which align with the strategic goals of Goodwin College. A unit will generally have 1-3 major objectives.
2. *Measures*: The managers and the assessment coordinator work together to develop a measure of each unit's progress in achieving their objective.
3. *Data*: Development of each measure requires careful consideration of what data is already available, what new data may be realistically obtained, and how to collect that new data. Planned data sources should be settled on for a measure before that measure is finalized.
4. *Goals*: The managers determine realistic performance goals for each measure.

Stage 1 is conducted in close collaboration between the unit manager and the assessment coordinator. While final decisions are left to the unit manager as much as possible, the assessment coordinator provides guidance to ensure that the plan provides a solid foundation for assessment efforts.

This includes wording measures and objectives in a way that:

- Is clear and measurable.
- Ensures they can be measured properly as written.
- Is not open to alternative interpretations.
- Makes their saliency to the objectives apparent.

It also includes making sure that there is a workable and sustainable plan for collecting any and all data which is necessary for the evaluation of these measures, before moving forward.

When all of these things are settled on, the assessment coordinator will work with the manager to draft a formal plan. A template for this plan is provided below (Appendix B). A digital copy will be stored in the OIE drive, and will be emailed to the participants for their records.

Stage 2: Conducting the assessment

5. *Data collection*: This includes both marshalling any existing data and collecting any new data needed. The assessment coordinator assists the managers with developing data collection tools and tracking systems when necessary.
6. *Analysis*: The assessment coordinator assists the managers with analyzing the data.
7. *Self-judgment*: Now that the unit manager has measured their unit's performance on these measures, they decide whether or not they are satisfied with this level of performance by checking it against the goals they set.

Once the plan is in place, it is carried out to collect data. The first time a unit conducts an assessment, this stage will also be conducted in close collaboration with the coordinator. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness is available to help with analysis of data.

Annual goals can and should be revised moving forward to reflect realistic ambitions for improvement.

Stage 3: Closing the loop

8. *Strategies for improvement:* If the unit manager is satisfied with performance, no particular strategy for improvement is necessary. If they are not satisfied with performance—either because the original goal was not met, or because they wish to meet an even higher standard next year—a strategy must be developed to address how current performance will be improved.
9. *Reporting:* A report will be submitted by the unit manager at the end of the assessment cycle (mid-January).
10. *Implementation:* Some strategies may require the approval of a higher authority within the college, or approval of a request for more resources. In these cases, implementation will necessarily be delayed until such approval is received. Any strategies which do not require such approval should be implemented immediately.

When goals have been met—and perhaps even exceeded—it can be tempting to set them aside and not revisit them. It is entirely reasonable to do this with one or more satisfactorily fulfilled measures, particularly if a unit is falling short in another area which requires a concentrated redirection of efforts for improvement. However, for the sake of accountability, any decision to accept current performance on a measure should be explained in the report submitted by the unit manager. Keep in mind that if performance is far above the goal, this is likely a sign that the goal was unrealistically low and should be revised upward for future assessments.

There are also several responses when goals have not been met, depending on the exact circumstances. If performance is very close to the goal, it's possible that no specific strategy change is necessary in order to achieve it in the future, especially if historical data shows that performance has been steadily improving. If performance is far below the goal, this is likely a sign that the goal was unrealistically high and should be revised downward for future assessment. However, in such cases, the unit manager had some reason (expectation, intuition, or ambition) for setting the goal so high. This means the revised goal should likely still reflect an ambitious and aggressive drive for improvement.

The annual report is due to the Office of Institutional Effectiveness after completion. It is timed this way so that any strategy for improvement which involves requesting greater resources can be submitted in time for annual budget deliberations. A basic template for this report is provided below (Appendix B), and the assessment coordinator is available to review drafts if necessary.

Reports are submitted by the unit manager to the assessment coordinator. The assessment coordinator will share these reports with the manager's supervisor and the University Committee on Assessment (CCA). Digital copies will be stored in the OIE drive and on the Canvas shell.

Stage 4: Ongoing assessment

11. Continuing assessment of existing measures
12. Focus on measures for which improvement strategies have been implemented
13. Add new measures as necessary or appropriate

From a long-term viewpoint, Step 11 is arguably the single most important step of the entire process. Following it enables a long view of accountability within a particular unit, a demonstration of progress over time, and consistent documentation of results for the President's Cabinet and outside accrediting bodies such as NECHE.

For this reason, in almost all cases, *any measure which a unit starts assessing should continue to be assessed*, regardless of performance.

Any time a strategy for improving a particular outcome is implemented, the next year's assessment should give special focus to evaluating the success of this strategy. Depending on the complexity of the strategy, this may require the addition of new measures or data collection efforts, or may be as simple as continuing the existing data collection regarding this outcome.

Once an annual self-assessment program has been started, it is designed to be relatively easy to maintain; the unit just needs to keep collecting the data on a regular basis and submitting their annual report. If they are trying to improve in an area where they are not reaching their goals, then that area will be the primary focus of the next report.

Appendix A: Questions to Guide Co-Curricular Assessment Planning

Questions for Stage 1

The purpose of this stage is to help the unit choose measures, set performance goals, and plan to determine a baseline of performance.

1. *Objectives*: Keeping in mind the mission of this unit, what are our top-level objectives? How do these tie in to the larger strategic goals of the college?
2. *Output & outcome measures*: How will we know if we are achieving those objectives? What are the outputs and outcomes that need to be measured?
3. *Existing data*: What data are we already collecting which relates to the measures? How are we collecting it? Where is it stored? How far back does it go?
4. *New data collection*: What new data do we need to collect, who will be doing it, and how (surveys, pre- and post-tests, interviews, focus groups, etc.)?
5. *Goals*: What are your goals for each of the measures from Question 2?

Questions for Stages 2 & 3

Once the data has been collected and analyzed, the unit will have performance baselines established for all measures, so they will be able to see where they are or aren't meeting their goals. The purpose of these stages is identifying opportunities for improvement and generating strategies for the same.

6. *Judgment*: What is your judgment of current performance? Which outputs and outcomes merely need to be maintained, and which need to be improved?
7. *Goals*: Are the goals as previously set realistic, or do they need revision?
8. *Maintenance*: For those outputs and outcomes which only need to be maintained, what are your strategies for maintaining them? Do you anticipate these strategies requiring any additional resources to implement?
9. *Improvement*: For those measures which need improvement, what are your goals for improvement, and what are your strategies for reaching those goals? Do you anticipate these strategies requiring any additional resources to implement? How will you assess the outcomes of those strategies—will the current assessment program be enough?

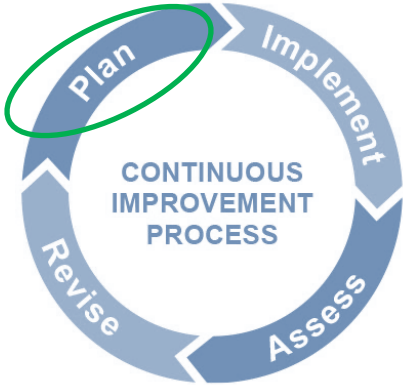
Questions for Stage 4

Repeat Stages 1-3, with special emphasis on any areas the unit has identified as important.

APPENDIX B: CO-CURRICULAR ASSESSMENT REPORT
Co-curricular Assessment, Annual Department Report 2021-2022

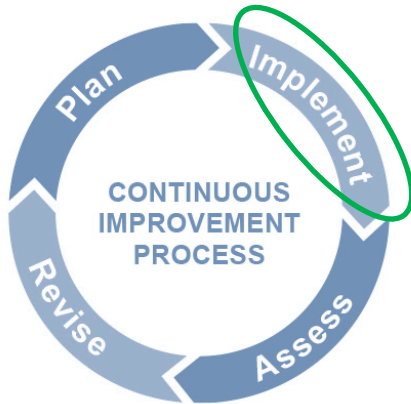
Department:

Director:



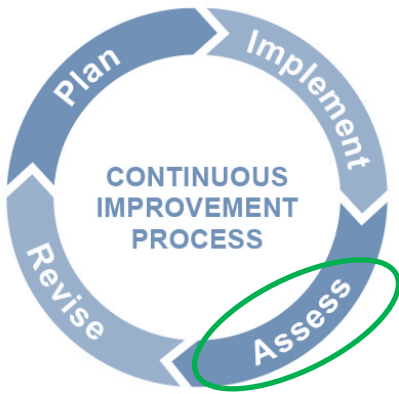
Section 1: Plan (Please Complete in the Fall)

1. How do your departmental activities fit either the University Mission statement or the mission statement for Student Services?
2. What was working for your department last year?
3. What was not working for your department last year?
4. Where would you like your department to improve?
5. What are you curious to learn more about, when it comes to your department?



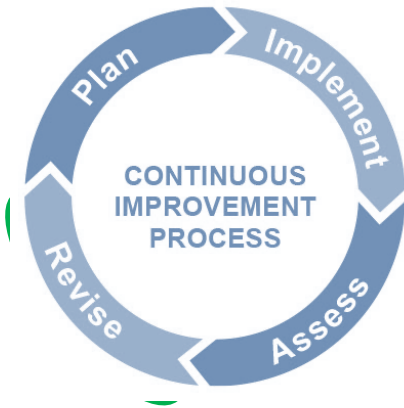
Section 2: Implement (Please Complete in the Fall)

1. What evidence will help you answer your burning question? How will you collect it?
2. Who is your sample?
3. What are some potential biases that could be a part of this assessment project? Are there any ways that we could minimize biases?
4. What kind of tool are you using for your assessment (e.g., scoring guide, key performance indicators, focus groups, interviews, etc.)? Describe the elements of this tool.
5. Who will be involved in the assessment plan?
6. Who will look at the data with you once the data is collected?



Section 3: Assess (Please Complete: Winter/Spring)

1. What were the results of the assessment process?
2. What were some strengths? What were some weaknesses?
3. Is the data directly reflective of programming? Are there other factors that could be influencing the data results?
4. What surprised you?
5. What were some areas that the department needs to continue to watch?



Section 4: Revise (Please Complete: Summer)

1. What specific changes will you make to the way your department operates as a result of this data?
2. What did your colleagues think of the results? What were their suggestions?
3. How will you use these results to improve your department?