https://gradsch.osu.edu/faculty-staff-resources/learning-goals-assessment

Assessment Process

1. Identify Assessment Goals and Outcomes

Learning goals/outcomes refer to what graduate programs want students to achieve. Goals/outcomes can be attained through classroom and external learning activities.

When developing learning goals/outcomes, graduate programs should consider what they expect students to learn while in the program and how students may be different because of the program experience. Learning goals/outcomes can target cognitive outcomes (what students know) or behavioral outcomes (what students do). If a graduate program is starting the assessment process for the first time, it is probably wise to start with a few broad learning goals/outcomes. This will make the task seem less daunting.

1. Programs should develop 3-5 learning goals/outcomes that master's or doctoral students are expected to achieve. (That is, "Students who complete our doctoral program should be able to do x.") Examples:
    1. Conduct research to answer novel questions in the field
    2. Conduct research ethically
    3. Demonstrate an understanding of the theories and research approaches in the field
    4. Use both oral and written forms of communication effectively to explain concepts in the field to both lay and expert audiences
2. Criteria should be established for the goals/outcomes. Example: ”The minimal acceptable criterion is that 75% of students will obtain a rating of 'meets expectations' or higher. When 95% of students earn a rating of 'meets expectation,'the performance standard constituting excellence for this learning outcome will be achieved.“
3. A timeline should be established for each goal/outcome. This timeline indicates the frequency by which each goal/outcome will be assessed. It is not necessary to assess each goal every year.

2. Identify Assessment Methods

Both direct and indirect measures of student learning should be identified for each goal/outcome.
Direct measures are those that assess a student’s performance on activities related to the goal/outcome. Indirect measures are those that ask students to reflect on their learning.

Direct measures

Direct measures of assessment are those in which students are required to demonstrate their learning. For example, questions on exams, writing assignments, and presentation are examples of direct measures of assessment. Direct measures provide direct evidence of student learning.

Direct measures can be obtained from the following:

1. Imbedded exam questions in courses
2. Writing assignments in courses
3. Candidacy exam rubric
4. Final oral exam rubric

Indirect measures

Indirect measures are those which ask students to reflect on their learning. Methods used to collect indirect measures include surveys with students, exit interviews with students, and alumni surveys with an accompanying rubric.

Indirect measures can be obtained from:

1. Annual surveys of graduate students
2. Exit interviews with graduate students
3. Interviews with internship or capstone supervisors
4. Alumni surveys
5. Job placement
6. Reflective writings

Note: GPAs and course grades are not appropriate direct or indirect measures. Grades reflect individual work whereas graduate program assessment is an evaluation of student learning in a program. Moreover, individual courses rarely include content that is exclusive to a single learning goal; thus, a course grade will not be specific to one learning goal. Specific course assignments or imbedded questions on exams, however, can be used as direct measures to assess student learning related to the learning goals.

3. Collect Assessment Data

Programs can design rubrics to assess student learning at events that occur on an annual basis or at milestone graduate student events, such as the thesis or dissertation defense, candidacy exam, or final oral exam. In addition to rubrics, programs can identify key assignments or exam questions from core classes and systematically collect data from all students in the program.

Rubrics are scoring guides that faculty develop and use to assess performance on student assignments, such as essays, papers, theses, and dissertations. Programs that have never used rubrics to assess student learning can follow the simple steps below. This information is adapted from "Assessing Student Learning, 2nd Edition" by Linda Suskie.

Step 1: Pick an assignment that all graduate students will complete (for example, a qualifying exam, candidacy exam, or final oral exam). Assemble a team of faculty members who are interested in graduate program assessment to meet and develop a rubric for the assignment.
Step 2: Determine the type of rubric that will be developed for this assignment: checklist rubric, rating scale rubric, descriptive rubric, or structured observation guides.
A *checklist rubric* is a simple list that an evaluator will use to determine whether the assignment included or did not include each item on the list. It is a simple rubric, but it may not adequately assess the quality of a written assignment.

A *rating scale rubric* includes an assessment of quality. Typically, characteristics of the paper or presentation are rated on a "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" scale, or an "outstanding" to "inadequate scale." One limitation of this type of rubric is that each rater will have a different opinion of what "outstanding" versus "very good" means, for example. A second limitation is that students do not receive useful feedback with this type of rubric.

Descriptive rubrics are similar to rating scale rubrics, but the ratings are accompanied by brief descriptions of what each rating means. For example, an assessment of "outstanding" for the organization of a paper may have the following descriptive explanation: "Clearly, concisely written. Logical, intuitive progression of ideas and supporting information. Clear and direct cues to all information." While more time-consuming to develop, descriptive rubrics address some of the limitations of rating scale rubrics.

Step 3: Create the rubric, but there is no need to start from scratch! There are many good models on the Internet, as well as examples included on the Graduate School's assessment page. However, programs that wish to develop a fresh rubric should consider the following questions. First, how does the assignment align with the learning goals? Second, what skills should students demonstrate when completing the assignment? Third, what does good student work equate to in terms of writing or presentation?

Tips for developing an effective rubric

1. Include at least three levels (e.g., inadequate, adequate, excellent/outstanding), but no more than five because at that point it is hard to distinguish between numbers.
2. Label each level with names, such as "exceeds expectations," "meets expectations," "approaching expectations," or "below expectations."
3. If this is a descriptive rubric, summarize what each rating implies in terms of quality.
4. Pilot test the rubric with samples of student work.

4. Analyze, Interpret, and Share Data

After data are collected from a sufficient number of graduate students, programs should enter data into TracDat, analyze it, and summarize the results.

Given that assessment is a continuous process, programs should schedule an annual meeting with program faculty, staff, and students to review and discuss the results.

Methods used to analyze the data and criteria for discussing the results should be set forth in the assessment plan. At a minimum, data should be compared to the criteria that have been set for each goal/outcome.

It is important to remember that not every goal/outcome needs to be assessed each year. Goals/outcomes should be analyzed every 3-5 years, depending on the size of the graduate program.

TracDat

TracDat is the software tool adopted by Ohio State to facilitate assessment planning, documentation, and reporting. The software allows programs to enter learning goals and outcomes, measures, and reporting data. Once these data are entered, the reporting function will generate an assessment plan as well as an assessment report following the input of results.

5. Modify and Improve Assessment

If the assessment data suggest areas for improvement, faculty should discuss ways in which student learning can be improved.

Focus could be on core classes, research seminars, and other learning opportunities in the program.

After the review is finished and modifications (if any) are made to the graduate program, faculty should determine where to go next in the assessment process. For example, a learning goal/outcome may need to be changed after data have been collected and analyzed or deemed not informative. If so, then the program should return to step 1 in the assessment process. Or, perhaps the measure was off in some way but the goal was fine. In that case, step 2 would be the next starting point.

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