

Introduction to Outcomes Assessment of Graduate Programs

All graduate degree programs and graduate certificates that appear on transcripts are to be assessed each spring. For DGPs who are new to outcomes assessment and for those who would like a refresher, the answers to the following questions will guide you in improving your graduate programs.

What is Outcomes Assessment?

Outcomes are the knowledge, skills, and other attributes students are expected to come out with as a result of the educational experiences of the program. The goal of outcomes assessment is to enable program faculty to make evidence-based decisions to improve their programs.

Traditionally, faculty have taken an inputs-based approach to academic decisions. That is, we decided what courses and other experiences students in our programs should have and simply assumed that the outcomes of those experiences were what we expected. An outcomes-based approach begins with faculty defining program outcomes. Then faculty gather evidence that demonstrates the extent to which the program has enabled students to achieve the outcomes and, where students fall short of those expectations, determine how the program could be improved to better enable students to meet the outcomes.

What are Assessment Plans?

All academic programs have assessment plans. These plans consist of outcomes, evidence to be collected for assessing the outcomes, the frequency each outcome is to be assessed, and the last year the outcome was assessed.

In the plan you will see that outcomes are grouped under objectives, the broader goals that the outcomes are designed to achieve. The master assessment plan is useful because it displays the objectives and outcomes according to when they are expected to be assessed over six years. Programs are to assess all of their outcomes over a maximum of every three years, a three-year assessment cycle.

To access your assessment plan:

1. go.ncsu.edu/apa and log in with unity ID and password
2. Select appropriate program type under “Please Choose” and then your program in the drop-down; click on “View Assessment Materials”
3. “Click here to access your assessment plan”
4. “Click here to view your master plan”

What are Outcomes Assessment Reports?

Assessment reports are an evidence-based process for improving academic programs. To submit an assessment report, you will fill in the online Academic Program Assessment template, which is a table with four headings:

Column 1: Outcomes (these are loaded in the template from the assessment plan)

Column 2: Findings Based on Evidence Collected (the evidence to be collected is also loaded from the plan)

Column 3: Evaluation of the Program Based on Findings

Column 4: Actions Taken to Address Areas for Improvement

Your report is expected to meet the [criteria for an acceptable report](#). When it meets these criteria, submit your report to your department head or dean/associate dean as appropriate (for departmental programs the head and for non-departmental/interdisciplinary programs the dean/associate dean). The head or dean may return the report to you for further work in meeting the criteria.

To submit the report, find heading “Report Status” at the top of the reporting template. On the drop-down menu beside the heading, select Department Head or Dean/Designee and click on “Update.”

To access your assessment reporting template:

1. go.ncsu.edu/apa and log in with unity ID and password
2. Select appropriate program type under “Please Choose” and then your program in the drop-down; click on “View Assessment Materials”
3. “Click here to access your assessment reports”
4. Make sure the drop-down menu has the proper date and click on “Create Assessment Report”