

Assessment at FTCC: General Guidelines
for Program and Unit Assessment



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Why is Assessment Important at FTCC?

Assessment is an essential part of supporting student success at FTCC. It allows instructors to measure what students are learning and identify areas where they may need additional support. This feedback helps faculty adjust instruction as needed and gives students a clearer understanding of their progress, encouraging them to take an active role in their own learning.

Assessment also applies to areas beyond the classroom. Evaluating the effectiveness of services such as financial aid, career counseling, and student activities helps ensure these resources are meeting student needs. These nonacademic services contribute significantly to the student experience and should be regularly reviewed for improvement.

Clear assessment guidelines promote consistency and fairness across the college. They help faculty and staff understand how outcomes are measured and how results are used to support improvement efforts. Strong assessment practices also help demonstrate institutional effectiveness and meet expectations for ongoing improvement.

Program and Unit Assessment Cycle

FTCC uses a two-year assessment cycle to support continuous improvement across both academic programs and support units. This cycle helps ensure that our programs and services are meeting student needs and supporting the college's mission.

During the two-year cycle, the outcomes remain the same. This allows time to collect meaningful data and identify trends. However, the measures used to evaluate the outcomes can be revised if needed. For example, if a measure is unclear or not providing useful information, it can be updated to better support the assessment process.

The assessment cycle begins with the development of outcomes. All academic programs included in the assessment cycle are assessed regardless of location or mode of delivery, including on-campus, off-campus, and online offerings. Academic programs create student learning outcomes, while support units develop outcomes focused on service effectiveness. Each outcome is paired with at least one measure that will be used to collect and analyze data.

Programs with fewer than ten enrolled students in an academic year will not be included in the assessment cycle for that year. Enrollment will be reviewed annually to determine whether a program meets the minimum threshold for participation. Programs that do not meet the enrollment requirement in a given year will resume assessment when enrollment reaches the required level.

The First Year

The first year of the assessment cycle focuses on developing strong outcomes and collecting data. Academic programs create student learning outcomes, while support units develop outcomes related to their services. Each area should identify at least three outcomes that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART).

Each outcome must have at least one related measure to help evaluate whether the outcome is being met. These measures guide the collection of data during the first year. Once data is collected, it should be reviewed and analyzed to identify patterns, strengths, and areas that may need improvement.

Based on the results, the program or unit creates an action plan. This plan outlines specific steps that will be taken to improve learning or services. The goal of this process is to use results in a meaningful way that supports student success and strengthens the program or unit.

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

Student Learning Outcomes, or SLOs, explain what a student should know or be able to do by the end of a program. These outcomes focus on knowledge, skills, or behaviors that can be demonstrated in a clear and measurable way.

At FTCC, SLOs should follow the SMART model. This means each outcome should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. In other words, the outcome should clearly state what the student is expected to do, how that performance can be evaluated, and when it should be achieved. Keeping outcomes realistic and connected to the goals of the program helps ensure they are meaningful and useful for assessment.

Each SLO should include an action verb that shows what kind of learning is expected. The verb should be clear and easy to measure. For example, words like "identify," "describe," and "analyze" can be assessed, while vague words like "know" or "understand" should be avoided. If help is needed when choosing a verb, Bloom's Revised Taxonomy is a useful tool.

Student learning outcomes for academic programs should align with the program outcomes established within the division. Using these program-level outcomes ensures consistency across courses and provides a clear framework for assessing student learning. Program outcomes are often the most effective way to assess student learning because they reflect what students are already required to demonstrate in order to complete the program. Assessing these outcomes allows programs to use existing coursework, assignments, and evaluations rather than creating additional or artificial measures.

Unit Outcomes

Support units should create at least three outcomes that reflect the purpose and priorities of the department. These outcomes often focus on areas such as service quality, customer satisfaction, staff development, efficiency, compliance, or overall effectiveness. Each outcome should include a clear action verb that describes what will be demonstrated or achieved.

Unit outcomes should align with the mission of the department, the college's strategic plan, and broader institutional goals. The focus is on using results to improve services and support the overall student experience. Like academic outcomes, these outcomes should be meaningful, measurable, and useful for guiding decisions within the unit.

Measures

Once outcomes have been established, each one must be paired with a measure. A measure is the method used to evaluate whether the outcome is being achieved. It identifies what kind of evidence will be collected and how that evidence will be reviewed.

Measures can be either direct or indirect. Direct measures provide clear evidence of learning or performance. Examples include tests, essays, projects, presentations, portfolios, performances, and certifications. Indirect measures reflect perceptions or results related to learning or services. These may include surveys, job placement rates, or general observations.

Each measure should be clearly described and should answer the following questions:

- **What:** What is being assessed? Describe the specific skill or knowledge related to the outcome. Academic outcomes should begin with "Students will be able to..." and include a measurable action verb.
- **How:** How will the outcome be assessed? Describe the method of evaluation, such as a rubric, exam, written assignment, or portfolio.
- **Why:** Why is this important for students? Explain why this knowledge or skill matters to students in a real-world context. How will it help them in their academic work, future careers, or personal growth?
- **Where:** In what course is this assessment to take place?
- **When:** Identify the time period during which the outcome will be assessed. Include the term and year, if possible.
- **Who:** Who is responsible for the assessment? Indicate the person or role responsible for collecting and analyzing the results, such as the course instructor or department chair.

Whenever possible, supporting documents should be included to strengthen the credibility of the assessment. These may include rubrics, assignment instructions, or evaluation tools used to score student or service performance.

Target

A target is the expected level of achievement for a specific outcome. It shows whether students or the unit have met the expected level of performance. In other words, the target defines what success looks like. For example, a target might be: "Eighty percent of students will answer at least seventy percent of the questions correctly." This lets you clearly see whether students met the standard you set.

If the target is based on results from a previous assessment cycle, include that in the plan. If this is the first time the outcome is being assessed, note that a baseline is being established during the current cycle. Including a clear target is important because it allows you to make sense of the results and decide what, if anything, needs to be improved.

Gather and Assess Data

Once outcomes, measures, and targets are in place, data should be collected during the timeframe set by the college. Compare the collected data to the target to see whether the expected level of performance was met. Review and analyze the results, looking for patterns, strengths, and areas that may need improvement. To help guide this part of the process, each program or unit will answer a set of reflection questions designed to support thoughtful analysis and meaningful next steps.

Academic Programs

Academic programs should address the following questions when analyzing student learning outcomes:

- **What were the strengths demonstrated by students in meeting the expected learning outcomes?**
(What specific content areas did students do well on?)
- **What were the key challenges or gaps in student performance related to the expected learning outcomes?**
(What did students struggle with or score low on?)
- **Based on the assessment data, what specific insights were gained about student learning and achievement?**
(Why do you think students struggled in those areas?)
- **How will the identified weaknesses and insights gained from this assessment be used to guide continuous improvement and enhance student learning in your program?**
(What will you do to fix the weaknesses and help students do better in the future?)

Support Units

Support units should respond to the following questions when evaluating unit effectiveness:

- **What were the strengths demonstrated by your unit in achieving its expected outcomes?**
(What did your unit do well? What goals were successfully met?)
- **What were the key challenges or gaps in your unit's performance related to its expected outcomes?**
(What did your unit struggle with? What areas need improvement?)
- **Based on the assessment data, what specific insights were gained about your unit's effectiveness and impact?**
(Why do you think these challenges happened? What does the data tell you?)
- **How will the identified weaknesses and insights gained from this assessment be used to guide continuous improvement and enhance your unit's effectiveness and support services?**
(What will your unit do to fix these problems and do better in the future?)

Action Plan

After the results are reviewed, the next step is to select at least one action plan based on assessment results, regardless of whether outcomes were met. The action plan should focus on what needs to be improved based on the findings and explain how those improvements will be made. These improvements should target areas where students struggled or where the unit did not meet its goals. The action plan connects Year One to Year Two by taking what was learned and turning it into specific steps for improvement. It should be realistic and manageable within the next assessment period.

FTCC's assessment software, Watermark, includes a list of action plan options to choose from:

- Revise Curriculum
- Restructure Outcome Statement
- Revise Measurement/Assessment
- Gather Additional Data
- Revise Benchmark/Target
- Implement New Program or Services
- Community Partnership
- Modify Position/Personnel
- Modify Policies/Procedures
- Adopt or Expand Technologies
- Additional Training
- Collaborate with Another Department/Unit/Program
- Modify Physical Environment
- Other (please specify your alternate plan)

In addition to selecting an action plan category, you must also include a brief description explaining why the plan was chosen and what outcome you expect from implementing it. Assessment leads should be prepared during the second year of the assessment cycle to provide documentation supporting the implementation of the selected action plan. Examples of documentation may include revised assignments, updated rubrics, training materials, meeting notes, or other evidence demonstrating that the planned changes were carried out.

The Second Year

During the second year of the assessment cycle, the outcomes stay the same. This helps track student learning or service effectiveness over time in a consistent way. However, the measures can be revised if needed. For example, if a measure used in the first year was unclear or did not provide helpful data, it can be updated to better assess the outcome.

The second year is also the time to show that the action plan created in Year One was completed. When possible, documentation should be uploaded to support this. Examples include updated rubrics, revised assignments, or other materials that show what was done. This documentation should be uploaded to the “description documents” section of the measure details for the second year. This step is important because our accrediting body expects more than a plan for improvement. There must be evidence that changes were actually made.

After collecting and analyzing data again in Year Two, the program or unit should reflect on the results using the same set of questions. These final reflections help close out the cycle and prepare for writing new outcomes for the next two-year period.

Closing the Loop

Closing the loop is the final step in the assessment cycle. It involves comparing results from Year One and Year Two to evaluate progress and identify ongoing needs. This step confirms whether the actions taken after Year One led to improvement and highlights areas that still require attention.

Closing the loop is important because it shifts the focus from collecting data to using the results to support real change. It also provides an opportunity to evaluate which strategies were effective and what adjustments may be needed moving forward.

The following questions should be used to guide this final reflection.

Academic Programs

- **How did student performance change from Year 1 to Year 2? Where did student performance improve, and what became more difficult for students?**
Look at your assessment results from both years. Did students show growth in areas like

test scores, assignments, or skill development? Were there any areas where performance declined or did not meet expectations?

- **What factors helped or hurt student performance over the two-year cycle?**
Think about anything that may have impacted how students performed—such as changes in what you taught, how you taught it, the support students received, or outside factors like class sizes, scheduling, or student readiness.
- **What strategies helped students succeed, and what changes are still needed to better support them?**
Think about teaching methods, assignments, or activities that worked well for your students. Also consider areas where students struggled—what adjustments could make a difference moving forward?
- **What will your program do to keep what’s working and improve what isn’t?**
Based on what you’ve learned, what steps will you take to continue using successful strategies and address areas where students need more support? Think about things like curriculum changes, faculty development, or new ways to assess learning.

Support Units

- **How did your unit’s results in Year 2 compare to Year 1? What got better, and what was more difficult?**
Look at the results you collected from both years. Did your unit help more students, get better feedback, or meet more goals? Were there any new challenges or areas where results were lower than before?
- **What things helped or hurt your results between Year 1 and Year 2?**
Think about anything that may have affected your results—like staff changes, new responsibilities, schedule changes, student needs, or updates to how your unit works.
- **What worked well in your unit, and what still needs to be better?**
Think about what helped your unit succeed, such as services or ways of helping students. Also think about what didn’t go as planned or where students still had trouble getting what they needed.
- **What will your unit keep doing, and what changes will you make to get better results?**
Based on what you’ve learned, what will you keep because it worked well? What will you change or try next to help students more or meet your goals?

FERPA

All documents uploaded to the assessment plan must be free of any student Personal Identifiable Information (PII). Including this type of information is a violation of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Examples of PII include student names, ID numbers, addresses, email addresses, and any other information that could identify a specific student. When preparing documents for upload, carefully review all content to ensure no personal

information is included. *If there is any uncertainty about whether something counts as PII, it is best to leave it out.*

Questions?

Please contact the FTCC Office of Assessment and Accreditation at (910) 486-7315 or (910) 678-0157.