University of Houston DOWNTOWN

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING

A GUIDE TO ASSESSMENT PLANNING AND REPORTING

Continuous improvement of student learning is at the heart of what educational programs do at UHD, and this guide is here to make the thinking and decision-making behind this work explicit. It defines continuous improvement of student learning and provides a structured way to understand how improvement unfolds through inquiry, evidence, and action. It also explains how this work is documented through program-level assessment plans and annual assessment reports. These documents (plans and reports) are presented not as isolated artifacts, but as connected components that form a coherent picture of how programs learn from evidence and respond to it.

How to Use this Guide: Begin by reviewing the overview on pages 1-6 to understand key concepts and expectations. Refer to the Appendices for FAQs that provide detailed explanations and examples.

The goals of this guide are to:

- Promote a shared understanding of what continuous improvement of student learning means and how educational programs are expected to engage in it through assessment, in alignment with expectations established by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC).
- Provide guidance to help programs develop strong and actionable assessment plans and meaningful assessment reports

Continuous Improvement of Student Learning: What Is It and Why Does it Matter?

Continuous improvement of student learning is an intentional cycle of inquiry in which educational programs prioritize a focus for examining student learning, collect and analyze relevant assessment data, and make targeted improvements based on the results. The process is iterative as 'continuous' improvement requires ongoing evaluation and adjustment, rather than a one-off effort. What is learned from each round of inquiry guides next steps.

The typical inquiry cycle includes the following steps:

1. **Select the focus of inquiry**. What do you want to understand about student learning?
2. **Identify the student learning outcome (SLO)** that best represents that focus.
3. **Determine how evidence will be gathered and analyzed**.
4. **Establish the target**. What is the level of aspirational performance that the program is striving to achieve?

5. **Collect data and report results.**
6. **Analyze and learn from the results.** Analysis should lead to interpretation and hypotheses about the underlying factors contributing to both areas of strength and areas where performance falls short of expectations.
7. **Identify targeted improvements** in curriculum and/or instruction based on analysis of the results.
8. **Implement those improvements.**

The cycle does not end at this point. It continues as programs:

9. **Examine the same focus and related evidence** to deepen understanding, evaluate the effectiveness of actions taken, and determine if other adjustments need to be made.
10. **Use what is learned to guide next steps.**

The following points warrant clarification here:

- The steps described above operate as an integrated activity where parts are linked and flow naturally, rather than functioning as isolated tasks.
- The terms 'ongoing' and 'continuous' do not mean 'annual.' Rather, they refer to an iterative process that repeats over time, not a one-off effort.
- Related to the point above, continuous improvement is fundamentally ongoing, but institutions establish timeframes to structure and support its implementation. At UHD, this timeframe is established by Policy PS. 03. A. 31 and spans three years, within which each SLO that becomes the focus of inquiry is examined and revisited.

Why Continuous Improvement of Student Learning Matters?

Continuous improvement of student learning is key to understanding, evaluating, and enhancing student success – work that sits at the core of UHD's mission and vision. Additionally, thoughtful engagement in this work and its documentation demonstrates the university's institutional effectiveness and fulfills expectations established by SACSCOC. One of the fundamental characteristics of SACSCOC accreditation is an institutional commitment to the concept of quality enhancement through continuous assessment and improvement. In the context of reaffirmation, sustained, ongoing engagement in this work is required.

The specific SACSCOC standard informing this guide is Standard 8.2.a:

> *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 for student learning outcomes for each of its educational programs.*

This outcome focuses specifically on the assessment of SLOs – how well students are achieving the knowledge and skills defined by the program. It does not address broader indicators of program effectiveness, such as enrollment, retention, graduation, job placement, etc.

At its core, Standard 8.2.a emphasizes ongoing examination of student learning and intentional use of those insights for continuous improvement. Philosophically, this standard assumes that educational programs already maintain a strong level of program quality and that students are, in general, meeting learning expectations. Accordingly, its focus is not on requiring programs to prove their quality, but on ensuring that programs are systematically examining student learning and using evidence to inform instructional and curricular improvements to enhance student learning.

Standard 8.2.a is a requirement of the United States Department of Education (USDE). Institutional compliance with this standard is essential for maintaining eligibility to receive federal financial aid. As a federally recognized accrediting agency, SACSCOC serves as a gatekeeper for establishing an institution's eligibility to participate in programs authorized under Title IV of the Higher Education Act, as amended, and other federal programs.

To learn more about the SACSCOC requirements, refer to the Accrediting Standards - SACSCOC

How Is Continuous Improvement of Student Learning Documented at UHD?

At UHD, continuous improvement of student learning is documented through each program's **Assessment Plan** and **Annual Assessment Report**. The table below summarizes the key information expected in each.

Assessment Plan	Assessment Report
• The SLOs included in the plan • Assessment methods for each SLO • Targets for each method • Assessment timeline	• Implemented changes since the previous report for the same SLO • Summary of results for the current assessment • Analysis and interpretation of the results • Reflection on the influence of any actions implemented since the previous assessment • Use of results • Assessment Plan Revisions (if any)

Assessment Plan

Overview of assessment plan components is provided below. For more detailed guidance, see Appendix A – Assessment Plan-Related FAQs.

- **The SLOs included in the plan:** *(Guiding question: What do we want to examine?).* Assessment plans identify the SLOs program faculty commit to assessing regularly during the three-year assessment timeline defined by UHD Policy PS. 03. A. 31. SLOs represent specific and measurable aspects of learning derived from the program's broader learning expectations (i.e., PLOs – Program Learning Outcomes). Programs identify the SLOs to be examined through program-level discussion about student learning, where faculty generate and prioritize lines of inquiry that reflect areas of learning they want to examine more closely. Programs determine how many SLOs to include in their assessment plans. While there is no external mandate prescribing a specific number, plans should include multiple SLOs that meaningfully represent the program's current priorities for student learning.

- **Assessment methods:** (Guiding question: Where will the evidence come from? How will it be analyzed?). Assessment methods describe the sources of evidence used to assess SLOs and how that evidence will be analyzed to determine whether the targets have been met. While there is no external mandate prescribing a specific number of methods, sound assessment practice and accreditation expectations call for the use of multiple direct methods for each SLO. Assessment methods should be described with sufficient clarity to make the assessment plan actionable.
- **Targets for each method:** (*Guiding question: What is the level of aspirational performance that we are striving to achieve?).* Targets provide a reference point that helps programs interpret results, reflect on student learning, and guide continuous improvement. Targets should be improvement-oriented rather than success-oriented. Their purpose is not to prove that students performed well, but to provide a meaningful point of comparison between current performance and the level of learning the program aims to achieve so that opportunities for improvement can be identified.
- **Assessment timeline:** (*Guiding question: When and how often will we examine each SLO?).* UHD follows a three-year assessment timeline per Policy PS. 03. A. 31. Programs determine how often each SLO is examined during the three years, provided that each SLO is assessed and reassessed within the three-year schedule.

Assessment Report

Once the assessment plan is implemented and evidence of student learning is gathered, programs document their observations, what they learned, and what they plan to do next. This work happens in the assessment report. Overview of assessment report components is provided below. For more detailed guidance, see Appendix B: Assessment Report-Related FAQs.

- **Implemented changes since the previous report for the same SLO:** Assessment reporting at UHD begins with a look back at the previous assessment of the same SLO, if it has been assessed before. Programs review the report from that time, identify the improvements that were proposed, and then indicate in this section which of those previously proposed improvements were actually implemented. The purpose is to demonstrate that assessment results are used to make intentional changes in curriculum, instruction, or learning experiences in order to improve student learning. Not all planned changes from the previous assessment may have been enacted. In that case, programs should acknowledge this transparently and provide a rationale as to what may have affected follow-through. If the SLO is being assessed for the first time, this section should simply state that this is the first assessment of the outcome, and therefore no prior actions exist to report.
- **Summary of results:** In this section, programs are expected to provide an objective summary of the findings for the SLO assessed. An objective summary describes what the data show and whether the target was met or not.
- **Analysis and interpretation of the results:** This is where the programs are expected to move beyond summarizing results to interpreting what the findings may mean. Interpretation involves looking beneath the surface of the data and exploring potential factors that may have contributed to the observed findings. Simply repeating or copying the summary of results in this

section does not constitute interpretation. Interpretation is essential because plans for improvement described later in the report should be grounded in the insights developed here.

- **Reflection on the influence of any actions implemented since the previous assessment:** This section goes hand in hand with the *Implemented changes since the previous report for the same SLO* section. While that earlier section documents what actions (if any) were actually carried out since the prior assessment of the SLO, this section prompts programs to reflect on whether those actions appear to have moved the needle on student learning, even in small ways. This reflection does not require an effectiveness study or collection of additional data relating to implementation. Rather, it involves noting whether previously implemented changes appear to have helped or not, or whether their impact is not yet evident. If planned actions were not implemented, there may be nothing to discuss beyond acknowledging that.
- **Use of results:** The report concludes by identifying improvement actions the program plans to take in response to the findings. This section is where assessment demonstrates its value: Programs describe the specific steps they will take in response to the results to strengthen curriculum or instruction.
- **Assessment Plan Revisions:** The conclusion of reporting is a decision point for programs. This is where programs determine whether the assessment plan should be continued as is, refined, or redesigned. See Appendix C: From Assessment reporting to Plan Updates for guidance on these determinations.

Together, the assessment plan and the assessment report support the broader work of continuous improvement of student learning. The plan provides the structure for examining student learning, and the report provides the documentation of what the program learned and how it is acting on that knowledge. A helpful way to think about this is:

> *The assessment plan guides how programs think about the work of continuous improvement, and the report documents how that work is carried out.*

Conditions that Support Continuous Improvement of Student Learning

The following conditions support meaningful engagement in this work and its sustained implementation over time:

- College or program culture that values collaboration, inquiry, and openness to improve teaching and learning.
- A learning mindset that views improvement as an ongoing process of inquiry.
- Leadership support at the department, college, and institutional levels. This includes reinforcing the importance of assessment, encouraging thoughtful engagement with results, and supporting programs in implementing improvements.
- Adequate resources (including time, tools and professional learning) to support meaningful engagement in this work.
- Clear guidance on institutional expectations.
- Curriculum that aligns with the outcomes.
- Foundational understanding of what continuous improvement is.

- Basic assessment and data literacy skills.
- Valid data that accurately reflects student learning.
- Quality assurance and feedback processes for plans and reports.
- Mechanisms for acting on results and promised improvements. Continuous improvement requires structures that ensure assessment results lead to action.

Available Resources

Resources are available to support programs in their efforts to continuously improve student learning through assessment. These supports include learning events, coaching/consultation, and practical tools.

Learning events are offered through workshops/sessions provided by the Office of Assessment and Accreditation (OAA). In addition, programs may engage in one-on-one consultations with assessment staff (college-based and the OAA) for guidance as they design assessment plans and create reports. Practical tools and guidance materials are also available. For example:

- The Assessment Plan Rubric and Feedback tool
- The Assessment Report Rubric and Feedback tool

These tools are designed to help programs self-assess the quality of their assessment plans and reports and identify opportunities for refinement. These and other resources are available on Office of Assessment and Accreditation's Assessment Resources page.

References

Continuous improvement has been used in multiple industries, businesses, and professional practices. Several models have been adopted for use in education. For those interested in learning more about continuous improvement in education, the following sources may be useful.

Bryk, A. S., Gomez, L. M., Grunow, A., & LeMahieu, P. G. (2015). *Learning to improve: How America's schools can get better at getting better.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

LeMahieu, P. G., Bryk, A. S., Grunow, A., & Gomez, L. M. (2017). Working to improve: Seven approaches to improvement science in education. *Quality Assurance in Education, 25*(1), 2–4.

Vetrithangam, D. (2026). Continuous improvement. Strategies for success. In Vetrithangam, D. Kumar, P., Batth J. S., Arunadevi, B., & Saravanan, V. (Eds.), Transforming outcome-based education with machine learning (pp. 83-110). Springer.

APPENDIX A - ASSESSMENT PLAN-RELATED FAQs

The FAQs are listed thematically first, followed by detailed responses in the sections that follow.

Questions about Roles and Responsibilities in Assessment Planning

1. Who is responsible for developing an assessment plan for a program?
2. What structures and supports are in place to guide the development of the assessment plan?

Questions about Developing SLOs

3. Where should programs begin when developing an assessment plan?
4. How does a focus of inquiry become a specific and measurable SLO?
5. What is the difference between a PLO and an SLO?
6. Are PLOs and SLOs unique to higher education?
7. How many SLOs should be included in an assessment plan?
8. Do all program PLOs need to be represented in one assessment plan?
9. Can more than one SLO be developed from a single PLO?
10. Can a program use a PLO verbatim as an SLO in an assessment plan?
11. Does a program have to go through the inquiry process depicted in FAQ 3 to identify an SLO?
12. What verbs should be used when writing SLOs?

Questions about Assessment Methods

13. What is an assessment method?
14. How many assessment methods should be used for each SLO in an assessment plan?
15. What type of assessment methods should be used?
16. Are indirect assessment methods appropriate for SLO assessment?
17. Should assessment rely primarily on end-of-program measures such as exit exams, portfolios, and capstone projects?
18. How should a program select assessment methods?
19. If we are doing course-embedded assessment, can we combine assignments from multiple courses or multiple sections into a single method?
20. How can programs ensure that an assessment method is appropriate for an SLO?
21. When using a rubric, should all rubric criteria/dimensions be included in the assessment?
22. How much detail should be included when describing assessment methods?

Questions about Targets

23. What are targets?
24. Why use the term *target* rather than *success criterion*?
25. What are the expectations for setting targets?
26. What are examples of success-oriented targets versus improvement-oriented targets?
27. If aspirational targets are set, does not meeting them put a program at risk?

Questions about Assessment Timeline/Schedule

28. What is the institutional assessment schedule at UHD?
29. Who established the three-year assessment timeline for UHD, and does it represent best practice?

Questions about the Distribution of SLOs in an Assessment Plan

30. Are programs expected to assess every SLO in the assessment plan every year?
31. How many SLOs are programs expected to assess each year?
32. Do programs have flexibility in how they schedule SLO assessment within the three-year timeline?

Questions about Reassessing SLOs

33. How important is it to take a second look at an SLO within a plan (i.e., assess and reassess)?
34. Why is there a focus on repeating the assessment of an SLO?
35. Are programs expected to demonstrate improved results every time an SLO is reassessed?

Questions about What an Assessment Plan Looks Like

36. What should an assessment plan look like? Is there a template to follow?

Roles and Responsibilities in Assessment Planning

1. Who is responsible for developing an assessment plan for a program?

The development of an assessment plan is a faculty-led process that requires engagement of program faculty.

Assessment planning is not the responsibility of a single individual; it is a collaborative process grounded in the collective expertise of program faculty. While the work begins within the program, faculty may engage relevant stakeholders (such as students, employers, or others within the program's ecosystem) to inform the design of the assessment plan where appropriate.

2. What structures and supports are in place to guide the development of the assessment plan?

While faculty lead the design of the plans, others provide structure, coordination, and oversight.

- **Program Assessment Coordinators:** Facilitate the development process by collecting data and input, supporting alignment, and ensuring the plan is documented in the University's assessment platform (Nuventive).
- **Department Chairs:** Support and guide the process within the department, ensuring that assessment planning is prioritized, coordinated, and aligned with institutional expectations.
- **Deans:** Ensure that programs within their college have assessment plans in place that align with institutional expectations.
- **Assessment Staff (college-based and the Office of Assessment and Accreditation):** Provide guidance, feedback, and support to strengthen clarity, alignment, and quality of assessment plans.

Developing SLOs

3. Where should programs begin when developing an assessment plan?

Educational programs begin this work by prioritizing and defining a focus of inquiry. This focus may arise from something the program wishes to understand more intentionally about student learning (curiosity), from program priorities (areas central to the curriculum, discipline, or student success), or from observed gaps or needs in student work. When a need or gap prompts this focus, it highlights an area for further understanding or improvement rather than a deficit.

In prioritizing and defining the focus of inquiry, programs hone in on the goals they intend to accomplish. This is where Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) are essential.

PLOs are broad and aspirational statements that reflect the overall direction and educational goals of the program – what the program expects students to know, do, or demonstrate as they develop intellectually through the program's curriculum and learning experiences. In other words, PLOs are the goals toward which the curriculum is shaped and instruction is guided in a program.

PLOs are listed in the program's degree plan and appear in the university catalog and program websites. As such, they communicate the program's expectations for student learning to prospective students, current students, and the larger community. Lumina Foundation's Degree Qualifications Profile can be a helpful reference for programs as they articulate through their PLOs the value that their programs add to students' lives.

While PLOs guide the work and even the identity of a program, they are not always specific and measurable enough to guide assessment.

PLOs are typically broad statements that encompass several aspects of learning. This breadth is a strength because engaging with a PLO can reveal multiple lines of inquiry that faculty may choose to explore within that outcome. Programs can begin this process by asking questions such as the following:

- What do we want to understand about student performance related to this outcome? What are we wondering?
- What are we noticing in student work? Where might learning not be developing at the level we expect? What gaps or needs are we observing?
- What aspects of this PLO are most important for the program to examine at this time?

Example: Consider the following PLO from a BA in English program: *Graduates will demonstrate critical thinking*. This is a broad outcome because *critical thinking* can encompass multiple dimensions of learning. Its breadth is a strength because it invites faculty to explore several different lines of inquiry. The examples below illustrate hypothetical starting points for such inquiry for this PLO, using the questions provided above:

1. We want to understand how well students construct arguments supported by textual evidence (curiosity).
2. We are noticing that students rely heavily on sources but struggle to evaluate their credibility. Evaluating sources is an essential skill in today's environment and should be a priority for us to examine (priority and a gap observed in student work).
3. We are wondering if our students are able to analyze how cultural contexts influence the interpretation of texts (curiosity).
4. We notice that our students are not engaging in reasoning at the level of depth expected in the program. (a gap observed in student work).

Strong assessment emerges when PLOs are treated not as endpoints to be measured, but as starting points for inquiry. The lines of inquiry shown above demonstrate how faculty might engage with a PLO to surface areas for deep understanding.

When program-level dialogue generates multiple lines of inquiry, the next step is to determine which ones to prioritize. Once a line of inquiry is selected, translate it into a specific and measurable SLO for assessment.

4. How does a focus of inquiry become a specific and measurable SLO?

Assessment requires intentional design choices. Rather than attempting to assess every line of inquiry that emerges from program-level discussions about student learning, programs must prioritize. At this stage, the selected focus of inquiry is translated into a specific and measurable SLO that represents the aspect of learning the program intends to examine.

- Specific means the outcome clearly identifies the particular aspect of learning being examined. It is focused (not broad) and avoids vague, convoluted, double- or multiple-barreled wording.
- Measurable means the outcome describes student performance in observable/verifiable terms so that student learning can be evaluated through behaviors or products that provide evidence of learning.

Anatomy of SLOs:

SLOs:

- Specify the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes students are expected to attain as they progress through and complete a program.
- Are specific and measurable.
- Are derived from PLOs. PLOs express the broad learning expectations while SLOs translate those expectations into specific and measurable aspects of learning that can be assessed at the program level.
- Do not need to mirror the exact wording of the PLOs they are derived from.
- Appear in the assessment plan (not the catalog, degree plan, or program website).
- Function as an assessment tool, but they also promote practices that support effective teaching and learning in a program.

For example, suppose faculty selected the second line of inquiry identified earlier: *We are noticing that students rely heavily on sources but struggle to evaluate their credibility. Evaluating sources is an essential skill in today's environment and should be a priority for us to examine.*

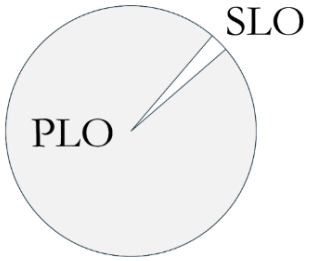
The next step is to translate this inquiry into an SLO by identifying the specific aspect of student learning to be examined and expressing it in observable terms. For example:

SLO: Students will evaluate the credibility of sources used to support arguments.

This outcome is specific because it has a clear focus (i.e., source evaluation). It is also measurable because faculty can examine student work (such as critique of a text) to determine whether students can identify sources used in an argument and evaluate their credibility.

5. What is the difference between a PLO and an SLO?

As the visual below illustrates, an SLO represents a specific and measurable aspect (or slice) of the broader learning expectation expressed in the PLO, and it is typically identified through inquiry (not arbitrarily).



The examples below illustrate how specific and measurable SLOs can represent focused aspects (or slices) of broader PLOs.

PLO	SLO
Students will employ multiple approaches for making managerial decisions.	Students will select the most important factor(s) in a forecasting decision based on a multiple regression model.
Teacher candidates understand differentiated instruction.	Teacher candidates will analyze PK-12 student assessment data and justify differentiated instruction strategies based on the learning needs identified in the data.
Students will communicate effectively as accounting professionals.	Students will explain accounting regulations and compliance requirements in audience appropriate language.
Graduates will be able to use rhetorical theory in the analysis and production of written communication	Students will analyze a media text using appropriate rhetorical theory.

In many programs at UHD, PLOs are numbered (e.g., PLO 1, PLO2, PLO3, etc.). Programs may indicate which PLO an SLO emerged from by noting the corresponding PLO next to the SLO. This helps to ensure that SLOs are connected to broader PLOs.

For example:

Students will analyze media text using appropriate rhetorical theory (This SLO is mapped to PLO 1)

6. Are PLOs and SLOs unique to higher education?

No. Similar distinctions appear across educational and professional contexts, even if different terms are used. For example, in K-12 education, national or state standards describe broad learning expectations, while lesson objectives specify how those expectations are demonstrated in practice. In workforce settings, broad competencies define expected abilities, while performance indicators describe how those abilities are demonstrated.

7. How many SLOs should be included in an assessment plan?

An assessment plan includes multiple SLOs. The term 'multiple' means that an assessment plan should not rely on a single SLO alone.

Since no external entity (DOE, SACSCOC, or THECB) mandates a specific number of SLOs in an assessment plan, programs should include in their plans a meaningful and manageable number of SLOs to assess and reassess within the university's three-year assessment timeline. In some cases, two SLOs may be sufficient, while in others, programs may choose to include more based on their scope and priorities. A higher number of SLOs does not strengthen an assessment plan.

8. Do all program PLOs need to be represented in one assessment plan?

An assessment plan does not need to address all PLOs at once. Programs can rotate their focus across PLOs over time to allow for deeper and more meaningful examination, rather than coverage of all outcomes in one plan.

9. Can more than one SLO be developed from a single PLO?

Yes. Because PLOs are typically broad statements, programs may develop multiple SLOs that represent different specific and assessable aspects of the learning expressed in a single PLO.

10. Can a program use a PLO verbatim as an SLO in an Assessment Plan?

Yes, if the PLO is written in a way that is specific and measurable.

11. Does a program have to go through the inquiry process described under Question 3 to identify an SLO?

A program may take a PLO and operationalize it into a specific and measurable SLO without going through the inquiry process. However, engaging in the thought process illustrated under Question 3 often leads to more focused and meaningful SLOs that better support continuous improvement of learning.

12. What verbs should be used when writing SLOs?

There is no required or prescribed list of verbs for writing SLOs. The verbs below from Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001[1]; Krathwohl, 2002[2]) can be helpful references, but they should be used as guides, not rules.

[1] Anderson, L. W., & Krathwohl, D. R. (Eds.). (2001). *A taxonomy for learning, teaching and assessing: A revision of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives.* Longman

[2] Krathwohl, D. R. (2002). A revision of Bloom's taxonomy: An overview. *Theory Into Practice, 41*(4), 212-218.

Cognitive Process Dimension	Verbs
Remembering – retrieving relevant knowledge from long-term memory	Recognize, recall, state, list, match, name, describe, define
Understanding – determining meaning	Interpret, exemplify, classify, summarize, infer, compare, explain, report, discuss, illustrate, outline
Applying – using information in new situations	Execute, implement, use, show, solve
Analyzing – breaking material into its constituent parts and detecting how the parts relate to one another and to an overall structure or purpose	Differentiate, organize, attribute, compare, investigate, debate, research, deconstruct, deduce
Evaluating – making judgments based on criteria and standards	Critique, judge, assess, defend, decide, determine, justify, prioritize, recommend, select, argue, predict
Creating – putting elements together to form a coherent whole or make an original product (making something new)	Generate, plan, produce, construct, design, develop, compose, create, imagine, propose, devise, combine,

There are two important considerations when using Bloom's Taxonomy:

- First, it was originally published in 1956 as an analytical framework for classifying learning outcomes based on the levels of cognitive demand they require; it was not designed as a tool for writing outcomes, although it can be used as a reference when doing so. In particular, the Taxonomy was designed to be applied to learning outcomes that had been already written in order to examine the kinds of thinking and acting they ask students to do so that gaps can be identified and a balanced range of cognitive expectations can be ensured. Programs can use the Taxonomy in this way: place the taxonomy on top of their SLOs and ask: What kind of thinking are we asking students to do? And then decide if there is a need to balance the cognitive demand.
- Second, the Taxonomy focuses on the cognitive domain of learning and does not capture other important dimensions of student learning (e.g., interacting with others in a team environment). For this reason, the absence of a verb from the Taxonomy does not mean it is inappropriate for use in an SLO.

Assessment Methods

13. What is an assessment method?

An assessment method specifies both the source of evidence and the process used to evaluate student learning.

14. How many assessment methods should be used for each SLO in an Assessment Plan?

While there is no external mandate prescribing a specific number of methods, sound assessment practice and accreditation expectations call for the use of multiple methods for each SLO. (Multiple methods: The use of more than one assessment method to evaluate the same outcome).

15. What type of assessment methods should be used?

Direct Assessment Methods: Assessment methods that allow for direct examination or observation of student knowledge, skills, values and attitudes against measurable SLOs. (Student work can be seen or heard).

SACSCOC and sound assessment practices require that assessment of SLOs is based on direct assessment methods. Examples of direct assessment methods include:

- Research projects, presentations, exhibitions, performances embedded in capstone experiences
- Course-embedded assignments using rubrics
- Scores on final exams or selected exam questions in key courses (not the course grades)
- Portfolios of student work
- Scores/pass rates on licensure/certification or other standardized tests that directly assess the learning described in the SLO (e.g., scores by competency not overall pass rates)
- Ratings of students by field-experience supervisor
- Student reflections on values, attitudes, and beliefs (essays not self-report surveys)

16. Are indirect assessment methods appropriate for SLO assessment?

Indirect assessment methods, such as surveys, interviews, focus groups, provide information about student perceptions of learning or the perceived extent or value of learning experiences. While these methods can offer useful insights about students' experiences or perceptions, they do not allow for direct examination or observation of student learning (perceptions of learning are not evidence of learning). Assessment plans are centered on SLOs and therefore require direct evidence of student learning.

Indirect methods are well-suited for assessing effectiveness outcomes exploring how the program is experienced (e.g., employers report satisfaction with graduates' preparedness, graduates feel confident and competent in their abilities, students are satisfied with the overall quality of the program). These methods are valuable for program evaluation and should be used for that purpose, not for SLO assessment.

Note that SACSCOC is taking a harder line on the use of direct assessment methods for SLO assessment. Over-reliance on indirect methods can be a reason for non-compliance in future reaffirmation reviews.

17. Should assessment rely primarily on end-of-program measures such as exit exams, portfolios, and capstone projects?

End-of-program measures such as exit exams, portfolios, and capstone projects can provide valuable evidence of student learning at the point of program completion. However, relying exclusively on these measures limits a program's ability to understand how student learning develops throughout the curriculum. Consistent with SACSCOC expectations, student learning should be assessed as students progress through and complete a program. As such, evidence should be drawn from coursework across the curriculum as well as culminating experiences/assessments (e.g., exit exam, capstones, thesis, internships, portfolios).

18. How should a program select assessment methods?

Once a specific and measurable SLO is identified, the next step is to determine where the learning expressed in that SLO occurs within the program. In other words, where in the student experience do students develop and demonstrate the knowledge, skills, or values described in the outcome? The answer may reveal more than one place in the program, and that is expected (See the table below for a hypothetical example).

SLOs	Course A	Course B	Course C	Course D	Exit Exam
SLO 1	X			X	X
SLO 2		X	X		X
SLO 3	X		X	X	X

Once the program identifies where the student learning occurs, the next step is to determine where the evidence might come from. In the example above, each SLO is addressed in multiple courses across the program, and all SLOs are also measured through the exit exam. For SLO 1, for instance, the program may choose to gather evidence from:

- Course A (early/midpoint) and Course D (advanced point), or
- Course A and Exit Exam (culminating measure), or
- Course D and Exit exam

19. If we are doing course-embedded assessment, can we combine assignments from multiple courses or multiple sections into a single method?

Multiple sections of the same course: Yes, and this is ideal. Do this if all sections use the same assignment, or if different assignments are used in different sections but they are evaluated with a shared rubric aligned to the SLO.

Different courses: No. Do not combine assignments from different courses into a single method for any reason (e.g., attempting to include more student work in the sample when projected course enrollments are low). Courses vary in content, level, and complexity, and their assignments should reflect those distinctions. Combining assignments from different courses creates the risk of producing non-comparable (apples-to-oranges) evidence when it mixes different types of data. An exception may apply when different courses assess the same SLO through different assignments but evaluate them using a shared rubric with common criteria. However, this is uncommon outside of coordinated contexts, such as general education.

20. How can programs ensure that an assessment method is appropriate for an SLO?

High-quality assessment methods produce valid and reliable evidence of student learning, while poorly designed methods may undermine the assessment process and lead to results that provide little meaningful insight. For this reason, it is not enough to simply identify an assessment method; programs should also consider whether the selected method is aligned with the SLO.

First, the assessment method must be directly aligned with the learning described in the SLO. For example, if an SLO expects students to “discuss” or “explain” a concept, a multiple-choice test would be a misaligned method unless it includes an open-ended component that allows for constructed response.

Second, the evaluation criteria or rubric accompanying the assessment should align with the SLO so that student performance is judged based on the specific knowledge or skills the outcome intends to measure. For example, if the SLO states, “Students will analyze a media text using appropriate rhetorical theory,” the rubric criteria should reflect the knowledge and skills required to perform this analysis.

21. When using a rubric to assess an SLO, should all rubric criteria/dimensions be included in the assessment?

When using assignments evaluated with rubrics, assessment should focus on the rubric dimension(s) aligned with the SLO as rubric criteria not aligned with the SLO can introduce noise into the assessment data and make it harder to interpret student learning related to the outcome. For example, if an SLO focuses on students’ ability to evaluate a teaching situation that has gone wrong and apply a solution, rubric dimensions such as grammar or APA formatting do not align with the intent of that outcome. When assessment conversations center on these elements, attention drifts from the core of the SLO. While student performance on these dimensions is important for instructors when evaluating student work in a course, program-level assessment should focus on the rubric dimension(s) that directly align with the learning described in the SLO.

22. How much detail should be included when describing assessment methods?

Assessment methods should be described with enough detail to make the plan actionable. Someone inheriting the plan should be able to understand how the evidence will be collected and evaluated without needing additional clarification.

At a minimum, the method description should include:

- Where the assessment evidence will come from.
- How the assessment method relates to the SLO being assessed.
- Whether or not sampling will be used.
- How the data will be analyzed (including how student performance will be summarized and compared to the target).
- Person(s) responsible for evaluating/scoring student work.

Example to emulate: Notice how the example below incorporated each of these elements within the assessment method description.

SLO	Assessment Methods
Students will explain accounting regulations and compliance requirements in audience-appropriate language	**Method 1:** "Email to the Business Owner" assignment from ACC 3305. Students are given a business scenario. They identify the relevant accounting regulation and explain why it applies. Students then write an email to the business owner explaining the regulation in accurate and plain language. All student work collected for this assignment will be analyzed by the course instructor using an assignment-specific rubric. The rubric has 5 dimensions, but for the purposes of this assessment, the focus will be on the rubric dimension addressing students' ability to explain accounting regulations in audience-appropriate language. Performance will be scored on a five-point scale (1= does not meet expectations – 5= exceeds expectations). Results will be summarized by calculating the percentage of students who score 4 or 5 on this rubric dimension. This percentage will then be compared to the target.

Example to avoid: Notice in the next example that only the assessment method is named, without a description of how it will be implemented.

SLO	Assessment Methods
Students will analyze a media text using appropriate rhetorical theory	**Method 1:** Graduation portfolio

Targets

23. What are targets?

Targets indicate the levels of aspirational performance that the program is striving to achieve.

24. Why use the term *target* rather than *success criterion*?

The phrase *success criterion* might lead programs to frame assessment around meeting minimum levels of achievement – levels below which the program does not want to fall. In contrast, the term *target* emphasizes a goal that programs strive toward.

25. What are the expectations for setting targets?

Targets should be:

- Rigorous or aspirational (i.e., set at a level that may be challenging to reach or designed to go from good to great, rather than maintaining the status quo) yet realistic.
- Improvement-oriented, rather than success-oriented (see next question for details).
- Informed by baseline data (not arbitrarily developed).
- Clearly written and easy to understand (not convoluted with "either/or" "both/and" statements).

26. What are examples of success-oriented targets versus improvement-oriented targets?

A success-oriented target sets a threshold that is easily achievable. An improvement-oriented target, by contrast, is aspirational - set at a level that may be challenging to reach. In other words, a success-oriented target proves that students are doing fine, whereas an improvement-oriented target helps the program see where learning can get better.

Suppose student work is evaluated using a four-level rubric: 1: Unsatisfactory, 2: Basic, 3: Proficient, and 4: Distinguished.

A success-oriented target might state: 80% of students assessed will achieve a rubric score of 2 or higher. Because a score of 2 represents only Basic level performance that is one step above Unsatisfactory, this target emphasizes minimal success. As such, it focuses on confirming or proving achievement. A target like this that groups lower-performing students with higher- performing students (e.g., those scoring 2 , 3, and 4) can mask important differences in learning and make it difficult to identify where improvement is needed. As a result, it provides limited insight into how learning can be strengthened.

An improvement-oriented target might instead state: 80% of students assessed will achieve a rubric score of 3 or higher. A target like this will help the program distinguish between students who are proficient and those who are not. Such distinction will make strengths visible when many students meet the target and highlight gaps when they don't, thereby making the results useful for improvement.

Another example: 80% of students will score at least 65% on the exam. The threshold of 65%, unless informed by baseline data, appears easy to achieve. As a result, it is more likely to confirm that students are doing fine than to surface where learning can be strengthened.

27. If aspirational targets are set, does not meeting them put a program at risk?

No. Not meeting a target does not place a program at risk. The purpose of SLO assessment is not to prove that programs are perfect or that students always meet expectations. Rather, the purpose is to examine student learning and identify opportunities to continuously improve. From a continuous improvement perspective, what matters most is how programs engage with the assessment data - whether they thoughtfully interpret the results and use those insights to guide improvements in curriculum and instruction. What places a program or an institution at risk (with SACSCOC) is when educational programs are not operating from this perspective.

Assessment Timeline/Schedule

28. What is the institutional assessment schedule at UHD?

At UHD, assessment plans operate on a three-year schedule, as established in Policy PS. 03. A. 31.

29. Who established the three-year assessment timeline for UHD, and does it represent best practice?

The three-year assessment timeline was established through the revisions faculty made to UHD Policy PS. 03. A. 31. in March 2025. At that time, the institution moved from a six-year assessment timeline to a three-year one.

Assessment plans that operate on shorter timelines are considered good practice because they support continuous improvement by keeping assessment active and iterative. In longer timelines (such as six- or seven-year plans), assessment can become episodic, with SLOs assessed once and not revisited for several years. Shorter plans also function as living documents that are revised/updated at shorter intervals, rather than remaining unchanged for six or seven years.

Distribution of SLOs in an Assessment Plan

30. Are programs expected to assess every SLO in the assessment plan every year?

No. Programs are not expected to assess every SLO in the assessment plan each year.

31. How many SLOs are programs expected to assess each year?

Per Policy PS. 03. A. 31., programs are expected to assess at least one SLO each year.

32. Do programs have flexibility in how they schedule SLO assessment within the three-year timeline?

Programs have flexibility in how they schedule SLO assessment within the three-year timeline. While programs determine the sequence and timing of SLO assessment, each SLO must be assessed at least

twice within the three-year plan. This ensures that assessment functions as a continuous, iterative process rather than a one-time activity. Below are examples of how SLOs can be assessed and revisited within a three-year timeline in alignment with this expectation.

Example with Two SLOs

Outcomes	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
SLO 1	X		X
SLO 2		X	X

Example with Two SLOs (Annual assessment of each SLO – not required, but considered strong practice)

Outcomes	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
SLO 1	X	X	X
SLO 2	X	X	X

Example with Three SLOs

Outcomes	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
SLO 1	X		X
SLO 2		X	X
SLO 3	X	X	

Example with Four SLOs

Outcomes	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
SLO 1	X	X	
SLO 2		X	X
SLO 3	X		X
SLO 4		X	X

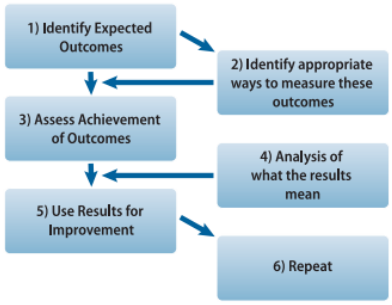
Example with Six SLOs

Outcomes	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
SLO 1	X		X
SLO 2	X		X
SLO 3		X	X
SLO 4		X	X
SLO 5	X	X	
SLO 6		X	X

Reassessing SLOs

33. How important is it to take a second look at an SLO within a plan – that is, to assess it and then reassess it?

A central principle of continuous improvement is that assessment is not one and done, but an ongoing, iterative process. This principle is reflected in SACSCOC's assessment process visual (see below) where Step 6 ("Repeat") emphasizes the expectation of reassessment. Without that second look at an SLO built into the plan, this expectation is not realized.



Assessment plans that assess each SLO only once cannot demonstrate continuous improvement of student learning.

34. Why is there a focus on repeating the assessment of an SLO?

'Continuous' improvement requires an ongoing cycle of evaluation and adjustment, rather than a one-off effort. Repeating the assessment of an SLO allows the program to determine whether the improvements driven by the first round of assessment have been effective in helping students learn

and/or perform better (often referred to in assessment literature as “closing and continuing the loop”), or whether other modifications are needed.

35. Are programs expected to demonstrate improved results every time an SLO is reassessed?

No. Continuous improvement recognizes that:

- While programs may implement changes intended to strengthen student learning, improvements in outcomes may take time to emerge and may not be immediately reflected in the next assessment of the same outcome.
- Not every change implemented will necessarily produce improved results.

Therefore, in continuous improvement practice, the emphasis is on learning from the evidence and fine-tuning practices, rather than demonstrating improved results in each subsequent assessment.

What an Assessment Plan Looks Like

36. What should an assessment plan look like? Is there a template to follow?

Assessment plans take a form similar to the one shown below.

Sample Assessment Plan

Program Mission:

How the program mission aligns with the College mission and strategic plan:

How the program mission aligns with UHD’s mission and strategic plan:

Outcomes	Methods	Targets	Schedule to Assess
SLO 1	Method 1 Method 2	Target Target	Year 1 Year 3
SLO 2	Method 1 Method 2	Target Target	Year 1 Year 3
SLO 3	Method 1 Method 2	Target Target	Year 2 Year 3

The final version of this table should include the SLOs and detail the assessment methods, targets, and academic years.

APPENDIX B – ASSESSMENT REPORT-RELATED FAQs

The FAQs are listed thematically first, followed by detailed responses in the sections that follow.

Questions about Implemented Changes

1. Why does the reporting process begin with documenting implemented changes since the previous assessment of the same SLO?
2. What if the suggested improvements from the previous assessment were not implemented or only some of them were?
3. What if the SLO being assessed has not been assessed before?

Questions about Summary of Results

4. Should summary of results include longitudinal data?
5. Are programs expected to disaggregate assessment results in the summary of results section?
6. What distinguishes between a meaningful summary of results from a surface-level one?

Questions about Analysis and Interpretation of Results

7. Why is interpretation necessary in an assessment report?
8. Are programs expected to speculate when interpreting assessment findings?
9. What distinguishes a strong interpretation of results from a surface-level one?
10. Can results be considered uninterpretable due to lack of statistical significance or small sample size?
11. Can program faculty's disciplinary or philosophical approaches to analysis and interpretation shape how results are interpreted?

Questions about Reflecting on Implemented Changes' Influences

12. Why are programs asked to reflect on the influence of actions taken since the previous assessment of the SLO?
13. What if changes we implemented did not improve the results or their influence is not visible yet?

Questions about Use of Results

14. How substantial do planned improvements need to be?
15. What if the assessment results show that the target was met? Do programs still need to identify improvements?
16. Doesn't this approach imply improvement for improvement's sake?
17. Do improvements need to focus on curriculum and instruction?
18. What is the distinction between instructional, curricular, and assessment-related improvements?
19. What are common pitfalls to avoid in the Use of Results section?

Implemented Changes

1. Why does the reporting process begin with documenting implemented changes since the previous assessment of the same SLO?

This focus reinforces the principle that continuous improvement depends not only on identifying opportunities for improvement but also on acting on those insights. Revisiting the report from the last time the SLO was assessed and documenting implemented changes helps ensure that assessment is connected to action and follow-through, rather than functioning primarily as an exercise in measuring student performance.

2. What if the suggested improvements from the previous assessment were not implemented or only some of them were?

Programs should document this transparently. Not every action proposed in a previous assessment will necessarily be implemented. When improvements are not implemented, or only partially implemented, a brief explanation of the reasons provides important context. Beginning the assessment process by reflecting on what was and was not implemented can help programs consider whether any of the unaddressed actions are relevant and worth carrying forward.

3. What if the SLO being assessed has not been assessed before?

If the SLO is being assessed for the first time, programs should simply indicate that this is the first assessment of the outcome. In this case, there are no prior actions to report. Future assessment of the same SLO will then build on the findings from this initial assessment.

Summary of Results

4. Should summary of results include longitudinal data?

In the past, most assessment reports placed emphasis on longitudinal comparisons, such as reporting how results from the current assessment compare to results from prior years. While programs may include such comparisons if they find them useful, they are not required.

This guidance does not discourage the use of longitudinal data. However, how it is used matters. Multi-year comparisons can sometimes lead programs to focus on whether the results are slightly higher or lower than in previous cycles and stay there. Longitudinal analysis should be used thoughtfully to support learning from the results, not just comparison.

5. Are programs expected to disaggregate assessment results in the summary of results section?

Programs are expected to disaggregate assessment results only in specific circumstances required by Policy PS 03.A.31.

6. What distinguishes a meaningful summary of results from a surface-level one?

The examples below illustrate two different approaches to reporting assessment results. The example on the left (a weak example) provides minimal information. As such, it does not support meaningful insight. On the other hand, the example on the right (a strong example) explains the assessment context, describes what is seen in the data, and reports results in relation to the target.

Weak reporting of assessment results	Strong reporting of assessment results
20 lab results were reviewed. Structure and format: 80% Reproducibility: 50% Analysis: 65% Target not met	A total of 20 lab reports from the *BIOL 4432 Experimental Methods and Data Analysis in Biological Sciences* course were evaluated using a five-point rubric (1= Does not meet expectations, 2= Developing, 3= Approaching expectations, 4= Meets expectations, and 5= Exceeds expectations). For the purposes of this assessment, we focused on the three rubric criteria that directly aligned with the outcome: Structure & Format; Reproducibility; and Analysis. The target was: At least 80% of the students will earn a score of 4 or 5 on each of these three rubric dimensions. The results were as follows: • Structure & Format: 16 of 20 students (80%) met expectations (target met) • Reproducibility: 10 of 20 students (50%) met expectations (target not met) • Analysis: 13 of 20 students (65%) met expectations (target not met) While most students demonstrated proficiency in organizing their reports, performance was lower in the areas of reproducibility and analysis. Only 50% of students met the target for reproducibility, suggesting a gap in how they describe their methods in a way that allows others to replicate the process. Additionally, 65% met the target for analysis, indicating that some students are confusing analysis with summary. They are restating the results rather than explaining what the data means.

Analysis and Interpretation of Results

7. Why is interpretation necessary in an assessment report?

Reporting assessment results tells only part of the story. Results alone do not explain why students performed as they did. Interpretation involves analyzing those results to generate insights and hypotheses about the underlying factors contributing to both the strengths and the gaps the data revealed. Through this process, programs develop a deeper understanding of what the results may suggest about instruction, curriculum, or student preparation. This step is essential as the actions proposed for improvement later in the report should be grounded in this interpretation of the findings. Without this analytical step, the connection between assessment results and improvement efforts

becomes unclear. When there is not a logical and clear link between assessment results, their interpretations and the improvements proposed, the assessment loses its value.

8. Are programs expected to speculate when interpreting assessment findings?

Yes, speculating and making evidence-informed inferences about assessment results is an appropriate and necessary part of assessment reporting. It helps programs move beyond reporting results toward understanding possible contributing factors (root causes), which is essential for identifying meaningful next steps for improvement.

9. What distinguishes a strong interpretation of results from a surface-level one?

Data do not speak for themselves. Good interpretation goes beyond what happened to explore why it may have happened. The example on the left below (example to avoid) restates the data (what happened) and passes it off as interpretation, whereas the example on the right (example to emulate) moves beyond numbers to infer possible explanations for student performance.

No Interpretation	Interpretation
16 of 20 students met expectations for structure and formatting. We are happy with this finding. However, 10 students met expectations for reproducibility, and 13 students met expectations for analysis. It seems students need more help with writing.	Several factors may have contributed to these results: • When it comes to reproducibility, it is possible that students are unsure of the level of detail expected in their writing. We may not have shared with them enough examples of reports that describe variables, procedures, and conditions in a way that others can follow without ambiguity. • The absence of strong analysis in reports may be due to a misconception where students view the "analysis" section as a space to repeat results rather than interpret them. It may also be due to limited exposure to well-modeled examples that demonstrate how to move from data to analysis.

10. Can results be considered uninterpretable due to lack of statistical significance or small sample size?

In SLO assessment, the purpose is to analyze student learning and use results to inform improvement. Results should not be considered uninterpretable due to lack of statistical significance or small sample size. All results (regardless of how much data the program has or whether a result passes a significance test) should be examined for what they reveal about student learning. Even small data sets can reveal strengths or areas for improvement when examined in context. Programs should acknowledge the limitations of the data while still engaging in thoughtful interpretation.

11. Can program faculty's disciplinary or philosophical approaches to analysis and interpretation shape how results are interpreted in assessment?

Faculty may approach analysis and interpretation differently based on their disciplinary training or philosophical orientation. In SLO assessment, however, analysis and interpretation are not about adhering to a particular analytic tradition. It is about engaging with the data as teacher scholars. This involves looking beneath the surface of the data and exploring what the results suggest about student learning.

Reflecting on Implemented Changes' Influences

12. Why are programs asked to reflect on the influence of actions taken since the previous assessment of the SLO?

This reflection connects past actions/decisions to current data and supports an ongoing process of inquiry into what seems to be working, what is not, and what to do next.

13. What if changes we implemented did not improve the results or their influence is not visible yet?

That is entirely possible. Continuous improvement recognizes that:

- progress may occur gradually rather than immediately;
- the effects of implemented changes may not yet be visible in the next assessment cycle; or
- not every change will actually lead to improvement.

What these mean is that programs should not think that they must prove improvement. With continuous improvement the goal is learning and action, not proving success.

Use of Results

14. How substantial do planned improvements need to be?

The philosophy of action for continuous improvement is grounded in micro-improvements, which are small, easy, and manageable steps that strengthen student learning without requiring big changes or interventions that may take months or years to yield results. Micro-improvements can be understood as "5, 10, or 15% solutions" – small changes that can shift the trajectory of student learning over time.

The final column in the table below provides an example of a micro-improvement, and the other columns show how that improvement was informed by the findings. This example illustrates that planned actions do not need to be complex, resource-intensive, comprehensive, or daunting. Small, targeted changes grounded in assessment findings are all that is needed.

SLO	Results	Interpretation	Micro-improvement
Students will coherently	40% of the student work assessed showed that	The findings suggest that students may	In ENG 3210, faculty will incorporate a modeling

connect ideas in their writing	students' writing lacked clarity, organization, and well-developed reasoning. Connections between ideas were unclear or insufficiently explained.	need more support in organizing and clearly expressing their ideas. This prompts consideration of whether students need clear models of strong writing to see what effective writing looks like.	activity where students review a sample of strong writing and identify key features such as clarity and organization. This will be followed by guided practice where students apply these features to revise their own writing.

15. What if the assessment results show that the target was met? Do programs still need to identify improvements?

Even when targets are met, examining the data may reveal nuances in student learning or highlight practices that are working well. If the interpretation of the findings suggests that particular instructional practices or curriculum structures are working well, the improvement section can describe how the program plans to reinforce or expand those practices.

Continuous improvement is not about fixing failure; it is about paying attention to what the evidence suggests and taking thoughtful next steps.

16. Doesn't this approach imply improvement for improvement's sake?

No. It is not about improvement for improvement's sake. It is about using evidence of student learning to make informed, targeted adjustments where needed.

When people hear the word improvement, they often assume it requires adding something new, such as launching a new initiative, making a large change, or introducing an innovation. However, improvement does not always mean doing more. A helpful guiding question is: What should we stop, start, or continue doing based on evidence? Once programs interpret their data and develop hypotheses about the factors contributing to observed strengths or areas for growth, they are better positioned to answer this question. In most cases, improvement may involve discontinuing what is not working, continuing and strengthening what is working, or making small adjustments. By examining what is working, what is not, and what is needed, programs can identify meaningful next steps. Approached this way, improvement is not undertaken for its own sake, but as a thoughtful response to what is learned through inquiry.

17. Do improvements need to focus on curriculum and instruction?

Yes, improvements should primarily focus on curriculum and instruction.

Programs may refine their assessment strategies or instruments as a result of the assessment when appropriate. However, adjustment to assessment methods should not be the central focus in use of results. The primary focus should be on considering how teaching, curriculum, or learning experiences can be strengthened to improve student learning.

18. What is the distinction between instructional, curricular, and assessment-related improvements?

The distinction lies in whether the improvement targets learning or the assessment of that learning.

- Instructional improvements focus on how learning is facilitated within a course(s).
- Curricular improvements focus on how learning is structured and developed across courses or experiences within a program.
- Assessment-related improvements focus on how learning is measured, including changes to instruments, targets, how the evidence is collected and interpreted, etc. In some cases, they may also involve adjustments that optimize performance on the assessment (e.g., having students retake an exam).

See Appendix D for detailed guidance, including when assessment-related changes may be elevated to learning-focused adjustments.

19. What are common pitfalls to avoid in the Use of Results section?

- Improvements that are not connected to assessment results. This typically stems from missing or shallow interpretation, where results are not analyzed in a way that reveals what they suggest about student learning.
- Improvements that are vague (e.g., “Faculty will emphasize X concept more”). Improvement plans should describe specific and actionable steps (e.g., “Faculty teaching Course X will introduce a lab session in Week 5 to strengthen students’ ability to interpret experimental results’).
- Improvements that are focused on assessment processes (e.g., revising a rubric, changing the assignment used for assessment, modifying the target, etc.). The primary purpose of assessment is to strengthen student learning through instructional and/or curricular adjustments. Improvement plans should therefore focus on actions that influence how students learn. Refinements to assessment methods may be included when appropriate, but they should not replace or overshadow actions aimed at improving student learning.
- Statements such as “continue to monitor.” Monitoring alone does not indicate what the program plans to do differently, as such it does not count as use of results.

APPENDIX C – From Assessment Reporting to Plan Updates

1. What happens to the assessment plan after an assessment report is completed?

The reporting process naturally leads to a post-report reflection which helps programs decide whether to continue, refine, or redesign the assessment plan.

- **Continue the plan:** The current plan is working and is not expired. The SLOs are relevant, specific and measurable, methods are generating meaningful evidence, and the plan supports understanding of student learning for improvement. No changes are needed.
- **Refine the plan:** The plan is generally sound but small adjustments are needed to strengthen its specific elements (e.g., changes to targets or the assessment schedule, etc.).
- **Redesign the plan:** This applies when:
    - The plan has reached the end of its timeline, and a new/updated plan needs to be developed; and/or
    - The plan needs improvement. This may include situations where SLOs are not clearly defined or measurable, assessment methods are not aligned with the SLOs, evidence collected is not usable for analysis, targets do not support improvement-focused thinking, results are repetitive and not informative, too many SLOs to manage meaningfully, or the overall structure of the plan is not aligned with institutional or SACSCOC expectations, etc.

2. How do programs balance stability and change with their plans?

Assessment plans are best understood as living documents. They provide continuity that allows programs to track student learning over time, but they should also be responsive to evidence and reflection. Continuity alone is not sufficient justification for maintaining a plan. Programs should consider whether the plan is generating meaningful insight into student learning or whether revisions are needed.

3. Do programs need to revise their assessment plans every year?

No. Assessment plans are not intended to be rewritten annually. See Question 1 above for specific guidance.

4. What should programs consider when redesigning their plans?

- Are there SLOs for which targets have been consistently met over multiple assessments? If so, this may indicate that the program has developed strong practices related to these SLOs. The program may choose to shift attention to other SLOs and include those in the plan.
- Are there SLOs where results have not revealed meaningful opportunities for improvement? If so, the program may determine that further assessment of this SLO is unlikely to generate new

or meaningful insights and may instead shift attention to other SLOs and include those in the plan.

- Are there SLOs where results continue to reveal opportunities for improvement? If so, the program may choose to keep those SLOs in the plan.
- Are there SLOs not currently addressed in the plan but warrant attention? If so, the program may consider incorporating them into the assessment plan.
- Are there elements of the plan that limit its effectiveness or create misalignment with institutional or SACSCOC expectations? If so, the program should address the affected elements of the plan to improve alignment and usefulness.

APPENDIX D – Distinguishing between Curricular, Instructional, and Assessment-Related Changes/Improvements

Instructional	Curricular*	Assessment-Related
What is the focus of the change/improvement?		
How learning happens within the classroom (e.g., what is taught, how it is taught)	How learning is structured across courses and experiences within the program	How and when evidence of learning is collected and evaluated OR How performance on an assessment may be improved
Decision guide: What kind of improvement is this? Use the questions below to identify the type of change made in response to assessment findings.		
Is the change about how we teach or support learning within courses? Is it intended to improve how students develop the knowledge, skills, and values described in the student learning outcome? If YES, then it is an instructional change**.**	Is the change about what students are expected to learn and how learning is structured across the program? Is it intended to strengthen how learning builds over time (e.g., from entry to graduation) to support the development of the knowledge, skills, and values described in the student learning outcome? If YES, it is a curricular change.	Is the change about how and when learning is measured, or how evidence is collected or scored? Is the primary purpose to improve the assessment process? OR Is the change about improving how students perform on a specific assessment? Is the purpose to improve performance/scores? If YES, it is an assessment-related change.

**Curricular changes are defined in alignment with how UHD defines curriculum in PS 03.A.12: "A defined and prescribed set of courses, which students must successfully complete to qualify for receiving a diploma or certificate of completion. In its broadest sense, the term "curriculum" may also refer to all of the formal courses offered at the University"*

Here are examples for each type. Please note that these examples are not an exhaustive list of possibilities.

Examples of instructional changes:

- Reordering topics in a course for better flow
- Expanding/reducing the scope of content
- Breaking down complex concepts into sequential steps
- Adjusting pacing and/or timing of instruction on a topic
- Differentiating instruction to accommodate individual learning abilities
- Integrating a new instructional technology or tool to reinforce content or make class more interactive
- Changing or supplementing the textbook
- Providing feedback on work in progress (e.g., giving early feedback to identify gaps in understanding rather than just evaluating the final product)
- Implementing active learning strategies in class (e.g., jigsaw, role play, think-pair-share, concept mapping, fishbowl, gallery walk)
- Embedding reflection activities into class time (e.g., learning diaries, metacognitive think a-louds such as "I used to think … but now I think …")
- Promoting self-regulated learning (e.g., students are asked to: set improvement goals, reflect on feedback, adjust their learning based on what is learned)
- Asking students to teach each other or explain concepts in pairs
- Modeling/demonstrating a skill/concept for students to replicate (e.g., the “I Do We Do You Do” method)
- Providing models or exemplars of strong work (e.g., effective writing) and engaging students in analyzing what makes the work effective
- Using simulations, scenarios, or case studies to reinforce real-world application
- Using instructional videos to reinforce key content
- Using intentional mistakes to alert students to errors
- Using small group instruction
- Activating prior knowledge to help students connect new information to their existing knowledge

Examples of curricular changes:

- Revising course sequencing
- Adding or removing courses (based on identified gaps/redundancies)
- Integrating capstone experiences
- Distributing practice opportunities for key skills across multiple courses
- Embedding HIPs at strategic points in the program
- Moving key skills earlier in the program (if early courses don't support upper-level outcomes)

Examples of assessment-related changes*:

- Changing/clarifying the instructions for an assignment
- Revising the rubric

- Changing the assessment method (e.g., exam > case study)
- Refining the success criteria/target
- Introducing norming sessions for raters or improving calibration among raters
- Revising sampling strategy
- Asking students to complete an assignment early in the course
- Adding a mid-semester assessment
- Having students retake an exam
- Guiding students on how to complete the assignment

It is important to note that some assessment-related changes may support learning when they are intentionally structured to do so. The example below illustrates the difference:

Assessment-Focused Change	Learning-Focused Change
Allowing students to retake an exam may be considered an assessment-related change when: • Students are allowed to retake the exam to improve their score • The retake replaces or averages the original score • No additional guidance (other than multiple attempts) are provided In these examples, the focus is on improving performance, not learning.	Allowing students to retake an exam can have a learning focus if: • Students complete an error analysis to identify why answers were incorrect • Students correct missed items and explain their reasoning • Students submit a brief reflection describing what they learned and how their understanding has changed after the second attempt

When an assessment-related change constitutes a learning improvement (as is the case in the example on the right above), programs must explain how it is designed to impact student learning. Without that connection, the action remains at the assessment level rather than contributing to improved learning.