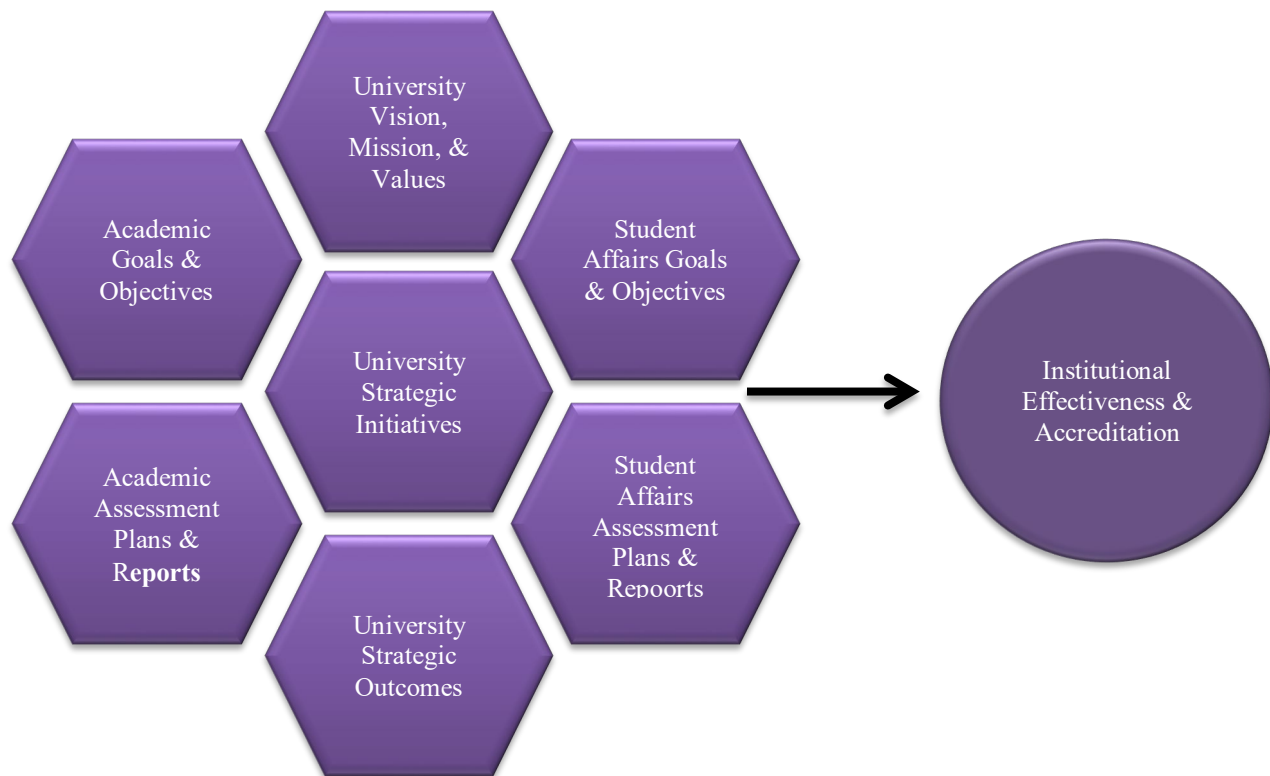


Texas Christian University Student Affairs Assessment Guide

Chapter 2: Strategically Planning Assessment

According to Banta and Palomba (2015, p. 259), “For assessment to be valuable, it must be linked to other important processes.” Therefore, from top to bottom, assessment activities must be linked to strategic goals and initiatives which are linked to the University vision, mission, and values which are linked to institutional outcomes. These processes are all interrelated and together lead to institutional effectiveness and accreditation.



Strategic Planning

Ellis (2015, p. 7) defines strategic planning as “the process of determining what a student affairs organization intends to be in the future and how it will get there. It is finding the best future for the student affairs organization and the best path to reach that destination. Such planning involves fundamental choices about the future of the student affairs unit. These choices include deciding on the mission and what goals to pursue, as well as the programs and services to offer to accomplish this mission. The answers determine how student affairs staff will find and use the resources needed to meet the goals.”

Strategic Plan Elements

Strategic plans vary across disciplines, however, most have a set of common elements. Typically these elements include:

- ✦ A vision statement (what this unit/department aspires to be)
- ✦ A mission statement (why the unit/department currently exists)
- ✦ Identification of five- to seven-core values
- ✦ A presentation of the unit/department's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOTs)
- ✦ A statement of five- to seven-key goals based on the SWOTs accompanied by key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure their accomplishment
- ✦ A resulting action plan to achieve the goals
- ✦ Evaluation and assessment of progress in fulfilling the plan

A strategic plan is basically the roadmap to the future for the unit/department that developed it. Each unit/department should have a strategic plan that sets the course for the next three to five years.

Strategic Planning Process

By engaging in strategic thinking, planning, management, and decision making, a student affairs professional can identify and consider a wide array of options through an inclusive process that explores the environment and sets an agreed-on course of action based on strategy (Ellis, 2010).

The strategic planning process can be an arduous, but very rewarding, task. In order to be successful, it is important to remember that this is an inclusive approach – not to be accomplished by one or two individuals to set the tone for the whole. If the planning and implementation process is to succeed, it must incorporate the views of all the constituencies that will be affected and will have a role in its implementation. The more staff members who are involved in the process, the more buy-in you are likely to achieve, and the better your plan will be. It also helps to have a clear understanding of factors that affect the organization, both external and internal. Being aware of opportunities and threats ahead of time allows the organization to have a plan of action should anything happen – good or bad. Also, having a realistic perspective on the strengths and limitations of the organization increases the odds of having an effective strategic plan. And no plan, no matter how good, will be effective if it does not have senior level administrative support with responsibilities for carrying out the plan shared across all levels. Lastly, an effective strategic planning process incorporates best practices and sets clear priorities with a detailed implementation plan. The finished document should be designed to be actionable – not sit on a shelf.

At the end of the day, the unit's strategic plan should align with the division and institution mission, vision, goals, and strategic initiatives.

Program Review

Program review is a rigorous, systematic, objective, impartial, expert-based examination, evaluation and self-evaluation of how effectively a program is working. It is a comprehensive and systematic process that involves the collection and analysis of in-depth information about a program or department.

Program review is about being mission-driven, uses a set of standards or established criteria, and requires evidence to document and support claims made about the program. In many ways, program review in Student Affairs is very much like accreditation.



In most Student Affairs areas, the standards by which programs are evaluated have been designed by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS). CAS is a consortium of professional associations who work collaboratively to develop and promulgate standards and guidelines and to encourage self-assessment. Their mission is to promote the improvement of programs and services to enhance the quality of student learning and development.

Steps in CAS Program Review

- 1 **Plan the Process**
Map out steps, develop a timeline, and identify outcomes for self-study
- 2 **Assemble and Educate Team**
3-5 (program) to 8-10 (division) comprised of stakeholders including students; train team on self-assessment concepts & principles
- 3 **Identify and Collect Evidence**
Define what is evidence, discuss how to collect evidence, and manage the evidence
- 4 **Conduct Ratings using Evidence**
Using the Self-Assessment Guides (SAGs), clarify criteria and process for rating [small group, individual, staff]; negotiate rating differences and manage group ratings
- 5 **Develop an Action Plan**
Identify strengths and weaknesses, recommendations, resources, timeframe, and responsible individuals
- 6 **Prepare a Report**
Describe the process, evidence gathering, ratings, and evaluations; summarize strengths and weaknesses; describe the action plan
- 7 **Close the Loop**
Implement the recommended changes

The program review process allows one to be strategic about the direction in which to take the program. The process allows time for reflection, giving leadership time to ensure the program is built on a solid foundation. Program review, or self-study, provides the opportunity to celebrate program accomplishments and articulate the program narrative.

Assessment Plans

Plans for gathering evidence of student learning/development include institution-wide or program specific approaches that convey how student learning/development will be assessed, the data collection tools and approaches that will be used, and the timeline for implementation. Most assessment plans also include how results will be disseminated to stakeholders. When evidence of student accomplishment can be readily accessed and used, stakeholders have more confidence in the institutions ability to deliver what is promised. Transparency allows others to have faith in the institution. This is why it is so important to have transparency in all aspects of the assessment process. Transparent assessment plans are:

- ✍ Descriptive of institutional assessment processes, procedures and activities;
- ✍ Inclusive of assessment measures including what they are, how they are applied, and frequency of gathering evidence;
- ✍ Clearly expressed and understandable by multiple audiences;
- ✍ Prominently posted at or linked to multiple places across the website;
- ✍ Updated regularly to reflect current activities;
- ✍ Downloaded or accessed in a timely fashion by multiple web browsers and Internet download speeds;
- ✍ Receptive to feedback or comments on the quality and utility of the information provided.

Assessment Plan Outline

- ✍ Departmental goals (link campus mission/goals & purpose for the assessment)
- ✍ (Learning) Outcomes
- ✍ Techniques and target groups
- ✍ Analysis of results
- ✍ Provisions for administration (who is responsible for various components)
- ✍ Use of information (provisions for sharing with constituents; recommendations and use of information)
- ✍ Timeline
- ✍ Assessment evaluation

(Banta & Palomba, 2015, p. 257)

While there are no set rules for developing an assessment plan, at its most basic level an assessment plan answers these four questions:

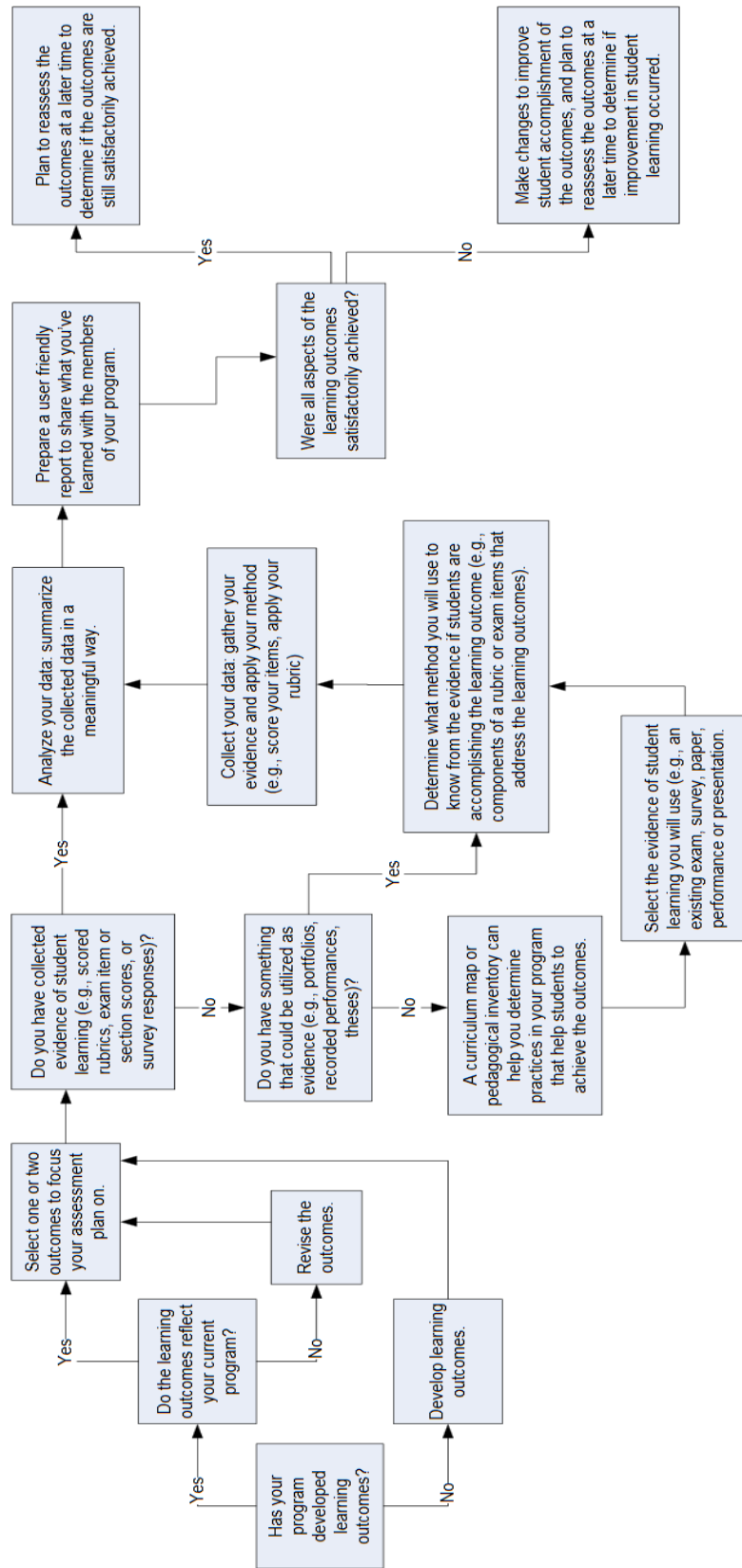
- ✍ Which student learning outcomes will you focus on?
- ✍ What evidence will you use to determine how well students are achieving the selected outcomes?
- ✍ How will evidence be collected?
- ✍ How will you use the information to improve your program?

The flowchart on the following page provides a template for developing a departmental or program assessment plan.

Student Affairs has become a vast field, often encompassing everything from first-year programs to career development, to student engagement and many things in between. As programs continue to evolve, student affairs professionals need to become adept at ways to discuss and demonstrate the value and effectiveness of our programs, particularly in the context of student learning and the contribution co-curricular programs have on achieving the greater institutional mission. We have a responsibility to continuously monitor how successfully we are offering programs, services, and activities that enhance our students' learning and their overall campus experience (Henning & Roberts, 2016).

Creating an Assessment Plan

This flowchart is designed to help you determine where to begin your assessment plan, and which steps to take from that point. Reading from right to left, your planning should begin at your first 'no' response. Use the steps following that point in the flowchart to guide your plan for completing the assessment cycle. Be sure to keep a record of what you have already accomplished, and document what you plan to do next.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A huge “thank you” to CampusLabs for providing much of the information in this guide. The Accreditation course provided a great framework and many of the resources in this text.