

Learning Assessment Plan Guide
Colgate University

prepared by the Assessment Committee
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Learning assessment provides faculty with an opportunity to better understand what students learn through the curriculum of their Department or Program (hereafter, Department). To help departments undertake the type of learning assessment that is most helpful for addressing their own department's goals and objectives, each department will submit a Learning Assessment Plan. An effective plan need not be lengthy (2 - 3 pages), but is expected to include the following:

- student learning goals that are appropriate for students in your Department.
- identification of the 13 Goals of a Colgate Education that connect to the Department's student learning goals.
- means for the direct assessment of students for each the Department's student learning goals.
- means for the indirect assessment of students for each the Department's student learning goals.
- a comprehensive plan for acting upon the results of the Department's assessment of student learning.
- a timeline for all activities included within the Learning Assessment Plan.

To provide additional help developing a Learning Assessment Plan, all of the sections expected of an effective plan are described below.

Learning Assessment Plan components:

At its best, learning assessment is student-centered, goal-driven and informative to curricular improvement efforts. In this document, we describe the key components of a Learning Assessment Plan at Colgate. Each Department's Learning Assessment Plan will be regularly reviewed by the Director of Assessment, Learning Assessment Coordinator and the membership of the Assessment Committee, and will be used by Learning Assessment Coordinator to find ways to facilitate your Department's learning assessment activities. For example, reviewing existing plans made clear that Departments were not receiving reports on indirect measures of student learning collected from all graduating seniors. As a result, the Assessment Committee has focused on addressing this issue and Departments will be provided with annual reports on this data. It is our intent that this guide will help departments and programs develop and modify their learning assessment plan in a way that is highly efficient while also resulting in effective assessment outcomes. The Learning Assessment Plan for your Department is expected to include the following:

1. Mission Statement

Your mission statement should be a simply worded statement of what your Department or Program strives to impart/convey to students. This should also reflect the values and goals of the University, as appropriate for your Department or Program. The process of creating a mission statement and coming to an agreement on its elements can be a valuable process that can help you communicate the culture of the Department or Program to prospective and new faculty and students. Mission Statements are generally no more than 100-200 words.

2. Student Learning Goals of your Department or Program

Curricula afford an opportunity to shape the development of our students. Through the curriculum, the faculty provide a set of experiences that create an opportunity for students to develop the knowledge, skills, habits, and dispositions that the Department/Program sees as important. This section of the plan should include a list of those things that students should have developed by the time they complete the curriculum. When writing this section, it might be helpful to think of a student discussing their education with one of your respected colleagues. What would you want your colleague to see in your former student? Depending on your field, this will vary. In some fields it will be critical that students have come to see themselves as a contributing member of a community. In others, there may be a need for a particular set of skills. Think through a set of goals that reflect what you are attempting to teach students through your curriculum, and articulate those in this section.

It may also be helpful to look to guidance provided by relevant professional organizations. Some organizations (e.g., the American Psychological Association) publish guides for undergraduate curriculum. Do not feel the need to faithfully follow these guidelines, as the authors of such guides are unlikely to have the depth of knowledge of our students that we do. On the other hand, the professional organization guide may be a good place to keep informed of emerging trends at the regional or national level. Designing curricula and goals that incorporate these trends may be helpful to our students. Typically, this section will include a set of 5-9 curricular goals. After establishing your goals, please note which (if any) of the [Thirteen Goals of a Colgate Education](#) is most connected to each one.

3. Measures of Student Learning

For each of your Student Learning Goals, you should be able to collect direct and indirect measures of student learning (these terms are described in more detail below). Think carefully about your goals when planning measures. If your goals focus on student growth, you should collect data at two or more points in time. If your goals focus on the foundational abilities of your students, it may be important to measure those before they transition to a more specialized focus later in the curriculum. It is typical for the majority of the student learning measurement effort to focus on later points in the curriculum when the most learning has occurred.

a. Direct Measures. Direct measures of student learning are the result of evaluations of student work based on some established set of criteria. Student work could include a paper, artistic work, performance, exam, or report. In many Departments, a single piece of student work (e.g., a Capstone paper) could be the artifact used to assess student learning on most (if not all) of the Department's goals. These evaluations are best done using instruments that focus on the aforementioned Student Learning Goals and provide sufficient detail to ensure that different members of the Faculty will provide similar assessments of student work with minimal training. This section of your Learning Assessment Plan should describe all direct measures of student learning that will be used. *Ideally, each student learning goal will be assessed using at least one direct measure of student learning.*

b. Indirect Measures. Indirect measures of student learning are things that are likely to be closely related to student learning, but where there is likely to be less accuracy or precision than would be seen on a high quality direct measure. Indirect measures could include written reflections, surveys, or focus groups of faculty and/or students. The main advantage of indirect measures is that their administration typically demands less time. In many cases, multiple indirect measures can increase their accuracy and precision. That is, combining a faculty member's perception of a student's learning and that student's self-assessment gives (on average) a more accurate estimate of student learning than either of those measures on their own. *Ideally, each student learning goal should be assessed using at least one indirect measure of student learning.*

4. Plan for use

It is critical that the Department or Program has a plan for using the data. This plan should detail the process by which the faculty will collect, discuss, and act based on the student learning data. Some of the details that would be important to include are:

- Who will compile the data into reports?
- When and how will the data will be shared amongst the appropriate faculty?
- When will the appropriate faculty meet to discuss the data?
- What questions will guide the discussion of the data?
- What potential responses to the data will be considered?
- How will the events of this meeting be recorded?
- Who will be responsible for leading the execution of the preferred response to the data?

You may choose to include other details. A detailed plan for use will help you create a consistent structure for decision making year after year. It is not expected that every year there will be clear evidence that can guide curricular decisions. Some years, it may be best to respond to the data by adding a new measure to drill down on something interesting. Other years, you may decide that the curriculum might benefit from revision. Plans can change. Measures can change. And curricula can change. The faculty are best positioned to make these decisions.

5. Timeline

Please include a timeline for when actions will be taken. Actions items should include: the administration of each direct and indirect measure and a faculty discussion of the learning assessment data. All of these events should occur no less frequently than once per year. Exact dates are not necessary, but please be as specific as possible. Characterizations like, late April or the last week of April are adequate if more specific information is not available. The Learning Assessment Coordinator and Assessment Committee Membership will use these timelines to support your planned activities.

The Learning Assessment Coordinator and your Division's representative on the Assessment Committee are available for consultation upon request, regarding the plan or any of its component elements.