

**OCCIDENTAL COLLEGE  
PROGRAM ASSESSMENT GUIDE  
ASAP project**

**Purpose**

In this document, a *program* may be an entire department or a substantial service or function that is coordinated by a department. *Assessment* is the on-going process of defining goals and learning outcomes as well as evaluating the effectiveness of goals to reach the outcomes. It also requires using the results to improve the program's contribution to student development and retention to graduation.

Program assessment is a way to reflect on the quality and effectiveness of our programs and services with specific attention to student learning goals that are tied to the mission of the College. By engaging in this process, we strive for the following outcomes:

- Improve the quality and intentionality of student learning experiences
- Enhance the leadership capacity of staff to promote student learning
- Use limited resources wisely
- Increase collaboration across the College
- Introduce new ideas from respected colleagues from other institutions
- Attract new resources to enhance campus life and the student experience
- Revise and update our program assessment tools and techniques

*Learning outcomes* are statements that articulate the measurable results that students will be able to do, think, or feel as they engage in processes like communication, analysis, critical thinking or addressing contemporary problems. Effective outcomes use an action verb to describe what an engaged learner will gain from participation, e.g., negotiate, write, analyze, describe, or attain mastery. When applicable, outcomes also strive to move students' levels of competency from novice to mastery over time.

**Process Overview**

Program assessment is a continuous practice and not a sporadic event. It is collaborative, involving all staff members in a program or department, including student staff members where appropriate. To simplify communication, one person will be identified as *Program Leader* by the grant co-directors. This person is the primary contact throughout the review process.

Minimally, a Program Leader and colleagues will:

1. Determine their program's contribution to student learning and the College mission;
2. Develop a concise set of student learning outcomes for their program;
3. Develop a set of questions to drive data collection on outcome effectiveness;
4. Produce a self-study document that addresses the outcomes and their effectiveness;
5. Secure consultant(s) outside the College to critically analyze the self-study;
6. Respond to the consultants' analysis;

7. Prepare an action plan and time table inclusive of the self-study, the consultants' report, and Program response;
8. Deliver the final document to the grant co-directors; and,
9. Commit to implementing changes as outlined in the action plan until the next review.

The following persons/offices may assist in the program review process:

- (a) The grant co-directors may:
  - Assist program staff to formulate their participation outcomes and questions;
  - Arrange for logistical assistance and move the process along;
  - Assist in identifying possible external consultants; and,
  - Contact consultants, providing them with materials and arranging for a campus visit.
- (b) Institutional Research can provide data for use in developing a self-study;
- (c) The grant co-directors are a resource for developing evaluation tools and monitors the division-wide program assessment effort.

### The Self-Study

Self-studies may take many forms and consider many topics. Program staff should address the following areas (many of which are interconnected) in their review. Each area includes prompts to stimulate conversation for the self-study and the campus visit.

1. **Program Goals:** What are the program's goals? How were they selected? Have these goals been assessed and results shared among colleagues and participants? How are goals reviewed and/or adapted? Please include a copy of the current Program Goals and Mission with your self-study.
2. **Learning Outcomes:** Are outcome statements focused on measurable behavior rather than a process or activity? Do outcomes reflect the appropriate level of knowledge of participants? Do they reflect a sequence of developmental experiences? How will the learning outcomes be evaluated? Do program documents and promotion broadcast measurable learning outcomes to potential participants and the College community?
3. **Meeting Needs of Students:** Are participants adequately prepared for the activities in which they engage? Do participants report success or difficulty in their involvement? How does involvement in the Program lead to a satisfying and productive life? What kinds of experiences are participants having in your Program? Does the Program deliver the intended skills and knowledge intended by its planners?
4. **Staff Development:** Are Program staff members engaged with their responsibilities and function? Do they offer constructive critique and suggestions for process improvement? How have the student workers been included in the Program planning process? Is the Program's content flexible enough to allow innovation? Are there opportunities to work closely with a range of students? Are there sufficient opportunities for staff to interact and share experiences? How is the Program's workload shared or distributed?

5. **Mentoring Students:** In what ways does the program encourage, facilitate or provide for staff members/student collaboration? What are expected and actual outcomes from such collaboration? How do staff members feel about their responsibilities in this area? What improvements could be made?
6. **Mission and Diversity:** Are there striking ethnic, racial, and/or gender disparities among students involved in the Program and Oxy students as a whole? If so, are there ways to attract those not traditionally attracted to the program? Describe how the College's commitment to diversity is reflected in your program.
7. **Cultural Competence:** In what ways do program offerings give participants a broad perspective on their own culture and on other cultures? In what ways could this perspective be expanded to include other views? To what extent does the Program neglect important topics and social issues? Do participants learn of new developments and controversies surrounding issues of culture and identity as they relate to the program's purpose?
8. **Collaboration and Referral:** How frequently are participants urged to explore beyond the program, i.e., encouraged or required to partake of other services/programs at Oxy? How will the program make changes to support and collaborate with other departments or programs at the College?
9. **Technology:** Has new technology affected the way in which the program is delivered to participants and the ways in which students learn?
10. **Support Staff:** What are the support staff needs of the program? Are they currently being met? If additional support is needed, comment specifically on how this might be accomplished, e.g., more student workers, a graduate assistant, technology upgrade, etc.
11. **Physical Facilities:** How are the program's mission and/or goals hindered by its physical facilities? If changes are indicated, comment specifically on how this might be accomplished.
12. **Looking to the Future:** Where will the program be in the next five years? The next ten? What are its most important strengths and weaknesses? What are possible opportunities and threats the program faces?

### Review Cycle and Calendar

The grant co-directors maintain the program review schedule. The Program Self-Study should be completed by the end of the semester prior to the expected campus visit. See the chart below for a suggested timeline of the entire process.

Date/Deadline	Task
September 1	Department/Program identified for program assessment
September 15	Program leader identified and trained on self-study process
October 1	Leader and self-study team begin by identifying: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• program's contribution to student learning and College mission;</li> <li>• a set of student learning outcomes for the program;</li> <li>• key questions to drive data collection on outcome effectiveness; and</li> <li>• a means of measuring learning outcomes (survey, focus group, etc.).</li> </ul> Self-study document is researched and written.
November 15	Submit final draft of self-study to grant co-directors
November 30	Grant co-directors review document for accuracy and depth of analysis. May require additional revisions.
December 1	Secure outside consultant(s) to analyze the self-study document. Arrange for on-campus visit in Spring.
January 15	Outside consultant(s) receives self-study and has time to review prior to campus visit.
March 15	Consultant(s) visit is complete. Program Leader and team receive written analysis.
April 1	Leader and team respond to the consultants' analysis in writing.
April 30	Leader and team prepare an action plan and time table inclusive of the self-study, the consultant(s) analysis, and the team's response
May 15	Deliver the final document to the grant co-directors

### **Institutional Research**

The Director of Assessment and Retention can assist departments in developing surveys for administration to current majors and alums. This may include:

- Developing survey instruments based on program goals and outcomes
- Working with the program leader to produce survey mailing and collection
- Creating a format to accept survey results and instructing program staff in data entry of survey results
- Providing analysis and a report on survey results to the program leader

If the program leader chooses to conduct surveys, requests for assistance should be made to the Director of Assessment and Retention well in advance so that the project can be completed by the start of the semester in which the Self-Study is being written.

### **External Consultants**

The grant co-directors and principal investigator will consult with the program leader to select external consultants with expertise in the program under review. When the Self-Study is completed, the grant co-directors and program leader will work together to arrange a consultant visit.

Prior to the visit, consultants will be provided with (a) the Program Self-Study, (b) reports of any analysis, (c) a copy of this Program Assessment Guide, (d) a copy of the Mission of Occidental College, (e) brief vitae of all Program staff, and (f) any other relevant brochures, websites, and information about the Program.

During the visit, external consultants will meet with students and staff in the program as well as the grant co-directors. Consultants must be able to provide a written summary of their findings to the grant co-directors and the program leader within a reasonable time after the conclusion of their visit (ideally within one month).

The program leader is responsible for writing a response to the Consultant Report and for preparing an action plan for submission to the grant co-directors and principal investigator.