



NORTH CAROLINA AGRICULTURAL AND TECHNICAL STATE UNIVERSITY

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ASSESSMENT AND RESEARCH

Overview of the Annual Assessment and Program Evaluation Review

Assessment is a process that provides a “culture of evidence” that can be used to determine if the mission and goals of the university are being met” (Wolf, 1990). According to Erwin (1998:15), assessment is the process of defining, selecting, designing, collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and using information to increase students’ learning and developing.” The purpose of the assessment process is to provide information to drive systematic program improvement.

With the above guidance, there are four primary purposes for conducting assessment and program review at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University (NCA&TSU):

- NC A&T State University is committed to excellence in all its programs and activities as it addresses the educational needs and expectations of its stakeholders.
- The Institutional Assessment plan is required by the new “accountability” legislation that mandates annual assessment of student learning and development, faculty development and quality, and progress towards the University’s mission.
- Our regional accrediting agency, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), requires institutions to conduct “systematic, broad-based planning and evaluation activities.” Furthermore, we are required by SACS to develop educational goals, identify strategies to accomplish these goals, and design and implement procedures to evaluate the extent to which these goals are being achieved. This evaluation “must include educational goals at all academic levels (undergraduate and graduate).” The institution must define its expected educational results and describe its methods for analyzing the results (SACS, 2001). The institution is expected to use the results of these goals to improve educational programs, operations, and services.
- Stakeholders expect NCA&TSU to maintain quality and accountability. State government, taxpayers, students, parents, businesses and industries all contribute to the financing of higher education. Therefore, these stakeholders expect value and quality for their support (Smith and Bradley, 1995). Continuous improvement is an outcome of assessing our institutional effectiveness.

Basic Steps in Developing an Assessment Plan

To be effective, an assessment plan should include the following important steps:

- Assessment should flow from the mission statement and should be an ongoing process, which is integrated into the academic program.
- Faculty should decide which student learning goals and outcomes will be assessed and at what point in the college experience.
- Institutional data should be identified that can assist with measuring outcomes.
- Assessment should use multiple measures including both quantitative and qualitative methods.
- A time line for the implementation of the assessment plan should be developed.
- The results of assessment activities should lead to program improvement.
- Procedures for improvement and continued evaluation, based on assessment results, should be developed and implemented.
- The assessment plan should include evaluation, revision of the plan based on findings, and the budgeting of funds for continuous evaluation and program improvement. Effective program evaluation allows for a continuous feedback loop so that data can be used to identify program strengths and weaknesses as well as make program changes.
- Assessment results should be reported to various sources, e.g., university administration, external funding agencies (as required), and legislators, Office of the President).
- Institutional effectiveness clearly allows the university to describe the various organizational processes, structures, policies and practices. Continuous quality improvement is an outcome of assessing our institutional effectiveness. A&T's effectiveness as an institution is measured by the extent to which it accomplishes its mission, goals and objectives.

Therefore, one measure of institutional effectiveness is the systematic assessment and evaluation of academic programs. Findings from this process are used for continuous program improvement.

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Assessment measures can be comprised of locally developed tests or commercially developed instruments as well as a mixture of both. Locally developed instruments are those constructed by faculty. Commercially developed tests are produced and distributed by testing companies and services. Some examples of assessment measures are:

- comprehensive exams and other tests
- laboratory exercises
- experiments
- laboratory skills assessment
- senior projects, or theses, or performances for undergraduate programs
- portfolios
- annual review of students, especially graduate students
- exit interviews, alumni surveys, graduate surveys, employer surveys
- results of licensing exams
- rates of graduate school enrollment for undergraduate students
- external awards and competitions
- student publishing records
- case studies
- student satisfaction levels
- job placement

Effective assessment is comprised of multiple measures of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Faculty determine the types of assessment measurements based on the expected outcomes of student learning at various points in the college experience (e.g., entering students, continuing students in majors, withdrawing students, graduating students, alumni, and employers who hire graduates). Outcomes for these various time points can be measured for basic skills, general education, major field of study, and student experiences.