

**Tulane University  
Outcomes Assessment Plans  
Frequently Asked Questions**

**Should a unit's basic function be included as a goal, or should it be part of its mission statement?**

A unit's basic function should be included as part of its mission statement.

**How do I know what the mission should be?**

Mission statements should be developed within a particular department, school, or unit by the faculty and staff. Committee members should not correct or wordsmith unit mission statements rather members should evaluate the statement for its consistency with the university mission.

**How do I know if the unit mission is related to the institution mission?**

A "common sense" test is sufficient to make this determination. Some mission statements may include language such as "...in support of the university's goal..." However, many will not be that explicit. Some statements do indicate commitment to teaching or research in their particular field.

**What is the institution mission?**

The Tulane University mission statement can be found: <http://tulane.edu/about/mission.cfm>

The mission is: Tulane's purpose is to create, communicate and conserve knowledge in order to enrich the capacity of individuals, organizations and communities to think, to learn and to act and lead with integrity and wisdom.

Tulane pursues this mission by cultivating an environment that focuses on learning and the generation of new knowledge; by expecting and rewarding teaching and research of extraordinarily high quality and impact; and by fostering community-building initiatives as well as scientific, cultural and social understanding that integrate with and strengthen learning and research. This mission is pursued in the context of the unique qualities of our location in New Orleans and our continual aspiration to be a truly distinctive international university.

Information about Tulane University's strategic plan can be found:

<http://www.tulane.edu/~strplan/>

***\*More information about crafting mission statements is included in the Mission Statement Primer.***

## What are some examples of good learning outcomes?

These examples were taken from the University of Texas at Dallas

<http://www.utdallas.edu/academics/nsm/>

### B.S. in Chemistry

**Gain Fundamental Knowledge:** Students will gain fundamental knowledge of foundation areas of chemistry. (ACS guidelines)

**Gain In-Depth Knowledge:** Students will gain in-depth knowledge of chemistry and research skills. (ACS guidelines)

**Gain Knowledge of Math and Physics:** Students will gain knowledge of mathematics and physics. (ACS guidelines)

**Develop Oral and Written Communication Skills:** Students will develop oral and written communication skills. (ACS guidelines)

### B.A. in Arts and Humanities

**Describe and apply interpretation methodologies:** Students will be able to describe and apply basic methodologies of interpreting literary, historical, and artistic texts

**Demonstrate effective communication skills:** Students will demonstrate effective written and oral communication skills

**Demonstrate broad knowledge of a specific issue:** Students will demonstrate a broad knowledge of a major period, genre, or issue in literature, history, and the arts

**Apply insights from multiple disciplines:** Students will be able to apply insights from multiple disciplines to the interpretation of texts and solution of problems

### B.A. in Interdisciplinary Studies

**Demonstrate solid communication skills:** Students will demonstrate an ability to communicate effectively.

**Achieve diverse education in three fields:** Students will achieve diverse education in three separate fields exemplified by their abilities to communicate with experts in disciplines as well as serve as interdisciplinary communicative liaisons.

**Meet constant changes of global society:** Students will be prepared to meet the constant changes of a global society by designing their own degree plans that arise from their analysis of what will be society's demands and how those demands fit their own skills and talents.

***\*More information about crafting learning outcomes/goals is included in Developing Student Learning Outcomes.***

## What are direct and indirect measures?

“Direct measures of student learning require students to display their knowledge and skills as they respond to the instrument itself. Objective tests, essays, presentations, and classroom assignments all meet this criterion.”

“Indirect methods such as surveys and interviews ask students to reflect on their learning rather than to demonstrate it.”

From Palomba & Banta (1999) *Assessment Essentials*

## What are some examples of direct and indirect measures?

	Direct Measures	Indirect Measures
<b>Course</b>	Course-based exams/assignments/projects	Course evaluations
	Term papers, lab reports, case studies	Test blueprints (outlines of concepts & skills tested)
	Course-embedded questions	Classroom Assessment techniques (e.g., thought papers, muddiest point explanation)
	Observations of field work, clinical experience, internship performance	Percent of class time spent in active learning
	Standardized tests (departmental)	Number of student hours spent at intellectual or cultural activities related to the course
	Oral presentations	Reflective essays
	Portfolios	
	Graphic tests and posters	
	Group and team projects	
	Transcript analysis of class conversations	
	Capstone Course projects/assignments	
<b>Program</b>	Pass rates or scores on licensure or certification exams or subject area tests	Focus group interviews with students, faculty, employers
	Student publications or presentations	Registration, enrollment, graduation, transfer data
	Capstone projects, senior theses, exhibits, portfolios, or performances	Department self-study or program review data
	Employer & internship supervisor ratings of students' performance	Job placement data
	Portfolios	Employer or alumni surveys
	Research projects	Student perception surveys
	Structural/situational assessments	Archival measures – student and alumni databases
	Embedded questions and assignments-- essay exams, objective exams	Syllabus audit
	Locally-developed exams	Acceptance rates into medical, professional, graduate schools
	Pre/post test data	Exit interviews
<b>Institutional</b>	Technology skills assessment performance	Student perception surveys (local or national; e.g., NSSE)
	Performance on tests of writing, critical thinking, or general knowledge	Graduation, retention, GPA data
	Rating-scale scores for class assignments in General Education	Transcript studies that examine patterns & trends of course selection & grading
		The institution's annual reports, including institutional benchmarks & graduation rates
		Time to degree data

### **What's a data summary?**

A data summary is a complete and concise description of the assessment results. The summary provides enough information so that a reader who is not intimately familiar with the program can understand the assessment results.

### **How much detail should be provided in the data summary?**

Enough detail should be provided that a reader can make an overall statement about the results. The summary does not include as much detail as a full report would and the summary may include references to such a report.

### **What are some examples of a data summary?**

*This example was extracted from Christopher Newport University.*

[http://assessment.cnu.edu/docs/Ex\\_Good\\_Assess\\_Record.pdf](http://assessment.cnu.edu/docs/Ex_Good_Assess_Record.pdf)

*The learning outcome:* Students will identify and distinguish among basic measurement concepts and practices including reliability, validity, performance assessment, sampling, and fairness in testing.

*The data summary:* All seniors (n = 70) took a departmental graduate exit survey. This survey was co-designed by department faculty and the Director of Assessment & Evaluation. A survey item corresponds to each of the topics stated in the intended learning outcome: reliability, performance assessment, validity, sampling, and fairness in testing. Students are asked to rank order which of these areas they learned the most in the major. Because the department values learning in all of these topics, we would prefer that no topic is ranked consistently lower than others, which we define as .5 or more difference in average ranking.

### **Results**

Rank Order of Measurement Concepts

Area	Avg. Rank
Reliability	2.6
Sampling	2.8
Fairness in testing	2.9
Validity	2.9
Performance assessment	3.8*

### **Is the assessment plan focused on the students or the program?**

The assessment should be focused on the program or unit, not individual students.

### **What is the desired level of achievement?**

A desired level of achievement is also referred to as a benchmark. A benchmark is a criterion-referenced objective or "Performance data that are used for comparative purposes. A program can use its own data as a baseline benchmark against which to compare future performance. It can also use data from another program as a benchmark. In the latter case, the other program often is chosen because it is exemplary and its data are used as a target to strive for, rather than as a baseline." (p. xv) Hatry, H., van Houten, T., Plantz, M., & Greenway, M.T. (1996) *Measuring program outcomes a practical approach*.