
School: School of Arts and Sciences

1. Are learning goals clear and publicly available? Are learning goals aligned; course learning goals aligned with program level learning goals, aligned with school learning goals, aligned with university learning goals?

Meets Current ACLO Standards

As the report tells us, the simple answer here is, Yes. All SAS programs now have learning goals that are clearly defined and publicly posted and these these goals are aligned from the University through the School, to the Program and Course level. Learning goals in SAS programs are readily available on department web sites, the official catalogue site. This is a notable accomplishment, given the size, scope and diversity in SAS programs.

2. Are course syllabi available online? Do they include course and program learning goals?

Meets Current ACLO Standards

The report indicates that the vast majority of syllabi in SAS contain appropriate learning goals, for the course and program. Syllabi, or course synopsis are made available to students in a number of ways, those these are not specified. It is clear from a review of departmental websites that a most programs make syllabi available through that mechanism. Again, a notable achievement.

3. Is there a description of the program assessment structure and process? Is there a standing faculty committee in place? How often does it meet?

Making Continued Progress

The majority of the programs in SAS have reached ‘best practice’ status in developing their assessment structure. All conduct an annual review under the direction of the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education and the Director of Teaching, Learning and Assessment. SAS continues to innovate in ways to engage faculty in the development of assessment programs, and this work should be lauded. SAS could easily rest on its laurels, but it continues to move forward and hold its programs to a high standard of performance in the development of their assessment plans and processes.
4. Is the discussion of assessment tools and methods most used by the program adequate? Did the report make clear why those tools and methods were used?

Making Continued Progress

SAS has changed its method of requesting assessment information from the programs, in an attempt to engage the faculty more directly in the conduct of assessments. This ‘inquiry-oriented assessment’ technique has raised expectations held by the SAS Assessment Committee, and subsequently, some of the results from the programs in the area of ‘tools and methods’ according to the new expectations have declined. What’s interesting here is the effort to raise expectations in the first place, illustrating the dynamic nature of assessment in SAS. The SAS Assessment Committee is asking for drilling deeper into the assessment practices of the programs, and this is commendable. Given that, the majority of SAS programs did report the use of direct measures, and a majority produced useful results for improvement from the methods they used.

5. Are benchmarks or standards used to guide the assessment process made clear? Are they established by a professional assessment body or through comparison with peer programs?

Making Continued Progress

SAS reports that some programs gave less detailed information on benchmarks and standards than desired. This will be addressed in the next assessment cycle to dig deeper into department practices in this area. It should be noted that benchmarks and standards for individual programs in the arts and sciences, where no professional organizations conduct re-accreditations and such, are often difficult to elaborate and define. What is significant here is the efforts of SAS to address these issues directly.

6. Are successful implementations of assessments made clear? Is the discussion as to how the results are compiled adequate? Is at least one direct assessment measure of a program level goal discussed?

Making Continued Progress

SAS has been successful in encouraging its programs to use various methods of direct assessment; 75% of programs are assessing at least one learning goal per year using one direct method or another and have reached ‘best practices’ status within SAS. This does not preclude, of course, the use of indirect measures, too, which is also occurring regularly. Obviously, the creation and continued operation of the SAS Assessment Committee, and the diligence of the Associate Dean of Undergraduate Education and the Director of Teaching, Learning and Assessment provide continued oversight for the programs to keep them on track in this area.
7. Was there adequate discussion of the successful implementation of change in the curriculum or program under review, based on the results of particular assessments that have been conducted?

Making Continued Progress

The report shows us the number of programs that have initiated specific changes in curriculum, pedagogy, assessments or learning goals. It also tells us the number of departments that have a standing process to review assessment information and implement change based on that evidence. The latter is lower than one might expect given the efforts within SAS over the past 8 years or so. But, again, the SAS Assessment Committee has raised its expectations in this area, so some programs have not scored as well in this report then they may've in the past. What's most lacking here, though, is evidence of improved student learning based on prior changes driven by assessment. This ‘closing the loop’ activity is always hard to do, and from the report we learn that SAS is making a serious commitment to move programs along in this area. It must be understood, too, that the results of a change in program or process takes time to manifest. What is important is that this process is overseen and monitored, and that is certainly happening in SAS.

8. Is the process used to review and update the relevance of the school's learning goals and the program learning goals within the school clearly explained?

Making Continued Progress

For the current assessment cycle, relatively few departments updated or review their learning goals. This is to be expected, given the solidity of many of the programs in SAS, in which there is not rapid change in what is taught or what is to be learned or what is expected of the students when the complete a program. What matters here, though, is whether the structure is in place to insure that this kind of review will be done on a regular basis. This is certainly happening, driven most often by the SAS Assessment Committee, the Associate Dean and the Director as they review curriculum and development. These offices also oversee the broader learning goals within the school, in conduction with the Core Curriculum review process.

General Comments: It should be noted immediately that the quality of the SAS assessment report is stellar. As has been noted over the past few years, the SAS report summarizes an enormous quantity of assessment activity in a comprehensive and coherent manner. This speaks volumes in itself, and indicates that the same level or organization and thoughtfulness one finds in the report itself is also evident in the assessment structure and practices within SAS and its programs. The report gives a very clear picture of the sustained oversight and assessment activity of the SAS programs, the commitment to assessment within SAS, and the strong leadership of the SAS Office of Undergraduate Education. The dedication and commitment of time and resources to all of the assessment activity within SAS should also be commended.
What’s most interesting in this year’s report is the innovation within the SAS assessment structure that continues to find ways to engage faculty in the development of learning goals and their assessment. The pervasive culture of assessment within SAS is palpable and is highly valued by all of us who work in this area at Rutgers. One suggestion, though. As was done in the Core Curriculum report, it would be very helpful if a few examples of assessments conducted, and changes implemented within a few programs, were made available in the report.

**Summative Evaluation:** Meets Current ACLO Standards