

# Student Outcomes Assessment Policy

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<b>Subject:</b>	Assessment and Outcomes
<b>Policy:</b>	Student Outcomes Assessment Policy
<b>Revised:</b>	TBD
<b>Effective Date:</b>	August 19, 2004
<b>Review Date:</b>	Three (3) years from Effective Date above.
<b>Sponsor:</b>	Assessment and Outcomes Committee

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## Introduction and Purpose:

Montana State University, the State's land-grant institution, educates students, creates knowledge and art, and serves communities, by integrating learning, discovery, and engagement. Toward this end, the university has established a program of student outcomes assessment with the goal of improving student learning and performance.

Assessment, as the term is used at MSU-Bozeman, is the systematic process of gathering, interpreting, and acting upon data related to student learning and experience for the purposes of course and program improvement. The connection between teaching and learning is a complex one, and it is necessary to use multiple measures to develop a comprehensive understanding of how curriculum design and delivery relate to student learning. Assessment is an iterative and adaptive process in which results inform changes to instructional and assessment practices. The critical element is the use of results in decision-making. Finally, the basis of good assessment practice is a shared understanding of program goals to ensure that all those involved in curriculum delivery are working toward the same ends.

## Policy:

The University follows a decentralized approach to assessment, with specific units (departments or colleges as appropriate) responsible for assessing specific academic programs, and faculty groups responsible for assessing general education. In conjunction with guidelines published by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, MSU requires faculty to establish learning objectives for all undergraduate degree programs and develop departmental plans for evaluating the extent to which students are achieving the objectives. The faculty in all units must review their goals and assessment plans every two years in conjunction with the catalog cycle, and must publish annual updates through the centrally maintained assessment database, which can be accessed through the Internet. The administration's role is to

coordinate and document assessment activities taking place at the unit level as well as to conduct surveys and provide data of institutional scope.

## **Procedures:**

### **A. Faculty Requirements**

Faculty are expected to participate in the assessment activities of their units in the following ways:

- o participating in biannual reviews of program goals and assessment plans
- o assisting with collecting and interpreting assessment data as required by assessment plans
- o participating in annual reviews of unit assessment results and resulting decision-making process

Faculty are encouraged to implement supplemental assessment strategies in their own classes as a means of improving teaching and learning. It is important that data gathered for the purpose of improvement not be used punitively, and there is no requirement that such data be made public.

### **B. Unit Requirements**

Under the leadership of the department head (or college dean as appropriate), each unit must maintain an appropriate structure, which includes faculty participation, for managing unit assessment efforts. This can be accomplished by including assessment in the charge of curriculum committees or by establishing separate assessment committees. These committees are responsible for ensuring that assessment plans are carried out, that results are documented, and that the information is shared with the entire faculty for potential action. Decisions based on assessment data are documented and included in the unit's annual report. Committees are also encouraged to develop and document supplementary assessment plans to follow up on specific actions to monitor effectiveness. Department heads are responsible for annual updates on assessment results and for leading biannual reviews of program goals and assessment plans.

### **C. Administration Requirements**

The goal of outcomes assessment is program improvement. For assessment to be effective, faculty must document program weaknesses as well as strengths and use their findings to make program improvements. Assessment results demonstrating the need for improvement should be viewed positively as an opportunity and should never be used punitively. It is the assessment process-especially the documented use of data in subsequent decision-making-that is vital; assessment is not simply an effort to demonstrate success. To ensure that assessment proceeds in accordance with the goal of program improvement, the provost, deans, and department heads are expected to recognize and acknowledge participation in assessment activities through the annual review process at all levels.