THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA | Office for Academic Affairs
Office of Institutional Effectiveness

Quick Guides

Academic Programs: Data Collection

Data collection for program assessment should demonstrate that outcomes are being measured, and the measurement yields useful data for program evaluation and planning. Data should also answer specific assessment questions, be seen as credible to the faculty and the intended users of the results, and provide useful information that will lead to improvements. Some questions to consider before data collection:

- Is there data that already exists that can assist with the assessment of a selected outcome--
  Where did/does this data come from? Can the source or collection instrument be used again?
  Does this data contain personal or potentially identifying information that could potentially violate privacy and protection policies?

- If data collection is required by the department, will the data be easy or difficult to obtain--
  Will data collection be feasible in terms of resources and time?
  Will a pilot data collection from a small sample be required?
  Has the data collection instrument (survey, rubric, etc.) been used/tested before or will it need to be piloted and tested?

- Is baseline or benchmark data needed or will comparison groups be used?
  Time should be built into the timeline for a pilot study to collect baseline data if necessary.

An example of an effective data collection plan is outlined below:

1. Begin the process of data collection after outcomes and measures are selected. The measures selected should align with the student learning outcomes being assessed.

2. Identify the information are you already collecting. Also, inventory the kinds of data that are readily available from other divisions within the University, such as the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, and whether or not that kind of data can be used for baseline or benchmark data (this type of data can include: DFW rates, enrollment data, etc).

3. Decide if any of these data can be used for baseline data. If so, make sure the data has no personal or potentially private information included.

4. If baseline data needs to be collected, identify the data source and/or the instrument used to collect that data.

5. Develop a timeline for collection for the assessment cycle and collect data at selected, reasonable intervals during the cycle. Have designated faculty or staff members be responsible for collecting the appropriate data and report the data to the Assessment Coordinator. The Assessment Coordinator will then compile the data from the various sources and enter the data in the software tool. If baseline data is not needed (for comparison studies between groups, for example), then the assessment data collection process can begin. If baseline data is needed, then make sure a reasonable amount of time is built in to collect data before interventions take place.

Tips for effective assessment data collection:

The data collected should be representative of the whole assessment cycle. You may want to collect data once a year, every other year, or you may want to collect it every semester. You may want to collect a representative sample, rather than collect data on every student/artifact.

A valid assessment method is one that measures what it is supposed to measure, with minimum interference from other variables. Methods that provide information that can be directly controlled by the academic program are more valid than those the program has no control over. Using multiple data sources is recommended in order to achieve more robust assessment.

Collect data that can gather substantive knowledge about the program, provide realistic feedback on strengths, weaknesses, and can define areas for improvement. Streamline the assessment process and generate effective assessment by evaluating 3-5 student learning outcomes at a mastery level (i.e. program level, not course or student level) to garner meaningful insight on the academic program.

Use the worksheet below to help with developing a data collection plan.

Worksheet

Do you have baseline data or benchmarks for each outcome (research question)?

1. Yes, we have baseline data and we can use the same instruments to evaluate achievement of our outcome. For each outcome to which this applies:
    a. Identify the metric or quantitative measurement, data source and/or instrument used to collect data.
    b. Describe the timeline for collection.
2. No, we do not have baseline data or benchmarks. For each outcome to which this applies:
    a. Describe how you intend to develop baseline metrics to demonstrate impact of your project or how you intend to identify benchmarks or standards of achievement. How does this affect your timeline?
    b. Describe the metrics or quantitative measurement you intend to use.
    c. Describe the data source and/or the instrument you intend to use for data collection.
    d. Describe the timeline for data collection.
3. No, we do not need baseline data to measure the impact of this project. We are using a cross-sectional comparison. For each outcome to which this applies:
    a. Describe the populations or subgroups you intend to compare.
    b. Describe the metrics or quantitative measurement you intend to use.
    c. Describe the data source and/or the instrument you intend to use for data collection.
    d. Describe the timeline for data collection