



Administrative Unit Assessment Frequently Asked Questions

(Click on a question below to be taken to the reply)

Table of Contents

- What is the purpose of administrative unit assessment? 2
- How should our unit choose AUOs? 2
- Our unit is currently in a time of transition. How can we participate in administrative unit assessment in a meaningful way during this period? 2
- Who will be able to access and see our administrative unit assessment reports? 2
- Should our unit create new Administrative Unit Outcomes (AUOs) every year?..... 3
- Our unit just developed a new strategic plan, and we want to create all-new AUOs to align with our plan. Is this okay?..... 3
- How do we develop effective, high-quality AUOs? 4
- How specific do our targets need to be? 5
- Does our unit need student learning outcomes (SLOs)? 6
- How do we create direct measures for our SLOs? We have a survey that asks students if they feel that they’ve learned something from our program, is this a direct measure? 7
- Our unit is ready to write our report. When do we need to include Comments on Findings, Action Plans, and Comments on Past Action Planning? 8
- What do we do with the feedback we receive from Institutional Effectiveness? 10
- Do we need to resubmit our annual report after we receive feedback from Institutional Effectiveness? 10
- Our unit has created AUOs, measures, and targets, but we want to be sure we’re on the right track before we start collecting data. Is there a way to get feedback before we submit the annual report? ... 10
- Our unit is still has questions. Can we get some extra help? 10

What is the purpose of administrative unit assessment?

The purpose of administrative unit assessment is to collect data that your unit will USE to make decisions about how to get better at what you do. Some key points:

- This process is about seeking improvement, not about demonstrating performance.
- If the data collected are never used, then this becomes a pointless exercise. If a unit is measuring something that they have already optimized, then this becomes a pointless exercise. And there's nothing worse than a pointless exercise!

How should our unit choose AUOs?

Your unit should choose AUOs that will provide data you are interested in and will answer questions that your unit is asking. Here are some guiding questions to help think through possible AUOs:

- What barriers or challenges to satisfying your mission is your unit currently or consistently grappling with?
- What trends does your unit see coming down the pike that you want to start preparing for now, so you stay on top of your game?
- What questions do you and your team keep coming back to, but haven't found a satisfying answer to yet?
- What relationships or partnerships does your team need to build?
- What skills does your team need to build?
- What could your team do or examine so it is focusing on prevention instead of reaction?
- What metaphorical rocks do you need to look under to prevent surprises?

Our unit is currently in a time of transition. How can we participate in administrative unit assessment in a meaningful way during this period?

Units that are currently moving or restructuring can still benefit from the administrative unit assessment process. During this time, when a unit's mandate or responsibilities may be in flux, it may be helpful for AUOs to focus more on internal processes and team function, such as:

- Team member participation in professional development
- Team member participation in diversity, equity, and inclusion activities
- Tracking efforts to create greater work-life balance for team members
- Collecting data on customer satisfaction with services or resources provided (even if the services or resources change, the unit will have useful data that demonstrates their effectiveness)
- Team member participation in community service activities

Who will be able to access and see our administrative unit assessment reports?

Institutional Effectiveness archives all submitted administrative unit assessment reports so that documentation is preserved through leadership changes and for SACSCOC reporting purposes. A unit's

report can only be requested by the senior leadership to whom it reports. All reports are available for review by SACSCOC representatives during the university's 5- and 10-year reaffirmation processes.

Sometimes, units submit high-quality outcomes that would make good examples for others to see. In these cases, Institutional Effectiveness will contact your unit head and obtain permission to share a de-identified version of your outcome.

Should our unit create new Administrative Unit Outcomes (AUOs) every year?

The goal of administrative assessment is to demonstrate how our administrative units improve over time. If units create all new AUOs every year, it will not be possible to illustrate the effects of the unit's efforts to improve its processes, services, or products. Well-crafted AUOs should be applicable to activities of the unit over several years.

However, there are a few instances where units will need to change some of their AUOs:

- They have met their targets for their existing AUOs for many years in a row, and would now like to focus on improving other processes, services, or products.
- They have developed a new strategic plan, and want to align their administrative assessment with their new plan.
- They have realized that some of their current AUOs are no longer useful for helping them improve.

Our unit just developed a new strategic plan, and we want to create all-new AUOs to align with our plan. Is this okay?

Yes, it is good practice to align your administrative assessment efforts with your unit's strategic or operational plan. It is best if your unit can align some of your previous AUOs with current activities, and you will want to make sure that your new AUOs are structured so that they will be useful to your unit for several years. For advice on how to do this, please see "How do we develop effective, high-quality AUOs?" below.

How do we develop effective, high-quality AUOs?

Each unit should have 3-5 AUOs, and measure at least three every year. Your unit's AUOs should be:

- Focused on the processes, services, and/or products that your unit would like to improve.
- High-level enough that they can be used over multiple years to guide continuous improvement.
- Specific enough that they are actually measurable.
- Derived from the mission or mandate of your unit.
- Related to things that your unit can actually control.

Here are some examples:

Table 1: Administrative Unit Outcomes (AUOs)

Administrative Unit Outcomes (AUOs) <i>Please include all of your AUOs, even those not measured this year.</i>	Assessment Measures <i>Please include a measure for each AUO, even those not measured this year.</i>	Targets <i>Please include a target for each AUO, even those not measured this year.</i>
AUO Example #1: Fill the vacant Associate Director for Student Advising position.	 Not High-Level Enough	
AUO Example #2: Student Advising Services	 Not Specific Enough	
AUO Example #3: Continue to provide advising services to students.	 Not Focused on Improvement	
AUO Example #4: Increase funding from the university for advising services for students.	 Not within the Unit's Control	
AUO Example #5: Increase the number of trash cans in the Student Advising office.	 Not Related to Unit's Mission	
AUO Example #6: Improve advising services for students.	 Just Right	

How specific do our targets need to be?

The more specific your targets are, the easier it will be to determine whether your target has been met, the better they will demonstrate improvement over time. If your unit is implementing a measure for the first time, feel free to set a baseline target. For example, **“Collect baseline data to set specific target for next cycle.”** If your unit is engaging in more exploratory assessment activities, where you measure an aspect of your operations that you think might need improving but are not sure, you can set a target like **“Collect exploratory data to determine if improvement actions are necessary.”** Here are some additional examples of both good and bad targets:

Table 1: Administrative Unit Outcomes (AUOs)

Administrative Unit Outcomes (AUOs) <i>Please include all of your AUOs, even those not measured this year.</i>	Assessment Measures <i>Please include a measure for each AUO, even those not measured this year.</i>	Targets <i>Please include a target for each AUO, even those not measured this year.</i>	2019-2020 AY Findings <i>Please include findings for each AUO measured this year, and please state if your target was met.</i>	Comments <i>For each outcome, consider your findings.</i>
AUO #1: Increase recruitment of high-potential students	Track the number of contact hours with prospective students.	We will have more contact hours with prospective students.	 Too vague	
		Increase the number of contact hours with potential students by 3% over the previous year (35 hours for the 18-19 academic year).	 Just Right	
AUO #2: Promote employee professional development in alignment with departmental critical skill needs.	Track employee participation in professional development activities.	An increased number of employees will participate in professional development.	 Too vague	
		X% of employees will engage in at least one professional development opportunity.	 Just Right	
AUO #3:				

Does our unit need student learning outcomes (SLOs)?

For units that are responsible for delivering content to students, we consider these units to have instructional responsibilities. Units with instructional responsibilities should create at least one student learning outcome as a part of their administrative assessment process, and should create at least one direct measure for any SLOs.

Important note: For student programs or services where the expected outcomes relate to student attitudes, confidence, motivation, etc., these outcomes should be represented in an administrative outcome and should not be represented in a student learning outcome.

SLOs should:

- Be focused on the knowledge/skills/abilities that students will be able to demonstrate as a result of interacting with your program or service.
- Be detailed enough to be measurable.
- Include a direct measure of student learning, where students are required to demonstrate their new knowledge/skills/abilities (the next question below provides more information on how to develop direct measures).

Here are some examples:

Table 2: Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) – if applicable

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) <i>Please include all of your SLOs, even those not measured this year.</i>	Assessment Measures <i>Please include a measure for each SLO, even those not measured this year.</i>	Targets <i>Please include a target for each SLO, even those not measured this year.</i>	2019-2020. <i>Please include each SLO m year, and pl your target year.</i>
SLO #1: Provide students with the opportunity to learn leadership skills.	 Not Focused on What Students Will Do		
SLO #2: Students will understand leadership.	 Not Detailed Enough to be Measurable		
SLO #3: Students will be able to describe transformational leadership.	 Just Right		

How do we create direct measures for our SLOs? We have a survey that asks students if they feel that they've learned something from our program, is this a direct measure?

A survey of students' opinion of their learning is not a direct measure. Direct measures require students to demonstrate their learning.

For administrative units, direct measures can be:

- Pieces of student work evaluated through a rubric, including papers, presentations, and other performances.
- Test questions with right or wrong answers.

Most administrative units with instructional responsibilities do not require students to create papers or presentations, so using a rubric will only be appropriate for some units. However, most units with instructional responsibilities already give student surveys at the end of sessions or experiences. In these cases, test questions can be added to the existing survey to serve as direct measures. Here are some examples:

Table 2: Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) – if applicable

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) <i>Please include all of your SLOs, even those not measured this year.</i>	Assessment Measures <i>Please include a measure for each SLO, even those not measured this year.</i>	Targets <i>Please include a target for each SLO, even those not measured this year.</i>	2019-2020 AY Findings	Comments on Findings	Action Planning
SLO #1: Students in the [LEADERSHIP PROGRAM] will be able to identify the five core values and be able to explain how they use one core value to lead others.	In a post-event survey, students will report that they have applied the core values of leadership in their daily lives.	85% of students will agree or strongly agree that they have applied the core values of leadership in their daily lives.		 Doesn't require a demonstration of learning. However, this measure/target pair would work well for an AUO for this program.	
	Two questions will be added to the student perspective survey which is distributed at the end of the academic year to all [LEADERSHIP PROGRAM] participants. Question 1 (short answer): Please identify the five Core Values. Question 2 (short written response): In 3-5 sentences, please explain how you use one of these core values to lead others.	85% of students will answer Question 1 correctly. 75% of students will answer Question 2 correctly.			 Requires a demonstration and describes how performances are evaluated.
SLO #2: Students will be able to work collaboratively with others.	The program director will observe students throughout the [training/semester/program] to determine whether students are working well with others.	Most students will demonstrate that they can work collaboratively.		 Requires a demonstration but does not describe how students' performances will be evaluated, and target is too vague.	
	The program director's evaluations of students' observed teamwork abilities will be conducted annually using a rubric developed by [THE UNIT] for this specific purpose. Students will be rated 1 (Poor), 2 (Fair), 3 (Good), or 4 (Excellent) on the following: -Treats team members respectfully -Provides assistance and encouragement to team members -Tailors communication strategies to effectively listen and respond to the diverse perspectives of others. -Helps the team move forward by articulating the merits of team members' ideas -Offers solutions or courses of actions that build on the ideas of others	70% of students will receive an average rating of 3.0 across all rubric items. 40% of students will receive ratings of 3 or better in each of the evaluation categories.			 Requires a demonstration and describes how performances are evaluated.

Our unit is ready to write our report. When do we need to include Comments on Findings, Action Plans, and Comments on Past Action Planning?

The last four columns of the template are designed to guide administrative units through a process of reflecting on their findings and determining what to do based on this information. Here is an example for the *Findings* column:

Table 1: Administrative Unit Outcomes (AUOs)

Administrative Unit Outcomes (AUOs) <i>Please include all of your AUOs, even those not measured this year.</i>	Assessment Measures <i>Please include a measure for each AUO, even those not measured this year.</i>	Targets <i>Please include a target for each AUO, even those not measured this year.</i>	2019-2020 AY Findings <i>Please include findings for each AUO measured this year, and please state if your target was met.</i>	Comments on Findings <i>For each AUO measured: What do these findings mean to your unit? When do you plan to measure the outcome again? Are you considering making changes to your assessment plan based on these findings?</i>	Action Planning <i>Is the program planning or other improvements to be included?</i>
AUO #1: Promote employee professional development in alignment with departmental critical skill needs.	Track the percentage of employees who participate in professional development activities.	85% of employees will engage in at least one professional development opportunity.	5 of our employees participated in professional development this year.	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> Findings are presented in a different format from the target and don't state whether the target was met. Because total # of employees wasn't included here, the % of employees can't be determined. </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> Findings are presented in the same format as the target and state that the target was met. </div>	
AUO #1: Promote employee professional development in alignment with departmental critical skill needs.	Track the percentage of employees who participate in professional development activities.	85% of employees will engage in at least one professional development opportunity.	90% of our employees participated in at least one professional development opportunity this year. Target met.		
AUO #3:					

For any outcome where findings are presented (since not all outcomes must be measured every year), units should use the *Comments on Findings* column of the report template to add context to their findings. The goal of this column is to document how units make sense of their findings.

Table 1: Administrative Unit Outcomes (AUOs)

Administrative Unit Outcomes (AUOs) <i>Please include all of your AUOs, even those not measured this year.</i>	Assessment Measures <i>Please include a measure for each AUO, even those not measured this year.</i>	Targets <i>Please include a target for each AUO, even those not measured this year.</i>	2019-2020 AY Findings <i>Please include findings for each AUO measured this year, and please state if your target was met.</i>	Comments on Findings <i>For each AUO measured: What do these findings mean to your unit? When do you plan to measure the outcome again? Are you considering making changes to your assessment plan based on these findings?</i>	Action Plan <i>Is the program planning or other improvements to be included?</i>
AUO #1: Promote employee professional development in alignment with departmental critical skill needs.	Track the percentage of employees who participate in professional development activities.	85% of employees will engage in at least one professional development opportunity.	5 of our employees participated in professional development this year.	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> Comments are vague, and don't address what the findings mean to the unit, or how the unit plans to track this outcome in the future. </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> Comments describe what the findings mean to the unit and how the unit plans to move forward with tracking this outcome in the next cycle. </div>	
AUO #1: Promote employee professional development in alignment with departmental critical skill needs.	Track the percentage of employees who participate in professional development activities.	85% of employees will engage in at least one professional development opportunity.	90% of our employees participated in at least one professional development opportunity this year. Target met.		We were surprised to surpass our target for this year. Upon reflection, an increase in travel funds may have had this impact. For next year, we plan to raise the target to: 90% of employees will engage in at least one professional development opportunity, and 55% will engage in at least two.
AUO #3:					

The **Action Planning** column is designed to help units document the decisions they make to improve. For all outcomes where the target is not met, the unit should include an action plan. If all targets are met, then at least one action plan should be included on any outcome the unit wishes to improve.

Table 1: Administrative Unit Outcomes (AUOs)

Administrative Unit Outcomes (AUOs) <i>Please include all of your AUOs, even those not measured this year.</i>	Assessment Measures <i>Please include a measure for each AUO, even those not measured this year.</i>	Targets <i>Please include a target for each AUO, even those not measured this year.</i>	2019-2020 AY Findings <i>Please include findings for each AUO measured this year, and please state if your target was met.</i>	Comments on Findings <i>For each AUO measured: What do these findings mean to your unit? When do you plan to measure the outcome again? Are you considering making changes to your assessment plan based on these findings?</i>	Action Planning <i>Is the program planning any changes or other improvements based on these findings? An action plan should be included for all unmet targets.</i>
AUO #1: Promote employee professional development in alignment with departmental critical skill needs.	Track the percentage of employees who participate in professional development activities.	85% of employees will engage in at least one professional development opportunity.	5 of our employees participated in professional development this year.	These findings indicate that our employees are engaging in professional development.	We will continue to encourage our staff to engage in professional development.
AUO #1: Promote employee professional development in alignment with departmental critical skill needs.	Track the percentage of employees who participate in professional development activities.	85% of employees will engage in at least one professional development opportunity.	90% of our employees participated in at least one professional development opportunity this year. Target met.	We were surprised to surpass our target for this year. Upon reflection, an increase in travel funds may have had this impact. For next year, we plan to raise the target to: 90% of employees will engage in at least one professional development opportunity, and 55% will engage in at least two.	To encourage our employees to engage in more professional development, for 2019-20 one staff member will have the responsibility of researching and communicating professional development opportunities to everyone.
AUO #3:					

 Too vague, doesn't describe what the unit plans to do next with regard to furthering this outcome.

 Describes a specific action the unit will take to address this outcome in the next cycle.

Comments on Past Action Planning is where units should document the outcomes of previous action plans for this unit. If this is a new outcome, then previous action plans may not exist.

 Too vague.

Comments on Findings <i>For each AUO measured: What do these findings mean to your unit? When do you plan to measure the outcome again? Are you considering making changes to your assessment plan based on these findings?</i>	Action Planning <i>Is the program planning any changes or other improvements based on these findings? An action plan should be included for all unmet targets.</i>	Comments on Past Action Planning <i>What action plans have been implemented for this outcome in the past? How have those changes affected unit quality or efficiency?</i>
These findings indicate that our employees are engaging in professional development.	We will continue to encourage our staff to engage in professional development.	This outcome has been important for our unit in the past.
We were surprised to surpass our target for this year. Upon reflection, an increase in travel funds may have had this impact. For next year, we plan to raise the target to: 90% of employees will engage in at least one professional development opportunity, and 55% will engage in at least two.	To encourage our employees to engage in more professional development, for 2019-20 one staff member will have the responsibility of researching and communicating professional development opportunities to everyone.	Last year, we increased our travel fund to encourage more employees to attend conferences. This year, the unit leader provided lists of professional development opportunities, especially conferences, several times throughout the year. An increase in conference attendance contributed to us meeting our target.

 Describes a specific action the unit has taken in the past to address this outcome and its effects.

What do we do with the feedback we receive from Institutional Effectiveness?

Every report submitted to Institutional Effectiveness goes through a double-review process, where it is reviewed by two different staff members who embed feedback directly into the report. This feedback is given to assist the unit in improving its assessment processes, and is intended to be used to inform the next cycle of assessment. Please refer to this feedback as you finalize your assessment plan and report for the next cycle.

Do we need to resubmit our annual report after we receive feedback from Institutional Effectiveness?

No, administrative units do not need to resubmit their reports after they receive feedback from Institutional Effectiveness. This feedback is provided purely to help the unit improve its processes for future cycles.

Our unit has created AUOs, measures, and targets, but we want to be sure we're on the right track before we start collecting data. Is there a way to get feedback before we submit the annual report?

Institutional Effectiveness is happy to provide feedback at any point. This includes providing feedback on outcomes, measures, and targets during the planning phase, and on report drafts before final submission. Please feel free to send plans and drafts to Lauren Bryant, Assistant Director of Institutional Effectiveness in the Office of Analytics and Institutional Effectiveness (labryant@vt.edu) to receive feedback.

Our unit is still has questions. Can we get some extra help?

Absolutely. Please contact Lauren Bryant, Assistant Director of Institutional Effectiveness in the Office of Analytics and Institutional Effectiveness (labryant@vt.edu) to set up a meeting or get more information.