

**Southern Utah University – Program Assessment 5-Year Plan  
2016-2020**

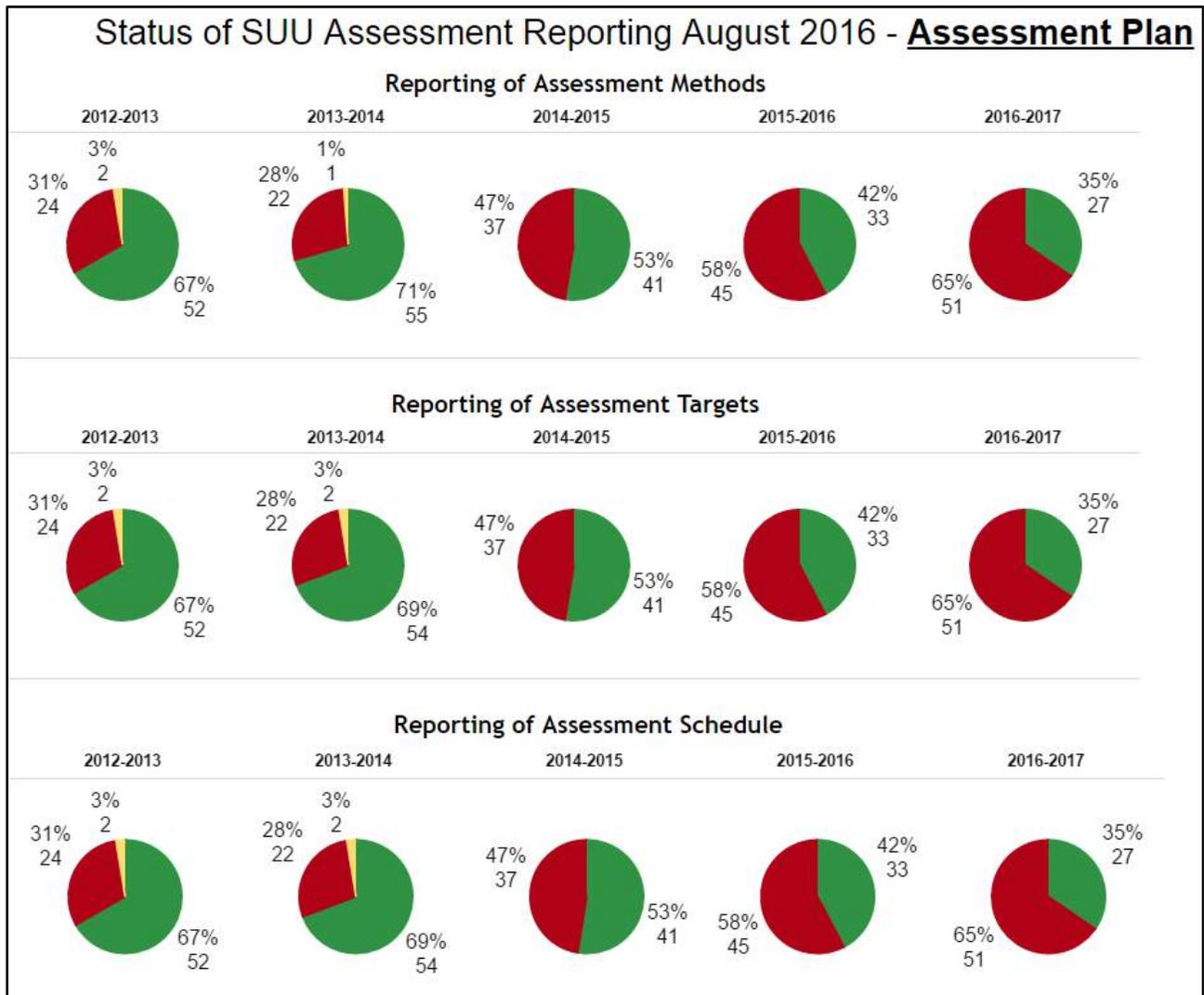
**Updates & Next Steps**  
*James Sage & Christian Reiner*

**1. Urgency / Motivation (What is the issue?)**

Declining TracDat Reporting

Since 2012, program-level assessment reporting in SUU’s institutional assessment reporting system, TracDat, has been declining. *Screenshot 1* depicts this declining trend in assessment reporting. While we have very good reason to believe assessment efforts are taking place in courses and programs, that information is not being uploaded to TracDat. So, there appears to be a disconnect between program assessment activities and assessment reporting in TracDat. The systematic use of an institutional assessment reporting tool, like TracDat, is an important aspect of campus-wide assessment and accreditation efforts.

**Screenshot 1:** Depiction of the declining trend to report assessment planning information in TracDat



**Note:** Red = #/% of Programs not Reporting; Yellow = #/% of Programs Reporting for 1 Learning Outcome; Green = #/% of Programs Reporting for 2 or More Learning Outcomes.

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Implication for Institutional Accreditation

Our institutional accreditors, the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), expects that we engage in regular assessment of student learning—including systematic collection of assessment information. Moreover, NWCCU expects that faculty take primary responsibility for the collection of assessment information and that assessment results are disseminated, used to demonstrate achievement of intended student learning outcomes, and used to inform program improvement. Importantly, NWCCU does not prescribe *how* we should conduct assessment; rather, NWCCU only expects *that* we engage in meaningful assessment. These expectations are outlined in the NWCCU Standards listed below in *Box 1*.

**Box 1: NWCCU Standards Related to Assessment of Student Learning**

**2.C – Education Resources**

- 2.C.1 The institution provides programs, wherever offered and however delivered, with appropriate content and rigor that are consistent with its mission; culminate in **achievement of clearly identified student learning outcomes**; and lead to collegiate-level degrees or certificates with designators consistent with program content in recognized fields of study.
- 2.C.2 **The institution identifies and publishes expected course, program, and degree learning outcomes.** Expected student learning outcomes for courses, wherever offered and however delivered, are provided in written form to enrolled students.
- 2.C.4 **Degree programs, wherever offered and however delivered, demonstrate a coherent design with appropriate breadth, depth, sequencing of courses, and synthesis of learning.** Admission and graduation requirements are clearly defined and widely published.
- 2.C.5 Faculty, through well-defined structures and processes with clearly defined authority and responsibilities, exercise a major role in the design, approval, implementation, and revision of the curriculum, and have an active role in the selection of new faculty. **Faculty with teaching responsibilities take collective responsibility for fostering and assessing student achievement of clearly identified learning outcomes.**

**4.A – Assessment**

- 4.A.1 The institution engages in **ongoing systematic collection and analysis of meaningful, assessable, and verifiable data—quantitative and/or qualitative, as appropriate to its indicators of achievement**—as the basis for evaluating the accomplishment of its core theme objectives.
- 4.A.2 The institution engages in an effective system of evaluation of its programs and services, wherever offered and however delivered, to **evaluate achievement of clearly identified program goals or intended outcomes.** Faculty have a primary role in the evaluation of educational programs and services.
- 4.A.3 **The institution documents, through an effective, regular, and comprehensive system of assessment of student achievement, that students who complete its educational courses, programs, and degrees, wherever offered and however delivered, achieve**

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identified course, program, and degree learning outcomes. Faculty with teaching responsibilities are responsible for evaluating student achievement of clearly identified learning outcomes.

4.A.6 The institution regularly reviews its assessment processes to ensure they appraise authentic achievements and yield meaningful results that lead to improvement.

**4.B – Improvement**

4.B.2 The institution uses the results of its assessment of student learning to inform academic and learning-support planning and practices that lead to enhancement of student learning achievements. Results of student learning assessments are made available to appropriate constituencies in a timely manner.

**2. The Importance of Program Assessment** (*Why does assessment matter?*)

Compliance vs. Continuous Improvement

According to the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), assessment is more than a response to accountability or curriculum improvement; instead, the HLC asserts that “effective assessment is best understood as a strategy for understanding, confirming, and improving student learning” (The Higher Learning Commission of NCA (n.d.). *Student Learning, Assessment, and Accreditation, 2007*. Retrieved October 6, 2016 from <https://www.wju.edu/assessment/statement.pdf>). In other words, assessment is at the very core of what we try to accomplish in higher education, namely to facilitate and improve student learning. Once correctly understood, assessment is not so much a matter of compliance (even though compliance matters), but rather a matter of continuous improvement.

Assessment at Program Level vs. Course Level

While students primarily engage in learning activities within the context of individual courses during their academic experience, it is important to remember that individual courses are intended to work together resulting in cumulative achievements within a coherent program of study leading to graduation. In other words, academic programs (majors) should be designed to support student achievement of learning outcomes (what the students should be able to know, do, or value) as a result of engaging in and completing a given program of student (not just what the student learns in a given course). In this way, programmatic assessment goes above and beyond assessment at the course level because it focuses on curriculum cohesiveness and effectiveness and student achievement of learning outcomes across the curriculum. To be effective, assessment at the program level needs to be systematic, intentional, collaborative, and comprehensive.

Reporting of Assessment Activities

While the key purposes of assessment are to facilitate and improve student learning, it is also important to document those assessment efforts. Documentation of assessment efforts allows for tracking and reviewing of assessment activities over time and serves as an assurance of assessment taking place. Such assurance is essential for responding to reporting mandates and requests from external entities, such as accrediting bodies like NWCCU. Several years ago, TracDat was formally adopted as SUU’s assessment reporting tool. TracDat provides a reporting template that is grounded in widely accepted assessment practice and allows SUU and its programs to document and report assessment activities in coherent and consistent ways.

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The tables below show how assessment reporting in TracDat aligns with typical components of assessment plans, main categories in TracDat, and applicable NWCCU standards.

**Table 1:** *Typical Components of Assessment Plans aligned to TracDat (Institutional Reporting)*

Typical Components of Assessment Plans	TracDat (Institutional Reporting)
1. Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)	Student Learning Outcomes
2. Curriculum Map	Curriculum Map
3. Overall Assessment Process	Assessment System/Process
4. Assessment Methods	Assessment Methods and Targets
5. Assessment Cycle	Schedule
6. Report Out	Assessment Results and Target Met
7. Close the Loop	Action and Follow-Up

**Table 2:** *Alignment between TracDat (Institutional Reporting) and NWCCU's Standards*

TracDat (Institutional Reporting)	NWCCU's Standards
Student Learning Outcomes	2.C.1; 2.C.2
Curriculum Map	2.C.4; 2.C.5; 4.A.2; 4.A.3
Assessment System/Process	2.C.5; 4.A.1; 4.A.2; 4.A.3; 4.A.6
Assessment Methods and Targets	2.C.5; 4.A.1; 4.A.2; 4.A.6
Schedule	2.C.5; 4.A.1; 4.A.3
Assessment Results and Target Met	2.C.1; 4.A.2; 4.A.3; 4.A.6; 4.B.2
Action and Follow-Up	4.B.2

### 3. Support & Next Steps *(How will we accomplish our goals?)*

#### Goals

Based on the discussion in the previous two sections, we must ensure that SUU programs not only engage in meaningful assessment but that we can also demonstrate to NWCCU at our next Year Seven Comprehensive Review that we meet the NWCCU standards/criteria related to assessment of student learning. More specifically, programs need to complete four (4) years of assessment reporting (2016-2017, 2017-2018, 2018-2019, 2019-2020) in TracDat before the next NWCCU Year Seven Comprehensive Review.

#### Support for Assessment/Assessment Reporting

James Sage (Associate Provost) and Christian Reiner (Executive Director of IR & Assessment) will develop resources to assist with assessment and assessment reporting. The resources will be made available online and will include specific directions for entering data in TracDat as well as guidance for conducting assessment. James and Christian will also be available to meet with academic units and individuals to go over assessment and reporting in TracDat.

#### 5-Year Plan

Please note that the tasks and due dates laid out in the 5-Year Plan (below) reflect minimum requirements to accommodate all programs independent of where they are at in their assessment efforts and assessment reporting. Programs are free and encouraged to go above and beyond the minimum requirements as deemed necessary and feasible by them based on specialized program accreditation requirements and/or experience with (or interest in) assessment.

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**Table 3: 5-Year Plan & Preparing for NWCCU Year Seven Comprehensive Review**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Task</b>	<b>TracDat Component</b>	<b>Due Date</b>
2016-17	Define/update learning outcomes	Student Learning Outcomes	Dec 2, 2016
	Plan when outcomes will be assessed (at least 2 outcomes per year)	Student Learning Outcomes	
	Show alignment of outcomes with curriculum	Curriculum Map	Feb 10, 2017
	Lay out overall assessment process	Assessment System/Process	April 7, 2017
	Plan how outcomes will be assessed	Assessment Methods and Targets; Schedule	
	Report assessment results for 2016-17 (if available)	Assessment Results and Target Met	
2017-18	Report assessment results for 2017-18	Assessment Results and Target Met	Oct 5, 2018
	Identify actions for improving student learning in 2018-19	Action	
2018-19	Report assessment results for 2018-19	Assessment Results and Target Met	Oct 4, 2019
	Identify actions for improving student learning in 2019-20	Action	
	Report on actions implemented in 2018-19	Follow Up	
2019-20	Report assessment results for 2019-20	Assessment Results and Target Met	Oct 2, 2020
	Identify actions for improving student learning in 2020-21	Action	
	Report on actions implemented in 2019-20	Follow Up	
2020-21	Report assessment results for 2020-21	Assessment Results and Target Met	Oct 1, 2021
	Identify actions for improving student learning in 2021-22	Action	
	Report on actions implemented in 2020-21	Follow Up	

Assessment Reporting Structure

Each academic program has an assigned TracDat administrator whose responsibility it is to make sure that assessment data is reported in a timely fashion in TracDat. It is not this person’s responsibility to do all the assessments but to report the assessment data. Assessment itself should be a collaborative effort involving all faculty in the program. While not required, it is recommended that the TracDat administrator be one or more of the faculty overseeing assessment efforts in a given program.

# Quick Reference for 2016-2020 Program Assessment Efforts

**Tables 1 and 2 combined:** Components of Assessment Plans aligned to TracDat and NWCCU's Standards:

Typical Components of Assessment Plans	TracDat (Institutional Reporting)	NWCCU's Standards
1. Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)	Student Learning Outcomes	2.C.1; 2.C.2
2. Curriculum Map	Curriculum Map	2.C.4; 2.C.5; 4.A.2; 4.A.3
3. Overall Assessment Process	Assessment System/Process	2.C.5; 4.A.1; 4.A.2; 4.A.3; 4.A.6
4. Assessment Methods	Assessment Methods and Targets	2.C.5; 4.A.1; 4.A.2; 4.A.6
5. Assessment Cycle	Schedule	2.C.5; 4.A.1; 4.A.3
6. Report Out	Assessment Results and Target Met	2.C.1; 4.A.2; 4.A.3; 4.A.6; 4.B.2
7. Close the Loop	Action and Follow-Up	4.B.2

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	Report assessment results for 2016-17 (if available)	Assessment Results and Target Met	
2017-18	Report assessment results for 2017-18	Assessment Results and Target Met	Oct 5, 2018
	Identify actions for improving student learning in 2018-19	Action	
2018-19	Report assessment results for 2018-19	Assessment Results and Target Met	Oct 4, 2019
	Identify actions for improving student learning in 2019-20	Action	
	Report on actions implemented in 2018-19	Follow Up	
2019-20	Report assessment results for 2019-20	Assessment Results and Target Met	Oct 2, 2020
	Identify actions for improving student learning in 2020-21	Action	
	Report on actions implemented in 2019-20	Follow Up	
2020-21	Report assessment results for 2020-21	Assessment Results and Target Met	Oct 1, 2021
	Identify actions for improving student learning in 2021-22	Action	
	Report on actions implemented in 2020-21	Follow Up	