

Program Assessment Report (PAR) Help Guide

Notes: This document is intended to supplement the templates – Template I, Template II, and Curriculum Map Template – for Program Assessment Reports (PARs) and serve as a tool for departments in preparing their PARs. The terms department and program are used interchangeably to reflect the various administrative structures in place. A group of peer reviewers will be using a rubric to evaluate your PAR. For a copy of the latest version of the rubric, please see the Forms section on the [assessment website](#).

Programs should review previous PARs and look to build on them over time. New programs that have not yet submitted PARs are encouraged to review the program proposals that were submitted to the Office of the State Board of Education as part of program development. These proposals contain information about the program’s learning outcomes as well as the draft plan for learning outcomes assessment. While the plan in the proposal may be different from what the program actually implements, it can serve as a reminder and a good starting place for dialogue among the faculty.

Instructions for Completing PAR Template I and Curriculum Map Template

- 1. Mission:** What is the mission of your program? How does it align with the mission of the college and university? How do your program learning outcomes (PLOs) inform or reflect your mission?

The program’s mission is the core statement of purpose. In some cases, the program may not have a specific mission, but rather is embedded in the department’s mission. Similarly, the program or department’s mission should connect to or flow from the college’s mission, which stems from the university’s mission. Mission statements might include vision (forward focus), values, and/or goals or the terminology appropriate to the discipline. While it is not the place of the PAR review to evaluate mission statements, the mission provides useful context of the program and helps your program or department’s faculty to examine your PLOs within that perspective.

Points to ponder: What does the department prepare students to do? For example, is the program designed to produce graduates who are socially responsible citizens, pre-professionals, entry-level teachers, and/or graduate school applicants? How do your PLOs reflect your purpose?

- 2. Assessment Process:** Responses to this item reflect the **current state** in the department/program. Provide a current ‘snapshot’ of your PLO assessment process.

- a. Engagement & Process:** Describe how the department discusses, uses, and shares information about student learning outcomes achievement (i.e., How does the assessment process work beyond individual courses? Who is involved? How do the department’s faculty interact around this topic? How often? How are results shared and with whom?). [750 words max]

Program-level assessment is different from course-level assessment in that the department or program faculty share the responsibility for the program's assessment. Even though individual course-level assessments typically rest with the individual faculty member, assignments and student work may be extracted from courses and used at the program level.

Some departments/programs use committees or coordinators to organize or facilitate program assessment, while others rely on the entire department or existing structures like department retreats and meetings. Whichever way the department/program goes about assessment, it is important to consider a process that involves the faculty as broadly as possible and is explicitly known to them and carried out; this is what is meant by the term "routinized process."

Where responsibilities for a program are shared between two or more departments, such as interdisciplinary programs and secondary education, please discuss the ways in which the two areas collaborate on and/or approach program assessment.

Finally, consider how assessment results are shared. What does your feedback loop look like to ensure meaningful use of your findings? Are results distributed? To whom? In what format? At a minimum, the department faculty should discuss the results. Does what you find match with students' experiences of the program? Sharing results with students and inviting their reactions may be helpful to the program as well. It also may be useful to share results with employers, alumni, recruiters, prospective students, or others to demonstrate program quality.

- b. **Strengths & Challenges:** What is going well in the assessment of this program?
Are there any challenges, gaps, or areas for improvement in the assessment of this program?
[250 words max]

PARs are submitted every three years, but the assessment of student learning should be ongoing. Describe what worked and what did not. For example, did your assessment measures give you the kind of information you need to assess each learning outcome? Do you need other kinds of involvement? Or do you need to create a schedule so that some PLOs can be evaluated each year? These examples do not encompass the range of areas on which a program might reflect about their strengths and challenges in assessing student learning.

- c. **National standards (if applicable):** Is your program accredited by an external, national and/or professional agency? If so, briefly summarize the extent to which your PLOs represent the national/professional standards (verbatim, adapted, etc.) and the extent to which other aspects of your assessment process are prescribed by that accreditation (e.g., types of measures used, levels of proficiency, etc.). [150 words max]

A number of programs at the University have specialized accreditation through professional disciplinary associations or agencies. Although the basic principles of program learning outcomes assessment (e.g., improvement-oriented, learner-focused, evidence-driven) are similar or generally the same between PAR and specialized disciplinary accreditation, the mechanics of the processes can differ. For example, some specialized accreditation may mandate specific PLOs whereas others may provide standards that can be

adapted specific to the localized needs. By making connections between a program's specialized accreditation and the PAR process, this section provides important context that will not only explicate similarities or differences that may exist but also be helpful during the PAR review process.

3. Continuous Improvement: Responses to this item are **backwards looking** in that you are reflecting on action items and next steps that were identified in your last report.

A key aspect of program assessment is its focus on improvements resulting from the PAR process. In other words, to demonstrate that the PAR process is iterative and focused on continuous improvement, programs are asked to **look back at the previous** PAR and to reflect and respond to action items and next steps that had been identified. An expectation of PAR is that programs are making real changes and continued efforts to enhance student learning. New programs for whom this is the first PAR would not have information to report yet for 3a, 3b, and 3c, and may indicate so by saying "not available as this is the first PAR for this program" or something similar.

- a. **Curriculum, instructional, or programmatic changes** (see previous PAR Template II, column 4; previous Curriculum Map; and Follow-Up Report, question III): Were you able to address action items and next steps identified in your last report? Please refer to specific items and discuss the 2-4 most significant changes. Discuss items that were not addressed, those you are continuing to work on, or new items that were substituted for the original action items/next steps. If new items were introduced, please provide a brief rationale. [750 words max]

The purpose of outcomes assessment is to ensure that students are meeting the faculty expectations for learning in the program and to provide the program with valuable information to enhance their learning and continue to improve the program. Examples of these changes may include but are not limited to:

- Curriculum changes: new or revised courses and requirements, changes in course sequencing, course formats, etc.
- Instructional changes: new or updated pedagogical approaches, course materials, teaching methods; improved alignment between course LOs and PLOs
- Programmatic changes: new, updated, or consolidated program offerings, etc.

Look at the previous PAR: (a) PAR Template II, column 4 "Actions Taken or Planned Based on Findings," (b) the previous curriculum map and associated reflection, PAR Template I, question 4 "Discuss how the curriculum map illustrates support for your mission and goals for student learning," and (c) Follow-Up Report, question 3 "Next Steps." In this section, (1) discuss the 2-4 most significant changes, (2) items not addressed, in progress, or newly introduced, and (3) note that newly introduced items need to include rationale.

It is possible that some of the actions identified in the last report were not completed or implemented as precisely stated in the prior PAR. Some may have been replaced by new ideas or other self-identified areas for improvement may have emerged through consideration of the peer feedback and/or other discussion by the faculty. The point here is that the best-laid plans sometimes are modified for very good reasons. In

these cases, programs may still be considered “established” provided they reviewed their action items and the peer feedback and, after considered discussion, determined that the particular actions as originally planned were not desired. Programs are required to provide rationale when there have been changes in plans.

- b. **Assessment process changes or improvements** (see previous PAR Template 1, question 2.b. and/or any self-identified areas for improvement): Have you made any changes to address the challenges, gaps, and/or areas for improvement identified in the assessment process? [250 words max]

As with “3. a” above, this item is a retroactive reflection on how the assessment process in the program may have changed or further developed since the last PAR. Consult the previous PAR: (a) Template I, question 2.b., (b) responses to the Follow-Up Report, and/or (c) other areas that were self-identified for improvement. Programs that have internalized assessment of student learning are continuously learning from their experiences and updating or tweaking the ways they go about assessment.

- c. **Responses to scores of “no evidence” or “beginning” in the last PAR.** If your program received such ratings on the last PAR, please indicate specifically what has been done to move the program forward in these areas. [250 words max]

An important assumption of the PAR process is that programs report where they are, but with an eye toward improvement. In other words, programs are all striving to become “Established” in their assessment of student learning regardless of where they begin. Continuous improvement also is an expectation of the University’s accreditation body, the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities. For these reasons, programs who received ratings of “no evidence” or “beginning” on their previous PAR are asked to address specific areas in which those rating(s) were received and explain how the program has advanced.

4. Complete the Curriculum Map Template and provide a summary analysis based on the following questions:

- a. Are students provided with multiple learning opportunities to develop the learning outcomes?
- b. Are courses in the major sequenced in a logical pattern to facilitate student achievement of the learning outcomes?
- c. How are learning experiences such as internships, service-learning courses, or other opportunities reflected on the map and how do they support the development of the PLOs?

Undergraduate programs, please also address:

- d. Considering ULOs 1 through 5, which ULOs are reinforced within your curriculum and to what extent? How are students provided with opportunities to develop these outcomes prior to and during their Finishing Foundations experience? Provide relevant examples as appropriate. [This question applies to all undergraduate programs regardless of whether you offer a Foundations of the Discipline course(s).]

A Curriculum Map illustrates how the program curriculum aligns with the PLOs, how students are provided opportunities to develop and achieve desired learning, and identifies possible instances where courses and

learning experiences may provide data for program-level assessment. The PAR includes two elements related to the curriculum map.

- *Template I Narrative Response to Question 4:* After completing the Curriculum Map Template (brief instructions are provided on the template and a more detailed description of the Template is provided below), programs should provide a brief narrative analysis based on the prompts provided in question 4.
- *Curriculum Map Template:* The template has two primary sections and an overview follows.

Mapping the PLOs

The first section of the Curriculum Map pertains to the alignment of the PLOs with the department's required courses and experiences (such as internships, for example) for the particular degree program. The PLOs listed in the curriculum map also will be included in column 1 of Template II.

After listing the PLOs in the rows and the courses/experiences in the columns, identify the intersection of the two. As part of this, programs need to select a schema to identify *either* the degree of emphasis given to each PLO in each associated course OR the level of competency that students are expected to achieve. The program will choose either A or B below and then within that, one of the presented options or another similar schema that represents either levels of emphasis or achievement.

- A. Degree of emphasis (one of the following):
- Limited to None (L) – Some (S) – Extensive (Ex)
 - Minimal to No Focus (MF) – Secondary Focus (SF) – Primary Focus (PF)
 - Introduced (I) – Reinforced (R) – Emphasized (Em)
- B. Level of competency achieved by students (one of the following):
- Beginning (B) – Developing (D) – Proficient (P)
 - Emerging (Emg) – Developing (D) – Mature (Ma)

For example, a program choosing A.i. would identify the intersections between the PLOs and the courses in the curriculum using the abbreviations L, S, and Ex to indicate the emphasis in the associated courses. Programs may determine the degree of emphasis or level of competency for their courses by querying faculty teaching the courses, analyzing syllabi, or through other means. If the degree of emphasis or competency achieved varies in a particular course and the variation will not be remediated, then use the lowest common denominator for marking the course. For example, if the degree of emphasis varies based on instructor, instruction mode, or some other factor, then mark the lowest common denominator (i.e., the curriculum map should reflect the learning that the program can reasonably expect all students in the program to achieve or experience).

The use of a categorizing schema helps programs examine their curricula to understand the breadth and depth of students' exposure to the PLOs and to identify potential courses from which student work may be extracted for program-level assessment.

Note: Each year, PLOs are extracted verbatim from the curriculum maps and provided to the administrators of the campus curriculum management system (Kuali). The PLOs are then loaded into Kuali for use in the curriculum process.

Mapping to ULOs (Undergraduate Programs Only)

University Learning Outcomes are outcomes that cut across the undergraduate curriculum, thus the second section of the Curriculum Map (bottom portion of the template) applies to all undergraduate programs, whether the courses are approved general education courses or not.

ULOs are University wide learning outcomes that start being addressed in general education classes but continue in the degree program. The ULOs section of the Curriculum Map is meant to help programs and the General Education Committee understand where the ULOs are being addressed within Boise State's degree programs. In the ULO section, you will first indicate whether a ULO is "aligned" with a PLO, then you will map where those "aligned" ULOs appear in your program.

The General Education Committee of the Faculty Senate, which has oversight of the ULOs and University Foundations curriculum, implemented this requirement beginning in 2019-20. Part of the GEC's responsibility is to ensure that students have opportunities to develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of the ULOs throughout their time at Boise State. Mapping PLOs to ULOs is one way for the GEC to monitor and assess this.

An overview of the UF curriculum: the general education curriculum at Boise State is comprised of a set of shared courses (UF 100, UF 200, English 101/102 (FW) and the Foundations of Communication (FC) course); a wide set of approved Foundations of the Discipline courses (FDs); and a Finishing Foundations (FF) course, which is embedded in each program.

On the Curriculum Map template, the shared courses of the UF curriculum are provided in the blue-shaded columns and are mapped to the associated ULOs; no changes or updates to these columns are needed. The FF course provides a culminating learning experience and serves as an explicit intersection of selected ULOs with selected PLOs. Programs should denote their FF course and associated number of credits in the orange-shaded column, adding columns if needed for more than one FF course. FF courses are required to include ULO 1 or 2 **plus** ULO 3 in addition to relevant PLOs.

ULOs 1 through 5 are "universal" in the sense that they are broadly applicable and can be applied in ways specific to a given discipline. Additional information about the definition of each ULO can be found on the [University Foundations website](#).

Although ULOs 1-5 are included in the shared pieces of the UF curriculum, further development of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions represented by these outcomes occurs throughout students'

experiences in their academic programs. In this way, programs have freedom in how and where they help students develop in these areas.

To complete this section, work through instructions 4, 5, and 6 on the Curriculum Map Template in which you will note PLO-ULO alignment, identify places in the program's curriculum where the ULOs are emphasized or further developed (by using only an "X" in this section), and review/verify information pertaining to the FF course.

What constitutes PLO-ULO alignment? Mark a PLO as aligned to a ULO if the PLO addresses [at least two of the ULO's achievement criteria](#). The level of emphasis within individual courses can (and should) vary. The goal is to support students in drawing connections between their disciplinary coursework and the ULOs across their degree program, striving toward mastery by the time they reach or complete their FF course.

Completing this section will assist the GEC in better understanding PLO-ULO alignment as well as the breadth and depth of students' exposure to the ULOs throughout their college careers. Please provide examples for relevant outcomes in the narrative.

Please note that undergraduate programs not meeting the rubric criteria for the ULO-related items would not be able to achieve the Established rating.

Instructions for Completing PAR, Template II

When thinking through the components in Template II, consider that these four columns are connected to each other so you are looking to create a through-line from outcome to measure to findings to actions for each row of data. Additional details follow below.

5. Program Learning Outcomes (1st column)

List the PLOs, one per row. The outcomes listed here also are included in the left-hand column of the curriculum map. A PLO is a statement that addresses: What should students know, be able to do, and become (or knowledge, skills, dispositions) as a result of the program? Ensure that your PLOs are expressed as student-centered learning outcomes (rather than delivery-focused inputs or what students will be exposed to).

It can help to think of the PLOs as broad statements of what you expect graduates to possess as a result of your program. Focus on "enduring understandings" that are at the core of your academic program. Having 6 to 8 PLOs is typical for many programs. Clustering longer lists of PLOs can be helpful for determining broad categories, which may include: content knowledge, methodologies, dispositions/values, variety of skills (reading/writing/communicating/team-work), applications (field work/lab work/performances/lesson plans), life-long learning/responsible citizenship, etc. (More detailed learning outcomes or indicators can be stated within each broad category.)

Note: programs with external accreditation or other professional standards may have state/national/professional standards that are prescribed and cannot be further interpreted or edited. In these instances,

programs are not expected to alter their PLOs simply to satisfy internal campus requirements. However, if the program has a set of PLOs that complement or stem from the professional standards, then it is preferred that those PLOs are presented in the report.

6. Measures Used to Assess Outcomes (2nd column)

What evidence is used by the department/program to determine whether the outcome has been achieved? The measures selected should help gather data that are useful in determining whether PLOs are being achieved and provide information that will be useful in improving instruction and curriculum.

Use both direct and indirect measures. The two types have different strengths and weaknesses, so your assessment process will benefit from a combination of both. A direct measure is an evaluation of actual student work/performance. Some examples include assignments extracted from courses, tests (local or national, pre- and post- or one-time), evaluation of portfolios, and observation of performance. Direct measures can be evaluated by faculty independently or in groups using a scoring rubric or other explicit description of the criteria for various levels of achievement. To maintain our university-wide accreditation, the NWCCU requires that each academic program use direct measures of learning, so you will need to report on at least one.

Some programs may use portfolios across multiple outcomes; in these instances, programs are advised to provide sufficient detail to illustrate that the portfolio method provides evidence of student learning across the relevant PLOs.

Indirect measures gauge perceptions of student achievement and attitudes. Surveys of current students, alumni, and employers are commonly used indirect measures. Focus groups and exit interviews are other examples. Employment rates and graduate school admissions also provide indirect evidence of student success. Some University-wide data (e.g., results of the Graduating Student Survey, the Alumni Outcomes data, etc.) are available for program-level assessment and should be used where meaningful alignment between the PLOs and the survey data has been identified. Additional information is available through the [Office of Institutional Effectiveness](#).

Also, consider both embedded and non-embedded measures. It is not necessary to include both types, but thinking of those two categories may suggest a wider range of possibilities. Embedded measures are found within your courses or other parts of your program, such as papers, tests, and supervisor reports from required internships or fieldwork. (Your Curriculum Map can be a useful guide to identifying courses from which student work can be extracted for purposes of program assessment.) Non-embedded measures happen outside of students' normal progress through the program (such as survey data, specialized assessments or tests, etc.).

Indicate which measures were used for each PLO. Not every PLO needs a separate measure—a portfolio, for example, may provide evidence for assessment of all of a program's PLOs—but it is important to make sure each PLO is assessed in at least one way.

Finally, many good stories of assessment are born from faculty observations that sparked a discussion or further investigation. Rather than ignoring the value of these kinds of discussions and informal light-bulb moments, we acknowledge that “informal” methods sometimes lead to meaningful discoveries.

7. Interpretation of Key Findings (3rd column)

This section of the report should include *conclusions* about the program’s effectiveness, the *evidence* on which those conclusions are based, and the *performance criteria, standards, or expectations* that shape the conclusions. For example, if 80% of students were rated “proficient” or better on a task, such findings may lead you to conclude that the program is doing well at preparing students for that task but has room for improvement: what percentage of students should perform at that level?

Be specific, avoiding generalities such as "students seemed to have trouble with . . ." or "students seemed to be skilled writers." Instead, respond with sufficient details that link the results with your conclusions (i.e., statements summarizing your data finding and what it means or what you conclude based on it). Ultimately, programs should be able to answer the questions, “What do you know about your students’ learning, and how do you know it?”

Keep in mind the findings reported here should be the result of the measures identified in the second column.

8. Actions Taken or Planned Based on Findings (4th column)

As mentioned previously, continuous improvement to student learning and the conditions that facilitate it are the bedrock of learning outcomes assessment. Based on the assessments and results reported in **this table** (from this current assessment cycle), how have or will the findings be used by the faculty to make changes to the curriculum, specific courses, and/or to the pedagogy used in the program? Please report: (1) actions already taken, and/or (2) actions planned for the future. Provide relevant examples.

While question 3 from Template I references programmatic changes since the last assessment cycle, this section of Template II pertains to findings gleaned through the ***current*** assessment cycle. In other words, the information presented in this column is not in follow-up to a previous PAR but is rather a reflection of what the assessment findings from the current cycle have led to or are leading to. Each column in this table is related to the PLO in the given row. Examples of actions taken or planned may include changes to the curriculum, such as new or revised courses and requirements, changes in teaching methods, new assignments, etc.

Important Information

Due Date: All PARs are due May 1 of the respective reporting year.

Contacts: programassessment@boisestate.edu

- Shari Ellertson, Senior Executive Director, Institutional Effectiveness
- Teresa Focarile, Associate Director for Educational Development, Center for Teaching and Learning
- Nicole Cundiff, Faculty Coordinator for Program Assessment

For questions about University Foundations, University Learning Outcomes, or the General Education Committee, please contact:

- Candyce Reynolds, Director of University Foundations
- Kay Wingert, Associate Director of University Foundations

Resources: Additional Help Resources can be found on the [Institutional Effectiveness Assessment website](#)