

Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment Overview

A. T. Still University of Health Sciences (ATSU)

Introduction

ATSU is committed to quality improvement throughout the University. Therefore, assessment activities occur at various levels across the institution and include mechanisms for gathering and reviewing data related to the University's strategic plan, individual schools and colleges, discipline-based programs, core professional attributes, and other student learning outcomes. This document provides an overview of the institution's current structures and processes related to assessment and quality improvement.

University Level

ATSU Strategic Plan

At the beginning of each five-year planning cycle, ATSU follows best practice and establishes a broadly representative Strategic Planning Committee comprised of administrators, faculty, staff, students, and alumni. As the committee develops the new plan, they seek input and invite review from a variety of stakeholders including the Board of Trustees. Following approval of the plan by the president, the University-wide Assessment Committee monitors progress, tracks and evaluates data, and makes recommendations. The 2016-2020 Strategic Plan is structured around six major themes: *I. Education Excellence, II. Continued Commitment to Scholarly Activity, III. Cultural Proficiency, Diversity, and Inclusion, IV. New and Expanded Partnerships, V. Effective Branding and Marketing, and VI. Fiscal Health, Affordability, and Compliance*, establishing the basis for university-level assessment. Each theme has one or more goals and each goal has one or more objectives. In total there are 38 objectives, each with designated measures used to gauge progress.

The University-wide Assessment Committee (UWAC) is tasked with reviewing and analyzing results of the various strategic plan measures. Two UWAC subcommittees are responsible for initial analysis of the results for each measure: UWAC-A (Academic) for academic matters (themes I, II and IV) and UWAC-R (Institutional Resources) for all non-academic institutional resources (themes III, V, and VI). Reports and recommendations emerging from initial reviews by the subcommittees are forwarded for consideration by the parent committee. UWAC reviews all reports and recommendations as they are forwarded, followed by an annual comprehensive review of all assessments together during an extended meeting. The committee then makes formal recommendations for modifications, adjustments, or changes aimed at achieving quality improvement in academic outcomes and institutional effectiveness. Easily implemented recommendations with zero or minor budget implications are directed to the responsible administrator for action. Recommendations requiring significant changes to programming or budget are prioritized and forwarded to the President's Cabinet by the senior vice presidents for academic affairs (SVPAA) and university planning and strategic initiatives (SVPSIP) who are ex-officio members of UWAC.

University-wide Assessment Committee

Although strategic plan objectives broadly cover areas appropriate to university-level quality improvement efforts, a few additional assessments at the university level are also the responsibility of UWAC. Again, the parent committee relies on initial review by one of the two subcommittees.

UWAC-A conducts academic program reviews including discipline-specific accreditation results where applicable. Reports on the aggregated results of the course evaluation core instrument and the core professional attributes are also initially reviewed by UWAC-A. Results of these reviews are forwarded to UWAC with any recommendations for improvements. UWAC-R conducts an annual environmental scan to assure continued relevance of strategic plan goals and objectives, anticipating any modifications made necessary in a changing external environment. Recommendations for adjustment to strategic plan goals or objectives are forwarded to UWAC for consideration. As is the case with review of strategic plan objectives, subcommittee reports and recommendations are considered by UWAC. Easily implemented recommendations are forwarded to the responsible administrators for immediate action. Recommendations with significant programming or budget implications are forwarded to the ATSU leadership team.

Finally, UWAC also fosters a culture of assessment by sponsoring annual assessment events such as presentations and workshops designed to engage and inform University faculty and staff.

College/School Level

Dean's annual report

Each year the deans review a collection of school/college-level assessment data including but not limited to:

- applicant pool numbers and demographics;
- matriculant numbers and demographics;
- persistence and graduation rates;
- board and/or licensing exam results;
- post-graduation employment/residency data;
- faculty headcounts and demographics;
- faculty scholarship activity;
- faculty service participation and leadership endeavors;
- tuition and fees;
- capital expenditures;
- community outreach activity; and
- curricular additions, deletions, and modifications.

This data, combined with analysis, commentary, and recommendations, is assembled by each dean into an annual report and submitted to the senior vice president for academic affairs (SVPAA). The SVPAA reviews all annual reports and discusses each report in detail with the respective dean. The report and subsequent discussions guide decisions on allocation of resources and plans for the coming year.

Program Level within Colleges/Schools

Program review

Program review provides a systematic method to evaluate effectiveness of ATSU's academic programs, promote academic excellence, and assure consistency with the University's mission. Program review is the responsibility of UWAC-A. Comprised of faculty, student, dean, and academic affairs representation from UWAC, plus additional faculty members representing all colleges/schools, UWAC-A follows a formalized process outlined in the program review guidelines document. All ATSU programs undergo program review.

Non-accredited programs must generate a self-study document and follow the process identified in the program review document as Pathway 1. The program review cycle for non-accredited programs is typically between 6 and 8 years. Accredited programs use a modified process for program review identified in the program review document as Pathway 2, with a review cycle closely aligned with the external accrediting schedule. Findings of every program review, including any recommendations, are reported to UWAC for consideration and discussion. Easily implemented recommendations are acted upon immediately by the responsible administrator. Substantive recommendations with major budget implications emerging from program review are placed in priority order with other quality improvement recommendations arising from other UWAC assessment activities and are forwarded to the President's Cabinet. In this manner, program review results and subsequent recommendations can guide resource allocation during the budget development cycle and influence decision-making at the University level. UWAC also schedules a follow-up for each program based on any recommendations and the action plan timeline developed by the program and approved by the SVPAA.

Discipline-specific accreditation

As a health sciences university, 19 ATSU programs undergo regularly scheduled professional accreditation review by a discipline-specific external agency. Since the process and goals of external accreditations are strongly similar to the program review process, ATSU's accredited programs submit discipline-specific accreditation self-study documents, along with any additional narrative and evidence necessary to address program review objectives not covered in the accreditation self-study document, such as the core professional attributes. Accredited programs also share findings of the accreditation review with UWAC-A in the program review process. It should be noted the SVPAA, dean, and program chair review accreditation outcomes immediately upon receipt, with the intent to address any accreditation findings.

Course evaluation core instrument

All courses across the University are subject to routine student evaluation. Nine core items in the student evaluations are identical regardless of discipline. Results for the nine core evaluation items are collected and evaluated by programs, colleges and schools for all courses at the end of each term. Results are also aggregated into a university-level report for consideration by the deans, SVPAA, and UWAC-A and UWAC.

Assessments of Student Learning

University level – core professional attributes

As a participant in the HLC Assessment Academy, the University Quality Initiative team embarked on a “bottoms-up” project to identify, embed, strengthen, and assess a set of important attributes found in all ATSU graduates regardless of the discipline studied. Emblematic of ATSU’s mission and values, the core professional attributes emerged as a set of five cross-curricular meta-skills inherent to all ATSU graduates; attributes deeply desirable in the health-care professions. These CPAs enable ATSU graduates to adapt and apply discipline-specific knowledge and skills to varying situations, enhancing competence and improving outcomes across all aspects of healthcare professionals’ roles. ATSU’s core professional attributes are *critical thinking, interpersonal skills, cultural proficiency, interprofessional collaboration, and social responsibility*. Program goals are mapped for alignment with the core professional attributes, and course syllabi identify alignment of course objectives with any of the attributes, as well. Mapping is conducted using assessment software to identify gaps and track measurements and outcomes. Outcomes surveys administered at program completion ask graduates to rate how well prepared they are in each of the five CPAs. Similarly, survey items inquiring about preparation in the CPAs are included in periodic alumni surveys. Results of direct and indirect assessments are shared with UWAC-A as part of its review of strategic plan measurement results.

College/School level – board and/or licensing examinations

As a health sciences university, the majority of graduates of the clinical programs must pass licensing and/or board examinations. Student performance on these external measures are tracked by individual programs/colleges/schools and UWAC, as the licensing/board examination results are reviewed as part of the deans’ annual reports, the program review process, and are one of the measures used to assess progress on strategic plan objectives.

Program level – discipline-specific knowledge/skills

Assessment of student learning in each discipline is the responsibility of the faculty. A wide array of assessment methods are employed including but not limited to: written exams, reflection and research papers, objective simulated clinical examinations, case presentations, standardized patients, laboratory examinations, and clinical performance evaluations. Colleges/schools track learning outcomes and make needed curricular changes through respective assessment and/or curriculum committees. Curricular changes are included in the annual dean’s report to the SVPAA.

Assessment Support: Office of Assessment and Accreditation

With a focus on continuous quality improvement guided by evidence, the Office of Assessment and Accreditation works to advance ATSU’s mission as a learning-centered university by providing facilitation, support, and leadership for assessment endeavors and University-wide Assessment Committee (UWAC) activities, program reviews, and accreditations across the University.

Reviewed and ratified by UWAC 02-08-2018