Institutional Outcomes Assessment Procedures and Guidelines

I.   Purpose

The purpose of this document and the guidelines within are to provide summary information related to the execution of the outcomes assessment function throughout the institution. The information presented is intended to assist faculty, staff, and administrators in understanding the processes, including timelines and documentation, and to ensure compliance with university policy and accreditation standards.

To ensure that all programs operate within a manner consistent with its mission, Athens State University maintains an internal evaluation system, where on-going assessment of student learning, student services, and administrative support provides the foundation for continuous improvement. Therefore, the process of outcomes assessment includes both program and co-curricular (support services) elements. Outcomes Assessment constitutes a primary input to the overall strategic planning and budgeting process.

II.   Fundamentals of Outcomes Assessment

Outcomes Assessment, as the term is used at Athens State University, refers to the systematic process of gathering, interpreting, and acting upon data related to student learning and administrative performance of all academic and non-academic support services for the purpose of continuous improvement. The process is ongoing, adaptive and participatory; it constitutes the foundation upon which program decisions are made. Outcomes Assessment is neither a review of faculty or staff performance nor an end in itself, but rather one of many evaluative mechanisms that helps the University effect change.

The assessment process at Athens State University focuses on answering these fundamental questions:

- How does each unit contribute to the University's mission?
- What should students know or be able to do upon completing a course of study?

- How well are students learning and how can both learning and curriculum be improved?
- What instruments and benchmarks will be used to evaluate student learning?
- How successful are alumni in their professional endeavors?
- How can the overall institutional environment be enhanced to optimize the educational experience of all stakeholders?

The University subscribes to the principle that individual academic and administrative support offices are best suited to determine how to evaluate student learning and operational performance and how to use assessment results for improvement. Therefore, the process follows a coordinated and systematic, though decentralized approach with specific units responsible for assessing specific academic and support programs. All support service units report findings annually to the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment.

III.   **Guiding Principles of Outcomes Assessment**

Outcome Assessment at Athens State University is a goal-directed process focused on quality assurance and continuous improvement of teaching, learning, and operational performance guided by the following principles:

- Assessment procedures should encourage improvement and not simply measure it.
- Assessment will be clearly and appropriately aligned with outcomes and should optimally include both direct and indirect methods of evaluation.
- Assessment requirements should be fiscally responsible and should not impose unnecessary time-consuming burdens.
- Assessment findings are to be viewed positively as an opportunity for improvement and are not intended as the basis for punitive decisions of any kind against students, faculty, or staff.
- Faculty and staff leadership, commitment, and collaboration are vital to a sound and effective assessment process.
- Data collected through assessment should be governed by data quality standards and by codes of ethics relating to research practices of human subjects and privacy laws.

- Open communication and discussion of assessment findings among faculty, staff, and senior administrators is vital to the enhancement of institutional effectiveness.

IV.   Assessment Glossary (Selected Terms)

Action Plan (AP): - Course of action planned and agreed upon by faculty/staff as a result of assessment findings. It indicates the specific changes that a given program/unit plans to implement in the next cycle based on assessment results. The Action Plan is a part of the Annual Assessment Report (AAR). Each program submits its Action Plan by October 31st.

Annual Assessment Plan (AAP): Required document that sets the priorities for assessing program outcomes and delineates the methodology and standards upon which performance will be measured. Each program submits its AAP (for the next academic year) by April 15th

Annual Assessment Report (AAR): Required document that reports the outcome assessment findings measured against expected performance and the consequent actions that the program will take based on those findings. Each program submits its AAR by October 31st.

University Assessment Database: The web-based database that supports the assessment process. It features a security system that allows for different levels of user roles, a tracking mechanism that stores and links documents to organizations and processes   and consolidates the AAP, AAR, and AP. The University Assessment Database handles all accreditation-related activities.

Consolidated Annual Assessment Plan (CAAP): The consolidation of the AAP/AAR/AP at the end of the assessment cycle to present a complete and logical view of outcomes assessment activities and the actions taken by individual programs and organizations to effect continuous improvement.

V.   Assessment Resources

The Office of Institutional Research and Assessment   provides additional resources to facilitate the conduct of assessment activities.   These resources can be found here: www.athens.edu/iras/outcome-assessment/
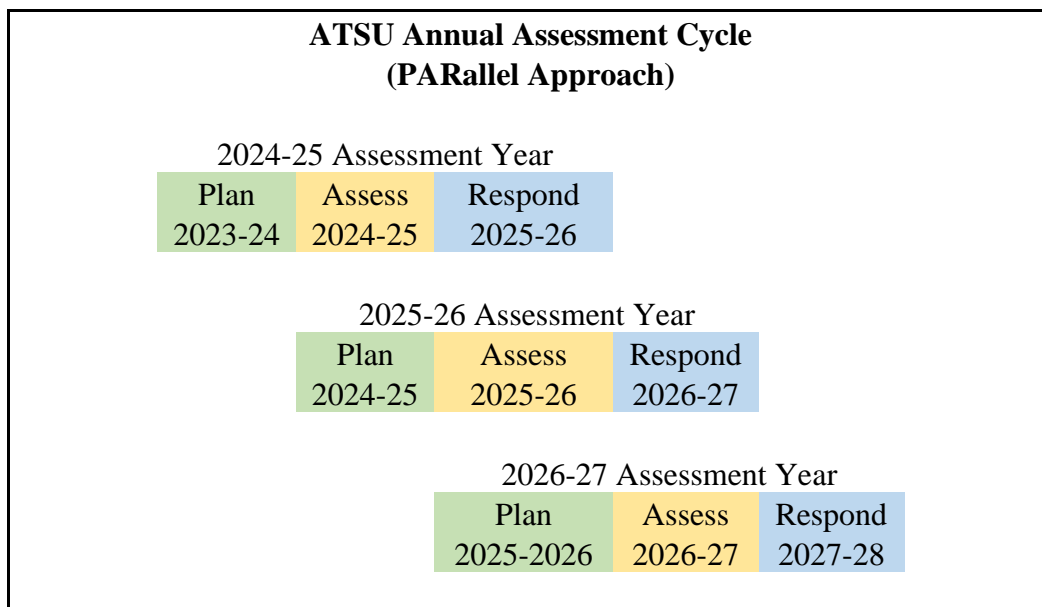- Athens State University Outcomes Assessment System

- Assessment Glossary of Terms
- AAP/AAR/AP Instructions and Guidelines
- University Assessment Database Training
- Institutional Effectiveness Workshop Presentations
- Annual Use of Results Summary

VI. Outcomes Assessment Process

Athens State University's Outcomes Assessment follows a parallel approach where programs and organizational units formally plan their assessment activities for the next academic year, assess student learning and administrative performance by collecting data throughout the academic year, and respond to the data by creating annual assessment reports and any necessary action plans. All assessment activities are documented through the University Assessment Database, administered by the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA)

ATSU Annual Assessment Cycle
(PARallel Approach)

2024-25 Assessment Year

Plan	Assess	Respond
2023-24	2024-25	2025-26

2025-26 Assessment Year

Plan	Assess	Respond
2024-25	2025-26	2026-27

2026-27 Assessment Year

Plan	Assess	Respond
2025-2026	2026-27	2027-28

The process consists of three steps or phases:

- **Phase I (Plan)**: **Development of the Annual Assessment Plan (AAP)** for each academic program and support service unit using standardized format that contains the following components: Mission Statement; Learning or Success Outcomes; Measures; (Course alignment, if applicable); Targets; Measurement and Target Descriptions; and Use of Assessment Findings for Continuous Improvement.

    Submission Deadline: **April 15** (AAP in the University Assessment Database). All assessment instruments and related documentation sent to OIRA for proper upload in the University Assessment Database.

- **Phase II (Assess): Implementation of AAP** (start of next academic year) and **data collection and analysis** (throughout the academic year--August through July).

- **Phase III (Respond): Respond to assessment data, submit the <u>Annual Assessment Report (AAR)</u>** and **<u>Action Plan (AP)</u>** for each academic program and administrative unit. The AAR contains the following components:

    1. A narrative statement that summarizes assessment findings, and determination of achievement level (target met, target partially met, target not met, or excepted).
    2. Any action plan that documents the actions that a unit will take following review of its assessment findings. Each academic program or administrative unit will submit an action plan each year. If a target is not met, the action plan will be used to work toward improvement. If all targets are met, the action plan will be aspirational.

    Submission Deadline: **October 31** (results from AY ended on the previous July)

    3. To complete the process, the Executive Assessment Committee will, each year, compile a summary report that will explain the institution's use of results.

    The AAP, AAR and AP are entered in the University Assessment Database by each designated program faculty member or administrative unit officer.

VII.   Roles and Responsibilities throughout the Outcomes Assessment Process

Pursuant to the Institutional Outcomes Assessment Policy, Athens State University requires that all academic and support programs conduct annual outcomes assessment. Each program unit is required to have an Annual Assessment Plan (AAP) and Annual Assessment Report (AAR) on file in the University Assessment Database. Assessment instruments and related documentation at the department and/or administrative unit level must be identified and submitted to OIRA for inventory and coding. All assessment documentation is stored in the University Assessment Database.

Executive Assessment Committee (EAC): Pursuant to institutional policy, the role of the EAC is to provide oversight and expert assistance with campus-wide assessment activities and coordinate planning and reporting deadlines.

Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA): OIRA's role is to coordinate, validate, and document assessment activities taking place at the unit level, to provide technical assistance and support in the development and formulation of assessment methodology, as well as to conduct surveys and studies and provide data of institutional scope. OIRA oversees the University Assessment Database, a secured, centrally maintained electronic master database of outcome assessment information. Upon submission of all assessment documentation by academic programs and administrative units, and in coordination with the EAC, OIRA reviews assessment plans and reports for compliance.

Faculty (Learning Outcomes)
In conjunction with guidelines published by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, the University requires faculty to establish student learning outcomes for all degree programs and develop an AAP for evaluating the extent to which students are achieving the objectives. The faculty in all programs must review their goals and assessment plans every year in conjunction with the catalog cycle and must report annual assessment findings (AAR) and resulting action plans (AP) to Division Heads.

Assistant Deans and Division Heads (Learning Outcomes)

Assistant College Deans and Division Heads must maintain an appropriate system for managing assessment efforts at both the college and program level. Such a system must ensure that assessment plans are developed, filed in the University Assessment Database, and carried out; that results are documented and shared with the faculty for potential action; and that decisions based on assessment data are documented in each one of the units' annual assessment reports. College Assistant Deans or Division Heads, at their discretion, must designate a program faculty member responsible for assessment in their respective academic program(s) including entering the AAP, AAR, and AP in the University Assessment Database.

College Assistant Deans must also designate an Assessment Coordinator for the college to serve on the Executive Assessment Committee. This person is responsible for coordinating all assessment activities within his/her respective college.

Responsibilities for the assessment of program-operational objectives/outcomes (management of academic programs) rely mostly on the College Assistant Deans and the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs and Student Services in consultation with the faculty as appropriate.

Vice Presidents and Heads of Administrative Service Support Units (Program-Operational Outcomes)

Vice Presidents must maintain an appropriate system for managing the overall assessment efforts for all pertinent administrative units/services under their authority. Such a system must ensure that assessment plans are developed, filed in the University Assessment Database, and carried out; that results are documented and shared with the respective staff for potential action; and that decisions based on assessment data are documented in each one of the units' annual assessment reports.

Each Vice President, at his/her discretion, must designate a staff member in each of the administrative units under his/her authority to serve as their Administrative Assessment Point of Contact for his/her respective unit. This person is responsible for entering into the University Assessment Database all AAPs, AARs, and APs for his/her unit and for the routing of all related documents to OIRA. In addition, each VP must also recommend to the Provost

an Assessment Coordinator to serve on the Executive Assessment Committee. This person is responsible for coordinating all assessment activities from all areas under the respective VP's authority.

Heads of administrative units (or VPs as appropriate) must maintain an appropriate system for managing unit assessment efforts. These officials review and approve their unit's AAP, AAR, and AP and submit to the respective Vice President who reviews and approves. Vice Presidents and Unit Heads may choose to delegate approval authority at their respective level.