Peer Review Q&A

When does the peer review process occur?

The peer review process at Midwestern State University occurs during December 1 and February 1 each year.

What happens during the peer review process?

Members of the University Assessment Committee are assigned various academic and administrative plans to read over and provide feedback to. Specific aspects are looked at in regards to compliance, but it also allows the reviewer to see the program's/division's commitment to continuous improvement. If you are a faculty member, you will only peer review academic plans. This is the same for staff members, who only peer review administrative plans.

What are the expectations for a peer reviewer?

Peer reviewers should take time to thoroughly read over each plan they are assigned. There is a peer review form for academic plans, and a separate one for administrative plans. These forms ask you to provide feedback for each section separately. Each section has multiple choice questions that ask you to select yes, no, or somewhat for whether or not the assessment plan had that component. There is also a spot for comments under each section. This section is particularly important, and only a few peer reviewers each year take the time to fill in comments. Those who get this feedback really appreciate the detailed comments, and often times utilize your suggestions and comments to help improve upon their assessment process.

How many plans will I peer review?

Each peer reviewer will be assigned a maximum of four plans to peer review.

What about the assessment plans that don't have a peer reviewer assigned?

The Office on Institutional Effectiveness will provide feedback for every assessment plan. Each year we try to switch up which plans get peer reviewed or not since there are always a lot less reviewers compared to the number of assessment plans.

What should I look for in each section?

Mission Statement

The mission statement should be the official statement for that program or division. Usually, it can easily be found on their website.

Assessment Narrative

The narrative is a place for the program or division to tell their story. It is usually written as a one to two page summary that discusses not only how assessment plays a role in the department, but also how it is meaningful and being used to improve upon the learning/the services being provided. Key aspects to look for include:

- Process: What did the assessment process look like throughout the year?
- Results: What were some of the main themes and discoveries from the year?
- Challenges: What were some challenges the department faced during the year?
- Positives: What were some positives from the year?
- Collaboration: How did the department work together towards continuous improvement throughout the year?
- Reflections: What is there to reflect on from the year?

Student Learning Outcomes (SLO's)

These outcomes are used by academic programs, as well as those who work directly with students/who provide services to students. There should be a minimum of three outcomes. The outcomes should be specific and meaningful to the program, and they should describe what students will be able to demonstrate or know upon completion of a degree program. They generally start with *"Students will be able to…"* and are followed by **action verbs**. The outcomes should also be measurable and realistic as well. Some examples include:

1) *Students will be able to* **demonstrate** good resume writing skills upon completion of a meeting with someone at the Career Management Center.

2) *Students will be able to* **describe and analyze** the strengths and limitations of various research designs.

3) *Students in the B.A. in Spanish program will be able to* **describe** the cultural trends, values, ideas, and different perspectives as manifested through art, literature, and music in Spanish speaking Latin America.

4) *Students in the B.S. in Mathematics program will be able to* **demonstrate** the ability to construct rigorous logical arguments by employing a variety of proof techniques.

Functional Outcomes

These outcomes are generally used by administrative departments and divisions that do not work directly with students. Just like student learning outcomes, there should be a minimum of three. If it is a department that does work directly with students, it's okay if they have a mix of both types of outcomes (student learning outcomes and functional outcomes). Academic programs can include functional outcomes in their assessment plan, but they must be in addition to, and not in place of, the three required SLO's. The outcomes should describe the kind of services that they strive to offer, as well as the purpose of these services. They generally start with *who the outcomes are centered around*, and are followed by **action verbs.** The outcomes should also be measurable and realistic as well. Some examples include:

1) *The Print Shop will* **increase** the amount of money generated in shredding services.

2) *MSU Texas employees who participated in HR's new employee orientation will* **rank** the training as excellent.

3) *The number of students enrolling in the B.S. in Mechanical Engineering program will* **increase** in the year 2020-2021.

4) *The Office of Public Information and Marketing will* **distribute** a specific number of copies of Sunwatcher magazine for each issue that is printed.

Measures

Student learning outcomes (SLO's) need a minimum of two measures for each outcome, including one direct measure and one indirect measure. Direct measures are where students demonstrate the learned knowledge/skills, and indirect measures are where students reflect on the learning. Functional outcomes are not required to have two measures for each outcome, but it is highly recommended. When looking at measures, the 4 W's help:

- Who: Who was the population being measured?
- What: What tool was used to measure?
- When: When was this measure being done?
- Where: Where was this measure being done?

For an academic example, say the B.A. in Psychology program has an outcome regarding demonstration of a particular skill.

- Who: Students who are enrolled in a specific class. (The name/number of the class would be included.)
- What: An exam given in a specific class. (The name/number of the class would be included.)
- When: The semester and year would be given, or even a specific month.
- Where: Grades from the exam will be entered in and stored to D2L after they are graded by professors.

For an administrative example, say the Office of Institutional Effectiveness has an outcome regarding the utilization of assessment across campus.

- Who: The number of academic and administrative assessment plans.
- What: An Excel spreadsheet is used to track the number of plans that were completed.
- When: The Excel sheet is updated before the deadline for submission, as well as after the deadline for submission, on Weave. The deadline is November 1, 2020.
- Where: Assessment plans are submitted on Weave, and the Assessment Specialist has this spreadsheet in a specific folder on her computer.

Targets

Targets describe the desirable level of performance for students, or the desirable level of performance for specific tasks and programs. Using specific numbers and/or percentages is ideal. Without a specific amount it is hard to determine whether or not a target was met.

Findings

Findings describe what the data shows, and whether or not a target was met. Findings should include specific numbers and/or percentages when possible. If data is entered, the dropdown menu should be selected as met, not met, exceeded, or not reported this period. We ask that the option of partially met is not used. If a target has been consistently met or exceeded for multiple years in a row, it is recommended to increase the target to a higher goal, or possibly change the outcome the following year if no more improvements are deemed necessary.

If data is entered, it should be stated in clear and simple terms where someone outside of that program or division would understand what is written. The information entered should also directly relate to the specific outcome it is under. If no data was collected, there should be an explanation as to why.

Action Plans

Action plans are required for any targets that were not met, and if multiple targets were not met then each one should have a separate action plan. Action plans describe detailed steps that will be taken to improve the program or services being provided, as well as when this action will be implemented. Each action plan section has action items, which is where these steps can be listed. If a target has not been met for the first time, it's okay to continue monitoring that for another year. However, anything that has not been met two years in a row or more should be more closely looked at. If the assessment plan has action plans from the previous year, they should be updated to reflect if they are completed or still in progress.

Attachments

Attachments are not required, but they do a great job at supplementing the assessment process and the data being gathered. These can include, but are not limited to:

- Examples of data that was collected
- Rubrics
- Student work
- Meeting minutes
- Findings

The peer review matrix and comments from the Office of Institutional Effectiveness from the prior year should both be attached each year. However, sometimes people who have editing access to assessment plans delete them by mistake. If either of these are missing, please contact Stephanie Mescher, Assessment Specialist at stephanie.mescher@msutexas.edu.

How will I know if they implemented feedback and suggestions from the previous year?

Each assessment plan should have the previous year's peer review form attached, as well as comments from the Office of Institutional Effectiveness. This will allow the peer reviewer to see what feedback and suggestions were given, while simultaneously looking at the assessment plan. Around March each year the plans open for the next cycle to be reported on, and the assessment plans are rolled over with data from the previous year, or created with a blank template, depending on what each program/department wants. During this time we also upload the peer review form and our comments from the previous year to each plan.

Please contact Dr. Eboneigh Harris, Director of Planning and Assessment, at eboneigh.harris@msutexas.edu or x4567, or contact Stephanie Mescher, Assessment Specialist, at stephanie.mescher@msutexas.edu or x4342 for any questions or concerns.