

# Assessment Handbook

Compiled by Pat Cuchens and Ami Möller

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University of Houston-Clear Lake  
Office of Institutional Effectiveness  
2016

# Contents

Introduction.....	1
Expected Learning Outcomes for This Handbook .....	1
Annual Assessment at UHCL.....	1
Develop Outcomes .....	2
Design Assessment Plan .....	3
Methods.....	3
Criteria for Success .....	3
Implement Plan and Collect Information .....	4
Interpret and Analyze Information.....	4
Modify and Improve .....	5
Assessment Timeline .....	6
OIE Assessment Contacts .....	7
Assessment Resources.....	7
The Basics .....	7
Developing Outcomes .....	7
Methods and Measures.....	7
Compiling Results and Use of Results.....	8
The Meta-Assessment Process.....	8
References .....	9
Appendix A UHCL Learning Outcomes .....	10
Appendix B UHCL Strategic Goals.....	11
Appendix C Glossary of Common Terms .....	12

# Introduction

This handbook is provided to assist faculty and staff in the development of strong assessment plans. It includes a framework for planning, conducting, and reporting annual assessment efforts, as well as useful resources for each step along the way.

## Expected Learning Outcomes for This Handbook

After reading this handbook, you should be able to:

- Define the terminology of UHCL’s assessment efforts
- Develop appropriate learning and program outcomes relative to specific goals of an academic program or operational/administrative goals of a support unit
- Devise various methods to measure progress toward the intended goal
- Establish quantifiable criteria for success directly related to outcomes and methods
- Explain the importance of documenting results and implementing changes in an effort to improve

## What Is Assessment?

Assessment is the systematic collection and examination of information to determine progress toward a specific goal. The process of assessment fuels efforts for continuous improvement, as academic programs and support units use assessment findings to determine whether intended outcomes were achieved and how best to improve future performance.

Palomba and Banta (1999) note that assessment is a “process that involves reviewing and reflecting on practice as academics have always done, but in a more planned and careful way” (p. 1). Since assessment is regularly occurring in higher education (Suskie, 2009), UHCL’s annual assessment process provides a university-wide standard to ensure that the assessing being done is tracked and documented in a formal manner.

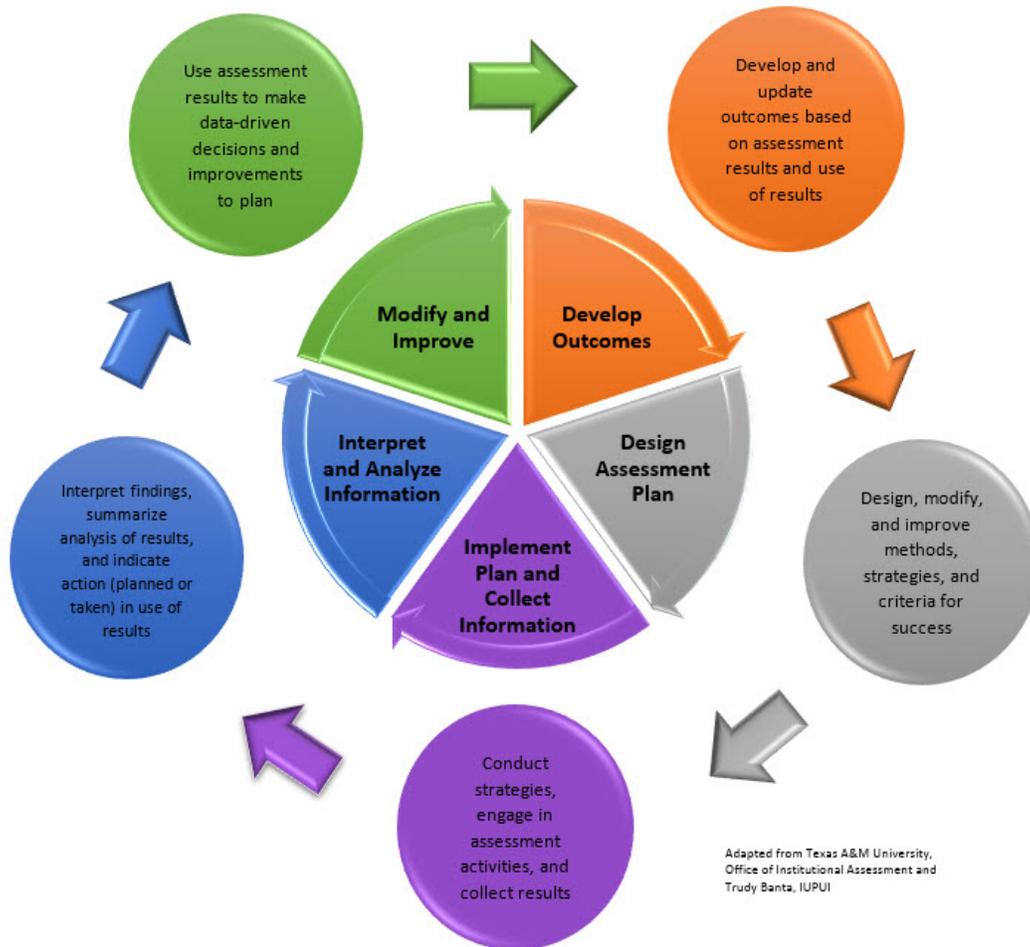
## Why Do We Perform Assessment?

Assessment is conducted to ensure that we are constantly focused on improving the learning experience. It is something academic programs must do to improve student learning and establish a strong scholastic reputation. It is something support units must do to promote reliable services and efficient business practices. While assessment is required by accrediting bodies, it is also intrinsic to the nature of higher education – an essential tool that affords us the ability to evaluate how we are doing and what we can do to improve.

# Annual Assessment at UHCL

As shown below, the assessment cycle consists of five phases – each of which feeds into the next to create an ongoing process of development, evaluation, and improvement.

## Assessment Cycle



### Develop Outcomes

The Develop Outcomes phase of the assessment cycle is the time to write new outcomes or modify and update existing outcomes. There are two types of outcomes in assessment plans: learning outcomes and program outcomes. Learning outcomes describe the knowledge, skills, or dispositions students are expected to demonstrate upon completion of a program. These outcomes focus on student behavior, are measurable, and clearly describe the expectation of student learning, as seen in these examples:

- Students will be able to critically analyze and evaluate current research.
- Students will be able to: 1) Gather and analyze relevant information; 2) Present relevant information in oral and/written form; 3) Discuss evaluations, implications and/or conclusions, 4) Defend evaluations, implications and/or conclusions.
- Students will be able to clearly convey technical material through both formal written papers and oral presentation.

Learning outcomes derive from the mission and goals of an academic or a co-curricular program. There should be a direct link between a program's educational objectives and the learning outcomes included on

the program's assessment plan. This link is documented by a process called "mapping to a goal set" where a learning outcome is mapped to one or more University Learning Outcome, or ULO (see Appendix A). Program outcomes describe specific programmatic, operations, and administrative objectives that a program or support unit intends to accomplish. These outcomes are relevant to business practices, general operations, or specific initiatives, such as these examples:

- Identify processes to enhance the timely production of state reporting.
- Redesign marketing materials for transfer students in an effort to increase transfer enrollment.
- Provide professional development opportunities to tutoring center's student workers.

Since program outcomes focus on operational and/or organizational aspects of program or unit, they should link directly to the university's strategic plan. This link is documented by a process called "mapping to a goal set" where a program outcome is mapped to at least one University Strategic Goal, or USG (see Appendix B).

### Design Assessment Plan

The Design Assessment Plan phase involves the creation, modification, or improvement of assessment methods and the defining of an appropriate criteria for success.

#### *Methods*

Methods are tools and techniques used to determine the extent to which an outcome was achieved. When determining what methods to use, choose assessment tools that accurately measure what you are intending to measure. Using a method with high validity enables you to draw reasonable inferences from the subsequent results. Best practices recommend using a combination of direct and indirect measures when assessing an outcome, in order to obtain a multidimensional picture of performance (Suskie, 2009; Banta et al., 1996). The following are examples of strong methods:

- Students will successfully complete a technical writing project in which they demonstrate writing skills, interpretation of research and background data, critical thinking, and logical argument. The project will be reviewed and scored by program faculty using the standard AAC&U Value Rubric for Written Communication.
- Individuals taking a campus tour will complete a feedback survey (with Likert scale questions and open-ended questions) that asks about their satisfaction with the information presented by student tour guides.
- Students will be evaluated by internship supervisors using the Student Evaluation Form at four different times while in program. The areas for rating are: 1. Theoretical Perspectives - 3 questions ranking poor 1 - 5 exceptional. 2. Observation Style - 5 questions ranking poor 1 - 5 exceptional. 3. Supervision - 3 questions ranking poor 1 - 5 exceptional. 4. Professional Issues - 6 questions ranking poor 1 - 5 exceptional.

#### *Criteria for Success*

A criteria for success statement describes the desired performance level for an outcome; it is the target or benchmark at which you judge whether an outcome was achieved. Criteria for success statements express in specific and measurable or observable terms the target, such as in the following examples:

- The desired level of performance is 80% of students will score between 3.5 and 4.0 or better on the 6 criteria [as described in Methods section].

- All students will have a minimum score of 3 on 50% of questions in each of the four categories of learning on the Student Evaluation Form.
- The mean score on the project will be at least 3.0 in all six areas of evaluation: organization, style/tone, mechanics, critical thinking, research literacy, and use of visuals. Seventy-five percent of students will achieve this target score on their project.

### Implement Plan and Collect Information

During the Implement Plan and Collect Information phase of the cycle, academic programs and support units implement the strategies intended to help achieve an outcome. Thereafter, academic programs and support units engage in assessment activities – collecting data as indicated during the creation of the outcomes and related assessment methods.

Depending on an outcome and its related methods, gathering information may include activities such as collecting actual student assignments, scoring these assignments, and tracking the scores; or holding scheduled meetings and retaining copies of all meeting sign-in sheets and minutes for future compilation or analysis. Implementing strategies and collecting data takes time. This phase of the cycle can be lengthy, especially when you are working toward long-term goals and gathering enough data to examine the information for possible multi-cycle trends. However you should work toward fully implementing the plan and collecting as much information as necessary to determine the level of performance reached.

### Interpret and Analyze Information

The Interpret and Analyze Information phase is devoted to evaluating and interpreting the collected data and then analyzing the effects on the outcomes. You should clearly document all aspects of this work within the assessment plan. While the initial analysis and documentation of results may start off being completed by a designated individual or small group, involving others will ensure greater improvement (Banta et al., 1996). For learning outcomes, you should disseminate all results and analysis to faculty directly involved in the course/program to which the outcome is tied. Sharing this information provides collaborative discourse among instructors and is the first step in working to improve student learning. It is equally important to share program outcome results with faculty and/or support unit staff, so they are informed and can participate in developing an action plan and incorporating the relevant aspects into their work.

During this phase of the assessment cycle, academic programs and support units document specific results in the annual assessment plan. Documenting this information is vital and can serve as a strong record in future funding requests, or show proof of exceeding expectations for future inquires. Results should include strengths and weaknesses and identify specific areas for improvement, such as in the following examples:

- Internship supervisors and 2-year graduates rated knowledge and training in ethics/professional practice and therapy in the “Strong” range or above (4.4/3.9 and 4.3/4.0, respectively on a 5-point scale). Regarding knowledge and training in cognitive-behavioral therapy, group therapy and assessment of abilities, ratings were in the range of “Strong” or above for both groups (4.2/3.9, 4.4/3.7 and 4.0/4.4 on the 5-point scale). For assessment of personality, there was a slightly lower, though non-significant, average rating of 3.9 across the two groups, which is attributable mostly to a lower rating by the 2-year graduate group of 3.6 compared to 4.2 for the internship supervisor group. (Source: Clinical Psychology MA)
- There were 328 Excellent scores and 293 Acceptable scores for a total of 621 scores. 646 total assessments were conducted. This is a 96.1 percent passing rate. (Source: Teacher Education, Interdisciplinary Studies)

- Educational outreach was completed between the Health Services department and community agencies to educate students and employees on Heart and HIV awareness. The Health Services department collaborated and partnered with Walgreens to do BP clinics and with an outside agency to educate the UHCL students/employees concerning HIV. The survey questionnaire had a 90% completion rate. Health Services clinic appointments increased from 2013 to 2014. See attached charts. (Source: Health Education/Health Services)

Now is the time to “close the loop” by including a detailed description of the use of results – a crucial aspect of the entire assessment process, considering the purpose of assessment is to make changes based on assessment findings that will lead to continuous improvement. Use of results should be thorough and include specific actions, continued, planned, or taken, to improve performance, such as the following examples:

- To increase the percentage of students who master organizational skills and attention to detail, the program added a portfolio workshop. To meet the needs of students who desire to learn more about broadcast journalism, we added a video component to the newspaper publication class (the U Cast) and a new course in video editing and production. (Source: Communication BA)
- The results indicate the efficacy of our efforts. Hence faculty will continue to emphasize the thematic and chronological context of historical issues in their teaching. They will model for students how to gain historical insight through understanding the setting of the issues under consideration, and design assignments and classroom exercises that lead students to ground people, events, and ideas in their historical contexts. Further improvement may be realized by implementing lower division classes that introduce future history majors how to contextualize historical issues. In addition, the history program will also continue to support extracurricular activities that promote student awareness of historical context, especially the History Club and the UHCL Film and Speaker Series. Both organizations have proven critical to supplementing classroom instruction by enriching the student's engagement with history. (Source: History BS)
- The new ability for students to pay their tuition and fees via E-Check has greatly helped those students who normally have to come to campus with a physical check to pay. Also, since UHCL added a credit card processing fee for all payments made via credit card for tuition and fees, the option to pay via E-Check allows students to still pay online and not incur the credit card processing fee. By adding a check box authorization in payment plans, we have greatly cut down on the confusion the students had prior to this functionality on how to accept payment plans. Also, to follow up from FY13, the functionality to not allow payment plans for students with anticipated aid was implemented and we have found both students and staff to be much happier with not having to either pay an unnecessary fee or reverse a payment plan that should not have been added. During the next assessment period we will be looking at ways to improve our customer service, specifically with training, and ways to improve our current processes. (Source: Cashier/Collections)

## Modify and Improve

During the Modify and Improve phase of the cycle, academic programs and support units put into action the changes for improvement decided upon during the Interpret and Evaluate Information phase and documented in the use of results portion of an assessment plan. This phase allows for the formation of data-driven decisions, based on the documented results from multiple historical assessment plans. It also leads straight into the following phase, Develop Outcomes, when modifications, adjustments, or updates to an outcome are made so the plan continues to be relevant, appropriate, and useful.

This phase of the cycle is devoted to taking the knowledge gained during the phases leading up to this point – collecting and measuring through various methods, analyzing the results, using those results to create action plans – and moving forward with continuous improvement. And putting what you learned during the assessment process into practice is what annual assessment is all about!

### Assessment Timeline

The following table displays the timeline for annual assessment plans and reports. Within the assessment process, there are three years being acted upon: Year 1 (Y1) is the academic year that just ended; Year 2 (Y2) is the current year, in which one reports results for the previous academic year; and Year 3 (Y3) is the upcoming year, for which an academic program or support unit is submitting a funding request. For more information on the funding request dates, please visit the Budget Office’s website.

August-October 30	<p><b>Academic Programs/Support Units</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct assessment on past year’s (Y1) outcomes</li> <li>• Interpret findings, summarize results, and develop action plan</li> <li>• Enter <i>Results</i> and <i>Use of Results</i> in assessment system (Y1)</li> <li>• Use assessment results to improve plan</li> <li>• Update/modify <i>Outcomes</i> and <i>Methods/Criteria for Success</i> for current year (Y2)</li> <li>• Update/modify <i>Outcomes</i> and <i>Methods/Criteria for Success</i> for Success for upcoming funding year (Y3)</li> </ul>
October 31	<p><b>Academic Programs/Support Units</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Submit completed assessment plan (Y1) in assessment system. A completed plan includes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Results</i></li> <li>○ <i>Use of Results</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Initiate assessment plan for current year (Y2) and upcoming funding year (Y3). An initiated plan includes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Outcomes</i></li> <li>○ <i>Methods/Criteria for Success</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
November 1-30	<p><b>Office of Institutional Effectiveness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review Y1 and Y2 assessment plans using rubrics in assessment system</li> <li>• Work with plan owners to improve plans as needed to meet best practices and UHCL assessment standards.</li> </ul> <p><b>Academic Programs/Support Units</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revise Y1 and Y2 assessment plans as needed.</li> </ul>
December 15	<p><b>Academic Programs/Support Units</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Submit Funding Request Form to Dean/Division if new funding is needed for FY3 assessment plan. Date is set by Budget Office; see <a href="http://prtl.uhcl.edu/budget/planning-and-budget-cycle">http://prtl.uhcl.edu/budget/planning-and-budget-cycle</a> for details.</li> </ul>
January 15	<p><b>Office of Institutional Effectiveness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide Assessment Plan Review Reports to Deans/AVPs/Provost, and appropriate administrators, indicating overall status and evaluation of completed Y1 assessment plans and initiated Y2 plans.</li> </ul>

	<b>Schools/Divisions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Submit funding requests to components. Date is set by Budget Office; see <a href="http://prtl.uhcl.edu/budget/planning-and-budget-cycle">http://prtl.uhcl.edu/budget/planning-and-budget-cycle</a> for details.</li></ul>
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## OIE Assessment Contacts

Office of Institutional Effectiveness staff are available to provide guidance as you move through the assessment process. If you have questions or concerns, please contact:

Pat Cuchens, Executive Director of Planning and Assessment  
[cuchens@uhcl.edu](mailto:cuchens@uhcl.edu)  
281.283.3065

Cecelia Croft, Institutional Research Specialist  
[croft@uhcl.edu](mailto:croft@uhcl.edu)  
281.283.3046

## Assessment Resources

For assistance with any part of the assessment process, please visit the Office of Institutional Effectiveness website: [www.uhcl.edu/institutional-effectiveness](http://www.uhcl.edu/institutional-effectiveness). Under the Planning and Assessment section of the site you will find many useful resources, including:

### The Basics

- UHCL Assessment Cycle and Timeline
- UHCL University Learning Outcomes
- UHCL Strategic Goals
- UHCL Glossary of Common Terms
- Nine Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning

### Developing Outcomes

- Tips for Writing Learning Outcomes
- SLO Assessment Plan Worksheet
- PO Assessment Plan Worksheet
- Action Verbs for UHCL Learning Outcomes
- A Model of Learning Objectives and Blooms Web

### Methods and Measures

- Direct and Indirect Methods
- All About Rubrics
- AAC&U VALUE Rubrics

## Compiling Results and Use of Results

- Results and Use of Results: Questions to Ask
- Using Survey Results

## The Meta-Assessment Process

- Avoiding the Pitfalls of Assessment
- Assessment Plan Review Process
- Assessment Plan Rubric

## References

Banta, T. W., Lund, J. P., Black, K. E., & Oblander, F. W. (1996). *Assessment in Practice: Putting Principles to Work on College Campuses*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Paloma, C. A., & Banta, T. W. (1999). *Assessment Essentials: Planning, Implementing, and Improving Assessment in Higher Education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Suskie, L. (2009). *Assessing Student Learning: A Common Sense Guide*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

# Appendix A

## UHCL Learning Outcomes

Revised 8 FEB 2016

- A. Critical Thinking - The mastery of higher order thinking skills including quantitative and qualifying analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of information, argumentation, problem solving, innovation, inquiry, and creativity.
- B. Communication - The demonstration of effective written, oral, and visual expression including the use of such media as audio, video, text, and graphics.
- C. Empirical and Quantitative Skills - The demonstration of manipulation and analysis of numerical data or observable facts resulting in informed conclusions.
- D. Information Technology - The application of information technology to search for, access, retrieve, organize, interpret, and transfer information.
- E. Interpersonal Competence/Teamwork - The capacity to understand many points of view and to work responsibly and effectively with others in a variety of settings to support a shared purpose or goal.
- F. Ethical Citizenship/Personal Responsibility - The ability to connect choices, actions and consequences to ethical decision-making in person and professional societal contexts.
- G. Global Perspective/Social Responsibility - The capability to demonstrate awareness of local and global diversity, including intercultural competency, civic knowledge, the international economy, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national, and global communities.
- H. Other - Professional accreditation standards.

# Appendix B

## UHCL Strategic Goals

Revised 13 MAY 2010

1. Achieve academic excellence through the offering of high quality programs delivered by an outstanding faculty and staff in an environment supportive of teaching and research.
  - a. Recruit, develop, and retain high quality faculty and staff to enhance academic and research excellence and to accommodate enrollment growth.
  - b. Ensure compensation for faculty and staff is competitive relative to peer institutions.
  - c. Achieve and maintain nationally accredited programs and other forms of national recognition.
  - d. Increase the number of academic programs with international connections and perspectives.
  - e. Support increased levels of applied and basic research as well as creative activities
  
2. Provide a supportive student-centered campus environment focused on student access and success.
  - a. Achieve downward expansion.
  - b. Develop new academic programs and enhance existing programs to meet community and student needs.
  - c. Develop and deliver quality online and off-campus programs.
  - d. Increase student financial support, including scholarships.
  - e. Provide academic and support services to increase student enrollment and retention.
  - f. Develop the critical thinking, creative, quantitative, leadership and communication skills of our students.
  - g. Enhance and support student life including student government and organizations, recreation, housing, community service, leadership development, research and other activities.
  
3. Enhance a campus which is attractive, functional, safe and supportive of the university's mission; promote an environment for effective collaboration; and maintain fiscal responsibility.
  - a. Acquire and maintain an appropriate infrastructure, including property, facilities, and technology.
  - b. Ensure the physical safety and security of the campus.
  - c. Promote a collaborative university shared governance system which includes faculty, staff, students and administrators.
  - d. Support ethnic and gender diversity within the faculty, staff and student body.
  - e. Exercise prudent stewardship of human, financial, physical and environmental resources.
  
4. Build mutually beneficial partnerships through outreach activities for the benefit of faculty, staff, students, alumni and the community.
  - a. Develop and enhance partnerships with educational institutions, including school districts, community colleges and universities.
  - b. Develop and enhance collaborative education, research and training partnerships with businesses, governmental agencies and non-profit organizations.
  - c. Engage the university's alumni through professional development, social and university service opportunities.
  - d. Engage the community through life-long learning programs, the cultural arts and other activities.
  - e. Increase resources from the broader community in support of the university's mission.

# Appendix C

## Glossary of Common Terms

**AMS** stands for Accountability Management System and is a Taskstream product used to house assessment plan data for academic programs and support units.

**Academic Program** denotes a degree program (Bachelor, Master, Doctorate) offered by any of UHCL's schools.

**Assessment Cycle** is the cyclical process of continuous improvement, including five phases: develop outcomes, design assessment plan, implement plan and collect information, interpret and evaluate information, and modify and improve plan.

**Assessment Plan** is a blueprint that enables planned evaluation of the strategies used to obtain set outcomes based on specific quantitative or qualitative data collected and analyzed through defined methods.

**Assessment Timeline** details the period of time devoted to the assessment cycle. The timeline provides due dates for completed assessment plans and related items.

**Closing the Loop** refers to the process of using assessment results to determine plans to improve performance and putting those plans into action. Closing the loop occurs during the modify and improve phase of the assessment cycle.

**Co-curricular Program** indicates a unit (usually within the Student Services Division) that, due to the nature of the services provided, includes both learning outcomes and program outcomes in its assessment plan.

**Criteria for Success** expresses in specific and measurable/observable terms the *desired* performance level for a specific learning or program outcome.

**Curriculum Map** displays the alignment between course curriculum and learning outcomes. Courses or specific activities address a particular outcome at one of three levels: introduce, practice, or reinforce.

**Direct Measure** is an assessment tool based on primary evidence of student work, such as embedded questions in quizzes or an evaluation of an oral presentation.

**Editor** is an AMS user with edit permissions for his/her assigned assessment plans.

**Indirect Measure** is an assessment tool based on reflection/perception or secondary evidence, such as a student survey which collects respondents' thoughts about their ability to meet a specific requirement.

**LAT** stands for Learning Achievement Tools and is a Taskstream product used to assist faculty in the collection and assessing of student assignments, organization of field placement, and development of e-portfolios for assessment purposes.

**Learning Outcomes** directly relate the skills and knowledge students are expected to gain from a course, academic program, or co-curricular program and must align with UHCL University Learning Outcomes

(ULO). These outcomes are included in academic program assessment plans and may be included in the support unit plans of co-curricular offices, such as those within the Student Services Division.

**Methods** describe the tools and techniques used to determine the extent to which the outcomes are achieved. The methods must identify specific areas that need further improvement. Assessment methods can be direct, indirect, qualitative, or quantitative measures.

**Primary Contact** is an individual who serves as a plan's liaison with OIE. This individual is responsible for ensuring assessment plan data is entered into AMS on or before the annual deadline. A Primary Contact has edit access in AMS (for his/her assigned plans). For academic program assessment plans, this role is typically filled by the Program Coordinator. For unit plans, this role is typically filled by the Director.

**Program Outcomes** are focused on operational/administrative objectives of a department/office and align with UHCL Strategic Goals (USG). These outcomes are included in academic program plans and support unit plans.

**Qualitative Measure** is a method of inquiry focused on quality/characteristics where data is observed but not measured numerically, such as an open-ended questionnaire or exit interview.

**Quantitative Measure** is a method of inquiry focused on quantity where data is expressed and analyzed numerically, such as a five-point scale rubric.

**Reliability** indicates the degree to which an assessment method produces results that can be consistently replicated.

**Results** describe the findings on performance, as measured by the established methods/criteria for success, and identify specific areas for improvement.

**Reviewer** is an AMS user designated to review submitted assessment plans. Using a standard rubric, a reviewer conducts the annual evaluation of each completed plan in AMS. Reviewers include individuals at various levels within the institution – Program Chairs, Deans, AVPs, and OIE staff.

**Sample** is a smaller group within a larger population, chosen to serve as a representative set for the greater population during data analysis.

**Standing Requirements** include an established collection of learning and/or program outcomes, as well as curriculum maps developed by academic programs.

**Status Report** is an update of how much progress has been made in continuous improvement efforts, based on planned or taken action.

**Strategies** are specific approaches, tactics, and procedures implemented in the effort to meet or exceed the criteria for success for a learning or program outcome.

**Support Unit** denotes any department or office, including operational/administrative (such as Budget, Admissions, Development and Alumni Relations) and co-curricular (such as Student Success Center, Counseling Services, and Student Life).

**Use of Results** describe the specific actions (planned or taken) to improve performance based on determined results. For learning outcomes, this includes what an academic program intends to do with the knowledge gained from results by documenting specific adjustments to teaching, measures, or targets to increase student performance. For program outcomes, this includes what a program or unit plans to do with the knowledge gained from results by documenting specific changes to operational strategies or processes in an effort to improve performance.

**University Learning Outcome (ULO) Set** includes established metrics to which student learning outcomes are aligned. There are eight ULOs: Critical Thinking, Communication, Empirical and Quantitative Skills, Information Technology, Interpersonal Competence/Teamwork, Ethical Citizenship/Personal Responsibility, Global Perspective/Social Responsibility, and Other – Professional Accreditation Standards.

**University Strategic Goal (USG) Set** includes the four goals of UHCL's strategic plan. Within the annual assessment cycle, these goals serve as metrics to which program outcomes are aligned.

**Validity** indicates the degree to which an assessment tool measures the desired performance it was designed to measure, and allows for appropriate inferences to be drawn from the results.

**Viewer** is an AMS user with view-only permissions for his/her assigned assessment plans; a viewer cannot make changes/edits to a plan in AMS.