



Program & Institutional Student Learning Outcome  
Assessment Handbook

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## Assessment Cycle

To facilitate continual improvement of student learning, SUNY Potsdam has adopted a 4+1-year cycle of Program Student Learning Outcome (PSLO) and Institutional Student Learning Outcome (ISLO) assessment (see figure below). This cycle helps us comply with Middle States [Standard 5: Educational Effectiveness Assessment](#).

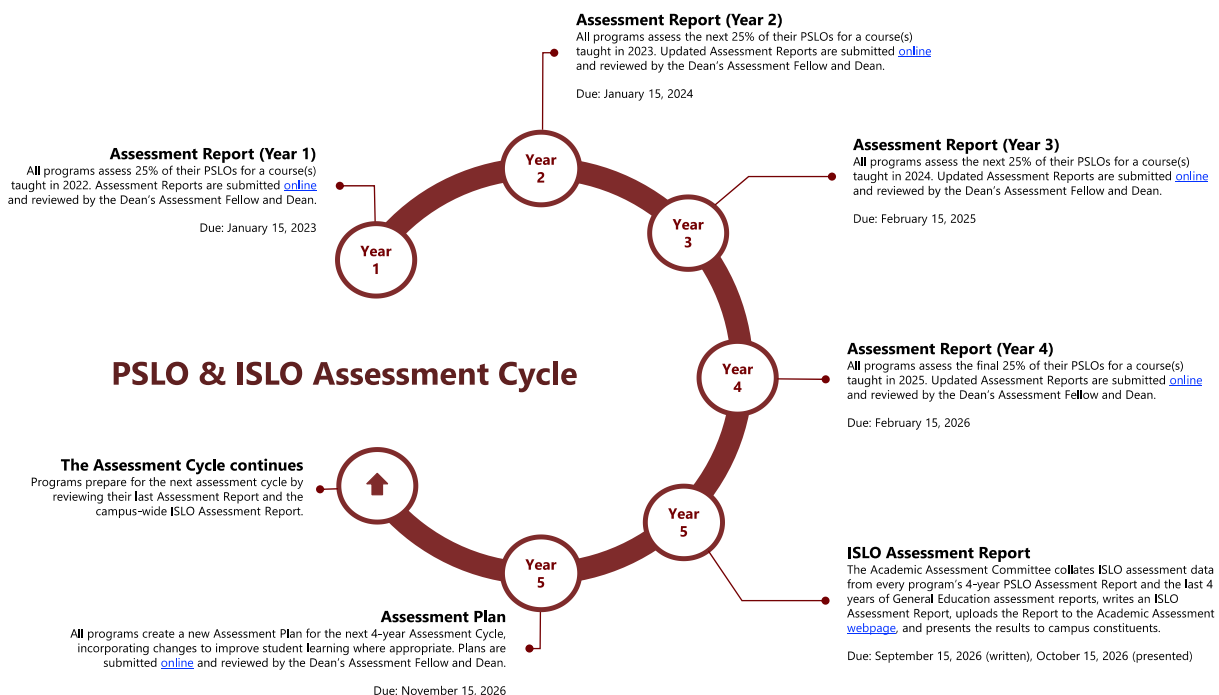
### First 4 years of the cycle:

All programs assess at least 1 (and ~25%) of their PSLOs each year<sup>1</sup>, according to their **Assessment Plan**, and write a **PSLO Assessment Report**. After 4 years, programs will have assessed all their PSLOs.

### Fifth year (+1) of the cycle:

In year 5, all programs assess their assessment and create a new **Assessment Plan** for the next 4-year Assessment Cycle, incorporating changes to improve student learning where appropriate.

Also in year 5, the Academic Assessment Committee<sup>2</sup> collates ISLO assessment data from PSLO Assessment Reports and General Education assessment reports and writes an **ISLO Assessment Report** describing the extent of student ISLO achievement and necessary changes to improve student learning.



<sup>1</sup> This is a minimum requirement. Programs can choose to assess more PSLOs each year if they wish.

<sup>2</sup> The Academic Assessment Committee is comprised of the Accreditation Liaison Officer, Dean's Assessment Fellow(s) from each school, Associate Dean of A&S, Assistant Dean of SOEPS, Director or Associate Director of General Education, and Director or Assistant Director of Institutional Effectiveness.

## Documents

### Assessment Plan

The **Assessment Plan** (template available [here](#)) provides a roadmap for a program's PSLO assessment over a 4-year cycle. It lists the program's SLOs; aligns them with SUNY Potsdam's ISLOs where applicable; and identifies assessment methods, performance criteria, and goals. It includes a short narrative that answers 3 questions about procedures and timelines.

The **Assessment Plan** is a tool to facilitate a program's PSLO assessment, and as such should include enough information to make annual assessment clear and seamless. The **Assessment Plan** template is meant to be intuitive to use, though clarification and context on some aspects follows.

- **ISLO mapping:** Because our General Education program covers all ISLOs, undergraduate programs are not required to map every PSLO to an ISLO. Graduate programs should also map their PSLOs to the ISLOs, but here, too, 100% alignment is not necessary.
- **Performance criteria:** Rubrics must be included if students are assessed using potentially subjective tools. Rubrics help minimize subjectivity and provide clear expectations for students (and thus should be provided to students). Programs must identify the minimum rubric score required to meet each PSLO. Rubrics are not required for objective assessment tools (e.g., multiple choice exams).
- **Target goals:** Programs should approach the 'not meeting' percentage as the threshold value that would trigger concern and potential program revision. Target goals are important because they provide *a priori* expectations for assessment result comparison.

Programs can choose to use all 4 target percentage categories, or just 3 (e.g., 'do not meet', 'approach', 'meet') or 2 categories ('do not meet', 'meet') if that is more meaningful for them.

**Due date.** In year 5 of the assessment cycle, every program<sup>3</sup> submits an updated **Assessment Plan** [online](#) by November 15 to guide their assessment efforts for the next 4-year assessment cycle<sup>4</sup>. Plans are reviewed by the Dean's Assessment Fellow, Academic Assessment Committee, and Dean using the Assessment Plan Review [Checklist](#) (see Appendix A for the review flow chart). Upon approval, the Academic Assessment Committee uploads approved **Assessment Plans** to the Academic Assessment [webpage](#).

**New programs.** Before new program proposals are considered for approval by Faculty Senate and the administration, the program must have PSLOs, a PSLO Assessment Plan filled out to the extent possible (e.g., the course(s) and ordinal year each PSLO will be assessed and the assessment tool they might use for each PSLO), and a curriculum map.

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<sup>3</sup> Some departments offer multiple programs at the same degree level (e.g., BA and BS) that are identical apart from required courses outside the department. In these cases, departments may choose to have identical PSLOs for these programs and to submit a single Assessment Plan and a single PSLO Assessment Report. However, for departments that offer programs at different degree levels (e.g., BA and MA), including degrees that are perceived as different by the department faculty (e.g., BA and BFA), then each program must have unique PSLOs (at the very least, in the degree of expectation) and must submit unique Assessment Plans and PSLO Assessment Reports.

<sup>4</sup> The updated Assessment Plan may include changes from the previous plan, such as amended assessment tools, rubrics, or PSLOs.

## Assessment Report

The **Assessment Report** (template available [here](#)) is the written record documenting how programs have assessed their PSLOs and how they are using that data to continually improve student learning. It includes 4 sections: 1 for each year of the 4-year cycle. Each section includes a table to record PSLO assessment data<sup>5</sup> and areas to reflect on the effectiveness of the assessment methods, information about sharing results and making decisions, and recommendations for improving student learning<sup>6</sup>.

Due date. Each year of the 4-year assessment cycle, every program submits an updated **Assessment Report** online by February 15<sup>7</sup>. These annual submissions focus on the (at least) 25% of PSLOs for which they gathered data the prior year and include a reflection about the efficacy of changes made to previously assessed PSLOs. Reports are reviewed by the Dean's Assessment Fellow, Academic Assessment Committee, and Dean using the Assessment Report Review [Checklist](#) (see Appendix A for the review flow chart). Upon approval, the Academic Assessment Committee uploads approved **Assessment Reports** to the Academic Assessment [webpage](#).

## ISLO Assessment Report

In year 5, the Academic Assessment Committee collates the ISLO assessment data from every program's completed 4-year PSLO Assessment Report and the last 4 years of General Education assessment reports. They then write an **ISLO Assessment Report** describing the extent of student achievement of our ISLOs over the preceding 4 years and, in consultation with campus constituents and stakeholders, establishing necessary changes to improve student learning.

Due dates. In year 5 of the assessment cycle, the Academic Assessment Committee shares the **ISLO Assessment Report** with department chairs and program directors, including the Director of General Education, and uploads the report to the Academic Assessment [webpage](#) by September 15. The Academic Assessment Committee presents the report to campus by October 15.

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<sup>5</sup> If the Number of Students Assessed is  $\leq 5$ , then write "Low N" in that column of the Report table.

<sup>6</sup> We strive for continuous improvement, so programs must consider and implement changes that will lead to even greater student learning. PSLO target goals should not reflect a status quo.

<sup>7</sup> Programs that assess a PSLO in the spring semester are encouraged to complete and submit their updated Assessment Report as soon after the spring semester as possible.

## Writing Effective PSLOs

A well-written PSLO identifies what the students in a particular program will do and under what conditions they will do it. Keep in mind that although disciplinary standards inform PSLOs, they are not written for peers in the field, but instead for students so they know exactly what expertise they will gain from your program. Also, programs should have few enough PSLOs to be assessed frequently but sustainably (we recommend 3 – 5, with 4 being an ideal match to our 4-year PSLO assessment cycle).

### **Five Guidelines for Well-Written PSLOs:**

1. **Meaningful:** What do you want a student who graduates from your program to be able to do? PSLOs should reflect the field's most important values and priorities, not little pieces of knowledge or skills (though you can assess students about those things).
2. **Focus on learning:** PSLOs are about what students learn, not the methods of instruction.
3. **Measurable:** Can you measure the PSLO with a rubric or a marking chart? Can you link it to specific assignments or parts of assignments (e.g., questions on an exam; assignment designed to measure that PSLO; capstone project; internship; artistic performance or product)?
4. **Simple:** PSLOs should cover one broad but distinct area, not a laundry list of things, and should have one operational verb that is observable. (Bloom's Taxonomy may help with this; see below). An operational verb describes an action you can directly observe in an external context and is subject to judgment.
5. **Specific:** Avoid vague language that is open to different interpretations.

### **Bloom's Taxonomy categorizes learning into 6 levels, from less to more complex:**

- Level 1 – Remember
- Level 2 – Understand
- Level 3 – Apply
- Level 4 – Analyze
- Level 5 – Evaluate
- Level 6 – Create

Each level lends itself well to a variety of operational verbs, as depicted on [Bloom's Verbs and Matching Assessment Types](#). If you are not a fan of Bloom's Taxonomy or its derivatives, you may want to consider [SOLO Taxonomy](#) (another hierarchical taxonomy) or [Finks Taxonomy](#) (non-hierarchical).

Appendix A. Assessment Plan & Assessment Report review flow chart.

