



## **Institutional Outcomes Assessment Policy Statement**

**1600-0900**

*Revised March 2009*

This document details the institutional policy that guides outcomes assessment at Athens State University starting in academic year 2007-08 and thereafter. The policy has been developed as a result of the establishment of the Office of Institutional Planning, Research and Assessment (OIPRA) and the development and implementation of a systematic and coordinated process for outcomes assessment throughout the University approved by the President on the 21<sup>st</sup> day of December 2006 and revised on the 9<sup>th</sup> day of March 2009.

Athens State University seeks to comply with all assessment requirements mandated by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), the State Board of Education, the Alabama Community College System, and other pertinent accrediting and regulatory organizations.

### **This policy statement consists of three parts:**

- Purpose and Definition of Outcomes Assessment
- Leading Principles of Outcomes Assessment
- Outcomes Assessment Process

### **PURPOSE AND DEFINITION OF OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT**

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 and support services provides the foundation for continuous improvement to sustain and enhance academic quality and the student educational experience.

Although the assessment of student outcomes is primarily directed to outcomes in academic programs, the University recognizes that the educational experience involves more than just courses. 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 process.

Outcomes Assessment, as the term is used at Athens State University, refers to the systematic process of gathering, analyzing, interpreting, and acting upon data related to student learning and the overall university experience for the purposes of course, program, and organizational improvement. The process is ongoing and adaptive and constitutes the foundation upon which decisions are made. 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 focus on the need to answer five fundamental questions:

- What should graduates of our programs know or be able to do as a result of going through our curriculum?

- How well are they learning?
- How will the University know?
- How can student learning or our curriculum be improved?
- How can the overall institutional environment be enhanced to optimize the educational experience of students, faculty, and staff?

The University subscribes to the principle that individual academic and support units are best suited to determine how to assess student learning and educational experience outcomes and how to use assessment results for program improvement. Therefore, it follows a coordinated and systematic though decentralized approach with specific units responsible for assessing specific academic and support programs, all reporting findings annually to OIPRA.

## **LEADING PRINCIPLES OF OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT**

Outcomes assessment at Athens State University is guided by the following principles:

- Outcome assessment is a goal-directed process focused on quality assurance and continuous improvement of teaching, learning and the overall educational experience.
- Assessment procedures should encourage learning and teaching, not simply measure them.
- Assessment should be appropriately aligned with outcomes and should optimally include direct and indirect methods of student learning, program operations, and service delivery.
- Assessment requirements should be fiscally responsible and should not impose unnecessary time-consuming burdens.
- Assessment findings should be viewed positively as an opportunity for improvement and are not intended as basis for punitive decisions of any kind.
- Faculty and staff leadership, commitment, and collaboration are vital to a sound and effective assessment process.
- Student learning is the primary responsibility of the student, even though teaching is a major element of assessment.
- 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 and staff is vital to the enhancement of institutional effectiveness.

## **OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT PROCESS**

### **Procedure Steps and Timeframe**

Athens State University's student outcomes assessment consists of three steps:

- Development of the Annual Assessment Plan (AAP) for each academic program and support service unit using standardized format containing the following components: Mission Statement; Program Purpose/Goals; Objectives, Assessment Methodology, and Expected Outcomes; Implementation Plan; Dissemination of Assessment Results; and, use of Assessment Findings for Continuous Improvement.

Submission Deadline: Late Spring Semester **[April 15]** (for the next academic year-2007-08 and every year thereafter)

- Collection and analysis of outcome data. (Throughout the academic year)

- Development of the Annual Assessment Report (AAR) and Action Plan for each academic program and support service unit using standardized format containing the following components: Narrative Statement summarizing assessment findings, Determination of Achievement Level and Resulting Actions via the Action Plan.

Submission Deadline: Late Summer **[September 15]** (starting with results from academic year 2007-08 and every year thereafter)

Note: Annual Assessment Plans and Annual Assessment Reports are not official until cleared by OIPRA and approved by the Institutional Assessment Committee.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

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 with OIPRA. Assessment instruments and related documentation at the department and/or administrative unit level must be identified and submitted to OIPRA for inventory and coding for identification through the assignment of a unique control number. All assessment documentation is stored in the ASU Assessment Management Online System (AMOS).

## **Faculty**

In conjunction with guidelines published by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, the University requires faculty to establish learning objectives for all degree programs and develop department annual assessment plans for evaluating the extent to which students are achieving the objectives. The faculty and staff in all units must review their goals and assessment plans every year in conjunction with the catalog cycle, and must report annual assessment findings and resulting action plans to Department Chairs.

## **Deans and Department Chairs (Academic Units)**

College Deans must maintain an appropriate system for managing the overall college assessment efforts. Such system must ensure that assessment plans are developed, filed in OIPRA, 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 Deans must designate a faculty or staff member (at their discretion) to serve as their College Assessment Point of Contact. This person is responsible for entering into the ASU Assessment Management Online System (AMOS) all AAPs and AARs for all departments in the college and for the routing of such documents for reviews and approvals at each level.

Department Chairs (or college deans as appropriate) must maintain an appropriate system for managing unit assessment efforts. Department Chairs review and approve their unit's annual assessment plan and assessment report and submit to the College Dean, which upon review and approval officially submits all documentation to OIPRA. Chairs and Deans may choose to delegate approval authority at their respective level.

## **Vice Presidents and Heads of Administrative Service Units (Administrative Units)**

Vice Presidents must maintain an appropriate system for managing the overall assessment efforts for all pertinent administrative units/services under their authority. Such system must ensure that assessment plans are developed, filed in OIPRA, 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 its authority to serve as their Administrative Assessment Point of Contact. This person is responsible for entering into the ASU Assessment Management Online System (AMOS) all AAPs and AARs for all units under the Vice President and for the routing of such documents for reviews and approvals at each level.

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 annual assessment plan and assessment report and submit to the respective Vice President who, upon review and approval, officially submits all documentation to OIPRA. Vice Presidents and Unit Heads may choose to delegate approval authority at their respective level.

### **Institutional Assessment Committee (IAC)**

The Institutional Assessment Committee consists of 8 faculty and staff members representing academic and administrative programs appointed by the President on a 3-year term basis. The Coordinator of Institutional Assessment and the Accreditation Liaison Officer serve as ex-officio members of the Committee providing guidance and support. The 8-member composition include three faculty members (one from each one of the Colleges), two staff members from student support services, one staff member from the Library, and two staff members from Information Technology (IT) Services representing both academic and administrative IT support areas.

The role of the IAC is to provide quality assurance for ASU's institutional effectiveness process through the review and evaluation of Annual Assessment Plans (AAP) and Annual Assessment Reports (AAR). The committee meets no less than twice a year typically during early summer (June) and early fall (September) based on the assessment cycle.

### **Office of Vice President of Academic Affairs/Office of Institutional Planning, Research and Assessment (OIPRA)**

The administration's role, through OIPRA, 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.

OIPRA oversees the ASU Assessment Management Online System (AMOS) and its companion the Assessment Management Evaluator Entry (AMEE), a secured centrally maintained electronic database and data collection tool of academic and administrative outcome assessment information. Upon submission of assessment plans and assessment reports by College Deans/Vice Presidents (or their designee), OIPRA, working jointly with the IAC, reviews each assessment plan and report for appropriateness and compliance. OIPRA reserves the right to consult with the deans, vice presidents and/or department chairs or unit heads (as appropriate) to ensure the most successful presentation of results. Upon completion of the review and approval process, OIPRA certifies each academic program and administrative/support unit with compliance with the assessment cycle pursuant to this policy. This document constitutes an official program record