# Instructions for Year 0 Assessment Plan Template

## All Reports due Oct. 15, 2025

Assessment Schedule for Year 0 Assessment Plans turned in October 2025 is as follows:

*Undergraduate Programs*: First assessment report will be due October 15, 2026 for the 2024-2025AY

*Graduate Programs*: First assessment report will be due October 15, 2027 for the two previous academic years (2024-2025 and 2025-2026). These will be on an ODD year cycle for biennial reporting.

Programs should plan to collect data during their Year 0 cycle so they are prepared for the upcoming reporting cycle.

### INSTRUCTIONS

Year 0 Assessment Plans are used for new programs or current programs undergoing substantial curricular reorganization or changes. Please reach out to Assistant Provost Deb Blanchard ([deborahblanchard@montana.edu](mailto:deborahblanchard@montana.edu)) if you are making changes to an existing or currently assessed program. In most cases, a regular annual program assessment report can identify, acknowledge, or explain any changes that an already existing program is making.

Please fill in the box indicating with major(s), option(s), minor(s), or certificate(s) are included in the Assessment Plan.

### Part 1: Program Learning Outcomes

Please fill in the yes/no questions related to program learning outcomes (PLOs).

PLOs should be written as *specific, measurable statements* describing what students will be able to do upon completion of the program. The assessment of PLOs provides feedback on the expected knowledge, skills, and attitudes that students develop as they progress through their program. Consider how PLOs may support institutional learning outcomes (i.e. the [MSU Core Qualities](https://www.montana.edu/msu-core/) that all MSU graduates will attain).

See [Bloom’s Action Verbs for Learning Outcomes](https://www.montana.edu/provost/assessment/blooms_action_verbs_for_learning_outcomes.html) for ideas for action verbs that can be used in crafting PLOs. Consider Bloom’s taxonomy and whether the language being used reflects the learning students can expect to attain upon completing the program. PLOs must match what is in the CIM system. If substantive changes are made during the assessment planning process, they will need to be updated in the CIM system. If you would like further information on the assessment planning process or other taxonomies, please see the [Program Assessment Overview](https://www.montana.edu/provost/assessment/program_assessment.html) website, which has a substantial amount of information and support.

Programs should strive for no more than 5-7 PLOs. If you have more than 7 PLOs, you can expand the table, but consider consolidating outcomes. You will need to assess all PLOs listed. Determine whether PLOs measure the student learning that occurs in the program versus whether it is a description of what the goals of a the program are. (e.g. “Understanding” the broad scope of knowledge in a discipline or field may be a goal of the program but might be better suited as part of the description of the program. Explaining, summarizing, or stating specific concepts related to the knowledge field may be more indicative of what students will be able to do upon completion of the major, minor, or certificate and can be tied to specific coursework that can be used for assessment purposes. This also allows students to articulate more clearly to future employer and/or graduate programs what they learned). You want assessment to be manageable.

### Part 2: Development of Assessment Plan.

All Plans must contain the following:

1. **Threshold Values.** Along with PLOs, plans should include threshold values – minimums against which to assess student achievement for learning outcomes. Threshold values are defined as an established criteria for which outcome achievement is defined as met or not met. Consider using a conservative threshold value to start, so there is room to improve. Thresholds can be adjusted after gathering results from assessment. Also consider whether some PLOs will be using student work from both lower and upper division courses to measure student learning across the span of the program – thresholds may be different for different courses as they relate to a specific PLO(s).
2. **Methods of Assessment & Data Source.** Assessment plans require evidence to demonstrate student learning at the program level. This evidence can be in the form of direct or indirect measures of student learning.Both direct and indirect assessment data must be associated with the program’s learning outcomes.

Data sources should rely on examples of **direct evidence** of student learning: specifically designed exam questions, written work, performances, presentations, projects (using a program-specific rubric – not a course grading rubric); scores and pass rates on licensure exams that assess key learning goals; observations of student skill or behavior; or summaries of classroom response systems (e.g. iClicker, Padlet, etc.), etc.

**Indirect evidence** of student learning includes: course grades, grade distributions, assignment grades, retention and graduation rates, alumni perceptions, questions on end-of-course evaluations forms, and advisory board feedback, etc. related to the course rather than the instructor. These forms of evidence may provide information for identifying areas of learning that need more direct assessment but should NOT be relied on as the primary source of direct evidence of student learning.

1. **Timeframe for Collecting and Analyzing Data.** Develop a multi-year assessment schedule that will show when all program learning outcomes will be assessed. These plans can be updated every year if the faculty determine they need to move in a different direction than originally planned. (Note: The Annual/Biennial Assessment Report Templates will ask if the assessment is consistent with the original plan. It is okay to say it isn’t. The Year 0 Assessment Plan is just that – a plan; all assessment planning is allowed to be changed as need be by the faculty curriculum committees.)

Graduate assessment reports are biennial, so faculty review of assessment results may only occur every other year, however, annual faculty meetings to review collected data and discuss student progress should be considered. Data is collected every year, even if only reporting on a biennial cycle.

1. **Curriculum Map & Assessment Planning Chart.** Using the chart below, fill in the map. This table can be recreated to make more room for PLOs and/or change the layout to landscape. Mapping should also occur in the Courseleaf CIM system.

All *required* courses in a program should align with at least one PLO. If the program requires a specific General Education/Core course as a part of the program, then it should be considered for assessment purposes. There are some exceptions and nuances to this – if you have questions after reading the examples below, please reach out to your Assessment & Outcomes Committee representative or Assistant Provost Deb Blanchard at [deborahblanchard@montana.edu](mailto:deborahblanchard@montana.edu) for clarification.

For example, Sociology requires SOCI101IS as a part of its major. SOCI101IS will be assessed as part of the General Education/Core program but since it is also a required course for the Sociology major, it will be assessed as a part of the major/minor since that department is in charge of the curricular content and how it aligns with its major.

A nuance to assessing required courses that sit outside of a given program is a Core class like Math (Quantitative-Q Core). Math courses are assessed by the Math Department as a part of the General Education/Core program and as a part of the major, but all programs rely on that department for their required Math courses. So, although a required Math course wouldn’t need to be assessed as a part of other program assessment plans, other majors do rely on specific Math classes to support their programs. Therefore, it is appropriate for programs depending on other departments for required courses to build into an assessment plan the intention of discussions across colleges to investigate curricular content and determine whether a required course is truly supporting a given program or not.

Mapping courses to PLOs allows the program to see at a glance if there are PLOs that may not be supported as much or enough than other PLOs. Alternatively, if all of the required courses in a program align to most of the PLOs, there may be a need to consider whether all of the courses should actually be required courses.

Attempt to schedule assessment so all PLOs are assessed at least every three years.

Part 3: What Will be Done.

Explain how assessment will be conducted, who receives the analyzed assessment data, and how it will be used by program faculty for program improvement(s).

1. How will assessment artifacts be identified?

Identify who in the department is in charge of this. Is there a curriculum committee that will work with faculty to make sure that course assignments are developed that will align with both course and program learning outcomes?

1. How will they be collected (and by whom)?

Identify where you will store the student work/artifacts. Determine who will be in charge of organizing and disseminating the student work for assessment purposes.

1. Who will be assessing the artifacts?

Identify who will be assessing the artifacts – will it be a curriculum committee, program faculty, graduate students with supervisor oversight, etc.?

Part 4: Assessment-Specific Rubrics.

All plans must include program-specific assessment rubrics (the methodology of how student artifacts are to be assessed).

This is different than course-specific rubrics. Program-specific rubrics are developed to create indicators (or criteria) for each PLO of what the student work should demonstrate to support the PLO(s) being assessed. In some cases, a program-assessment rubric can hold multiple PLOs and indicators that are assessed across the same student artifacts. Sometimes course-specific rubrics may contain an indicator that also works for a program-specific rubrics, but course-specific rubrics should never be used as a program-specific rubric for assessment. Measuring whether students achieve the outcomes of a course is not the same as determining if a course is achieving the outcomes of a program. Include a threshold for student success attainment. The chart below is an example of the information requested. You can configure your rubrics in different ways.

The following example uses a 4-level Likert scale. Your rubric may be designed more simply or more complexly. (e.g. Introductory, Developing, Mastery – with specific criteria indicators listed for each of those things or with more levels and developed criteria.)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **SAMPLE Example : PLO #1: Demonstrate a substantive breadth of knowledge in the field of study.** | | | | | **Threshold Values** |
| **Indicators or Criteria** | **Level 1** | **Level2** | **Level 3** | **Level 4** | **80% of students will meet or exceed Level 3 competency** |
| Analysis of Information, Ideas, or Concepts | Identifies problem types | Focuses on difficult problems with persistence | Understands complexity of a problem | Provides logical interpretations of data |  |
| Application of Information, Ideas, or Concepts | Uses standard solution methods | Provides a logical interpretation of the data | Employs creativity in search of a solution | Achieves clear, unambiguous conclusions from the data |  |
| Synthesis | Identifies intermediate steps required that connects previous material | Recognizes and values alternative problem solving methods | Connects ideas or develops solutions in a clear coherent order | Develops multiple solutions, positions, or perspectives |  |
| Evaluation | Check the solutions against the issue | Identifies what the final solution should determine | Recognizes hidden assumptions and implied premises | Evaluates premises, relevance to a conclusion and adequacy of support for conclusion. |  |

### Part 5: Program Assessment Report Communication

NWCCU, our institutional accreditor, requires and asks us to report on how faculty are central to the program assessment process ([Standard 1.C.5](https://nwccu.org/standards/)). This part of the assessment plan asks you to indicate the procedures that you have considered to make sure that faculty with the department are aware of assessment planning and results with the goal of receiving input from the faculty body on improving student learning within the program.

How will annual assessment be communicated to faculty within the department? How will faculty participating in the collecting of assessment data (student work/artifacts) be notified?

1. When will the data be collected and reviewed, and by whom?

This helps plan for what time of the academic year the department will engage in conducting the actual assessment.

1. Who will be responsible for the writing of the report?

This can be the head of a curriculum committee or the department head – but all reports should have been informed by faculty communication as well.

1. How, when, and by whom, will the report be shared?

This reiterates the need to include the faculty so that this task does not land on only a program lead or department head for all of the work.

Part 6: Closing the Loop(s).

“Closing the Loop” is the self-reflective portion of the assessment where faculty have an opportunity to evaluate how a PLO(s) was assessed previously to the findings in the current report. The goal of program assessment is continual student learning improvement even if thresholds have been met. For the purposes of the assessment planning, consider how the program might use past assessments to inform future changes and improvements. Consider what your will during your first assessment (refer to your schedule and what you will be assessing for the upcoming cycle). What kinds of information do you hope to garner from your first assessment and how might you use that information to inform the next assessment cycle?

A section for other comments is included for you to add whatever else you feel is important about your assessment plan, or that you would like the Assessment & Outcomes Committee to consider when providing feedback.

**Next Steps Upon Completion**

* Delete instructions and this front page from final report when submitting.
* Submit to [programassessment@montana.edu](mailto:programassessment@montana.edu) by October 15. If you submit after October 15, please cc Deb Blanchard at [deborahblanchard@montana.edu](mailto:deborahblanchard@montana.edu) to make sure your submission is noticed.
* Upload the Year 0 Assessment Plan to the department website for future reference.
* Update the Courseleaf CIM system if necessary.

# Year 0 Assessment Plan

Academic Year of Year 0 Plan:

College:  
Department:   
Submitted by:

Date of Submission:

## Program(s) to be Assessed.

**List all majors, minors, certificates and/or options that are included in this new Assessment Plan**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Majors/Minors/Certificate** | **Options** |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |

## Is this a new program? Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_

## Are you keeping existing outcomes? Yes \_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_

**If no, please identify all that apply:**

Consolidating PLOs \_\_\_\_

Rewriting PLOs to be more assessable \_\_\_\_

Rewriting PLOs to be more aligned with program objectives \_\_\_\_

Other:

## Part 1: Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs).

### List the Program Learning Outcomes.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| PLO# | PLO Description |
| 1 |  |
| 2 |  |
| 3 |  |
| 4 |  |
| 5 |  |
| 6 |  |
| 7 |  |

## Part 2: Development of Assessment Plan.

1. **Threshold Values.** Discuss your threshold values and how you will determine them for your courses and PLOs.
2. **Methods of Assessment & Data Source.** Discuss methods and potential data sources of student work.
3. **Timeframe for Collecting and Analyzing Data.** Develop a multi-year assessment schedule that will show when all program learning outcomes will be assessed.
4. **Curriculum Map & Assessment Planning Chart.** Using the chart below, fill in the map. This table can be recreated to make more room for PLOs and/or change the layout. Mapping should also occur in the Courseleaf CIM system.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **ASSESSMENT PLANNING CHART** | | | | | | | |
| **Program Learning Outcomes** | **Course Alignments: Include rubric, number, and course title** | **Identification of Assessment Artifact** | **Year to be assessed** | | | | |
|  |  |  | 2020-2021 | 2021-2022 | 2022-2023 | 2023-2024 | 2024-2025 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
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## **Part 3: What Will be Done.**

Explain how assessment will be conducted, who receives the analyzed assessment data, and how it will be used by program faculty for program improvement(s).

1. How will assessment artifacts be identified?
2. How will they be collected (and by whom)?
3. Who will be assessing the artifacts?

## Part 4: Assessment-Specific Rubrics.

All plans must include at least one program-specific assessment rubric (the methodology of how student artifacts are to be assessed). This is different than course-specific rubrics.

## Part 5: Program Assessment Planning & Report Communication

1. How will annual assessment be communicated to faculty within the department? How will faculty participating in the collecting of assessment data (student work/artifacts) be notified?
2. When will the data be collected and reviewed, and by whom?
3. Who will be responsible for the writing of the report?
4. How, when, and by whom, will the report be shared?

## Part 6: Closing the Loop(s).

“Closing the Loop” is the self-reflective portion of the assessment where faculty have an opportunity to evaluate how a PLO(s) was assessed previously compared to the findings in the current report. The goal of program assessment is continual student learning improvement even if thresholds have been met. Please explain plans for how Closing the Loop will be documented going forward?

## Other Comments:

Submit report to [programassessment@montana.edu](mailto:programassessment@montana.edu)

Upload Assessment Plan to department website for future reference.