



**Resource Guide for Assessment Plans
and Annual Reports**

Administrative Departments and Academic Support Operations

Office of Institutional Effectiveness

Revised August 2022

Purpose of this Resource Guide

As noted in the Utica University *Guide to Institutional Effectiveness* and the University's *Guide to Annual Assessment and Program Review: Co-Curricular and Non-Academic Departments*, non-academic and administrative departments are required to have clearly articulated missions and goals that are systematically assessed with the aim of continuous improvement. These expectations are consistent with the MSCHE Accreditation Standard VI.

This document, a *Resource Guide for Assessment Plans and Annual Reports*, is intended to provide assistance with the different components that constitute an effective assessment plan and quality assessment report. Additional support is available from the VP for Institutional Effectiveness/Dean of Academic Assessment (ie@utica.edu).

Elements of an Assessment Plan

An assessment plan includes the department's mission, its goals, its methods for assessing these goals, and a schedule for when each goal will be assessed. Generally speaking, the mission and goals do not change each year but remain fairly stable during a 5-year review period. These are referred to as "Standing Requirements."

How the goals are achieved may change annually. Likewise, which goals will be assessed and how they will be measured may also change on a yearly basis. These are documented in the "Assessment Cycle."

Standing Requirements

Mission: A mission statement is a brief description of the department's purpose. It articulates what the department does, who it serves, and how it supports the institutional mission. If applicable, stakeholders that benefit from the department's work should also be included in the mission statement. (This is especially important for those operations that serve a specific constituency, such as students, faculty, alumni, or donors.)

A good example of a departmental mission is the one from the Center for Career and Professional Development:

The Center for Career and Professional Development endeavors to serve students, in partnership with alumni, employers, faculty, and staff, through the provision of the following services and resources: counseling, assessments, programming, campus employment, outreach, and recruitment activities. Students will develop self-awareness and actively engage in the career and professional development process, empowering them to make informed career decisions and preparing them to achieve career goals.

A simple way to write a mission statement is to use the following template:

The mission of [state name of program or unit] is to [articulate primary purpose] by providing [identify primary functions or activities] to [indicate stakeholders]. The [program or unit] contributes to the University 's mission by [describe how].”¹

A mission statement is a brief description of the department’s purpose. It articulates what the department does, who it serves, and how it supports the institutional mission. If applicable, stakeholders that benefit from the department’s work should also be included in the mission statement.

Operational Goals and Expected Outcomes: Operational goals are statements identifying what the department hopes to achieve. Expected outcomes, explicit in goal statements, indicate what success looks like or what the department aspires to. Outcomes are measurable.

Goals are not a list of action steps! A goal is the reason why one performs an action. For example, “Hire an assistant director” is an action step. The *reason* an assistant director is being hired might be to maintain an adequate number of qualified staff professionals who have the appropriate expertise. The expected and measurable outcomes would be “adequate number” and “appropriate expertise.”

Similarly, “Respond to customer requests” might be an action step associated with IITS. The reason for responding to these requests may be to “*Increase customer satisfaction by promptly and satisfactorily addressing support tickets made to the Help Desk.*” This reason is the operational goal.

Operational goals are statements identifying what the program or department hopes to achieve. Expected outcomes, explicit in goal statements, indicate what success looks like or what the department aspires to.

There is no required minimum or maximum number of operational goals, but each department should focus on its **major** aims. Most commonly, non-academic and administrative departments have three to five goals that are congruent with the institution’s priorities and/or strategic goals.

¹ *Guide to Outcomes Assessment Plans and Annual Reports* (July 2017), the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, p. 3

Student Learning Goals: Both the *Guide to Institutional Effectiveness* and the *Guide to Annual Assessment and Program Review: Co-Curricular and Non-Academic Departments* indicate which administrative departments are additionally responsible for assessing student learning.

Learning goals should clearly articulate what students should be able to know or do either as a result of using a department's services or from being an integral member of the department.

Examples:

Students who use the Center of Career and Professional Development for résumé writing services belong to the first group of students. As a result of using these services, *students will clearly articulate the relevance of their academic and experiential background in writing.* Resident assistants or peer tutors are examples of students who belong in the second category: they are critical members of a department, vital to the department's ability to achieve its mission. As a result of the experience and the ongoing training they receive, *students who serve as resident assistants will progressively demonstrate the ability to mediate conflict.*

Similar to operational goals, learning goals should be explicit about what is being measured. The learning goal for the resident assistants, for example, clearly indicates who is being assessed (resident assistants) and what is being assessed (the ability to mediate conflict).

Learning goals should clearly articulate what students should be able to know or do either as a result of using a department's services or from being an integral member of the department.

Mapping Goals: Operational and student learning goals should be consonant with the University's mission, strategic goals, and, in the case of student learning, the institutional learning goals. This is how the institution shows how all operations support its educational mission.

Mapping department goals to institutional goals is how the institution shows how all operations support its educational mission.

Assessment Cycle

The assessment cycle refers to the academic year when specific assessments are being conducted. Department generally assess goals and outcomes at the close of the academic year and plan assessments for the following academic year. Timelines and specific due dates are indicated in the *Guide to Institutional Effectiveness*.

Assessment Plan: An assessment plan belongs to a particular cycle. The plan identifies the goals that will be measured during that cycle and indicates the methods that will be used to assess these goals. Not all operational goals need to be assessed every year, but each should be assessed at least twice during the five-year review period.

Assessment Methods: An assessment method is how the department measures achievement of its goals and outcomes. A method is not an event or an action step! It is an instrument that provides either quantitative or qualitative information about how well an outcome has been realized.

The best assessment processes use multiple methods to measure each goal. Departments are encouraged to utilize current, existing institutional sources of information (if valid) and to capitalize on what the operation already does as part of its work.

Take, for example, the goal, *“Increase customer satisfaction by promptly and satisfactorily addressing support tickets made to the Help Desk.”* This goal might be measured using the following methods:

Examples of Assessment Methods and Data Sources

Institutional Surveys, such as the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory and the National Survey of Student Engagement

Internal surveys

Focus groups and/or individual interviews

Rubrics measuring quality of performance

Tracking and analysis of service usage

Benchmarking with peer institutions, industry standards, or findings from prior years

Audit reports

Funds raised or generated

External funding awards

Student success rates (e.g retention, degree-completion, and employment)

Elements of a performance evaluation

Review of website hits and downloads

Percentage of requests for service fulfilled

- ✓ Tracking the number of support tickets received within a specified period of time.
- ✓ Analyzing the most common types of customer needs, as indicated by the support tickets.
- ✓ Measuring the response time between receiving the support ticket and resolving the complaint.
- ✓ Sending a brief survey to customers asking for feedback or requesting that they indicate the extent of their satisfaction.

An assessment method is how the department measures achievement of its goals and outcomes. It provides quantitative or qualitative information about how well an outcome has been realized.

A note about using surveys:

Surveys are an excellent way to collect information regarding perceptions, satisfaction, and climate or culture. They are also useful if a diagnostic inventory is needed—e.g. a survey of what structures, processes, and procedures exist to support a department’s mission and goals.

However, surveys are often overused as an assessment method, and some “home grown” surveys may not gather the information needed. Thoughtful consideration should be given as to whether or not a survey is really needed or might the assessment be accomplished using a different method. If a survey is used, the items and scales should be thought about carefully.

Harvard University’s Program on Survey Research offers excellent tips on writing survey questions (<https://psr.ig.harvard.edu/book/questionnaire-design-tip-sheet>), and Rutgers University provides numerous references on how to develop a survey instrument (<https://njaes.rutgers.edu/evaluation/resources/survey-instrument.php>).

Targets or Benchmarks: If feasible and reasonable, departments should indicate the acceptable and/or ideal level of achievement. This is known as establishing a target. In the example, “85% of users surveyed will indicate satisfaction with the response from the Help Desk,” 85% is the target.

It might make more sense for the department to benchmark its findings, rather than set a specific target. For example, an “adequate number of qualified personnel” might be benchmarked against industry or professional standards. Benchmarks are more appropriate when qualitative measures are being used.

Assessment Findings: Major findings from the assessments conducted during the cycle should be briefly summarized in one or two paragraphs. Supporting evidence (i.e. raw data, tabulated or graphed data, survey reports) may be included as an attachment.

In addition to reporting the assessment results, the department should provide some analysis or interpretation of the findings. *What do the results mean?* Simply reporting assessment findings will not lead to meaningful or useful understanding. An analysis of these findings is critical to understanding them and communicating how effectively the department is successfully achieving its goals.

Example:

“Results from the follow-up surveys regarding customer satisfaction indicated that 93% of users were satisfied that the issue they reported had been resolved. However, 57% reported that the wait time was three days, which did not meet our goal of responding promptly. The poor response time may be attributable to the staffing shortage in the department.”

Assessment findings should be summarized in one or two paragraphs. Substantiating evidence may be attached to the report. Results should be analyzed and interpreted, not just reported.

Action Plan: The action plan may be considered the most important component of the assessment process. *Continuous improvement is the goal of assessment!* Therefore, documenting how assessment findings have been used to improve the department’s programs and services is absolutely critical.

Examples:

“Based on the user satisfaction survey results, adjustments were made to staffing within the department and more personnel were assigned to customer service requests.”

“The findings indicate that demands for our services have increased annually and are now beyond the capacity of the current staff. We have developed two new staff positions and included these in our budget request for the next fiscal year.”

Since continuous improvement is the goal of assessment, documenting how findings were used to improve programs and services is absolutely critical! The action plan is the most important part of the annual assessment cycle.

Documenting in Google Sites

All departments are required to document their assessment processes using the Google Site created specifically for their operation. Instructions on how to use Google Sites are appended to this *Resource Guide*.

Assessment Checklist

Standing Requirements

- Your department has a mission statement that identifies what the department does, who it serves, and how it supports the institutional mission.*
- Your department has approximately 3 to 5 clearly articulated goals that identify what the program or unit aims to achieve.*
- Your goals include expected outcomes that indicate what success looks like or what the department aspires to.*
- If required, your department has articulated learning goals that indicate what students should be able to know or do as a result of their experience with your operation.*
- Your goals are logically mapped to the appropriate institutional goal(s).*
- Each goal has at least 1 method to measure how well it is being achieved, though the best plan use multiple methods to assess each goal.*
- Your department utilizes institutional sources and survey data as part of its assessment methods.*
- Your department identifies the acceptable or ideal level of achievement (i.e. targets and/or benchmarks).*
- Major findings per assessment method are briefly summarized.*
- Supporting evidence is attached to the report.*
- Assessment results have been analyzed or interpreted with respect to how successfully the department is achieving its goals.*
- A clear action plan describes how the assessment findings will be used by the department to inform continuous improvement.*

Annual Assessment Report from Administrative Departments

Department:

Date of Review:

ELEMENT	Exemplary	Established	Developing	No Evidence
<p>Mission <i>A brief description of the department's purpose that articulates what the department does, who it serves, and how it supports the institutional mission.</i></p>	Clearly and concisely identifies purpose, primary functions, and stakeholders. Describes a purpose that distinguishes it from other departments or units at the University . Reflects the University 's mission.	Clearly states broad aspects of the department's function. Alignment with the University 's mission may be inferred. Identifies key stakeholders.	Provides a general statement or list of the department's work but does not clearly describe the department's purpose. Does not identify stakeholders. Does not provide a clear sense of how the mission aligns with the University 's mission.	No formal mission statement exists.
<p>Implemented Improvements <i>Identified improvements made to the department or the department's processes; "closes the loop" on the previous assessment cycle.</i></p>	Provides clear and concrete evidence of how improvements from the previous assessment cycle were implemented. This may include improvements made as a result of assessment or improvements made to the department's assessment processes. Documents that appropriate actions were taken on all issues.	Provides evidence of how some improvements based on previous assessment results were implemented. Some but not all of the recommendations for improving the department's assessment process were also implemented. If action was not taken when warranted, a reasonable explanation is given as for why.	Evidence is insufficient or not provided. Not all issues were addressed and there is little to no explanation for why this is so. Minor changes were made to strengthen assessment processes.	The report provides no evidence that any improvements to the department or its assessment processes were implemented.
<p>Goals <i>Identify what the department aims or aspires to achieve.</i></p>	Goals are clearly articulated, observable, measureable, and, in some cases, aspirational. They are congruent with the department's mission. Goals include outcomes that indicate expected or aspirational results.	Goals are observable and measureable, but the language of some is vague. Each goal is appropriate to the department's mission. The desired outcomes may lack clarity	The goals are more of an operational checklist or target than a measureable goal. As such, they are not necessarily measureable, and they may not indicate what strategic results the department aspires to achieve.	Most of the goals are unclear, not measureable, and/or inadequate for meaningful assessment.

<p>Assessment Methods and Targets or Benchmarks <i>How the department measures achievement of its goals and outcomes and indicates what success looks like.</i></p>	<p>Assessment methods are appropriate measures for each goal. They are clearly described and appropriately designed. Each goal is assessed using multiple methods, both direct and indirect. Targets and/or benchmarks are clearly indicated and reflect reasonable but challenging expectations.</p>	<p>Assessment methods are appropriate measures for each goal. Some goals are assessed using only indirect methods, and/or some goals have only one assessment method assigned to them. Targets and/or benchmarks are identified, but it is not clear how they were determined.</p>	<p>Each goal is measured using only one assessment method, and the overall plan relies primarily on indirect measures. Assessment tools are vague, poorly defined, or not appropriate to the goal. Targets/benchmarks not indicated.</p>	<p>Unclear what the assessment methods are.</p>
<p>Analysis of Assessment Results <i>Discussion about what the assessment findings mean and/or how the department interprets the results.</i></p>	<p>Clear and substantial evidence is presented that indicates whether or not the goals were achieved. Findings are specific enough to be meaningful, and a clear, succinct analysis, interpretation of, and reflection on the results are included. Trends or patterns over time are discussed. The analysis involved all appropriate members of the department or other key stakeholders. Supporting evidence is attached.</p>	<p>Clear and well-organized discussion of results is presented. Some results are incomplete or findings are not yet available, and it is not entirely clear how the results have been interpreted or what they mean to the department. Trends or patterns, even when appropriate, are not noted. Supporting evidence is included.</p>	<p>Results are reported, but they are too summative or general to be meaningful. There is little analysis of findings, and no interpretation is provided. Little supporting evidence is included.</p>	<p>No evidence of assessment results is reported, or the evidence is so general and so brief, it does not report anything meaningful.</p>
<p>Action Plans: Using Assessment Results <i>Identifies how assessment results will be used for continuous improvement and/or resource requests.</i></p>	<p>Identifies key areas that require attention and defines next steps. Action plans are directly linked to assessment findings and reflect what was learned through the assessment process. . If no changes are reported or necessary, an explanation is provided.</p>	<p>Identifies key areas that require attention, but burden for improvement was placed outside the department. Action plan may be overly broad or too general. No explanation provided when report concludes that no action is required.</p>	<p>Does not describe what was learned during the assessment process. Identifies one or two items for improvement, but these are not supported by assessment findings.</p>	<p>No evidence that the department is using assessment findings to inform planning or continuous improvement.</p>

Recommendations for assessment process:

Annual Assessment Report from Co-Curricular & Student Support Operations

ELEMENT	Exemplary	Established	Developing	Undeveloped
Implemented Improvements	Provides clear and concrete evidence of how improvements from the previous assessment cycle were implemented. Documents that appropriate actions were taken on all issues. This may include improvements made as a result of assessment or improvements made to the department's assessment processes.	Provides evidence of how some improvements based on previous assessment results were implemented. Some but not all of the recommendations for improving the department's assessment process were also implemented. If action was not taken when warranted, a reasonable explanation is given as for why.	Evidence is insufficient or not provided. Not all issues were addressed and there is little to no explanation for why this is so. Minor changes were made to strengthen assessment processes.	The report provides no evidence that any improvements to the department or its assessment processes were implemented.
Student Learning Goals	Goals are clearly articulated, observable, and measurable. They are congruent with the department's mission. Learning outcomes are clear.	Goals are observable and measurable, but the language of some is vague. Each goal is appropriate to the department's mission. The desired outcomes may lack clarity.	The goals are targets, not measurable goals. As such, they are not necessarily measurable.	Most of the goals are unclear, not measurable, and/or inadequate for meaningful assessment.
Plan for Student Learning Assessment	The program has a sustainable assessment plan that describes when and how each learning goal will be assessed and how improvements based on findings will be implemented. Plan is based on thoughtful inquiry into student learning.	The program has an assessment plan, but does not indicate how improvements will be implemented and assessed. The plan may not be sustainable and does not seem to be informed by inquiry into student learning.	The program has an assessment plan, but not all of the learning goals are included in the plan. Assessment does not appear to be ongoing or systematic in the program.	The program lacks a formal plan for assessing the student learning goals; it relies on short-term planning, such as selecting the goal or course to assess in the current year.
Student Learning Assessment Methods and Targets	Multiple methods that align with learning goals are used to assess student learning. Methods are mostly direct, and assessment processes are efficient: more than one goal is measured using a single instrument. Student learning is assessed at multiple points in the curriculum. Targets	Assessment methods align with the learning goals, but not all goals are measured by multiple methods. Some goals rely too heavily on indirect methods. Students are assessed only at certain points but not throughout the curriculum. Targets and/or benchmarks are identified, but it	Most of the methods are indirect or non-specific (e.g. "exam"). Only one method is used to assess each learning goal. Learning is not assessed throughout the curriculum. Assessment tools are vague, poorly defined, and targets/benchmarks not indicated.	There is no clear relationship between the goals and the assessment methods. Targets are not specified, and measures are not acceptable for good assessment. (E.g. course grades)

	and/or benchmarks are clearly indicated and reflect reasonable but challenging expectations.	is not clear how they were determined.		
Student Learning Assessment Results and Analysis	Program-level results are clearly presented and easy to follow. They relate directly to the goals being measured. Results are specific enough to indicate strengths and weaknesses; they show precisely where and how students are performing at or beyond expectations and where they are performing below expectations. Supporting evidence is attached.	Clear and well-organized discussion of results is presented. Some results are incomplete or findings are not yet available, and it is not entirely clear how the results have been interpreted or what they mean to the department. Trends or patterns, even when appropriate, are not noted. Supporting evidence is included.	Program-level results are presented, but the presentation is difficult to follow or the results are summative and do not identify specific areas of strength or areas where improvement is needed. There is little analysis of findings, and no interpretation is provided. Little supporting evidence is included.	No evidence of assessment results is reported, or the evidence is so general and so brief, it does not report anything meaningful.
Action Plans: Using Assessment Results	Evidence demonstrates that assessment-based discussions have led to action or recommendations have been enacted. Improvements are <i>program</i> level, not course level, and concern curriculum or pedagogy. If appropriate, the program indicated a need based on assessment and stated how this need will be addressed. If no changes are reported or necessary, an explanation is provided.	Evidence suggests that assessment-based discussions have considered action, but these actions lack specificity or are confined to a single course or assessment method—i.e. they are not really program level. The program indicated a resource need based on assessment results, but did not indicate how the need might be addressed.	An action plan has been identified, but it is not clear how it resulted from assessment findings or assessment-based discussions. No explanation provided when report concludes that no action is required.	No evidence that the department is using assessment findings to inform planning or continuous improvement.
Operational Goals & Evidence	Goals are clearly articulated and measurable; they are assessed by valid measures, and solid evidence indicates the extent to which the goals have been achieved.	Goals are clearly articulated, but there is an over-reliance on one assessment method. Evidence that the goals have been achieved may be subjective. Further documentation might be required.	Goals are articulated, but the language is vague. There is a lack of alignment between the goals and the supporting evidence.	Goals are more of a process or action step than an outcome; questionable conclusions are made regarding the extent to which the goals were achieved.

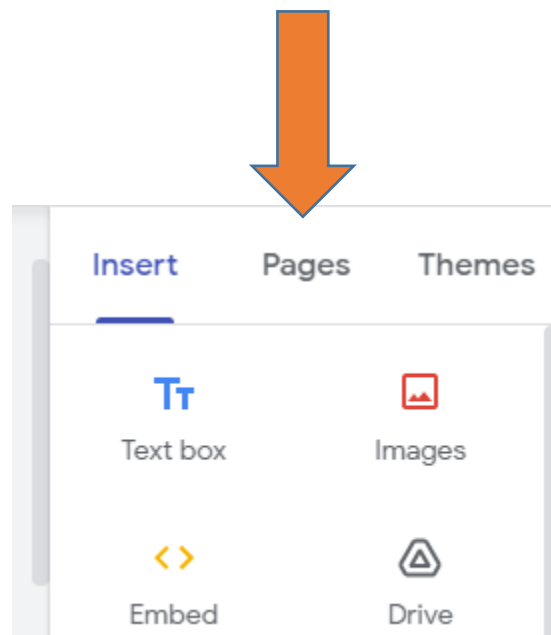
Operational Planning & Resource Needs	Planned improvements are clearly identified; they are specific and relate directly to assessment findings. Action plans are appropriate given current resources and demonstrated need.	The connection between the action plan and/or resource request and the assessment results or other evidence is not readily apparent.	Action plans are identified, but they are vague and non-specific. Plans may not be clearly linked to evidence or assessment results.	No operational plan indicated.
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Using Google Sites to Report Assessment Findings

Navigating a Google Site is fairly simple, but these instructions have been developed to help users reduce any guesswork. Detailed instructions are also available at the following link:

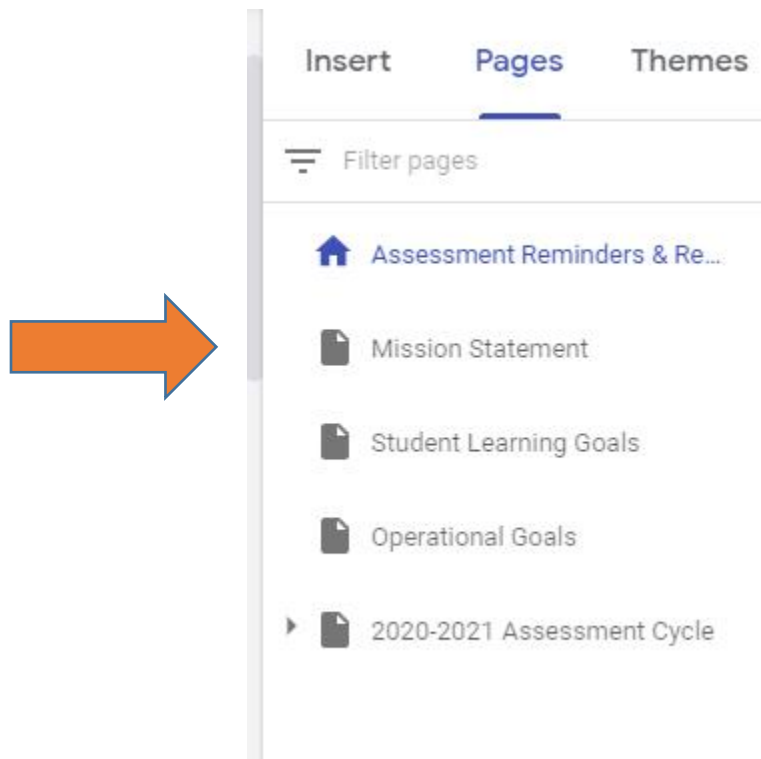
<https://support.google.com/sites/answer/6372878?hl=en>)

1. The home page, "Assessment Reminders and Resources," summarizes what is expected from academic departments regarding assessment and includes the *UC Guide to Academic Assessment*, the rubric used by the Academic Assessment Committee when reviewing assessment reports, and a checklist for assessment.
2. To access the other pages in the site, go to the right of the screen and click on "Pages."



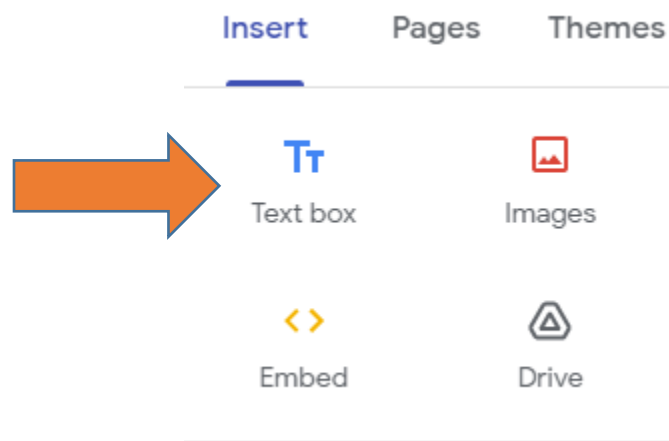
3. This will bring you to the full menu of pages that are included in the Google Site.
4. First go to the page labeled "Mission Statement." Make sure that the mission statement for your department/program is the correct one. It should be one or two sentences that *clearly and concisely* state the purpose of the degree-program.

If the mission statement is incorrect or if it merits updating, make the edit directly in the text book marked "Mission Statement."

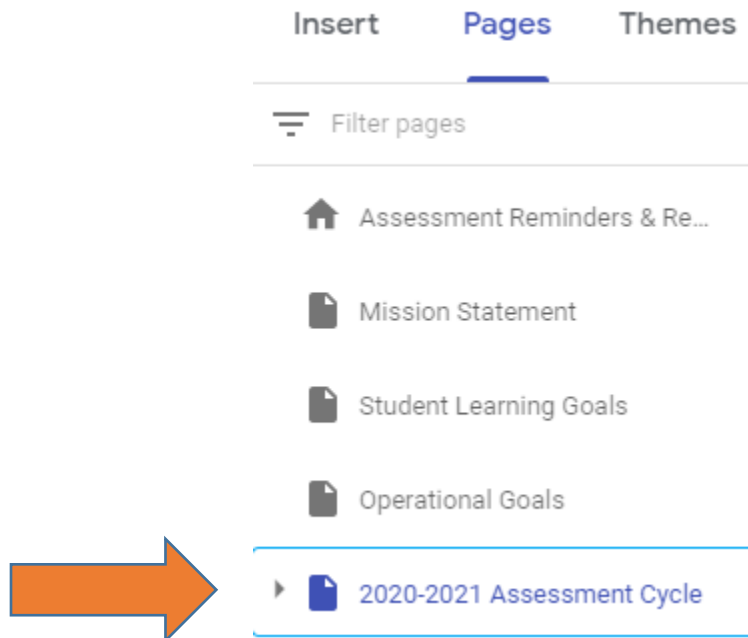


- Do the same on the pages labeled “Student Learning Goals” and “Operational Goals.” Make sure what is listed on those pages is accurate. **Note: Many departments did not have operational goals in previous reports, so they could not be populated in this site. You will need to add these goals.**

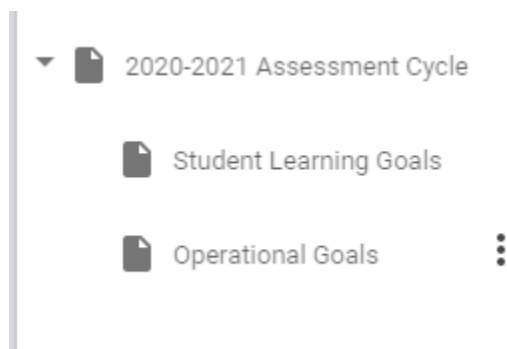
Goals may be added by clicking “Insert” in the right column and selecting “Text box.”



- Once you have made sure the mission and goals are updated and accurate, you are ready to enter the assessments from the 2020-2021 cycle. Click on “Pages” in the right column. Go to the “2021-2021 Assessment Cycle” page.



- Click on the small triangle to produce a drop-down menu.



- Complete the report by responding to the prompts on each page. These prompts ask what goals were assessed, how they were measured, what the targets were that signified success, what the results were, and how the department interpreted the findings. You will also be asked how the assessment findings will be used by the department/program. **For operational goals, identify what strategic goal the department goal maps to.**

Sample:

GOAL 1: [Insert goal here]

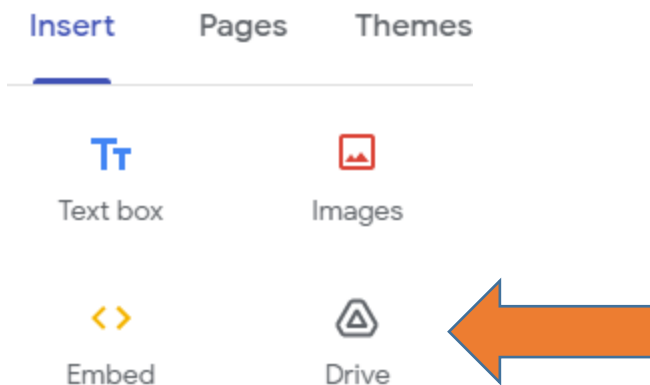
How was the goal measured?

How often is the goal assessed?

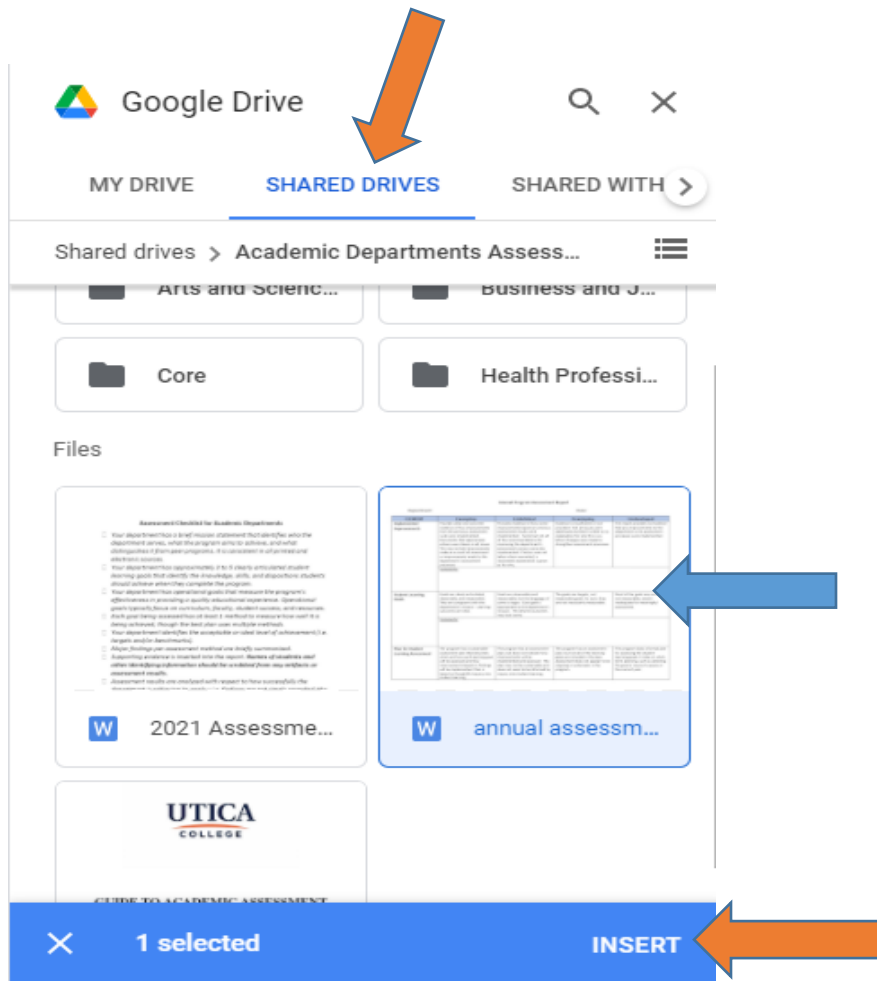
What target or benchmark signifies the goal has been successfully achieved?

Summarize the results of the assessment. (Insert any data or evidence supporting this summary. Please delete any student names from the record.)

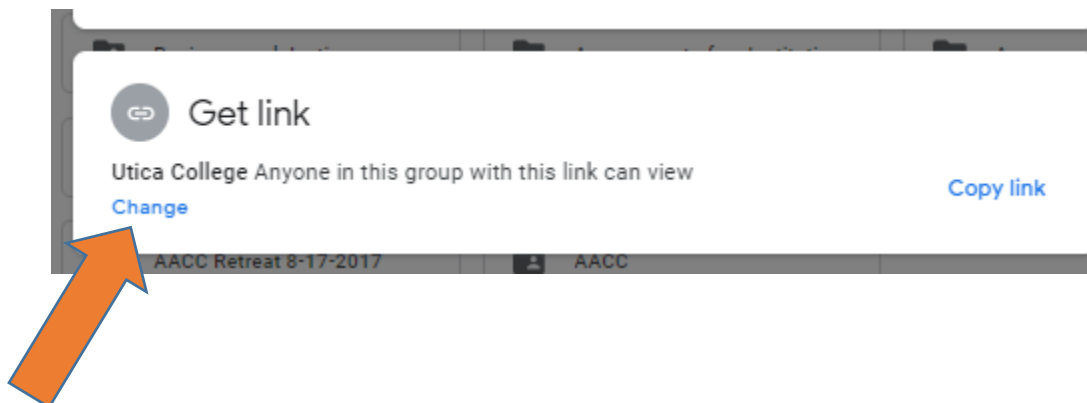
9. Supporting documents, including copies of assessment methods, should be included as substantiating evidence. In order to insert these documents in the site, you must first include them in the Google Drive that will be shared with the Academic Assessment Committee. Then click "Insert" in the right column and choose "Drive."

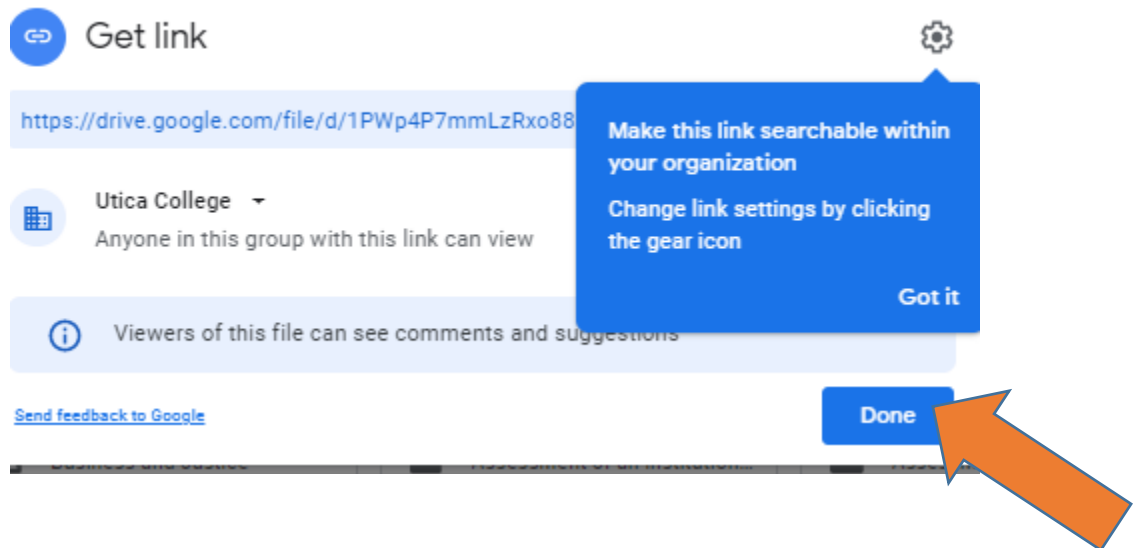


10. Select the Shared Drive, click on the desired document, and hit “Insert.”



Before you insert the document, however, make sure it is accessible to reviewers. This may be done by right clicking on the document and selecting “Share.” Click on “Change” and then click “Done.”





IMPORTANT: Do not insert any assessment results that include students' names or any information identifying students. To do so is to violate the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), a federal law protecting the privacy of education records.

Members of the University's assessment committees who review assessment findings and supporting evidence do not have a legitimate educational interest in the educational record of individual students. Depending on the circumstances, department faculty may not have legitimate educational interest either. Representatives from accrediting agencies who might wish to review assessment reports and findings most definitely should not have access to student records.