University of Montevallo
Unit Planning and Assessment Guide

VERSION 6 | 2021-2022

UNIVERSITY *of* MONTEVALLO
DIVISION OF ACADEMIC AFFAIRS
INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH PLANNING & ASSESSMENT

CONTENTS

University Mission Statement *5*

Vision Statement *5*

SACSCOC Standard for UM Unit Planning and Assessment *6*

Introduction *7*

Part I: Unit Plan Relation to Strategic Plan, Budgeting, Learning Outcomes And Program Review *7*

Strategic Plan **7**

University Budget Process **8**

Student Learning Outcomes and Program Review **9**

Part II: What Is Planning and Assessment? *9*

Part III: Purpose of Assessment and How to Do It Effectively *10*

Part IV: The Planning and Assessment Cycle at UM – Defining the Elements *11*

Planning **11**

Implementation **17**

Assessment **17**

Part V: The Planning and Assessment Cycle at UM – The Timelines *18*

General Timeline **19**

Part VI: Planning and Assessment Cycle – Documenting in Anthology *19*

UNIT MISSION AND DESCRIPTION **20**

Unit Mission Statement 20

Unit Descriptive Analysis 20

NUMBERED GOALS **20**

Number (how many Goals?) 20

Title 20

Goal 20

Intended Outcome 21

Assessment Measures 21

Budget Account Numbers Tied to This Unit Plan 21

Additional Resources Needed 21

Reorganize to Help Pay? 21

During Implementation (a consideration not part of CampusLabs/Anthology form) 21

Results and Data 22

Changes Based on Results 22

Bibliography *23*

Appendix A: Planning and Assessment Units *24*

Appendix B: Quick List of Institutional Surveys and Other Data Sources *26*

UNIVERSITY MISSION STATEMENT

The overriding mission of the University of Montevallo, unique in Alabama higher education, is to provide to students from throughout the state an affordable, geographically accessible, "small college" public higher educational experience of high quality with a strong emphasis on undergraduate liberal studies and with professional programs supported by a broad base of arts and sciences, designed for their intellectual and personal growth in the pursuit of meaningful employment and responsible, informed citizenship.

VISION STATEMENT

UM offers undergraduate and graduate students a learner-centered 21st century education informed by our liberal arts identity.

Core Values

- Diversity, equality and inclusion
- Intellectual and personal growth
- Civic engagement and social justice
- Global citizenship and sustainability

SACSCOC STANDARD FOR UM UNIT PLANNING AND ASSESSMENT

From "The Principles of Accreditation: Foundation for Quality Enhancement." Adopted by the College Delegate Assembly, December 2017. Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC).

SECTION 7: Institutional Planning and Effectiveness

Effective institutions demonstrate a commitment to principles of continuous improvement, based on a systematic and documented process of assessing institutional performance with respect to mission in all aspects of the institution. An institutional planning and effectiveness process involves all programs, services, and constituencies; is linked to the decision-making process at all levels; and provides a sound basis for budgetary decisions and resource allocations.

The Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) is an integral component of the reaffirmation of accreditation process and is derived from an institution's ongoing comprehensive planning and evaluation processes. It reflects and affirms a commitment to enhance overall institutional quality and effectiveness by focusing on an issue the institution considers important to improving student learning outcomes and/or student success.

1. **The institution engages in ongoing, comprehensive, and integrated research-based planning and evaluation processes that (a) focus on institutional quality and effectiveness and (b) incorporate a systematic review of institutional goals and outcomes consistent with its mission. (Institutional Planning) [CR]**

2. The institution has a QEP that (a) has a topic identified through its ongoing, comprehensive planning and evaluation processes; (b) has broad-based support of institutional constituencies; (c) focuses on improving specific student learning outcomes and/or student success; (d) commits resources to initiate, implement, and complete the QEP; and (e) includes a plan to assess achievement. (*Quality Enhancement Plan*)

3. **The institution identifies expected outcomes of its administrative support services and demonstrates the extent to which the outcomes are achieved. (Administrative effectiveness)**

INTRODUCTION

The University of Montevallo (UM) conducts assessments of their academic, academic support and administrative departments' effectiveness to ensure both quality and continuous improvement. Effective assessment of all units across campus has implications for improvement in strategic planning, support in discrete decision making, resource allocation, and general institutional effectiveness. Assessment provides a regular, systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of programs and services, and the data provided by the assessment process provides a source of information and impetus to guide goal-directed and research-based change. Planning and assessment have been intentionally integrated within the University planning process to emphasize this important linkage and to facilitate research-based planning. It is the intent of the University planning process to emphasize the powerful, iterative nature of assessment as a form of quality assurance and internal research and development to improve the effectiveness of academic and administrative units across the campus.

This guide is intended to provide a general blueprint for unit planning and assessment at the University and serves two main purposes: (1) provide a general overview of a unit planning and assessment process and (2) provide specific information on the unit planning and assessment process at the University of Montevallo. The guide contains general information about planning and assessment and details about planning and assessment for use in preparing UM's unit planning and assessment documents.

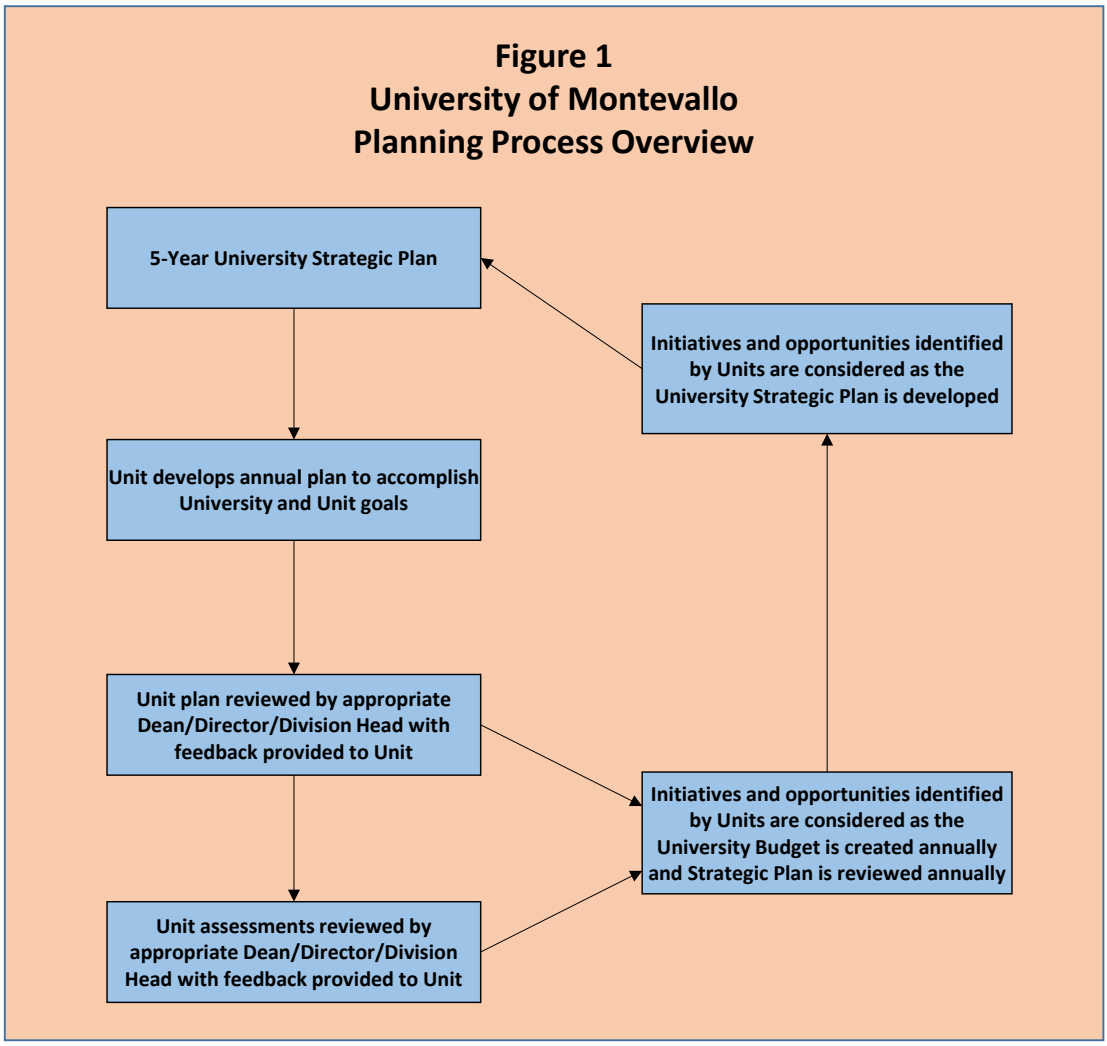
It should be noted that many of the terms used in this document are specific to the UM planning and assessment processes that have been developed over time and, in a sense, are inherited and unique to UM. The use of terms like goals, outcomes and measures have specific meanings for UM planning and assessment; for example UM planning documents and processes do not use the term "objective" as most standard planning processes do. For this reason, one overarching goal of this Guide is to clarify UM terms for UM planning and assessment purposes.

Finally, please remember that unit planning and assessment is as much art as it is science.

PART I: UNIT PLAN RELATION TO STRATEGIC PLAN, BUDGETING, LEARNING OUTCOMES AND PROGRAM REVIEW

Strategic Plan

The University's Strategic Plan describes institutional-level themes and goals for a five-year period. It is approved by the Board of Trustees and provides guidance for functional planning at the unit level (Strategic Plan Policy). It should be understood that the unit planning and assessment process defined in this Guide is an integral part of the University's overall strategic planning (link to strategic plan) and budgeting processes (link to budget process guide). Unit mission statements, unit goals and intended outcomes, and associated activities and measurement of goal attainment should be closely connected to the University's mission/vison statement and strategic goals (2021-2026 Strategic Plan). While some purely administrative goals may indeed be necessary in any given planning year and not so tied to any specific University-wide strategic goal, it is expected that at least one of the goals and intended outcomes in any given year be tied to the Strategic Plan in specific ways. This allows a comprehensive, participatory, integrated, and systematic process for determining, implementing and tracking



institutional improvement. Thus, an essential component of the Unit Planning and Assessment process involves familiarity with and focus on the University's Strategic Plan (2021-2026 Strategic Plan).

The "guiding lights" for the institution are the mission and vision statements. The core of institutional effectiveness resides at the operational level, where progress will be evidenced most meaningfully through the annual planning and assessment activities of the divisions/units. Therefore, a comprehensive evaluation framework by which institutional progress toward the mission can be continually examined involves regular strategic plan monitoring combined with annual unit-level assessment and budget processes.

University Budget Process

There are two ways in which the Unit Planning and Assessment Process is linked to UM's budget process. First, each annual planning and budgeting cycle begins with the submission of the planning portion of the unit plan for the upcoming academic year. These plans should identify any additional resources that may be needed in the pursuit of specific outcomes, including staffing requests (Staffing Request Help Sheet). These requests are considered in the University's overall budget process initiated in the Spring of each

year. Note that the links to the budget process for unit planning purposes are distinct from the general budgeting process for units. The cycle continues into the fall with the submission of the previous academic year's Unit Plan and Assessment Report.

Division heads use unit plans (with additional financial resources requested) and staffing requests to prioritize needs for the upcoming budget. These needs are presented in June of each year to the University Budget Committee. The Budget Committee roster includes the CFO, Provost, VPSAA/EA, and the VP for Administrative Affairs. The Director of IRPA and the SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison joins the committee meetings to provide support for the process. The University Budget Committee prepares the annual university budget and makes recommendations to the Executive Cabinet. The Executive Cabinet makes budget recommendations to the Board of Trustees.

After the Board of Trustees approves the university budget, the University Budget Committee responds to all unit heads informing them of their upcoming, annual unit budget. Upon the closing of a fiscal year, unit heads complete their unit pan assessment reports, thereby, closing the loop on the planning cycle. At this time, units enter results and data into the online planning system, as well as the changes the unit will make based on the analysis of the results.

Student Learning Outcomes and Program Review

For academic units the University's Student Learning Outcomes Assessment efforts should be viewed as an integral part of the Academic Unit Planning and Assessment process discussed in this document. While every student learning outcomes goal should not be included in an academic unit annual plan, it is suggested that planning activities to improve on at least one learning outcome goal in every cycle ought to be included as a Unit Plan goal *(not required however).* Ultimately, the Unit Planning and Assessment documents that are created should not be viewed as mere administrative exercises. Instead they should be used: they should guide specific activities over the course of a planning and assessment cycle. They are both guides to action and documentation of the effects of actions having been taken. *For academic units, these plans and assessments should also address concerns raised in the 5-year program review process that require immediate attention or in some cases attention over multiple years and unit planning cycles*. They should inform and enhance the attainment of the University's strategic goals and should emphasize student learning gain on the academic side. Guide to Student Learning Outcomes.

PART II: WHAT IS PLANNING AND ASSESSMENT?

Planning and Assessment is the ongoing and systematic process of identifying goals, aligned with a unit's mission, and the means to measure their attainment, gathering data related to the measures, using that information to make decisions about improvement, and then implementing those improvements. The most important aspect of this definition, if emphasis could be drawn to one item, is the use of information for continuous improvement of services.

Effective planning and assessment asks three questions.

1. What are we trying to accomplish?
2. How well are we doing it?
3. How can we improve what we are doing?

At its most basic, Unit Planning and Assessment consists of an assessment plan (i.e., department mission statement, goals and related activities, goal specific outcomes, measures associated with those outcomes, and targets for each measure), and an assessment report (findings, implications and follow-up activities). General assessment plans are created at the start of the assessment cycle, progress toward targets are evaluated periodically and a full report is completed at the end of the cycle.

In practice, departments compile the data identified in the measures throughout the assessment cycle, requiring departments to consider how they will collect, store and update the needed data prior to executing the plan. Ideally, data associated with key measures will have been collected and analyzed prior to plan implementation – as part of the planning process. In periodically reviewing progress a department may need and is permitted to adjust its plan. The final report requires departments to analyze the data and draw conclusions from it, specifically identifying areas where activities undertaken were successful (met targets), areas of concern (did not meet targets), suggested changes to departmental operations, resources to make the changes, and key outcomes associated with the implementation of those changes.

PART III: PURPOSE OF ASSESSMENT AND HOW TO DO IT EFFECTIVELY

The four main purposes of any departmental assessment are as follows.

1. To improve – The planning and assessment process should provide feedback to determine how department operations can be improved for the purpose of advancing the strategic goals of the unit and the University.
2. To inform – The planning and assessment process should inform department heads and other decision-makers of the contributions and impact of the department on the growth and development of the college.
3. To prove – The planning and assessment process should encapsulate and demonstrate what the department is accomplishing for faculty, staff and students toward achievement of goals.
4. To support – The planning and assessment process should provide support for campus decision-making activities such as strategic planning, budgeting and external accountability activities such as accreditation.

Furthermore, assessment is most effective when it is characterized by the following traits.

1. Planning and Assessment works best when the plan has clear and explicitly stated goals and outcomes.
2. Planning and Assessment works best when multiple measures are utilized.
3. Planning and Assessment works best when it is ongoing, not episodic.
4. Planning and Assessment is more likely to lead to improvement when it involves input from a broad array of departmental staff, and key customers.

5. Planning and Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a culture of assessment for the purpose of promoting change with an overarching goal to improve the quality of education.

Assessment is best prepared and supported when a group from the department participates in developing goals, solutions, outcomes and measures. It is generally recommended that assessment plans be developed by a committee within the department. It is unwise to put the responsibility for developing an assessment plan in the hands of a single person. Instead, this should be a group effort to ensure understanding, participation, and success in achieving goals.

Ultimately, the purpose of departmental assessment at UM is not to merely increase workloads and should not hinder other valuable work being done. Instead, the assessment process is designed to make department operations more effective, where effective is defined as producing high quality and reliable services efficiently in terms of time and costs. Assessment should be viewed and integrated into department operations as a critical management tool.

PART IV: THE PLANNING AND ASSESSMENT CYCLE AT UM – DEFINING THE ELEMENTS

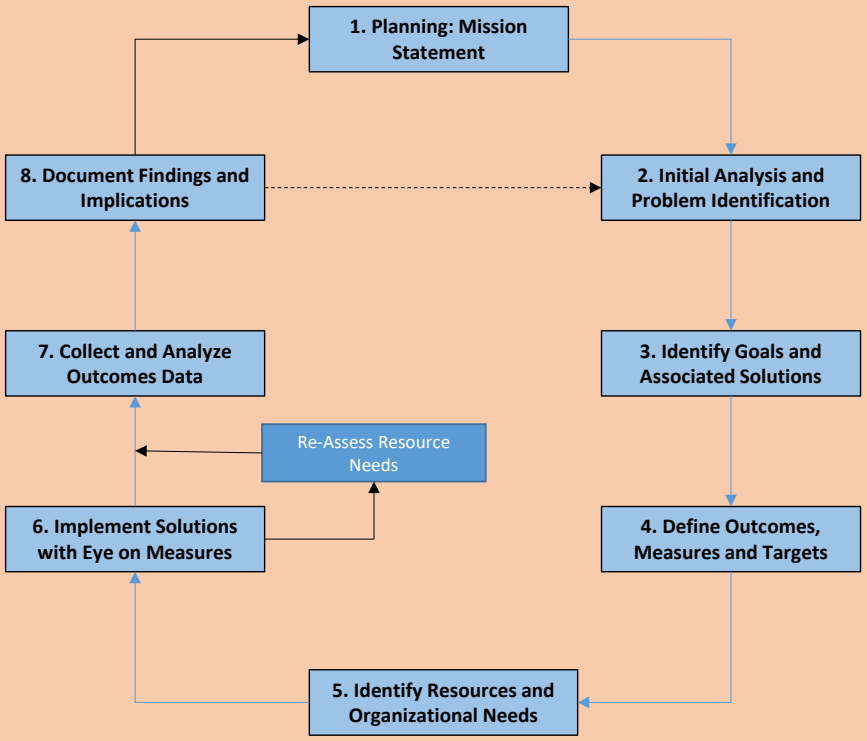
There are 8 clearly identifiable steps in the UM Unit Planning and Assessment process. Five (5) of these steps can be properly identified as steps in the planning process, one (1) involves plan implementation and two (2) can be identified as steps in the assessment process. The component of the Planning and Assessment process that should take the bulk of time and effort involves plan implementation.

While the Planning and Assessment documents should indicate in brief what *will* happen (plan) and then what *did* happen (assessment), implementation happens largely outside of what may be documented in the Planning and Assessment documents themselves. There is an ancillary consideration that partly defines UM's Unit Planning and Assessment process: identifying additional resource needs while in the implementation phase. There are core resources that a department requires merely to function and then there are resources needed to meet the goals of the unit's annual plan. That plan may often go beyond the standard unit operational function. UM recognizes the distinction between standard operations and efforts to improve, and insists that budget requests in the planning process be distinct from standard requests. Figure 2 depicts UM's Unit Planning and Assessment process. Please note that Part VI of this Guide will show how each of these 8 steps are documented in our online planning system.

Planning

1. Mission Statement. The planning process begins with the unit's mission statement that fundamentally defines the primary purpose(s) of unit. The mission statement should, where practical, reflect to some degree the Mission of the University as a whole and/or specific goals in the UM strategic plan that the Unit is uniquely positioned to affect. The mission statement should be periodically reviewed for relevance.

Figure 2
University of Montevallo
Unit Planning and Assessment Cycle



2. Initial Analysis and Problem Identification. Once the unit mission statement is established, the question becomes one of effectiveness in accomplishing that mission. Addressing that question requires some amount of data collection and compilation regarding the unit's operational capacity (staffing levels, money resources, available space, etc.), service universe (who served, how many served in a specified time period, etc.), and effectiveness (currently available data) on the universe of potential outcomes and measures. It is not expected that units will spend in any given year extensive resources in collecting and analyzing data solely for unit planning purposes. It is expected, however, that problems that are submitted for solution have some degree of concrete proof that a problem indeed exists.

Some of the data (or knowledge) about "problems" in the unit may be well-known and long-acknowledged – although informally. For academic programs, consideration of "program review" findings and implications are relevant. This is where it becomes critical that units engage a range of constituents inside the unit in the planning process – and most of the key constituents have already engaged in the "program review" process for academic units. Consensus, at least at the level of identifying a problem, may be sufficient as a call to action, in the event that direct, concrete data signaling a problem does not currently exist. It will be expected that as part of identifying outcomes and measures (discussed later), this

background information – baseline data - be compiled. *This is where planning and assessment is not a pure science. It is partly about organizing and building consensus.*

3. Identify Goals and Associated Solutions. Goals should align with the unit mission statement and/or the University's Mission/Vision and Strategic Plan. They should broadly reflect outcomes the unit expects to achieve in either the short- or long-term with an indication of the means. Goals are usually statements of action that submit to phrases that start like "to improve, "to increase, "to complete, "to shift, "to change, "to grow or even "to accelerate." A Goal statement should also provide a significant indication of how one intends to attain the associated outcomes in question. So in addition to the "to…" statement there should be a "by [doing something specific]" clause. The latter part of the Goals statement is an articulation of the units *planned solution*.

There are 3 fundamental types of goals in the unit planning process: process goals, performance goals and production goals. These three types of goals may be related and may be contained in a plan as a progressive set of hierarchical goals, or they may represent distinct, and unrelated elements in a plan.

Process goals are typically associated with intended outcomes and measures that are dichotomous in nature. Either the unit completed the task(s) or did not complete the task(s). There may be a single task associated with the goal or multiple tasks. The task(s) may be achievable in a given planning timeframe or may require multiple planning cycles to accomplish. Process goals are not the ideal type of goal for a unit planning process (they are easily conflated with implementation) but there are times when a process can be so complex and so dispositive in a unit's accomplishing other more ideal types of goals that it makes sense to include "completing the process" or "developing a plan (solution)" as a unit goal.

Performance goals typically measure in terms of time (speed), quantity, accuracy, resources (money), and most often as a combination of the four - in the form of a ratio. These goals relate to how work gets done:" i.e., how effectively and efficiently a unit gets its work completed. They are operational in nature. These goals are typically worded in such a way so that when measured, one may speak of having "improved" performance from a certain baseline to an intended result. What is the turnaround time for producing goods and services having been ordered or requested? Is the output per employee in the unit increasing (productivity)? Are faculty spending sufficient time advising students versus teaching and research? How much faculty time is spent on administrative activities versus teaching and learning? These goals may or may not impact production goals, although they should be expected to.

Production goals directly address whether a unit is accomplishing its core mission or not. These goals relate to the quality and quantity of the product being generated by core unit activity. In an institution of higher education, these will tend to encompass some goals that might otherwise be viewed as performance goals – retention rates and graduation rates, for example – but that have become adopted as fundamental outcomes for institutions and their sub-units.[1] Are student's learning what we said they would learn? Are more students graduating from the program this year versus last year? Are constituents more satisfied with the quality of services having been delivered? Have the number of requests for unit services increased? Like performance goals, these goals are typically worded in such a way that when measured, one may speak of having "improved" from a baseline to an intended level.

[1] In practice, performance and production goals fall on a continuum where goals may be considered more performance than production or vice versa.

There may be significant overlap between goal types in any given plan. In other words, process goals ought to lead to improvements in performance and production goals attainment. At the same time, performance improvements ought to lead to attainment of fundamental production goals for the unit. We might expect that if we invest more faculty resources and time into student advising that we should be able to improve retention and graduation rates. We distinguish between the three because one may not expect that a process goal will immediately lead to improvement in performance or ultimate outcomes, but may only set the conditions for improvement in those areas in subsequent cycles. The same is true for performance goal attainment with respect to production goals. Finally, some production goals may be precursors to other production goals – for example, improved retention should lead to improved graduation rates down the road.

Most units should not have more than 3 goals in any given year for which the unit is explicitly planning and implementing. In other words, a given unit may have a broader plan that encompasses multiple years and many associated strategic initiatives and goals. The concern in this annual unit plan and assessment is on the goals that are high priority in a given year. Again, that the goals for this year are part of a larger multi-year plan should be noted in the initial Analysis and Problem identification.

Larger units may require more than 3 goals. For example, a department which has 4 sub-units should have at least one goal for each subunit, but certainly not more than 2 for any subunit. Even larger units (academic affairs, for example) may not even want to have a goal for each unit, but instead would want to either select a broader goal for itself that must be a key goal for all or a subset of all sub-units. Or, a very large unit may want to merely select a goal already established by each sub-unit as a goal for itself. The hierarchy of review and approval and responsibility for units imply that all of the goals that may be established in a sub-unit (as part of its unit plan) are necessarily a goal for its parent unit. So, for these "super level" units, the planning process generally is about forging a level of coherence in its plan across all of its subunits, by adopting key subunit goals or by establishing a set of goals that are required of all.

4. Define Outcomes, Measures and Targets. In UM's planning parlance, intended outcomes are highly specific versions of the unit goal. There may be multiple intended outcomes for any given goal. They may encompass all of the specific outcomes associated with a goal or only a subset in a given planning cycle. Intended outcomes, like goals, may be process, performance or product oriented. More importantly, and especially for production goals, intended outcomes may be associated with other process and performance outcomes in addition to the production outcome itself.

Furthermore, outcomes move us closer toward discrete measures. One of the easier ways of viewing the relationship between goals and outcomes is to use a learning outcome as an example. A goal for an elementary school English language arts program may be "to improve reading comprehension for all students." Because reading comprehension can be disaggregated into several discrete components, our intended outcomes might include, "to increase students' understanding of high usage vocabulary words," and "to improve students' understanding of the parts of speech." These may be the two outcomes for one year. In a subsequent year, the intended outcome for the same goal might read, "to improve students' understanding of the difference between the introduction, the proof and the conclusion in the construction of a paragraph."

In this example, we even see that one goal for a "program" could cross multiple years or in the case of this elementary school, could be a goal for different levels of instruction (grade levels) in any given year,

where the intended outcomes associated with the same goal define the level of instruction. UM's SLO assessment guide will provide more detail on this distinction between program learning outcomes and progressive (interim/course) learning outcomes as students advance toward a degree (Guide to Student Learning Outcomes).

Nonetheless, the identification of intended outcomes in this example has narrowed the range of indicators (measures) that can be used to assess our efforts. We are no longer in the nebulous arena of "improving reading comprehension" but have narrowed that goal to specific sets of skills appropriate to the level of readiness (vocabulary, parts of speech, paragraph construction).

Another example of an outcome flowing from a goal might involve a goal for an admissions department where the goal is "to increase the level of recruitment of potential students from a particular area in the state." An appropriate intended outcome for this goal might involve an increased number of recruitment trips to the target area. A second and related intended outcome might involve an increased number of applications from prospects in that targeted area. Again, one goal can have more than one intended outcome.

Measures are even more specific than outcomes. They are concrete. They submit to a measurement "instrument" and are "quantifiable." A measure identifies the evidence and the methods you will use to determine whether you are achieving expected results and provide evidence that the department is accomplishing its outcomes. Measures should be quantitative and show performance compared to criteria for success in relation to intended outcomes. So, in setting goals, outcomes and measures, identifying baseline data for a measure and then setting targets for improvement are recommended. Measures chosen should relate to the outcome with which it is associated. There are two types of measures: direct measures and indirect measures.

Direct measures are powerful because they provide data that correlate exactly with the outcome. Direct measures explain what specific activity will be undertaken to show the extent to which an outcome has been accomplished, and to provide information that may be used to make decisions for improvements in following years. If the outcome involves improving learning gain, a direct measure would be one (like a test question or set of questions) that directly indicate whether a student has indeed learned what the student was supposed to learn.

Indirect measures do not necessarily correlate with the measure in question. Indirect measures often come in the form of an opinion or perception. For example, using the same learning gain outcome, we might survey students, asking them whether they felt they had learned what the course told them they would learn (course evaluation question). In this case, we can expect that student responses will not align perfectly with the results of the test of learning gain. And, a typical person might be inclined to trust the test results more than the results of the opinion survey as an indicator of learning gain.

There may be some instances where the results of the seemingly more indirect measure is the more (or at least as) important data point. For example, an IT department may have as an outcome improvement in turnaround time in its help desk operations. The direct measure might be the difference in time between when a ticket was initiated and when the ticket was closed. An indirect measure may be a survey question that asks respondents the extent to which they are satisfied with turnaround time when they accessed help desk services.

The direct measure might show that turnaround times only improved marginally, and did not meet the intended target. In contrast, the survey question showed remarkable improvements in satisfaction with help desk turnaround time – well beyond the target for this particular measure on this particular outcome. Or, the relative results may have been reversed – substantial improvement in turnaround time as directly measured that met the target and only marginal improvement (and below target) on the opinion survey. It is the interplay then between the two measures that really matters. The reality is that we cannot know what the perfect (or optimal) turnaround time to "make people happy" is for a help desk operation. Furthermore, it may not be the actual turnaround time but the perception that the experienced turnaround time was reasonable that matters from a *customer service* standpoint.

This latter example illuminates another point. There should ideally be more than one measure for each outcome in a unit plan. Even in the learning gain example, a disconnect between students' perceptions of their learning gain and measured learning gain may be cause for concern and may point to deeper problems in the teaching and learning process that need to be addressed – we may have a greater than warranted expectation of what an average student can learn in a given time period, for example.

There is one final note to make with respect to targets. Targets should flow easily from the measures that are set. Targets have a single purpose: to communicate clearly the level accomplishment for a particular measure. Targets must always indicate what is expected to be achieved in the *current cycle*. Targets require that baseline data had been collected on the measure, ideally in *the Initial Analysis and Problem Identification* (Step 2).

Targets must have specific numbers in them which indicate the level of accomplishment for the measure. Targets can indicate a number or percentage of items, people, or activities, or they can indicate a designated level of proficiency, or both.

Target = Level + subject + action + object + modifiers

Example #1: 80 percent (level) of students (subject) will score (action) on 4 final exam questions (object) proficient or advanced (modifiers).

Example #2: 80 percent (level) of faculty and staff accessing help desk services (subject) will indicate either "satisfied" or "very satisfied" (action) on a survey question asking satisfaction with turnaround time (object) on a 4-point scale (modifiers).

It is important to note that targets must be clear not just in numbers, but in words. "Satisfactory" and "successful" are positive, but they are not commonly understood. A better way to define these concepts, is to share the rating scale. Does "satisfactory" mean 3 out of 5 points? Does successful mean fewer than 5 mistakes? Define a target so that the meaning is easily understood.

Finally, in setting outcomes, measures and targets significant consideration should be given to how the data will be collected. Measurement instruments and data collection protocols should be reasonable (realistic) and then clearly defined. It is in this area where external resources including consultation with UM's Institutional Research, Planning and Assessment department could be most helpful. There is a significant amount of data and information that is generated by the University at varying levels and in different divisions and departments. To the extent possible, measures and data collection should not involve considerable addition to existing data collection processes. However, there are times when

additional data collection will be needed. It is for this reason that early consideration of outcomes data collection is necessary as part of the planning process.

5. Identify Resources and Organizational Needs. Ultimately, resources may be needed, including reorganizing one's operations in order to implement a unit's new program or design (the solution). Ideally, a unit will only need to reorganize its operations to implement a new solution. Sometimes, however, additional resources are needed. The "Initial Analysis and Problem Identification" step should serve to address this issue of additional resource need. Maybe the unit needs additional staffing. Or, maybe there are staff who are under-utilized or being used toward ends that do not serve core unit functions at all. At this phase of planning, a unit needs to re-examine that initial data and adjust its structure or request additional resources to execute its planned solutions.

Implementation

6. Implement Solutions with Eye on Measures. This aspect of the unit planning and assessment process consumes the bulk of the effort in terms of both time and energy. It is in this phase that activities expected to accomplish unit goals are undertaken. Ideally, this phase of the planning and assessment process involves implementing a new program or process that has already been planned/designed and otherwise communicated as the approach to be used to attain goals. To the extent possible the implementation of these plans and programs should also be documented. There are areas in the Campus Labs software where this information is expected to be entered or can be attached.

More importantly, data should be collected over the course of the implementation process to assess whether implementation is leading to the intended outcome. For example, if a new program is intended to improve a unit's fall to fall retention rate, measuring the fall to spring retention rate would be a practical activity to undertake to insure that the effort is on track. Problems that arise over the course of implementation and where course corrections are made should also be documented. Much of this "real time" data and consideration should find its way into the "documentation of findings and implications" phases of the planning and assessment process.

Ultimately, additional resources may be needed, including further reorganizing a unit's operations in order to implement the new program or design. Documenting and requesting these resource needs will be discussed in later sections of this guide.

Assessment

7. Collect and Analyze Outcomes Data. As already noted, data should be collected and reviewed on an ongoing basis – at the outset to determine goals and potential solutions, and during implementation to make near-term course corrections. As implementation nears its conclusion, however, more serious analysis should take place, where the focus is on whether outcomes and targets have been met.

A basic understanding of how your outcomes data will be collected should have been determined at the outset. Furthermore, ideally, preliminary data should have been collected over the course of implementation. So, to a significant degree this phase of the assessment process largely involves the actual collection or merely compilation of final outcomes data. Some of the data needed may be data that is generally available to the University, like data produced by IRPA. Understanding the various

production cycles, processes and reporting protocols at the University would be helpful to know for this phase of the assessment process.

From an analytical standpoint, there are four primary considerations.

(1) Did the unit meet its intended targets?

(2) Could the results be improved?

(3) Are the outcomes and/or measures useful?

(4) What are the next efforts that will best contribute to improving the department?

At this point, the assessment team who defined the outcomes and measures for the assessment plan should reconvene to look at the data. The team should determine (from the raw data) if the outcomes' target levels were met, partially met, or not met. What specifically did your assessments show regarding proven strengths or progress you made on outcomes? What specifically did your assessments show regarding any outcomes that will require continued attention? That team will also need to determine what further action is needed on the goal in question. In this process, the team should also consider the next cycle's goals and outcomes in light of the findings (informing Step 2 of the next cycle).

8. Document Findings and Implications. Documentation cannot be done unless the team who was involved in creating the assessment plan has analyzed and discussed the findings in Step 7. Most of the documentation will be entered into Campus Labs. The written document should directly identify responses to the four items that defined the analytical process in Step 7. The documentation should also include some discussion, particularly if the targets are not met, of difficulties in attaining goals and outcomes. There may have been underestimation of the level of resources that would be needed or misunderstanding of the readiness of the unit to undertake the efforts proposed. Ultimately, this documentation ought to inform goals and outcomes setting for the next cycle.

PART V: THE PLANNING AND ASSESSMENT CYCLE AT UM – THE TIMELINES

There are two related timelines that define the UM unit planning and assessment process. The planning and assessment cycle itself and the plan year. The former is a 16 month timeframe, which encompasses the latter, and the latter is a 12 month timeframe. In short, the planning and assessment cycle starts 4 months prior to the start of the plan year (implementation time frame). There is a practical reason for this 4 month lead time: what will occur over the course of a plan year needs to be determined (planned) and budgeted based on UM's standard fiscal year, starting October 1. The most current University Planning Calendar can be found here (Planning Calendar).

The following then is the general timeline for completing the various elements of a UM Unit Plan and Assessment defined in the prior sections.

General Timeline

April 15 – May 21 (5 weeks)

1. Mission Defined
2. Initial Analysis and Problem Identification
3. Identify Goals and Associated Solutions
4. Define Outcomes, Measures and Targets
5. Budget Requests Identified in plan and submitted to College Deans

October 1 – September 30 (following calendar year)

6. Implementation

April 1 – April 30

6a. Review of implementation progress toward goals (nothing directly submitted, *but preliminary findings should be considered in following year's plan which starts in this timeframe*)

May 1 to May 31

6b. Development and Submission of Next year's plan (per April 15-May 21 above)

August 1 to September 15

7. Collecting/Analyzing Final Outcomes Data

September 15 – September 30

8. Findings and Implications submitted through CampusLabs/Anthology

Adjustments to next year's plan made based on final analysis

PART VI: PLANNING AND ASSESSMENT CYCLE – DOCUMENTING IN *ANTHOLOGY*

This section is framed by UM's planning and evaluation system's (Campus Labs/Anthology) data entry requirements. The purpose of this section is to locate the documentation of each of the 8 steps identified above in UM's planning and assessment software. The headers are what users will see as headers in

Campus Labs. More information on accessing the Campus Labs system can be found here (link to one page help sheet on IRPA website).

UNIT MISSION AND DESCRIPTION

This area is where information related to Steps 1 and 2 will be entered into the system.

Unit Mission Statement

The mission statement (Step 1) should typically be a single paragraph and certainly not more than 2 paragraphs.

Unit Descriptive Analysis

Initial Analysis and Problem Identification (Step 2) information entered here is more extensive than just a brief statement describing the unit. This analysis ought to establish the rationale for the goals and solutions to be pursued. Depending on the size and complexity of the unit in question, the entry here could range from a few paragraphs to a few pages. If the analysis here is going to run well beyond 2 pages then it may make sense to highlight key points here and attach a reference document with the more extensive analysis. Note that *Anthology* allows for attachments (*Plan Item Files*) right below the box for entering the description.

Note also that some units may have multi-year plans at work. This section should be used to identify the general components of that multi-year plan, and indicate what the primary focus for the given planning and assessment cycle will be. Again, it may be useful to attach the plan components of that larger plan.

NUMBERED GOALS

This is where the unit documents the goals, outcomes, measures and budget requirements it has set for the coming planning and assessment year.

Number (how many Goals?)

This is simply a number that the unit assigns to the specific goal. As stated above, most units should not have more than 3 goals in any given year for which the unit is explicitly planning and implementing. See discussion in Part IV, Step 3 above.

Title

As the header suggests, a simple name for this particular goal should be identified, that distinguishes this goal and its related outcomes, measures and budget requirements from the unit's other goals. The entry here could be something as simple as "Goal 1" or it may be a one-line description of the Goal and/or activity to be undertaken.

Goal

As noted in Part IV (Step 3), the unit Goal is a broad statement of what the unit intends to accomplish by undertaking an activity or a set of activities – i.e., what is to be accomplished and what are the actions that will be undertaken. See Part IV for a fuller discussion of the different types of goals and outcomes. This statement should not be more than a paragraph.

Intended Outcome

The intended outcome, a more specific statement of what the unit intends to accomplish, is entered here. There is no need to reference the action to be taken. There should be at least 2 intended outcomes here. In some cases, like with a learning outcome, specifying 1 outcome may be sufficient. See the discussion of learning outcomes above in Part IV, Step 4 for some reasons to use more than one outcome even for a learning outcome.

Assessment Measures

Measures should be concise statements of how an outcome is to be measured. The instrument should be clearly identified and the items from the instrument to be used should be clearly identified, if applicable. Furthermore, targets based on the measure used should be clearly identified in this section of the unit plan and near to the form described in Part IV, Step 4.

Budget Account Numbers Tied to This Unit Plan

This section of the unit plan asks for the Unit to identify the budget number associated with the unit Plan, generally. If resources are to be provided by another unit (academic affairs on behalf of CSD department, for example) then that other units budget number should be indicated here along with an identification in name of that providing unit.

Additional Resources Needed

This is for additional financial resources needed. If no additional financial resources are being requested for your unit, this field does not need to be completed. If resources are needed, this field should clearly identify the type of resource(s) needed and any associated cost. Note that if the resources involve additional staffing, a "Staffing Request" form should also be completed in Campus Labs – in the "Budget Resources" menu. Also, see this linked document for more description of the staffing request process and how to complete it in Anthology and at the University (Staffing Request Help Sheet).

Reorganize to Help Pay?

How much of your current budget could be reorganized to pay (in part or total) for items you've described above in the "Additional Resources Needed" block? That reorganization ought to be briefly discussed in this section of the plan. If the reorganization is extensive then this section should reference the appropriate document containing the reorganization plan, and attach the relevant sections.

The initial Unit Planning documentation ends here. Note that to the extent that there is a significant budget requests associated with the Unit Plan, the plan can and should be revisited to adjust for the outcome of the separate budget request process.

During Implementation (a consideration not part of CampusLabs/Anthology form)

As noted above, implementing the unit planning activities described under the unit goal should take the most time over the course of a plan year. While units are not expected to provide documentation of implementation activities in the context of the Campus Labs system it is expected that proper documentation of activities will take place in order to insure that the assessment provides an accurate description of what actually drove success or failure over the course of the year. Where appropriate some of these documents may be attached in the assessment phase of the process.

It is also expected that periodic examination of interim outcomes will occur over the course of implementation and course corrections may be warranted as a result.

Results and Data

This section is the beginning of documenting (Part IV, Step 8) your final outcomes data (Part IV, Step 7 – the first 3 considerations). This section should focus on whether your targets were met or not met; and then on those things that drove or hindered meeting the targeted outcomes, including whether the measures themselves were useful. Group discussion (analysis) should have been data oriented. So, that data orientation should be reflected in the writing for this section. The unit may want to attach additional documentation of meeting discussions to this section.

Changes Based on Results

This part of the assessment documentation should involve the more forward-looking aspects of your analysis of outcomes data. What permanent changes have resulted from unit efforts? What other changes does the unit envision for the future based on the results? There should be some level of preview of future activities and goals in this section. Again, you may want to attach meeting minutes and other documentation – or even reference to the already completed plan for the following year could be included.

The unit planning and assessment documentation process is now complete and the full Unit Planning and Assessment cycle can be closed.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Fulks, Janet; Chaplot, Priyadarshini; Pacheco, Bob. June, 2010. *Inquiry Guide: Assessing Student Learning Outcomes*. Bridging Research, Information and Culture (BRIC); an Initiative of the Research & Planning Group (RPG) for California Community Colleges. (www.rpggroup.org).

Middaugh, Michael F. 2010. *Planning and Assessment in Higher Education: Demonstrating Institutional Effectiveness*. John Wiley & Sons; San Francisco, CA.

Sedlacek, William E. 2004. *Beyond the Big Test: Noncognitive Assessment in Higher Education*. John Wiley & Sons; San Francisco, CA.

Suskie, Linda. 2004. *Assessing Student Learning: a Commonsense Guide*. Anker Publishing Company; Bolton, MA.

Walvoord, Barbara E. 2004. *Assessment Clear and Simple: A Practical Guide for Institutions, Departments, and General Education*. Jossey-Bass; San Francisco.

APPENDIX A: PLANNING AND ASSESSMENT UNITS

Office of the President

Academic Affairs (Academic Units)

College of Arts and Sciences

- Behavioral and Social Sciences
- Biology, Chemistry and Mathematics, and Comp Sci
- Communication Science and Disorders
- English and Foreign Languages

College of Business

College of Education

- Collab-DHH (Special Ed)
- Counseling
- Elementary Education
- EXNS-HP
- EXNS – Nutrition and Wellness
- EXNS – PE Teacher Prep
- Family and Consumer Science
- Instructional Leadership Ed.S.
- Instructional Leadership M.Ed.
- Instructional Technology
- Leadership – Teacher Leadership
- Professional Educators Masters
- Secondary Education
- Teacher Education Services

College of Fine Arts

- Art
- Communication
- Music
- Theatre

Academic Affairs (Academic Support Units)

- Falcon Success Center
- Game Studies and Design
- Graduate Programs
- Honors Program
- JWS Observatory
- Carmichael Library
- Malone Center
- McNair Program
- Partnerships and Outreach
- Registrar
- Service Learning and Community Engagement
- Student Support Services
- Traffic Safety Center
- Undergraduate Research
- Upward Bound

Academic Affairs (Other Administrative Units)

- Office of Assistant Provost
- Institutional Research, Planning and Assessment

Administrative Affairs

- Human Resources
- Information Services and Technology
- M.A.D.E Program
- Physical Plant

Advancement and External Affairs

University Marketing and Communications

Athletics

Business Affairs

Accounting and Budgeting

Facility and Event Scheduling

Enrollment and Student Affairs

Admissions

Career Development Center

Counseling Services

Disability Support Services

Health Services

Housing and Residence Life

Police

Student Aid Office

Student Conduct

Student Life

Veteran and Military Affairs

Outdoor Scholars

APPENDIX B: QUICK LIST OF INSTITUTIONAL SURVEYS AND OTHER DATA SOURCES

Faculty and Staff Surveys

Faculty Administrative Assessments

Faculty Survey

Administrator Survey

Student Surveys

Senior Survey

Next Destination Survey

National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) – Currently on Hold

Advising Assessments

Course Evaluations

UM Student Satisfaction Survey

UM Student Engagement Survey

University Data and Statistics

Banner Student Information System

Canvas Learning Management System

Publicly Available Institutional Statistics

(https://www.montevallo.edu/about-um/administration/irpa/university-statistics/

IRPA Statistics and Data Analysis by Request

External Data Sources Useful for Benchmarking

Alabama Commission on Higher Education (ACHE)

https://ache.edu/

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Integrated Post-Secondary Education Data System (IPEDS)

https://nces.ed.gov/

https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/use-the-data

Field specific professional associations and accreditation bodies