ACADEMIC PROGRAMS OFFICE

Program Review, Accreditation, Assessment Handbook

A practical guide to navigating program review, accreditation, and assessment processes, preparing required materials, and supporting continuous program improvement.

ACADEMIC YEAR 2026–2027 | VERSION 1

Developed by the Academic Programs Office

Last revised 11/18/2026

CURRENT INFORMATION For current forms, timelines, policy references, and Academic Programs contacts, visit the Assessment webpage.

Welcome and Before You Begin

The Academic Programs Office supports faculty and academic staff as they engage in program review, accreditation, and assessment at CSU Channel Islands. This handbook serves as a starting point for understanding these processes, preparing required materials, and using evidence to support continuous program improvement.

How this handbook and the website work together

The handbook helps you understand what to do, what to prepare, and how the program review, accreditation, and assessment processes fit together. The Program Review, Accreditation, and Assessment webpage is the live source for current forms, annual deadlines, workflow details, templates, policies, and linked campus resources.

Academic Senate policies and resolutions remain the authoritative campus policy source. Use the following policies whenever a decision depends on a campus policy requirement.

Assessment

Program Review

GE Assessment

Use the handbook in three steps

1. Identify the process you are working on**.** Start with "What Are You Trying to Do?" and select the section that best matches your program review, accreditation, or assessment needs.
2. Prepare before you begin. Each section explains the materials to gather, key questions to consider, common challenges, and relevant timing or planning considerations.
3. Confirm current requirements online. Check the Assessment webpage for current forms, deadlines, templates, policies, and procedures. Contact the Academic Programs Office early when the process involves unusual circumstances, external requirements, or complex coordination.

Bring these details to an early consultation

- The program, course, or assessment activity you are working on and what you hope to accomplish
- The student learning outcomes, program learning outcomes, or accreditation expectations connected to the work
- The courses, programs, faculty, students, or other campus units that may be involved or affected
- Any draft materials already in progress, evidence or data already available or accreditation narrative
- Questions, challenges, or areas where additional guidance, data, or coordination may be needed

Live forms, timelines, templates, and policy links are available on the Assessment webpage.

ORIENTATION

How to Use This Handbook

Begin with the question you are trying to answer or the assessment activity you need to complete. This handbook provides guidance for navigating the process, while the Assessment webpage serves as the current source for forms, deadlines, detailed templates, policies, and related campus resources.

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This handbook is intentionally designed to complement the Assessment website. Use it to identify the process that fits your needs, understand what to prepare, consider related requirements and impacts, and avoid common delays. Then consult the Assessment webpage for current forms, templates, deadlines, policies, and campus resources.

Use the handbook in three steps

Identify the question, process, or requirement you are addressing. Determine whether your work relates to assessment planning, program review, accreditation, reporting, or continuous improvement.

Follow the relevant section and use its guidance before beginning. Review the recommended preparation steps, materials, timelines, and common considerations.

Confirm current requirements on the Assessment webpage. Check the website for current deadlines, forms, templates, and policies, and consult the appropriate campus office early when the work involves complex requirements or coordination across multiple units.

NAVIGATION

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Appendix A: Glossary

Live Resources & Links

Use this page as the handbook's connection point to current, detailed, and frequently updated information. The handbook provides practical guidance for navigating assessment, program review, and accreditation processes; the linked resources below provide current forms, timelines, templates, policies, training materials, examples, and implementation guidance.

Start with: Assessment webpage — the central source for program assessment, program review, accreditation support, General Education assessment, course-level assessment, current resources, and related campus guidance.

Current assessment process resources

- **Assessment** — assessment planning, program-level assessment, course-level assessment, GE assessment, and training resources.
- **Program Review** — current program review process and supporting materials.
- **Institutional Research** — institutional data, dashboards, surveys, and analytical support for program review, assessment, accreditation, planning, and evidence-based decision-making.
- **Academic Senate Curriculum Committee Resources** — committee-facing resources and guidance.
- **Academic Senate** — current governance information, policies, resolutions, committees, agendas, and minutes.
- **Curriculum-Related Academic Senate Policies & Resolutions** — authoritative policy index for course and program development, GE, graduation requirements, cross-listing, catalog rights, and curriculum approval processes.

Academic planning, policies, and compliance

- **Academic Master Plan** — institutional planning context for new degree development.
- **Chancellor's Office Academic Program Planning and Development** — CSU-level information for developing a new program or modifying an existing program. Campus login may be required.
- **CSUCI Academic Program Learning Outcomes** — reference current Program Learning Outcomes across CSUCI academic programs when reviewing program assessment, curriculum alignment, or interdisciplinary connections.

GE resources

- **General Education - CSU Channel Islands** — current GE assessment details, Program Learning Outcomes, and policies.
- **Graduation and General Education Requirements** — current GE patterns, graduation requirements, conversion guidance, and advising resources. Use this page rather than relying on copied requirement language in this handbook.

Contacts and additional support

- **Academic Programs Office Team** — current office contacts and related Academic Programs resources.

How to use these links: When the handbook identifies a GE, graduation, timeline, articulation, assessment, WSCUC, Chancellor's Office, or catalog consideration, use the corresponding live resource above to confirm the current requirement before you submit.

DECISION GUIDE

Start Here: Who Am I? Or What Am I Trying to Do?

Choose the outcome first. This section routes you to the right form family and the questions to ask before you begin.

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Assessment, program review, and accreditation work can become delayed when the process begins with a form rather than a clear purpose. Start by identifying the question you need to answer, the requirement you need to meet, or the improvement you hope to make. Then determine which learning outcomes, courses, programs, student populations, evidence sources, reporting cycles, and campus partners may be affected.

If you are …	Start with…	Go to…
Program Director or Chair	Develop or update the program's assessment plan	**Develop or Update an Assessment Plan**
Program Director or Chair	Conduct Annual Program-Level Assessment	**Conduct Annual Program-Level Assessment**
Program Director or Chair	Prepare for the full program review cycle	**Prepare for Program Review**
Program Director, Chair or Dean	Prepare for or maintain specialized program accreditation	**Navigate Specialized Program Accreditation**
Program Faculty	Participate in General Education assessment	**Assess General Education**
Program Faculty	Conduct assessment within a course or across course sections	**Conduct Course-Level Assessment**
Anyone	Understand the overall assessment, review, and accreditation process	**Planning Your Timeline**
Anyone	Find guidance on outcomes, rubrics, evidence, mapping, and continuous improvement	**Shared Practices and Resources**
Anyone	Find training, consultation, campus contacts, or process support	**Training, Support, and Consultation**

CONSULT EARLY Before beginning complex assessment, program review, or accreditation work, contact the appropriate Academic Programs staff. Early consultation is especially important when the process involves multiple programs or departments, specialized accreditation, WSCUC requirements, significant data needs, external reporting, changes to learning outcomes or assessment plans, or findings that may lead to curriculum, policy, resource, or student-support changes.

PLANNING

Planning Your Timeline

Work backward from the applicable assessment cycle, program review deadline, accreditation milestone, or reporting date. Timely planning and complete materials protect time for consultation, analysis, faculty discussion, and revision while reducing the risk of delays or incomplete reporting.

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Current assessment, program review, and accreditation timelines are published and maintained on the Assessment webpage. Because deadlines, forms, templates, and reporting requirements may change, this handbook does not repeat a fixed annual calendar. Instead, use the planning sequence below and confirm current milestones and materials before beginning the process.

Who needs to do assessment?

While we encourage all units to engage in assessment for continuous improvement, this policy covers academic units, curricular and co-curricular.

Academic programs are structured sets of courses and learning experiences that lead to a recognized degree. Departments may include multiple academic programs and some programs within a department may be assessed and undergo Program Review separately (for example, Computer Science offers two distinct degrees in Computer Science and Information Technology that are assessed separately).

Co-curricular activities are defined by the Western States College and University Commission (WSCUC) as "learning experiences that supplement the formal curriculum, providing opportunities for student engagement and development outside of traditional classroom instruction. These activities are designed to enhance student learning and engagement, aligning with curricular and career goals." Examples at CSUCI include the Writing and Multiliteracy Center, Learning Resource Center, and Learning Communities.

Programs with specialized accreditation may also use an accreditor-required report or format when it addresses campus assessment expectations. Confirm any additional campus submission requirements before proceeding.

Plan Backward from the Deadline or Milestone

1. **Identify the applicable deadline or milestone.** Determine the assessment reporting date, program review cycle, accreditation submission deadline, site visit, or other required completion point.
2. **Review the current timeline.** Allow sufficient time for data collection, analysis, faculty discussion, consultation, drafting, review, and revision.
3. **Schedule an early consultation when needed.** Seek guidance early when the work involves complex requirements, multiple units, specialized accreditation, significant data needs, or external reporting.
4. **Gather supporting materials.** Confirm that learning outcomes, assessment plans, curriculum maps, evidence, prior reports, institutional data, and related documentation are current and complete.

5. **Begin formal review or reporting when the materials are ready.** Submit or circulate materials only when they are complete enough to support meaningful review and avoid unnecessary revisions or delays.

The Five-Year Assessment and Program Review Cycle

Stage	Purpose	What the program should do
1. Make or Maintain the Assessment Plan	Keep the program's assessment structure current and usable.	Review Program Learning Outcomes, curriculum maps, assessment methods, benchmarks, and the multi-year assessment schedule. Update the plan when curriculum, outcomes, accreditation expectations, or program priorities change.
2. Conduct Annual Program-Level Assessment	Evaluate student achievement of one or more Program Learning Outcomes each year.	Select the scheduled PLO; collect direct evidence of student learning; apply the appropriate rubric or scoring method; analyze results; and document findings. Ensure all PLOs are assessed across the full program review cycle.
3. Discuss Findings and Identify Actions	Turn assessment results into meaningful program improvement.	Engage program faculty in reviewing results, identifying patterns, considering limitations, and deciding whether changes are needed to curriculum, assignments, pedagogy, advising, student support, assessment methods, or other program practices.
4. Document and Follow Up	Preserve evidence of continuous improvement and close the loop.	Complete the annual assessment report; document decisions, responsible parties, and timelines; track progress on prior action items; and reassess when appropriate to determine whether changes had the intended effect.
5. Maintain Supporting Evidence	Build a useful record for future assessment, accreditation, and program review.	Maintain assessment plans, curriculum maps, annual reports, rubrics, faculty discussion notes, student-learning evidence, action items, institutional data, and documentation of completed improvements in an organized location.

Stage	Purpose	What the program should do
6. Prepare for Full Program Review	Begin the formal program review process with a strong evidence base.	During the year prior to review, confirm the review schedule; identify the self-study lead or working group; meet with Institutional Research; review prior assessment reports and action items; assess any remaining PLOs; compile program data; and identify potential external reviewers.
7. Complete the Self-Study	Analyze the program comprehensively using assessment and institutional evidence.	Draft the self-study using the current template; integrate annual assessment findings, student-success data, curriculum analysis, resource information, and progress on prior actions; gather faculty feedback; and revise in consultation with the Dean, Academic Programs, and Faculty Director of Assessment and Program Review.
8. Participate in External Review	Obtain an external perspective on program quality and priorities.	Prepare reviewers with the self-study and supporting evidence; coordinate the review schedule and campus meetings; participate in the review; and examine the external reviewers' findings and recommendations.
9. Develop the Action Plan (MOU)	Translate the review into priorities for the next cycle.	Review the external report and Dean feedback; identify realistic and measurable priorities; develop the Action Plan with program faculty; assign responsibilities and timelines; and submit the plan through the current campus process.
10. Implement and Monitor the Action Plan	Carry program review priorities into the next assessment cycle.	Integrate Action Plan priorities into annual assessment, curriculum planning, resource discussions, and program decision-making. Document progress each year so the next program review begins with a clear record of what was accomplished and what remains underway.

IMPORTANT Assessment, program review, or accreditation materials may be returned for revision when required information, supporting evidence, or related documentation is incomplete or inconsistent. Complete and timely materials move through review more predictably; late or incomplete submissions may delay reporting, review, or follow-up actions.

Develop an Assessment Plan

Use this pathway to create a new assessment plan or revise an existing plan for an academic, curricular, or co-curricular program. An assessment plan establishes how the program will evaluate student learning, assess each Program Learning Outcome over the review cycle, and use findings to support continuous improvement.

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Academic Senate policy check: Assessment Policy Review current campus assessment requirements before finalizing the plan. CSUCI academic programs are expected to maintain an updated assessment plan, assess at least one Program Learning Outcome annually, and ensure that every outcome is assessed during the five-year program review cycle.

Academic unit, curricular and co-curricular assessment: The systematic collection and analysis of data to ensure that academic units' learning outcomes align with the University mission, vision, and core values as expressed by the Institutional Learning Outcomes. Academic unit, curricular and co-curricular assessment aids to demonstrate effectiveness at achieving learning outcomes and provides a foundation for continuous improvement.

Assessment Plan:

Units are required to submit a brief (1-2 page) assessment plan to the Continuous Improvement Committee by the end of October.

Plans should:

- Define unit or program learning outcomes consistent with the mission of the university, the unit's goals and values, the standards of the unit/program, and specialized accreditation requirements if applicable.
- Include an outline of which learning outcomes a unit/program plans to assess each year and all learning outcomes need to be assessed during the five-year review cycle.
- Include a course matrix connecting SLOs to PLOs and ILOs

Assessment plans and action items can be accessed on the CI Public Drive, by going to the Curriculum Folder and clicking on the Program Review Folder. Documents are organized by Program and Year of Review.

Check related impacts

- **Program Learning Outcomes:** Confirm that the outcomes are current, measurable, and aligned with the program's mission, curriculum, disciplinary expectations, and relevant institutional outcomes.
- **Curriculum alignment:** Verify that students have meaningful opportunities to develop and demonstrate each outcome within required courses and learning experiences.

- **Program review:** Ensure that all Program Learning Outcomes will be assessed during the five-year review cycle and that the plan can produce evidence needed for the next self-study.
- **Specialized accreditation:** Align the assessment schedule and evidence with accreditor standards when possible to reduce duplication and support consistent reporting.
- **General Education:** Identify any courses or outcomes that also contribute to General Education assessment and coordinate the use of applicable outcomes and rubrics.
- **Data and records:** Determine where student work, scoring results, meeting notes, reports, and action items will be stored and who will maintain access over time.
- **Resources and workload:** Confirm that the proposed methods are realistic given faculty capacity, course schedules, data availability, and program resources.

Common pitfalls

- Treating the assessment plan as a reporting form rather than a practical guide for ongoing inquiry and improvement.
- Scheduling several outcomes in one year while leaving other outcomes unassessed during the review cycle.
- Creating a plan without identifying responsible individuals, faculty discussion points, or reporting expectations.
- Revising the plan without considering program review findings, accreditation expectations, or previous action items.
- Designing a process that is too burdensome to sustain consistently.

Timeline and Process

Begin with the next annual assessment deadline, program review cycle, or specialized accreditation milestone and work backward. Allow time for faculty consultation, outcome review, curriculum mapping, selection or development of assessment tools, and program approval of the final plan.

Programs should assess at least one Program Learning Outcome each year and maintain a schedule that covers all outcomes during the five-year program review cycle.

CURRENT REQUIREMENTS Use the Assessment webpage for current templates, annual reporting expectations, program review timelines, training opportunities, and contact information. Consult the Faculty Director of Assessment and Program Review or the appropriate Academic Programs staff early when the plan involves specialized accreditation, substantial outcome revisions, complex data needs, or coordination across multiple programs.

Conduct Annual Program-Level Assessment

Use this pathway to assess one or more Program Learning Outcomes, analyze evidence of student learning, document faculty discussion, and identify actions for continuous improvement. Annual assessment should follow the program's current assessment plan and contribute evidence for program review and accreditation.

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Academic Senate policy check: Review Assessment Policy Review current campus assessment requirements before finalizing the plan. CSUCI academic programs are expected to maintain an updated assessment plan, assess at least one Program Learning Outcome annually, and ensure that every outcome is assessed during the five-year program review cycle.

Use this pathway when…

- The program is completing its regular annual assessment activity.
- One or more Program Learning Outcomes are scheduled for assessment.
- The program is following up on a prior assessment finding or action item.
- Program review or specialized accreditation requires current evidence of student learning.
- Faculty need to determine whether students are meeting an established outcome or benchmark.

Use the **Develop or Update a Program Assessment Plan pathway** instead when the program does not have a current assessment plan, the learning outcomes or schedule need substantial revision, or the primary task is redesigning the assessment process.

Before you begin

- Review the current program assessment plan and confirm the outcome scheduled for assessment.
- Examine the wording of the Program Learning Outcome and determine whether it remains current, meaningful, and measurable.
- Review prior annual reports, action items, program review findings, and accreditation recommendations related to the outcome.
- Identify the course, assignment, experience, or other point at which students demonstrate the outcome.
- Confirm who will coordinate evidence collection, scoring, analysis, faculty discussion, and reporting.
- Establish the student population, timeframe, and sample that will be included.
- Confirm how student privacy, records, and access to evidence will be managed.

What to include in the Annual Assessment Plan

Academic Year and Program

Identify the academic year covered by the plan and the academic program completing the assessment.

Specialized Accreditation

Indicate whether the program currently holds specialized accreditation and whether it is interested in pursuing specialized accreditation.

If specialized accreditation applies, consider whether the same evidence can be used to address both campus assessment expectations and accreditor requirements. Align terminology, measures, and reporting where practical to reduce duplication.

Program Learning Outcome(s) to Be Assessed

Identify the Program Learning Outcome or outcomes the program will assess this year.

Before selecting an outcome, confirm that:

- It appears in the program's current assessment plan.
- It has not been overlooked during the five-year assessment cycle.
- The program has a meaningful opportunity to collect evidence this year.
- The outcome is specific enough to be measured using the proposed evidence.

If specialized accreditation uses different terminology, identify the applicable SLO, standard, competency, Performance Expectation, or other required outcome and document its connection to the program's assessment structure.

Courses and Assignments

Identify the courses and assignments that will provide evidence for the selected PLO(s).

Include:

- Course number or learning experience.
- Assignment, examination, project, portfolio, performance, field experience, or other source of student work.
- Whether all sections or a sample of sections will participate.
- Whether the evidence comes from one course or multiple points in the curriculum.

When course-level SLOs are used as evidence for a PLO, make the connection explicit. The program should be able to explain how the course outcome, assignment, scoring criteria, and PLO align.

Assessment Process

Briefly explain how the PLO(s) will be assessed.

Include:

- The assessment method.

- The student work or evidence that will be evaluated.
- The rubric, scoring guide, embedded questions, or other evaluation criteria.
- Who will review the evidence.
- How results will be reviewed or discussed.
- How evidence from multiple sections, courses, or reviewers will be combined when applicable.
- Any sampling approach being used.

Examples may include:

> Faculty will assess the PLO using a common rubric applied to a signature assignment in the identified course. All sections of the course will participate.
>
> The program will assess the PLO through embedded questions on the final exam in two core courses. Faculty will analyze student performance on selected questions aligned with the learning outcome and compare results across course sections.
>
> Students will submit an electronic portfolio containing work from multiple courses. A faculty committee will review a sample of portfolios using a program rubric focused on integration of the selected PLOs.

A strong description should make it possible for someone outside the program to understand **what evidence will be collected, how it will be evaluated, and who will interpret the results**.

Explore Other Assessment Data

Annual assessment can include more than direct PLO assessment. Programs may also use institutional or program data to investigate questions related to student success or program effectiveness.

Consider whether you want to examine:

- Enrollment or number of majors.
- Retention and graduation.
- Time to degree.
- Course success.
- DFW rates.
- Equity gaps.
- Transfer pathways.
- Student progression through key courses.
- Other trends identified through Institutional Research dashboards or Program Review data.

If you select **Yes**, identify the question you want the data to help answer rather than beginning with the data source alone.

For example:

- Are students progressing successfully through a gateway course?

- Are there persistent differences in course success across student populations?
- Is enrollment in the major increasing, declining, or remaining stable?
- Are students completing the degree within the expected timeframe?

General Education Courses in the Program

Review whether the program offers courses included in the current General Education assessment cycle.

If applicable:

- Identify the relevant GE-designated courses.
- Communicate with instructors teaching those courses.
- Confirm that direct assessment evidence will be collected according to current GE Assessment requirements.
- Coordinate GE assessment with program-level assessment when the same evidence can appropriately serve both purposes.

Use the current Assessment webpage and GE Assessment Policy to confirm which subject areas are being assessed in the current year.

GE Assessment Acknowledgment

Programs with courses included in the current GE assessment cycle are responsible for ensuring that instructors are aware of and participate in required GE assessment activities.

Direct assessment evidence should be collected for applicable sections and submitted or retained according to the current GE Assessment process. Evidence collected through Canvas Outcomes does not need to be uploaded separately when current campus guidance indicates that it is already available through the system.

Before acknowledging this requirement, confirm that instructors have received the necessary information and understand the current collection and submission process.

Action Plan Items

Review the Action Plan developed through the program's most recent Academic Program Review.

Identify:

- Which recommendations or deliverables the program will work on this year.
- What progress has already been made.
- What work remains.
- Who is responsible.
- Whether assessment or other evidence will be used to evaluate progress.

Annual assessment is one way programs demonstrate progress between formal Program Reviews, so use this section to connect current work to the priorities identified during the previous review cycle.

Other Goals or Themes

Use this section for assessment or continuous-improvement questions that do not fit neatly into the PLO assessment or Action Plan sections.

Examples might include:

- Exploring a student-success concern.
- Reviewing a curriculum sequence.
- Examining a potential equity gap.
- Piloting a new assessment method.
- Revisiting a rubric or signature assignment.
- Evaluating an advising or student-support practice.
- Preparing for specialized accreditation.
- Gathering baseline evidence before making a program change.

Keep the question manageable enough that the program can make meaningful progress during the academic year.

Files to Attach

Attach supporting materials that will help document or carry out the plan, such as:

- Rubrics or scoring guides.
- Curriculum maps.
- Assessment instruments.
- Tables or figures.
- Survey instruments.
- Accreditation crosswalks.
- Previous assessment findings.
- Relevant Action Plan materials.
- Other supporting documentation.

Attachments should support the plan rather than replace the explanation provided in the form.

Check related impacts

- **Alignment:** Confirm that the selected evidence directly measures the PLO, SLO, standard, competency, or Performance Expectation being assessed.
- **Course-to-program alignment:** When course-level evidence contributes to a PLO measure, confirm that the relationship is documented and that aggregation is meaningful.

- **Curriculum:** Consider whether the findings may lead to changes in content, sequencing, assignments, pedagogy, prerequisites, or opportunities for students to practice and demonstrate learning.
- **Institutional data:** Use additional data to answer a defined question rather than collecting information without a clear purpose.
- **Program Review:** Connect annual assessment work to prior Action Plan items and preserve evidence that will be useful in the next self-study.
- **Specialized accreditation:** Coordinate measures, standards, terminology, and reporting when possible.
- **General Education:** Confirm whether courses in the program are included in the current GE assessment cycle and communicate expectations to instructors.
- **Follow-up:** Identify how the program will revisit findings or determine whether an implemented change had the intended effect.

Common pitfalls

- Selecting a PLO because evidence is easy to access rather than because it is scheduled or meaningful to assess.
- Using course grades as the sole evidence of student achievement.
- Naming a course without identifying the specific assignment or evidence that measures the PLO.
- Aggregating course-level SLO results without confirming alignment with the PLO.
- Describing the assessment method too generally to understand how evidence will actually be evaluated.
- Beginning with available institutional data rather than a clear question the program wants to answer.
- Treating GE assessment as separate from program planning when the same evidence could appropriately support both.
- Listing Action Plan items without identifying what the program will actually do this year.
- Identifying too many additional goals to complete meaningfully within one assessment cycle.
- Attaching materials without explaining how they relate to the assessment plan.

Timeline and Process

Complete the Annual Assessment Plan early enough in the academic year to coordinate participating faculty, collect student work, and address General Education or accreditation requirements before the relevant courses conclude.

During the year:

1. Confirm the PLO(s) and evidence to be collected.
2. Communicate expectations to participating faculty.
3. Collect direct assessment evidence.
4. Explore additional program data, if identified in the plan.
5. Track progress on Program Review Action Plan items.
6. Review and discuss assessment findings with program faculty.

7. Identify actions or follow-up questions.
8. Complete the annual assessment report for work conducted during the academic year.
9. Carry unfinished actions or questions into the next assessment cycle as appropriate.

CURRENT REQUIREMENTS Use the Assessment webpage for the current annual reporting deadline, templates, examples, training materials, and submission instructions. Consult the Faculty Director of Assessment and Program Review or the appropriate Academic Programs staff early when the assessment involves complex data, multiple programs, specialized accreditation, General Education, or significant changes to the assessment plan.

Prepare for Full Program Review

Use this pathway to complete the formal review of an academic program. Program review brings together evidence about student learning, program effectiveness, curriculum, resources, and future priorities to support reflection, external feedback, and continuous improvement.

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Academic Senate policy check: Program Review Policy Review the current campus program review guidance before beginning. Confirm the program's review cycle, required self-study components, external review expectations, institutional data process, and action-plan requirements.

Use this pathway when…

- The program is scheduled for its regular program review.
- A new or recently elevated program is completing an initial review.
- Campus leadership, an accreditor, or another authority has requested an interim or special review.
- The program needs to document progress since its previous review.
- The program is coordinating campus program review with specialized accreditation.

Use the **Annual Program-Level Assessment pathway** when the primary task is completing the program's yearly assessment activity rather than preparing a comprehensive review.

Before you begin

- Confirm the program review timeline, submission dates, and responsible coordinator.
- Review the previous self-study, external reviewer report, action plan, annual assessment reports, and progress updates.
- Clarify faculty roles in drafting, reviewing, discussing, and approving the self-study.
- Identify the institutional data, student learning evidence, curriculum materials, and other documentation needed.
- Determine whether specialized accreditation materials can be used to meet some program review requirements.
- Schedule time for faculty discussion, consultation, revision, external review, and action planning.
- Identify campus partners whose input may be needed, including Academic Programs, institutional research, advising, enrollment management, the library, or student support units.

Choose this form

Self Study Template - Use this as a guide to prepare the Self Study report
Program Review Dashboard - Use this dashboard to help gather data for the Self Study
External Review Template - Use this as a guide to prepare for External Review
Program MOU Action Plan Template - Use this as a guide to prepare for the Action Plan

Why do we do Program Review?

Program Review allows academic programs to intentionally reflect on their strengths and achievements, identify needed improvements, and to address these needs through long term planning that will endure through short-term administrative changes or budget constraints. Program reviews are integral to planning, resource allocation, and other decision making within the university. Regular program reviews also allow the university to account for its use of public resources and to develop support among its various constituencies.

Academic programs engage in program review for several key reasons:

1. Quality Assurance: to ensure that the program maintains high academic standards and meets institutional and accreditation requirements.
2. Continuous Improvement: to identify strengths and weaknesses, enabling data-informed decisions for curriculum updates, teaching methods, and resource allocation.
3. Accountability: to demonstrate to stakeholders (administration, students, accrediting bodies, and the public) that the program is effective and aligned with institutional goals.
4. Strategic Planning: to align the program's direction with evolving disciplinary trends, workforce needs, and the institution's mission and priorities.
5. Resource Justification: to provide evidence for the need for continued or additional funding, staffing, facilities, or other resources.
6. Student Outcomes Assessment: to evaluate whether students are achieving the intended learning outcomes and how the program supports their success.

Program review offers thorough and candid analysis of:

- The mission and goals of the program and their relation to the mission of the institution;
- The curriculum through which program mission and goals are pursued;
- The assessment of student learning outcomes, the Program revisions based upon those outcomes, and the plans for future assessment activities;
- The quality and diversity of faculty and staff and their contributions to Program mission and goals;
- The range and quality of scholarship and creative activities, emphasizing those involving students;
- The knowledge and skills of entering and graduating students;
- Physical facilities and program resources;
- Service and contributions to the community.

Program Review at a Glance

Stage	Purpose	What the program should do
1. Initiation	Launch the program review process and establish roles, responsibilities, and support.	Review the program review notification; inform program faculty; identify the self-study lead or working group; notify Academic Programs if the contact person is someone other than the chair; and discuss possible reassigned time or stipend support with the Dean.
2. Planning, Data Collection, and Assessment	Build the evidence base for the self-study and prepare for external review.	Meet with Institutional Research; identify, compile, and analyze program data; assess relevant Program Learning Outcomes using direct evidence; identify potential external reviewers; and submit reviewer information and CVs for Dean approval.
3. Self-Study	Analyze program evidence and develop the formal self-study report.	Complete data analysis; draft the self-study using the current template; gather faculty feedback; revise as needed; submit the draft to the Dean, AVP for Academic Programs and Continuous Improvement, and Faculty Director of Assessment and Program Review for feedback; finalize the report; and prepare the external review schedule.
4. External Review and Final Report	Obtain an external perspective on program strengths, challenges, and opportunities for improvement.	Coordinate the external review visit; schedule meetings with faculty, the Dean, Provost, and other relevant participants; provide reviewers with the self-study and supporting materials; use the External Review Checklist to prepare for the visit; and review the written external reviewer report once it is received.

Stage	Purpose	What the program should do
5. Action Plan	Translate self-study findings, external feedback, and Dean feedback into priorities for the next review cycle.	Review the external report and Dean feedback; meet with the Dean to discuss priorities; develop action items using the current Action Plan template; discuss and refine the plan with program faculty; and submit the draft Action Plan to the Dean, Provost, AVP for Academic Programs and Continuous Improvement, and Faculty Director of Assessment and Program Review.

The Self Study

The most important thing a program can do to prepare for the program review process is to have discussions among faculty to determine areas of inquiry specific to the program that they wish to address in the self-study. A program should ask itself what they would like to know about the experience of students in their program. For some help brainstorming, you can visit this list of guiding questions List of Common Questions for Program Review.

The self-study is a reflective document that takes stock of a program in terms of where it is at the present moment and how it got there. The external reviewers who come to campus may know very little about CI, and even less about the particular program they are reviewing, so the self-study must include all the information they need to understand the program as it fits into the broader context of CI.

Self-study report: A report that articulates the nature of assessment conducted, the analysis of that data collected for the assessment, and the strategies for improvement (closing-the-loop). Self-study reports typically follow the campus Program Self-Study Template (PDF, 133KB). Specific exceptions for programs that undergo program specific accreditation have access to an exemption, as those accreditation reports can be submitted for program review in lieu of utilizing the template. The goal of a self-study is for faculty in the program to engage in self-reflective analysis of a number of national metrics of student success, faculty and student demographics, changes in the discipline, and student learning outcomes achievement.

The first step here is to review prior program review documents and assess your progress toward identified goals from the last review. You can access documents from past program reviews on the CI Public Drive, by going to the Curriculum Folder and clicking on the Program Review Folder. Documents are organized by Program and Year of Review.

From there, we suggest that you have rich and detailed discussions with a broad and inclusive group of your faculty to identify how you would like to focus your self-study and assessment efforts. As the Program Review Policy notes, the self-study should have broad participation from the faculty and all faculty should be made aware of its findings.

Here are some sample questions that you might hold in mind at the outset of your self study.

- Who are you as a program?
- What do your Program Learning Outcome assessment results show about what students are learning, where they are succeeding, and where additional attention may be needed?
- How have assessment findings informed changes to curriculum, instruction, advising, student support, or other aspects of the program?
- How well is the program attracting and sustaining sufficient majors and course enrollment?
- How are you serving students?
- How successful is the program in retaining students, supporting timely progress toward degree requirements, and helping students graduate?
- What do course success rates show, and are there gaps across demographic groups that may indicate inequities?
- Are there areas of the curriculum or student experience that need additional assessment to better understand progress toward program goals and learning outcomes?

There is a template available to guide your preparation of the Self-Study Template (PDF, 133KB).

While it is common to have a compliance based approach to assessment and program review, focusing on preparing the self-study for the external reviewers and administrators, we want to emphasize that the process of creating the self-study, receiving feedback from external reviewers, and creating measurable goals for continuous improvement have considerable value to the program engaging in the process. We hope programs will use the self-study as an opportunity to reflect on what is going well and consider future improvements to better serve students.

Because assessment and program review are ongoing processes, key personnel like chairs and contact people might change due to sabbaticals and other leaves. Broader participation in the process will allow for continuity through these inevitable changes. We recommend using some kind of shared workspace, whether that be a Program Canvas site, a Dropbox folder, Microsoft Teams, or other alternative to encourage broad participation and share information with the entire program. Beginning with a shared workspace will help build continuity and make sure that all documents and work continue to be available, even if personnel change.

The self-study is due to the Dean, Provost, AVP APCI, and FDAPR in the Fall Semester to allow time for feedback before it is sent to the external reviewer(s).

The External Review

External reviews are a vital part of the program review process because they offer the chance for additional, outside perspectives on the program and its self-study. The external review is typically conducted by one or two reviewers. Potential reviewers should be selected strategically, with effort put forth to identify individuals who have experience in areas from which the Program can benefit or who have other skills, perspectives, or competencies that the program feels important to the review process.

As outlined in the Program Review Policy:
One of the External Reviewers will be from within the CSU system, such as a Chair or faculty member of a similar program at a different CSU or CI. In the event that only one reviewer is from outside campus, the CI reviewer must be from a different academic program. Reviewers are expected to have experience and

familiarity with the elements and needs of the academic program they will be reviewing and will be chosen based on recommendations by the Program, working together with the appropriate Dean. The Dean shall forward the names and addresses of the chosen reviewers to the AVP for Academic Programs and Continuous Improvement (AVPAPCI). The AVPAPCI or designee shall send the formal invitation letter to the reviewers with the timeline and compensation.

The External Review visit typically lasts two days with at least one full day of meetings and activities taking place in-person on campus.

To prepare for the external review visit, go through the External Review Checklist (PDF, 67.4KB).
View the External Review Template (PDF, 173KB).
View a sample External Review Visit Schedule (PDF, 54.5KB).

Learn more about why the External Review is an important part of Program Review.

The Action Plan (formerly MOU)

The Action Plan (formerly MOU) for Program Improvement is the written record of key recommendations and corresponding goals and actions to be taken by the program, consistent with the findings from the Self-Study, recommendations from the External Review report, and feedback from University administrators and the Continuous Improvement Committee. There is a guide for the preparation of this document.

Program Action Plan Template(MS Word, 55.6KB)

The Action Plan is a specific document that outlines the recommendations, supporting rationales, key personnel involved, and resource implications, in addition to identifying both 2- and 5-year deliverables. This Action Plan remains in effect until the next program review cycle begins, and is reviewed and assessed as the starting point for the next review cycle's Self-Study.

The Action Plan is due to the AVP for Academic Programs and Continuous Improvement (AVP APCI) by the end of the Spring semester.

Check related impacts

- **Assessment:** Confirm that the program has assessed all Program Learning Outcomes during the review cycle and can show how findings informed decisions or improvements.
- **Curriculum:** Identify outdated requirements, sequencing concerns, bottlenecks, gaps in learning opportunities, or curriculum changes that may require separate approval.
- **Student success:** Consider retention, time to degree, graduation, advising, access, equity, transfer pathways, and post-graduation outcomes where appropriate.
- **Specialized accreditation:** Align campus and accreditor requirements when possible while clearly identifying any requirements unique to each process.
- **Resources:** Connect identified needs to evidence and distinguish essential program requirements from longer-term aspirations.

- **Institutional priorities:** Consider alignment with the University mission, strategic priorities, academic planning, and relevant CSU expectations.
- **External review:** Ensure reviewers receive sufficient context and evidence to evaluate the program fairly and provide useful recommendations.
- **Action planning:** Confirm that proposed actions are realistic, prioritized, measurable, and connected to the findings in the self-study and external review.

Common pitfalls

- Treating the self-study as a descriptive report rather than an evidence-based analysis.
- Waiting until the submission deadline to request institutional data or collect supporting materials.
- Including data without interpreting what the results mean for the program.
- Focusing only on strengths while minimizing challenges, gaps, or unresolved concerns.
- Making claims that are not supported by evidence.
- Omitting annual assessment findings or failing to show how assessment influenced program decisions.
- Drafting the self-study without meaningful faculty participation.
- Creating a long list of recommendations without identifying priorities, responsibilities, resources, or timelines.
- Treating the external review as the end of the process rather than a source of feedback for the action plan.
- Failing to track progress after the action plan is finalized.

Timeline and Process

Work backward from the self-study deadline, external review date, and action-plan completion date. Allow sufficient time for data requests, evidence collection, faculty discussion, drafting, internal review, revision, external reviewer preparation, and follow-up planning.

CURRENT REQUIREMENTS Use the Assessment webpage for the current program review schedule, self-study template, external review guidance, action-plan materials, submission instructions, and contact information. Consult the Faculty Director of Assessment and Program Review or the appropriate Academic Programs staff early when the review involves specialized accreditation, complex data needs, multiple programs, significant curriculum changes, or substantial resource requests.

Navigate Specialized Program Accreditation

Use this pathway when an academic program is seeking initial accreditation, preparing for reaffirmation, responding to accreditor findings, or completing required interim, annual, or substantive reports. Specialized accreditation should be coordinated with campus assessment, program review, institutional accreditation, and academic planning requirements whenever possible.

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Use this pathway when…

- The program is seeking initial specialized or program specific accreditation.
- The program is preparing for reaffirmation or reaccreditation.
- An accreditor requires an annual, interim, monitoring, or progress report.
- The program is preparing for a site visit or external review.
- Accreditation standards have changed and the program must revise its processes or documentation.
- The program must respond to findings, recommendations, conditions, or areas of concern.
- A proposed program change may affect accreditation status or require prior approval from the accreditor.

Use the **Program Review pathway** when the primary task is CSUCI's regular academic program review. When accreditation and program review occur during the same period, coordinate the two processes to reduce duplication while ensuring that all campus requirements are addressed.

Accreditor terminology: Specialized accrediting agencies may use different terms for expected student or candidate achievement, such as Program Learning Outcomes, Student Learning Outcomes, Program Standards, competencies, performance expectations, professional standards, or other agency-specific requirements. Use the terminology required by the applicable accreditor and clearly document how those expectations align with the program's curriculum, assessment, and campus learning outcomes.

Before you begin

- Review the current accreditation standards and identify all required student or candidate learning expectations, competencies, Program Standards, performance expectations, or other agency-specific requirements.
- Identify which accreditation requirements must be assessed directly and what evidence the agency expects programs to maintain or report.
- Confirm the accreditation cycle, reporting deadlines, site visit dates, and required approvals.
- Review the prior self-study, accreditation decision letter, site visit report, progress reports, and outstanding recommendations.
- Identify the accreditation coordinator and clarify faculty, staff, administrator, and campus-partner responsibilities.

- Determine which campus assessment, program review, curriculum, student-success, and institutional data can be used as evidence.
- Identify any new data or documentation that must be collected.
- Confirm whether proposed curriculum, delivery, location, enrollment, or structural changes require prior accreditor approval.
- Establish a document-management process for evidence, drafts, correspondence, and final submissions.

Prepare these materials

- Program mission, goals, and applicable learning outcomes, competencies, Program Standards, performance expectations, or other accreditor-defined expectations.
- A crosswalk showing how program curriculum and assessment activities address applicable accreditation standards and expected student or candidate performance.
- Curriculum maps or other alignment documents demonstrating where required knowledge, skills, behaviors, competencies, or professional expectations are introduced, developed, and assessed.
- Assessment plans and evidence demonstrating achievement of the outcomes or standards required by the accreditor.
- Student achievement and student-success data required by the accreditor.
- Faculty qualifications, workload, professional development, and staffing information.
- Information about facilities, technology, library resources, clinical or field placements, and other program resources.
- Policies, handbooks, advising materials, and student-facing information required by the accreditor.
- Evidence of progress on prior accreditation findings, recommendations, or conditions.
- Draft self-study, narrative, compliance report, or other required submission.
- Supporting exhibits and documentation organized according to accreditor requirements.
- Site visit preparation materials, when applicable.

Check related impacts

- **Assessment:** Confirm that assessment methods and evidence address both campus expectations and accreditation standards without creating unnecessary duplicate processes.
- **Program review:** Determine whether accreditation materials can support the program review self-study and whether additional campus-specific analysis is required.
- **Curriculum:** Identify any accreditation-driven curriculum changes that require separate curriculum approval before implementation.
- **Student disclosures:** Confirm that required accreditation status, licensure, certification, clinical placement, or consumer-information disclosures are current and accurate.
- **Licensure and certification:** Verify alignment with applicable state, professional, or licensing requirements when relevant.

- **Institutional accreditation:** Consult the campus Accreditation Liaison Officer when program changes may have WSCUC implications.
- **External approvals:** Determine whether CSU Chancellor's Office, state agency, licensing board, or other external approval is required.
- **Data:** Confirm that reported data are consistent across accreditation submissions, campus reports, public disclosures, and institutional records.
- **Resources:** Identify any staffing, budget, facilities, technology, or placement requirements necessary to maintain compliance.

Common pitfalls

- Assuming campus Program Learning Outcomes fully substitute for accreditor-specific standards, competencies, or performance expectations without documenting the relationship between them.
- Using campus terminology in an accreditation report when the agency requires different or more specific language.
- Beginning the self-study without first reviewing the current accreditation standards and reporting instructions.
- Relying on materials from the previous accreditation cycle without confirming that requirements have changed.
- Treating accreditation as the responsibility of one coordinator rather than a shared program process.
- Collecting large amounts of evidence without clearly linking each item to a standard or claim.
- Reporting assessment results without demonstrating how findings led to decisions or improvements.
- Using inconsistent data, terminology, outcomes, or program information across different sections of the submission.
- Making curriculum or program changes without determining whether prior accreditor approval is required.
- Waiting until the site visit or submission deadline to address unresolved compliance concerns.
- Failing to document how prior recommendations or conditions were resolved.
- Treating accreditation findings as separate from program planning, assessment, or continuous improvement.

Timeline and Process

Work backward from the accreditor's submission deadline, site visit, or decision date. Accreditation processes often require significant lead time for evidence collection, faculty discussion, data analysis, drafting, internal review, external coordination, and revision.

CURRENT REQUIREMENTS Use the Assessment webpage and the applicable specialized accreditor's website for current standards, timelines, templates, reporting requirements, and supporting resources. Consult Academic Programs, the Faculty Director of Assessment and Program Review, and the campus Accreditation Liaison Officer early when accreditation work involves significant curriculum changes, WSCUC substantive change, external approvals, complex data needs, or institutional commitments.

General Education Assessment

Live resource: Consult the General Education webpage when assessment or program review involves GE learning outcomes, designated GE courses, assessment expectations, graduation requirements, or changes that may affect the General Education program.

Use this pathway when a course, program, or faculty group is participating in General Education assessment. GE assessment examines how well students are achieving designated learning outcomes across the General Education curriculum and provides evidence for reflection, improvement, program review, and institutional accreditation.

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Academic Senate policy check: Review General Education Assessment Policy before beginning GE assessment or proposing changes so learning outcomes, designation criteria, assessment expectations, and review responsibilities are clear.

The Policy on **General Education Program and Learning Outcomes** outlines each GE area and explains its Program Learning Outcome (PLO) and associated Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs). Courses certified as GE courses by CI's General Education Committee all incorporate at least one GE PLO and corresponding SLO that require regular assessment.

Use this pathway when…

- A General Education learning outcome is scheduled for assessment.
- Your course has been selected to provide student work for a GE assessment cycle.
- Faculty are reviewing evidence of student learning across multiple GE courses or sections.
- A program is examining how GE learning contributes to student achievement of broader institutional outcomes.
- Assessment findings indicate a need to review assignments, rubrics, instructional practices, or curriculum alignment.
- GE assessment evidence is needed for program review, institutional accreditation, or continuous improvement.

Use the **Course-Level Assessment pathway** when the primary purpose is to evaluate student learning within an individual course rather than contribute to a broader General Education assessment process.

Before you begin

- Confirm the General Education learning outcome or competency being assessed.
- Review the current wording and performance expectations associated with the outcome.
- Identify the courses, sections, assignments, or student populations included in the assessment.
- Confirm the sampling method and number of student artifacts needed.
- Determine whether the existing assignment provides appropriate evidence of the learning outcome.
- Review the applicable rubric or scoring guide before collecting or scoring student work.

- Clarify faculty roles for collecting, scoring, discussing, and reporting results.
- Confirm the timeline for evidence collection, scoring, faculty discussion, and submission.
- Determine how student privacy and assessment records will be protected.

General Education Subject Area(s) Reviewed	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Subject Area 1: English Communication — 1A English Composition, 1B Critical Thinking and Composition, and 1C Oral Communication	✓				
Subject Area 2: Mathematical Concepts and Quantitative Reasoning		✓			
Subject Area 7: Mission Pillars			✓		
Subject Area 3: Arts & Humanities				✓	
Subject Area 4: Social and Behavioral Sciences				✓	
Subject Area 5: Physical and Biological Sciences — 5A Physical Science, 5B Biological Science, and 5C Laboratory					✓
Subject Area 6: Ethnic Studies					✓

Ongoing each year: Data for GE courses are collected annually so that each scheduled review can consider multiple years of course-level assessment data for the subject area(s) under review.

Check related impacts

- **Assignment alignment:** Confirm that the assignment gives students a meaningful opportunity to demonstrate the specific GE outcome being assessed.
- **Course learning outcomes:** Consider how the GE outcome connects with the course's own student learning outcomes and instructional activities.
- **Rubric alignment:** Ensure that scoring criteria correspond to the intended learning outcome and are applied consistently across reviewers.
- **Sampling:** Confirm that the student work selected for review is appropriate for the question being asked and follows current campus sampling guidance.
- **Multiple sections:** When several sections or instructors participate, establish common expectations for evidence collection, scoring, and interpretation.

- **Program-level assessment:** Determine whether GE assessment evidence also contributes to one or more Program Learning Outcomes.
- **Institutional accreditation:** Preserve documentation that may demonstrate student learning and continuous improvement for institutional accreditation purposes.
- **Equity:** When appropriate and supported by sufficient data, consider whether patterns in student achievement suggest differences in learning opportunities or outcomes that merit further examination.

Common pitfalls

- Selecting an assignment that does not provide meaningful evidence of the designated GE learning outcome.
- Modifying a rubric or scoring scale without documenting the change or coordinating with the assessment process.
- Using course grades as a substitute for direct assessment of student learning.
- Collecting student work without confirming the required sampling procedure.
- Scoring artifacts without reviewing the rubric or participating in calibration when multiple reviewers are involved.
- Focusing only on the percentage of students meeting a benchmark without examining patterns in student performance.
- Treating GE assessment as an evaluation of individual instructors rather than an examination of student learning.
- Reporting findings without documenting faculty interpretation or discussion.
- Identifying improvements without specifying how or when they will be implemented.
- Collecting assessment results without returning to them in a later cycle to determine whether changes were effective.

Timeline and Process

Work backward from the current General Education assessment deadline. Allow time to confirm the outcome and participating courses, identify appropriate assignments, collect student work, prepare or calibrate reviewers, score evidence, analyze findings, discuss results, and complete the required reporting.

CURRENT REQUIREMENTS Use the Assessment webpage for the current General Education assessment schedule, learning outcomes, rubrics, templates, reporting instructions, training opportunities, and contact information. Consult the Faculty Director of Assessment and Program Review or the appropriate Academic Programs staff early when the assessment involves multiple courses or programs, significant rubric or assignment changes, complex sampling or data needs, or questions about alignment with institutional accreditation.

Conduct Course-Level Assessment

Live resource: Program assessment and review resources: Assessment Confirm current assessment expectations and related resources before revising SLOs, assessment matrices, or program review materials.

Use this pathway to examine student learning within an individual course, section, or multi-section course. Course-level assessment helps faculty determine whether students are achieving course learning outcomes, evaluate the effectiveness of assignments and instructional approaches, and identify opportunities for improvement.

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Academic Senate policy check: Review Assessment Policy

Review current campus assessment requirements before finalizing the plan. CSUCI academic programs are expected to maintain an updated assessment plan, assess at least one Program Learning Outcome annually, and ensure that every outcome is assessed during the five-year program review cycle.

Use this pathway when…

- You want to determine how well students are achieving one or more course learning outcomes.
- A course is being reviewed as part of program assessment, program review, or accreditation.
- Faculty are comparing student learning across sections, modalities, or instructional approaches.
- An assignment, rubric, or assessment method needs to be evaluated or improved.
- Assessment results suggest a need to revise teaching strategies, sequencing, or learning activities.
- A course contributes evidence to a Program Learning Outcome or General Education outcome.

Use the **Annual Program-Level Assessment pathway** when the primary purpose is to evaluate achievement of a Program Learning Outcome across the program rather than within an individual course.

Whether you are engaged in formal program level assessment or Program Review, if you are an instructor here at California State University Channel Islands, you should be (and likely already are) engaged in assessment in the individual courses you teach.

Course-level assessment is the process of gathering and analyzing information about how well students are meeting course-specific learning objectives with the goal of continually improving the learning experience for students. This often involves using tools like exams, assignments, projects, or discussions to evaluate student understanding, and then using that information to improve teaching and support student success. It's not just about grading, it's about finding out what is working well in a course and what might need adjusting.

What is a course assessment plan?

An assessment plan illustrates a course's alignment of student learning outcomes (SLOs) to broader program (PLOs), GE (GEPLOs), and/or institutional learning outcomes (ILOs). It specifies a methodology and schedule for assessing student learning outcomes over an accreditation or five-year review cycle. It must include direct assessment of student learning experience, based on activities and assignments directly produced by the student over the course of the learning experience. These activities and assignments can reflect the approaches of the discipline. Examples include but are not limited to course-embedded work, pre/post testing, licensure examinations, performances and exhibitions, and portfolios of student work. An assessment plan may also include indirect assessment of the student learning experience, such as surveys and focus groups. Each SLO should be assessed at least once during a given review period. A course assessment plan may use different terminology when required by a specialized accrediting agency, including terms such as Student Learning Outcomes, competencies, performance expectations, standards, or other agency-specific measures of student or candidate achievement. When applicable, use the terminology required by the accreditor and clearly document how it aligns with the course and program assessment structure.

Begin with the course student learning outcomes (SLOs). For more about locating and creating courseSLOs, go here.

Connecting SLOs to Program Learning Outcomes

Course-level Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) can provide evidence for Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) when the relationship between them is clearly established in the curriculum map.

When course-level evidence is used for program-level assessment:

- Identify which SLOs align with the PLO being assessed.
- Use assignments or assessment activities that directly measure the relevant SLOs.
- Apply common or comparable criteria, such as a shared rubric, when evidence is collected across multiple courses or sections.
- Aggregate results at the program level only when the measures are sufficiently aligned to support a meaningful interpretation.
- Document how course-level results were combined, including the courses, student populations, measures, and scoring criteria represented.

- Interpret the aggregated results in relation to the PLO benchmark rather than treating individual course grades as evidence of program-level achievement.
- Use the findings to identify patterns across the curriculum and determine where students may need additional opportunities to develop or demonstrate the PLO.

Course-level SLO results do not automatically become PLO results. Programs should be able to explain the connection between the course outcome, the evidence collected, and the broader program outcome before using the data for program-level assessment.

MAP Course SLOs to PLOs and outline the assessment tools

If you are doing this as part of a program proposal or self-study, you may want to use the resources located on the Program Review pages.

Here is an example of what this might look like for a course assessment plan:

Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)	Course Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)	Assessment
PLO 1: [Describe PLO]	SLO 1	Exam, Project, Assignment, etc.
	SLO 2	Quiz, Lab Report, etc.
PLO 2: [Describe PLO]	SLO 2	Quiz, Lab Report, etc.
PLO 3: [Describe PLO]	SLO 3	Essay, Presentation, etc.
	SLO 4	Case Study, Research Paper, etc.

Map course assignments and activities to SLOs

Look at the significant assignments for the course and determine whichSLOs they support.

Here is an example of a map of SLOs and course assignments generated by ChatGPT

Assignment	Description	Mapped SLO(s)
Research Paper	Students write a 5-page research paper on a psychological theory (e.g., cognitive psychology) using peer-reviewed sources.	SLO 1: Describe psychological theories and concepts SLO 2: Analyze research and evaluate methods
Quiz on Key Concepts	A multiple-choice quiz covering fundamental psychological theories, terminology, and historical figures.	SLO 1: Describe key psychological theories and concepts
Case Study Analysis	Students analyze a case study where psychological principles are applied (e.g., mental health treatment). They then write a report evaluating the case.	SLO 3: Apply psychological principles to real-world situations SLO 2: Analyze research methods

Group Presentation on Psychology Topic	Small groups present on a psychology topic (e.g., social psychology), summarizing key concepts, research findings, and applying the theory to real-world examples.	SLO 4: Demonstrate effective communication SLO 1: Describe psychological theories and concepts
Class Discussion Participation	Regular participation in class discussions where students critique articles, ask questions, and discuss course material in a group setting.	SLO 4: Demonstrate effective communication SLO 2: Analyze research and evaluate methods
Midterm Exam	A combination of multiple-choice and short-answer questions on major psychological theories, research methods, and key terminology.	SLO 1: Describe key psychological theories and concepts SLO 2: Analyze research and evaluate methods

Develop Rubrics for Data Collection

Once you have mapped Activities and Assignments to SLOs, you can create rubrics for your assignments and set up Canvas Outcomes with those rubrics to assess each SLO for each mapped assignment.

Determine a Schedule

Determine a schedule that ensures that all SLOs are assessed at least once during the five-year review cycle. Outline when you will assess each SLOand begin collecting data.Coordinate with your program chair to ensure thatSLOs corresponding to PLOs are assessed with the program review schedule.

Here is an example for how you might organize your schedule for the SLOs from the example above:

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
SLO 1: Describe psychological theories and concepts	SLO 2: Analyze research and evaluate methods	SLO 3: Apply psychological principles to real-world situations	SLO 4: Demonstrate effective communication	Review data from entire review period to create an action plan for using the data gathered for continuous improvement.

Check related impacts

- **Outcome alignment:** Confirm that the assignment or assessment activity actually requires students to demonstrate the selected course learning outcome.
- **Program alignment:** Determine how the course supports Program Learning Outcomes and whether results should inform program-level assessment.
- **General Education:** Confirm any additional GE outcomes, rubrics, or reporting requirements when the course carries a GE designation.
- **Multiple sections:** When several instructors teach the course, determine whether common outcomes, assignments, rubrics, or scoring expectations are needed.
- **Modality:** Consider whether students have equivalent opportunities to demonstrate learning across in-person, online, hybrid, or other delivery formats.

- **Prerequisite knowledge:** Examine whether student performance suggests gaps in preparation from prerequisite courses or earlier parts of the curriculum.
- **Equity and access:** When appropriate and supported by sufficient evidence, consider whether students have equitable opportunities to demonstrate the intended learning.
- **Accreditation:** Preserve course-level evidence that may support specialized or institutional accreditation requirements.

Common pitfalls

- Assessing an activity simply because it is easy to collect rather than because it measures the intended outcome.
- Using the final course grade as the sole measure of a specific learning outcome.
- Aggregating course-level results into a PLO measure without first confirming alignment among the SLOs, assignments, scoring criteria, and PLO being assessed.
- Writing outcomes that are too broad or vague to assess meaningfully.
- Using an assignment that does not align closely with the selected outcome.
- Setting a benchmark after reviewing the results rather than before the assessment.
- Changing assignments or scoring criteria across sections without documenting the differences.
- Comparing sections without considering differences in student populations, assignments, or instructional context.
- Focusing only on numerical results without examining what students did well or where they struggled.
- Treating course-level assessment as an evaluation of an individual instructor.
- Identifying changes without determining how their effectiveness will be assessed later.
- Collecting useful evidence but failing to connect it to program-level assessment or continuous improvement.

Timeline and Process

Course-level assessment should be planned before the student work is collected. Work backward from the term in which the assessment will occur and allow time to review outcomes, align assignments, develop or revise rubrics, collect evidence, score student work, discuss findings, and identify follow-up actions.

CURRENT REQUIREMENTS Use the Assessment webpage for current course-level assessment guidance, examples, rubrics, training resources, and related materials. Consult the Faculty Director of Assessment and Program Review or the appropriate Academic Programs staff when course-level assessment contributes to program review, General Education, specialized accreditation, or a broader multi-course assessment effort.

CONNECTED WORK

Shared Practices and Resources

Live resource: Reference live resources for: Assessment, Articulation, and Graduation and General Education Requirements.

The practices in this section support assessment, program review, General Education assessment, course-level assessment, and specialized accreditation. Use these resources across pathways to strengthen alignment, improve the quality of evidence, and support meaningful continuous improvement.

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Writing Measurable Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes should describe what students will know, demonstrate, create, analyze, or apply as a result of their learning.

Strong outcomes:

- Focus on observable student learning.
- Use clear, measurable language.
- Reflect an appropriate level of complexity.
- Align with the curriculum and program mission.
- Can be evaluated using meaningful evidence.
- Use action verbs from Bloom's Taxonomy (e.g., analyze, create, evaluate) that match the cognitive level of each SLO.

Avoid outcomes that describe only instructor activity, course content, or broad aspirations that cannot be assessed directly.

Example of Well-Constructed Learning Outcomes:

Knowledge-based: "Define key terms and concepts in microeconomics."

Skill-based: "Apply economic theories to solve real-world business problems."

Application-based: "Evaluate market trends using statistical analysis tools."

Critical Thinking: "Critically assess the impact of government policies on economic growth."

I want to create an assessment or grading rubric, but don't know where to start.

Think holistically about what the threshold for an acceptable assignment is and align this to a passing grade on the assignment. What does mastery of the assignment look like? Align that to your highest grade category. What distinguishes an A from a B or highly developed from developed? That can help determine how to distinguish levels of mastery.

Consider using AI to help start developing your rubric. *Review AI-generated suggestions for disciplinary alignment and accuracy, and follow current campus guidance when using AI tools.*

Creating Rubrics

Course assignment rubrics can be incredibly helpful for fairly and consistently evaluating student work, communicating the expectations of an assignment to students, and helping instructors determine whether students are meeting the goals of the assignment and course student learning objectives (SLOs).

Different rubrics may have different goals. For example, rubrics for Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) or GE Learning Outcomes may be designed to determine how students in a wide range of classes, from multiple disciplines, engaged in a wide range of assignments and activities are meeting a specific PLO. They may be incorporated into a rubric used to grade the assignment or assessed separately, ideally while an instructor grades the assignment.Instructors may create rubrics to assess course SLOs and/or to assist in grading assignments.

An assessment rubric is a tool used to evaluate student work that provides a clear set of criteria and performance levels to guide the assessment of one or more student learning outcomes. It may stand alone or be incorporated as one component of an assignment's grading rubric.Rubricsbreakdown more complex assignments into specific, measurable components, ensurefair and consistent evaluation, andoffer studentsvaluable feedback for improvement.
Rubrics typically include:

- Criteria: The elements or skills being assessed (e.g., analysis, organization, use of evidence).
- Performance Levels: A range of quality levels (e.g., Excellent to Poor, or 4 to 1).
- Descriptors: Clear explanations of what each level looks like for each criterion.

Why use rubrics?

- Clarify Expectations: Students understand exactly what is expected and how to succeed.
- Ensure Fairness and Consistency: Rubrics help reduce subjectivity and bias in grading.
- Provide Meaningful Feedback: Detailed descriptors guide instructors in giving constructive, specific comments.
- Support Student Learning: Rubrics can be used as learning tools—students can self-assess and revise their work.
- Streamline Grading: They make grading more efficient and transparent, especially for large classes or multiple graders.

Best Practices for Creating Effective Rubrics

1. Start with the Learning Outcomes
2. Align your rubric criteria directly with your course's Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs).
3. Ask: What skills or knowledge should this assignment demonstrate?
4. Choose the Right Type of Rubric
5. Analytic Rubric: Breaks the task into separate components with individual scores (most common and informative).
6. Holistic Rubric: Provides an overall score based on a general description of performance levels.
7. Define Clear, Measurable Criteria
8. Focus on observable behaviors (e.g., "uses evidence to support claims" vs. "shows understanding").
9. Limit to 4–6 criteria to keep the rubric focused and manageable.
10. Describe Performance Levels Clearly
11. Use consistent language across levels (e.g., Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor).
12. Use specific, actionable descriptors (e.g., "Thesis is clearly stated and strongly supported by evidence").
13. Use a 3- to 5-Level Scale
14. For assessment, a 4-point scale (e.g., Initial, Emerging, Developing, Highly Developed) can works well.
15. For grading this is often determined by grading ranges (e.g. A, B, C, D, F).
16. It may be necessary to align an assessment rubric with assignment grades if meeting theSLOis part of the overall grade of the assignment.
17. Share the Rubric with Students Early
18. Include it in your syllabus or assignment prompt.
19. Encourage students to use it during planning, drafting, and peer review.
20. Revise and Refine
21. After using a rubric, reflect on its effectiveness.
22. Adjust based on student performance patterns, feedback, or clarity issues.

Example Rubric

Criteria	Excellent	Satisfactory	Needs Improvement
Alignment with SLO	Clearly analyzes human impact using	Addresses topic but lacks depth in analysis	Limited or no use of scientific reasoning

	strong scientific evidence		
Research and Evidence	3+ high-quality, relevant sources well integrated	Uses sources, but integration or relevance may vary	Few or poor-quality sources; limited integration
Organization and Clarity	Well-organized; ideas flow logically; clear writing	Generally clear and organized	Unclear or poorly organized
Critical Thinking and Insight	Demonstrates deep understanding and thoughtful conclusions	Basic understanding with some insight	Superficial or unclear conclusions
Format and APA Citation	All formatting and citations correct	Minor citation or formatting errors	Major issues with formatting or missing citations

CHECK- IN: I've tried using rubrics, but my students' grades suffered.
This usually occurs because of inflexibility in the rubric, or incorrect weighing of the components of a rubric. For example, giving scores for correct citations the same weight as strength of argument may not reflect the actual importance of these two components to the grading process.
Consider the type of rubric you are using:

- Holistic Rubrics:Provide a single score based on an overall impression of the work, suitable for tasks where the focus is on the final product.
- Analytic Rubrics:Provide separate scores for each criterion, allowing for more detailed feedback on strengths and weaknesses.

Create a rubric that weighs components according to their importance in the overall assignment grade.

Curriculum Mapping

A curriculum map shows where students have opportunities to develop and demonstrate Program Learning Outcomes across the curriculum.

Use curriculum mapping to:

- Identify where outcomes are introduced, developed, and demonstrated.
- Locate gaps or unnecessary duplication.
- Select appropriate courses or experiences for assessment.
- Examine sequencing and student progression.
- Support program review and accreditation narratives.
- Guide curriculum discussions and revisions.

Update the curriculum map when learning outcomes, required courses, sequencing, or major program requirements change.

Signature Assignments

A signature assignment is a course-embedded assignment intentionally selected or designed to provide evidence of student achievement of a learning outcome.

Effective signature assignments:

- Align directly with the outcome being assessed.
- Give students a meaningful opportunity to demonstrate the intended learning.
- Produce evidence that can be evaluated using common criteria.
- Can be used consistently enough to support comparison over time.
- Fit naturally within the course rather than functioning only as an assessment requirement.

Choose the Right Assignment Type

Match the format to the learning outcome:
Knowledge recall - quizzes or short-answer questions
Analysis or application - case studies, problem sets
Communication skills - presentations or written reports
Critical thinking - essays, debates, or reflections

Direct and Indirect Evidence

- **Direct evidence** demonstrates what students can actually do. Examples may include papers, projects, examinations, performances, presentations, portfolios, capstones, or other student work.

- **Indirect evidence** provides information about perceptions, experiences, or related indicators. Examples may include surveys, interviews, focus groups, reflections, or student self-assessments.

- Use direct evidence as the primary basis for evaluating student learning. Indirect evidence can provide useful context and help explain or deepen interpretation of direct results.

Data Collection and Analysis

Collect only the evidence needed to answer the assessment or review question.

Before collecting data, clarify:

- What question is being asked.
- What evidence is needed.
- Which students or artifacts will be included.
- How the evidence will be evaluated.
- What benchmark or standard will be used.
- Who will analyze and discuss the results.

When reporting findings, distinguish between the **results** and the program's **interpretation** of those results. Avoid drawing conclusions that exceed what the available evidence can support.

Using Results for Continuous Improvement

Assessment is most useful when findings lead to discussion, decisions, and follow-up.

Possible actions may include:

- Revising an assignment or rubric.
- Changing course sequencing.
- Providing additional opportunities for practice.
- Adjusting instructional approaches.
- Revising advising or student support.

- Updating learning outcomes.
- Revising an assessment method.
- Requesting additional resources or professional development.

Document what was decided, why the action was selected, who is responsible, and when the program will revisit the issue.

Closing the Loop

Closing the loop means returning to a previous finding or action to determine what happened after a change was implemented.

Ask:

- Was the planned action completed?
- What changed as a result?
- Did student learning improve?
- What evidence supports that conclusion?
- Should the action continue, be revised, or be replaced?
- What should the program examine next?

Not every action will produce immediate improvement. Documenting what was learned from an unsuccessful or inconclusive change is also part of meaningful assessment.

Equity-Minded Assessment

Consider whether the assessment process provides meaningful information about students' opportunities to learn and demonstrate achievement.

When appropriate and when sufficient data are available:

- Examine patterns across relevant student populations.
- Consider whether assignments or assessment practices create unintended barriers.
- Review whether students have comparable learning opportunities across sections, modalities, or locations.
- Avoid interpreting small samples or isolated differences as definitive findings.
- Use findings to generate questions and guide further inquiry rather than making unsupported assumptions about students.

Documentation and Recordkeeping

Maintain enough documentation to preserve the history of the program's assessment, review, and improvement work.

Depending on the process, records may include:

- Assessment plans.
- Curriculum maps.
- Rubrics and scoring guides.
- Annual assessment reports.
- Program review self-studies.
- External review reports.
- Action plans.
- Accreditation reports and decision letters.
- Faculty discussion notes.
- Supporting data.
- Evidence of completed improvement actions.

Organize files consistently so future faculty coordinators and reviewers can understand what was assessed, what was learned, and what actions followed.

Common Quality Checks

Before finalizing assessment, program review, or accreditation materials, confirm that:

- Learning outcomes are current and measurable.
- Evidence aligns with the question or outcome being assessed.
- Benchmarks are established before results are interpreted.
- Findings are supported by the evidence presented.
- Faculty interpretation is documented.
- Actions follow logically from the findings.
- Responsibilities and timelines are identified.
- Previous action items have been addressed.
- Terminology and data are consistent across documents.
- Current templates and requirements have been confirmed online.

QUALITY CHECK

Training, Support, and Consultation

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Assessment, program review, and accreditation are collaborative processes. Faculty and programs are encouraged to seek support early, especially when developing a new assessment approach, preparing for program review or accreditation, interpreting complex evidence, or coordinating work across multiple units.

Start with the Assessment Website

Use the Assessment webpage as the primary source for current training opportunities, templates, examples, guidance, deadlines, and contact information. Because resources and schedules may change, this handbook provides general guidance rather than duplicating current workshop dates, registration links, or annual deadlines.

Roles and Campus Partners

Start with…	For support with…
Faculty Director of Assessment and Program Review	Guidance on assessment planning, annual assessment, program review, learning outcomes, evidence, rubrics, and continuous improvement.
Academic Programs Office	Support for academic program planning, program review, accreditation coordination, and connections between assessment findings and curriculum or program changes.
Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO)	Guidance when program-level work may intersect with WSCUC accreditation or substantive change requirements.
Institutional Research	Assistance identifying, obtaining, and understanding institutional data used for assessment and program review.
Academic Senate and faculty governance bodies	Consultation when findings or recommendations may involve academic policy, General Education, curriculum, or governance responsibilities.
GE Committee	Guidance on General Education learning outcomes, GE assessment, rubrics, evidence collection, and reporting
Graduate Studies Faculty Director	Graduate program requirements or graduate policy considerations identified through assessment, review, or accreditation

Programs with specialized accreditation may also need to coordinate with licensing agencies, credentialing bodies, clinical or field-placement partners, and other external organizations.

When to Ask for Help

Do not wait until a report is nearly complete if you are uncertain about the process.

Seek guidance early when:

- Requirements are unclear.
- Available evidence does not seem to align with the learning outcome.
- Data are difficult to interpret.
- Faculty disagree about the meaning of findings or appropriate next steps.
- An assessment approach is becoming too complex or burdensome.
- A deadline may be difficult to meet.
- Program review or accreditation identifies a significant concern.
- A proposed improvement may require curriculum, policy, budget, staffing, or other institutional action.

Final self-check before launch

☐ I am using the current template, form, or reporting format for the applicable assessment, program review, accreditation, or GE process.

☐ All required sections are complete and supporting evidence or documentation is included.

☐ Learning outcomes, assessment methods, rubrics, evidence, findings, and reported conclusions align with one another.

☐ The evidence collected is appropriate for the question or learning outcome being assessed and the benchmark or criteria for success are clearly identified.

☐ Program-level, course-level, General Education, program review, accreditation, data, and other related requirements have been considered and addressed.

☐ Findings have been discussed with the appropriate faculty or program participants, and interpretations are supported by the available evidence.

☐ Improvement actions are specific, realistic, connected to the findings, and include responsible parties and follow-up plans.

☐ Previous assessment, program review, or accreditation action items have been addressed or their current status is documented.

☐ I have checked the current Assessment webpage for deadlines, templates, instructions, and submission requirements.

☐ I have identified who will respond to questions, maintain the documentation, and carry follow-up actions forward after submission.

APPENDIX

Appendix A: Glossary

Terms commonly used in Assessment at CSUCI. Confirm current policy definitions where formal interpretation is needed.

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Term	Working definition
Academic Master Plan (AMP)	Institutional planning framework for academic programs and related development priorities.
Accreditation	A formal external review process used to determine whether an institution or program meets established standards of quality and effectiveness.
Action Plan	A document developed through Program Review that identifies priorities, responsibilities, timelines, resource considerations, and follow-up activities for the next review cycle. Formerly referred to as the MOU.
Assessment	The systematic collection, analysis, and use of evidence to understand and improve student learning or program effectiveness.
Assessment Cycle	The recurring process of identifying outcomes, gathering evidence, analyzing results, identifying actions, and following up to determine whether improvements were effective.
Assessment Plan	A multi-year plan developed for the Program Review cycle that identifies the learning outcomes to be assessed, the methods and evidence that will be used, and the schedule for assessing each outcome across the five-year cycle. The plan is generally established once per cycle and updated when the program chooses or needs to revise its assessment approach.
Annual Assessment Report	A brief report documenting assessment conducted during the previous academic year, including the outcome assessed, methods and results, faculty interpretation, and teaching, curricular, or program changes made or planned in response to the findings.
Benchmark / Criterion for Success	The level of performance established in advance to help determine whether students are meeting an intended learning outcome, standard, or expectation.

Closing the Loop	Returning to a prior assessment finding or action to determine what changed, whether the action was implemented, and whether it had the intended effect.
Course-Level Assessment	Assessment focused on student achievement of learning outcomes within an individual course or across multiple sections of a course.
Curriculum Map	A visual representation showing where learning outcomes are introduced, developed, reinforced, or demonstrated across the curriculum.
Direct Evidence	Evidence that demonstrates what students know or can do through student-produced work, such as papers, projects, examinations, performances, portfolios, presentations, or capstones.
External Review	A component of Program Review or accreditation in which qualified reviewers from outside the program evaluate evidence and provide feedback or recommendations.
General Education (GE) Assessment	The systematic assessment of student learning within the General Education program using designated GE learning outcomes, evidence, and assessment processes.
GE / UDGE	General Education / Upper Division General Education designations associated with campus and CSU learning and graduation requirements.
Indirect Evidence	Evidence based on perceptions, experiences, or related indicators rather than direct demonstrations of learning, such as surveys, interviews, focus groups, or student reflections.
Institutional Data	University-level data used to understand program characteristics or effectiveness, such as enrollment, retention, graduation, student demographics, course success, or time-to-degree information.
Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs)	Broad learning outcomes describing the knowledge, skills, and abilities CSUCI expects students to develop through their overall educational experience.
Learning Outcome	A measurable statement describing what students are expected to know, do, or demonstrate as a result of a learning experience.

Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)	Statements describing the knowledge, skills, abilities, or competencies students are expected to demonstrate by completing an academic program.
Program-Level Assessment	Assessment focused on determining how well students are achieving Program Learning Outcomes across an academic program.
Program Review	A periodic, evidence-based examination of an academic program that considers student learning, program effectiveness, curriculum, student success, resources, and future priorities.
Program Review Cycle	The recurring five-year period during which programs conduct assessment, implement improvements, maintain evidence of progress, and ultimately complete a comprehensive Program Review.
Rubric	A scoring or evaluation tool that identifies criteria and levels of performance used to assess student work consistently.
Self-Study	The program's comprehensive, evidence-based analysis prepared as part of Program Review or accreditation. It brings together student-learning assessment, institutional data, curriculum, resources, program accomplishments, challenges, and priorities for improvement.
Signature Assignment	A course-embedded assignment intentionally selected or designed to provide direct evidence of student achievement of a particular learning outcome.
Specialized Accreditation	Accreditation conducted by an external disciplinary or professional accrediting agency for a specific academic or professional program.
Student Learning Outcome (SLO)	A measurable statement describing what students are expected to know, do, or demonstrate as a result of a learning experience. SLOs are commonly used at the course level, although specialized accrediting agencies may use the term differently.
WSCUC	The WASC Senior College and University Commission, CSUCI's institutional accrediting agency.
WSCUC Substantive Change	A significant institutional or programmatic change that may require screening, notification, or approval by WSCUC before implementation.