CAS
Self-Assessment Guide (SAG)
Introduction and Instructions

I. Purpose and Organization of the Guide
The Self-Assessment Guide (SAG) translates functional area CAS Standards and Guidelines into a format enabling self-assessment. Educators can use this Guide to gain informed perspectives on the strengths and deficiencies of their programs and services and plan for improvements. Grounded in the self-regulation approach to quality assurance in higher education endorsed by CAS, this SAG provides institutional and unit leaders a tool to assess programs and services using currently accepted standards of practice.

The Introduction outlines the self-assessment process, describes how to put it into operation, and is organized into four sections. These include: I. Purpose and Organization, II. Self-Assessment Process, III. Rating Examples, and IV. Formulating an Action Plan. The introduction is followed by the Self-Assessment Worksheet, which presents the CAS Standards and Guidelines for the functional area and incorporates a series of criterion measures for rating purposes.

SAG Worksheet Format. CAS standards and guidelines are organized into twelve components.

- Part 1 Mission
- Part 2 Program
- Part 3 Organization and Leadership
- Part 4 Human Resources
- Part 5 Ethics
- Part 6 Law, Policy, and Governance
- Part 7 Diversity, Equity, and Access
- Part 8 Institutional and External Relations
- Part 9 Financial Resources
- Part 10 Technology
- Part 11 Facilities and Equipment
- Part 12 Assessment and Evaluation

A rating scale designed for assessment purposes is displayed following the standards and guidelines, along with a series of criterion measures to be rated. Making performance judgments by applying the rating scale to individual items (criterion measures) is the first step in assessing the program.

II. Self-Assessment Process
CAS self-assessment procedures involve several steps:

A. Establish the self-study process and review team
B. Understand the CAS Standards and Guidelines and the Self-Assessment Guide
C. Compile and review documentary evidence
D. Judge performance
E. Complete the assessment process
Step A: Establish the Self-Study Process and Review Team
The first step is to identify an individual to coordinate the self-assessment process. Once a leader is designated, members of the institutional community (e.g., professional staff members, faculty members, and students) need to be identified and invited to participate. Whether a sole functional area or a full division is to be reviewed, the self-study team will be strengthened by the inclusion of members from outside the area(s) undergoing review.

As a group, the review team should examine the standards carefully before implementing the study. It may be desirable for the team, in collaboration with the full staff, to discuss the meaning of each standard. Through this method, differing interpretations can be examined and agreement generally reached about how the standard will be interpreted for purposes of the self-assessment. Whatever procedures are used to arrive at judgments, deliberate discussions should occur about how to initiate the rating process and select the optimal rating strategy. In such discussions, it is expected that disagreements among team members will occur and that resulting clarifications will inform all participants. It is important that the team achieve consensual resolution of such differences before proceeding with individual ratings.

Step B: Understand the CAS Standards and Guidelines and the Self-Assessment Guide
CAS standards represent essential practices as formulated by representatives of multiple professional associations concerned with student learning and development in higher education. CAS Guidelines, on the other hand, are suggestions for practice and serve to elaborate and amplify standards through the use of suggestions, descriptions, and examples. Guidelines can often be employed to enhance program practice. Following a long-standing CAS precedent, the functional area standards and guidelines published in CAS Professional Standards for Higher Education (2012) and presented in this SAG are formatted so that standards (i.e., essentials of quality practice) are printed in bold type. Guidelines, which complement the standards, are printed in light-face type. Standards use the auxiliary verbs “must” and “shall” while guidelines use “should” and “may.”

In this SAG, the CAS Standards and Guidelines, presented prior to each part of the SAG, have been translated into multiple criterion measures for rating purposes. Each criterion measure focuses on a particular aspect of the standard. The criterion measures are not designed to focus on completely discrete ideas, as would be true if the SAG were developed to be a valid and reliable research instrument; rather, the measures are designed to capture the major ideas and elements reflected in the standards. For each of the 12 component parts, there is a series of numbered criterion measures that team members will rate. If the assessment team decides to incorporate one or more of the guidelines into the review process, each guideline can be similarly sub-divided to facilitate the rating process.

Step C: Compile and Review Documentary Evidence
Collecting and documenting evidence of program effectiveness is an important step in the assessment process. No self-assessment is complete without relevant data and related documentation being used. It is good practice for programs routinely to collect and file relevant data that can be used to document program effectiveness over time.

Documentary evidence often used to support evaluative judgments includes:

- Student Recruitment and Marketing Materials: brochures and other sources of information about the program, participation policies and procedures, and reports about program results and participant evaluations
• Program Documents: mission statements, catalogs, brochures and other related materials, staff and student manuals, policy and procedure statements, evaluation and periodic reports, contracts, and staff memos

• Institutional Administrative Documents: statements about program purpose and philosophy relative to other educational programs, organizational charts, financial resource statements, student and staff profiles, and assessment reports

• Research, Assessment, and Evaluation Data: needs assessments, follow-up studies, program evaluations, outcome measures and methodologies, and previous self-study reports

• Staff Activity Reports: annual reports; staff member vitae; service to departments, colleges, university, and other agencies; evidence of effectiveness; scholarship activities; and contributions to the profession

• Student Activity Reports: developmental transcripts, portfolios, and other evidence of student contributions to the institution, community, and professional organizations; reports of special student accomplishments; and employer reports on student employment experiences

Having a variety of evidence assists raters to make judgments about the wide range of program expectations articulated in the standards. Whatever is determined appropriate under given circumstances, multiple forms of evidence used should be reviewed and reported in the narrative section of the SAG worksheets. The self-study rating process may identify a need to obtain additional information or documentation before proceeding to lend substance to judgments about a given assessment criterion. Support documentation should be appended and referred to in the final self-assessment report.

Step D: Judge Performance
Assessment criterion measures are used to judge how well areas under review meet CAS standards. These criterion measures are designed to be evaluated using a five-point rating scale. In addition to the numerical rating options, Does Not Apply (ND) and Insufficient Evidence/Unable to Rate (0) ratings are provided. This rating scale is designed to estimate broadly the extent to which a given practice has been performed.

**CAS CRITERION MEASURE RATING SCALE**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>ND</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does Not Apply</td>
<td>Insufficient Evidence/Unable to Rate</td>
<td>Does Not Meet</td>
<td>Partly Meets</td>
<td>Meets</td>
<td>Exceeds</td>
<td>Exemplary</td>
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Under rare circumstances, it may be determined that a criterion measure used to judge the standard is not applicable for the particular program (e.g., a single sex or other unique institution that cannot meet a criterion measure for that reason). In such instances, a ND rating can be used and the rationale for excluding the practice reflected in the criterion measure presented in the self-study report. The 0 response can be used when relevant data are unavailable to support a judgment. When either the ND or the 0 ratings are used, an explanatory note should be entered. 0 items should generate careful group consideration and follow-up action as appropriate.
Program leaders may wish to incorporate additional criterion measures, such as selected CAS guidelines or other rating scales, into the procedures before the self-assessment process begins. Such practice is encouraged, and the SAG instrument can be amended to incorporate additional criterion measure yardsticks for judging the program. In such instances, additional pages to accommodate the additional criterion measures may be required.

**Step E: Complete the Assessment Process**

A two-tiered (individual and group) judgment approach for determining the extent to which the program meets the CAS standard is suggested. First, the self-assessment team and, if desired, the functional area staff members individually should rate each criterion measure using separate copies of the CAS Self-Assessment Guide. This individualized rating procedure is then followed by a collective review and analysis of the individual ratings.

The individual ratings should be reviewed and translated into a collective rating; then the team is ready to move to the interpretation phase of the self-assessment. Interpretation typically incorporates considerable discussion among team members to assure that all aspects of the program were given fair and impartial consideration prior to a final collective judgment. At this point, persistent disagreements over performance ratings may call for additional data collection. After the team review is completed, a meeting with concerned administrators, staff members, and student leaders should be scheduled for a general review of the self-assessment results. The next step, including discussion of alternative approaches that might be used to strengthen and enhance the program, is to generate steps and activities to be incorporated into an action plan. The Work Forms will guide this process.

**III. Rating Examples**

**Rating Standard Criterion Measures**

All CAS standards, printed in bold type, are viewed as being essential to a sound and relevant student support program. Many of the statements contained in the standards incorporate multiple criteria that, to facilitate more precise judgment, have been subdivided into measurable parts for rating purposes. Consequently, a single statement in the standards may require several criterion measure statements that allow raters to judge it part by part rather than broadly. This approach often requires multiple judgments concerning a single statement in the standards, but leads to a more precise assessment. Using a “Mission” standard as an example, the following illustrates how several criterion measures are used to assess a single standard statement.
Part 1. MISSION

Programs and services must develop, disseminate, implement, and regularly review their missions. The mission must be consistent with the mission of the institution and with professional standards. The mission must be appropriate for the institution’s student populations and community settings. Mission statements must reference student learning and development.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>ND</th>
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**Criterion Measures**

1.1 The program

1.1.1 develops, disseminates, and implements the mission

1.1.2 regularly reviews its mission

1.2 The mission statement

1.2.1 is consistent with that of the institution

1.2.2 is consistent with professional standards

1.2.3 is appropriate for student populations and community settings

1.2.4 references learning and development

**Using Guidelines to Make Judgments about the Program**

As discussed above, program leaders may wish to include selected CAS guidelines to be rated along with the standards. To accomplish this, criterion measure statements must be written for the guidelines selected. The self-study team can readily create statements to be judged as part of the rating process. Programs generally considered as being already in compliance with the standards can benefit especially by using guidelines in this way because guidelines typically call for enhanced program quality. The following “Financial Resources” program guidelines rating example illustrates the process.

Part 9. FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Programs and services must have funding to accomplish the mission and goals. In establishing funding priorities and making significant changes, a comprehensive analysis must be conducted to determine the following elements: unmet needs of the unit, relevant expenditures, external and internal resources, and impact on students and the institution.

Programs and services must demonstrate efficient and effective use and responsible stewardship of fiscal resources consistent with institutional protocols.

Financial resources should be sufficient to support study conceptualization, data collection, data entry and analysis, and the dissemination of assessment and research findings, as well as methodological training for staff.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion Measures</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>The program has adequate funding to accomplish its mission and goals.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>The program demonstrates fiscal responsibility, responsible stewardship, and cost-effectiveness consistent with institutional protocols.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>An analysis of expenditures, external and internal resources, and impact on the campus community is completed before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.3.1</td>
<td>establishing funding priorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.3.2</td>
<td>making significant changes</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>Financial resources are sufficient to support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.4.1</td>
<td>study conceptualization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.4.2</td>
<td>data collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.4.3</td>
<td>data entry and analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.4.4</td>
<td>dissemination of assessment and research findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.4.5</td>
<td>methodological training for staff</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Not all programs under review will incorporate guidelines to be rated as part of their self-studies. Even though the guidelines are optional for rating purposes, raters are strongly encouraged to read and review them as part of the training process. When CAS guidelines or other criterion measures are rated, they should be treated as if they were standards.

**IV. Formulating an Action Plan**

Typically, the assessment process will identify areas where the program is not in compliance with the standards. Action planning designed to overcome program shortcomings and provide program enhancements must then occur.

To complete the process, a final summary document should be produced that (a) explains the mission, purpose, and philosophy of the program; (b) reviews the outcome of the assessment; and (c) recommends specific plans for action. Following is an outline of recommended steps for establishing a comprehensive plan of action using the CAS self-assessment work forms. Space is provided in the SAG for recording relevant information.

1. **Answer Overview Questions (in the Instrument)**
   a. Respond, in writing in the space provided, to the Overview Questions that immediately follow the rating section of each of the 12 components.
   b. Use answers to the Overview Questions, which are designed to stimulate summary thinking about overarching issues, to facilitate interpretation of the ratings and development of the self-study report.
2. **Identify Areas of Program Strength (Work Form A)**
   
a. Identify criterion measure ratings where strength in performance or accomplishment was noted (i.e., program exceeds criterion, generally rated 4 or 5, and viewed as Exceeds criteria or is Exemplary).
   
b. Identify remaining ratings in which performance Meets the criterion (i.e., acceptable practice as reflected in rating of 3).

3. **Identify Areas of Program Weakness (Work Form A)**
   
a. Identify criterion measures where program weaknesses (i.e., program shortcomings that fail to meet criterion measures and/or rating discrepancies among raters of two points or more) were noted.
   
b. Identify criterion measures viewed as Does Not Meet or Partly Meets by one or more reviewer(s).

4. **Describe Practices Requiring Follow-up (Work Form A)**
   
a. Note criterion measure numbers where the standard was judged to be Insufficient Evidence/Unable to Rate and describe shortcomings that need to be improved.

5. **Summarize Actions Required for the Program to Meet Standards (Work Form B)**
   
a. List each criterion measure and/or related practices that the self-study process identified as being Insufficient Evidence/Unable to Rate, Does Not Meet, Partly Meets or where rater discrepancies were noted. Be specific when noting the rationale for each shortcoming identified.
   
b. List specific actions identified in the self-study that require implementation.
   
c. Prioritize the list by importance, need, and achievability of the desired change.

6. **Summarize Program Enhancement Actions (Work Form C)**
   
a. List each specific action identified in the self-study that would enhance and strengthen services.
   
b. Establish specific priorities for the action plan.

7. **Write Program Action Plan**
   
a. Prepare a comprehensive action plan for implementing program changes.
   
b. Identify resources (i.e., human, fiscal, physical) that are essential to program enhancement.
   
c. Set dates by which specific actions are to be completed.
   
d. Identify responsible parties to complete the action steps.
   
e. Set tentative start-up date for initiating a subsequent self-study.