Guidelines for PRAC Annual Assessment Reports
2020–2021 Reports
https://planning.iupui.edu/assessment/prac.html

PRAC Reports Due on January 15, 2022

Background and Purpose of PRAC Assessment Reports

IUPUI’s founding documents pledged to raise educational attainment in our city, region, and state, using teaching and learning strategies based on evidence. The university subsequently became an early adopter of ongoing assessment and improvement through evidence-based academic decision-making. Over the past 30+ years, evidence from assessment has driven IUPUI’s innovations in the first-year experience, general education, service learning, and the use of new technologies and pedagogies to support student academic achievement, among many other initiatives. The campus regularly garners national awards and recognition for its assessment work and leadership, and is thus well known among higher education institutions as an exemplar of assessment excellence.

The annual Program Review and Assessment Committee (PRAC) Assessment Reports help the campus to sustain and demonstrate this historical commitment to using evidence to support students’ learning and success throughout and beyond their time here. The reports further ensure and affirm, for the benefit of our stakeholders—accrediting organizations, colleagues engaged in program review, funding organizations, students, parents, community members, and others—that assessment and improvement efforts are consistent across the campus and over time.

The reports also provide regular occasions for programs, departments, schools, and administrative units to review and reflect on what their students need to learn and achieve, and on whether and how well their programs are supporting that learning and achievement. Finally, the reports serve as a principal resource for development of a variety of high-stakes campus-wide reports and award applications.

With the above purposes in mind, each unit’s annual PRAC Report should reflect ongoing efforts to:

- Affirm that each academic program, associate through Ph.D., has identified clearly defined learning outcomes.
- Identify and use appropriate assessment strategies and methods.
- Use evidence from assessment to understand students’ academic strengths and weaknesses, to guide academic decision-making, and to continuously improve teaching, learning, curriculum, and the co-curriculum, including student support services like advising, as appropriate to the unit’s mission.
**Definition of Assessment**

Assessment is the systematic collection, review, and use of information about educational programs undertaken for the purposes of improving student learning and development (Palomba & Banta, 1999). Assessment strategies are thus designed to enable faculty and staff to examine and improve the student learning and development that occur because of a course, academic program, or co-curricular learning experience. Unlike grading, which focuses on achievement of and feedback to individual students, assessment seeks to understand patterns of learning strengths and weaknesses across groups of students in a course or program for the purpose of improving student learning and development.

Traditionally, assessment has focused on student learning outcomes, but Hundley and Kahn (2019) found that faculty and staff assessment leaders are increasingly interested in examining the nature and effectiveness of learning experiences, practices, and environments for supporting outcomes achievement. The emphasis on “fidelity” to those features of high-impact practices (HIPs) that make them high-impact is one example of this enhanced focus on learning experiences and environments and on students’ perceptions of them. Attention to diversity and equity concerns is another current focus of assessment. Yet another is a renewed interest in educating “the whole student” and an intensified interest in assessing broad, developmental outcomes previously considered “ineffable”—difficult or even impossible to assess—exemplified by IUPUI’s Profiles of Learning for Undergraduate Success (the Profiles). These interests collectively are driving a growing emphasis on authentic student work products and performances, along with guided reflections, as sources of direct assessment data (as opposed to standardized tests, for example).

**Emphases for 2020–2021 Reports**

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to affect teaching, learning, and assessment, with many classes and co-curricular activities offered in remote and hybrid formats during the 2020–2021 academic year. We expect many programs continued and refined alternate assessment approaches developed in 2019–2020, created new assessment strategies, or adapted their usual approaches to the new teaching and learning modalities in use.

We also hope academic and co-curricular programs deepened and expanded their use of the Profiles, continuing to align and integrate them into disciplinary learning outcomes, courses, and co-curricular experiences. Similarly, we expect programs have continued to develop and assess experiences for inclusion in the Experiential and Applied Learning Record (the Record), offering students valuable experiences in the areas of global engagement, service learning, leadership, research, diversity, internships/career development, creative expression, and more.

With this background in mind, we ask that units preparing their 2020–2021 PRAC Reports address:

1. The ongoing impact of COVID-19 on assessment, including discussion of any efforts to
assess the quality of students’ experiences of remote and hybrid learning; any plans for permanent changes or enhancements to assessment resulting from these efforts; and a reflection on what was learned from the transition to and use of new teaching, learning, and assessment models.

2. For units that teach undergraduates, a discussion of progress to date on implementing the Profiles into teaching, learning, and assessment, and of any assessment findings related to student achievement of the Profiles.

3. An account of progress in identifying, developing, or redesigning, and implementing experiences included in the Record and of any assessment findings.

Note: We expect discussion of the Profiles and the Record will become a standard feature of PRAC Reports, so those preparing the reports should consider how best to incorporate these into their report formats, as well as into their ongoing teaching, learning, and assessment practices.

Content

Each credential-granting program (from certificates through graduate degrees) at IUPUI defined explicit student learning outcomes in advance of IUPUI’s 2012 Reaffirmation of Accreditation. If your program or unit has not updated these outcomes yet (or was established after 2012), now would be a good time to do so, since our next campus-wide accreditation visit will take place in 2022. The 2012 outcomes are included in the online IUPUI Campus Bulletin maintained by the Office of the Registrar. (If your unit has already updated program outcomes and communicated the updates to the Registrar, the site should show your up-to-date outcomes.) Many non-degree-granting units involved in IUPUI students’ education have also articulated learning outcomes for their co-curricular programs and have posted those expectations on their respective websites.

These program and unit learning outcomes serve as the foundation for the annual assessment reports. Your report should demonstrate that you are assessing your programs to determine patterns of student achievement of your desired learning outcomes, that you have intentional and systematic processes in place for performing these assessments, and that you are using evidence from assessment to guide program improvement. Reports may also include discussion of any assessment and improvement of the learning environment (including the physical environment and/or more abstract/affective aspects of the environment), of the effectiveness of learning experiences (HIPs or other special experiences available to students), and of efforts to improve equity among students. Overall, your report should thus provide a brief summary, with examples, of assessment activities, findings, and improvement efforts over the last year. The Planning Matrix for Learning and Assessment on the PRAC website (just under the PRAC Report Guidelines) provides a simple conceptual framework for each step of a basic assessment process.

Remember you are reporting on the past year’s activities only and you need not describe all your assessment activities in detail. Typically, assessment and assessment reporting take place in cycles, with only some outcomes, courses, or programs assessed or reported on in any given
year. Breaking up assessment into such cycles is particularly useful for large units with many departments or programs. Your introduction should thus include an overview of your assessment cycle and identify for readers what part of the cycle is addressed in the current report. Another approach is to focus your report on new learning outcomes, teaching, and learning practices, and/or on new assessment and improvement initiatives undertaken and any results of these.

Reports should include the following components:

- A brief introduction or overview of the material to be presented in the report, including a short description of the reporting unit and its programs. For example, units that include only graduate programs may want to call attention to this fact up front, so that a reader does not expect to see information on assessment of the Profiles.
- A list of—or hyperlinks to—relevant learning outcomes (i.e., for the programs you are reporting on). Please explain briefly how and by whom your outcomes were developed. For example, if outcomes are mandated by an external accrediting association, readers should be aware of that. If your discipline or programs in your unit have adopted a particular assessment philosophy or approach, a succinct explanation would be helpful. Outcomes should be stated as clearly as possible in behavioral terms—i.e., what will students be able to do if they achieve the outcome?
- A brief discussion of how your curriculum or co-curricular experiences, teaching/learning strategies, and, optionally, learning environments are designed to help students achieve the desired outcomes, with attention to any unique or innovative approaches and any recent major changes.
- An overview of your assessment cycle, if applicable, and brief explanation of the part of the cycle included in the current report.
- A description of your assessment methods and approaches. Provide examples of rubrics, discuss direct and indirect assessment approaches and instruments, and/or offer any other information needed for readers to understand your assessment strategies. You need not include all rubrics, approaches, instruments, and so forth, but please offer enough information for the reader to understand your overall assessment approach and your main assessment strategies.
- An overview of key findings from assessments of learning during the reporting year (2020–2021), with an emphasis on data that show significant changes from previous years or that reveal possible areas to target for improvement in subsequent year. You do not need to include detailed data or data tables; rather, please summarize and interpret your main findings based on the data. If even a data summary would be too lengthy, please provide a few examples of findings.
- A discussion of areas of concern about student learning based on assessment results, especially persistent concerns.
- A description of how you used evidence to determine and design improvement initiatives or other changes made or proposed to address areas of concern during the reporting year. Such initiatives might include, for example, curriculum revisions, teaching/learning innovations, advising/mentoring initiatives, introduction of high-impact practices or other hands-on learning experiences, or new professional development initiatives. If changes are related to earlier years’ assessment findings,
please specify what those findings were, so that readers can see the relationship between assessment and improvement.

- Results of assessment of the effectiveness of prior changes made/improvements implemented in response to previous assessment findings and evidence. To provide context, please briefly describe the previous finding that led to the change, and discuss to what extent, if at all, the change has achieved the desired outcome.

Please be sure to address connections among learning outcomes to assessment methods to assessment findings to improvement initiatives. The lack of such connections, especially between assessment findings (or other evidence) and improvements undertaken, is the most frequent criticism during the review of PRAC Reports.

**Approaches to Presenting Content**

**Examples.** A few good examples of particularly effective assessment approaches or teaching/learning strategies can be invaluable for helping readers outside your discipline to understand your assessment and improvement practices or particular challenges. In addition, the Office of Planning and Institutional Improvement (PAII) is always seeking clear, specific examples of improvements made because of assessment findings and the impact of these improvements. Such examples are invaluable for the various reports and award applications we prepare.

**Direct and Indirect Measures.** Reports should include discussion of both direct and indirect measures of student learning and resulting findings, as applicable. Direct measures are tangible student products like research papers, performances, lab reports, tests, and portfolios. Indirect measures include proxies for learning like job or graduate school placement rates, as well as perceptions and opinions about learning gleaned from instruments like surveys and focus groups.

**Support Services.** Reports may also, but are not required to, discuss assessment and improvement of practices that support student learning, even if they are not directly related to a learning outcome. Such services and practices may include recruitment and retention efforts, academic advising, and career counseling, among others. This information may be especially relevant to the missions of some support units or to academic units that have undertaken new initiatives to improve support services or co-curricular programs in a particular reporting year.

**Formative and Summative Assessments.** Sound assessment and improvement practices include both formative and summative assessment. That is, you should be performing formative assessment of students at various stages as they progress through your program, not relying solely on a single summative assessment (like a licensing examination) at the end of the program.

**Assessment vs. Grading.** Finally, remember that assessment and grading are not the same thing and may draw on different sources of evidence. Assessment looks at patterns of strengths and weaknesses across groups of students to identify possible curricular gaps and areas where pedagogical approaches may need rethinking. Grading focuses on providing
feedback and records of achievement to individual students.

Format

- Use a format that supports clear presentation of the information described above. Please note that narrative and outline formats are easier for readers to digest than lengthy tables. Short tables (1–2 pages) are acceptable.
- **Please limit report length to a maximum of 25 pages.** PRAC reports are read by PAII staff members and by members of the PRAC Reporting and Recognition Subcommittee and are archived online to provide access for internal and external stakeholders. Be considerate of your readers. Pages and pages of tables, for example, are not as helpful as a few good examples and a link to more comprehensive information. Be judicious about what really needs to be included to make the report comprehensible. You can always link to more detailed information posted online.
- Minimize repetition of information from previous years; instead, reference or link to prior years’ reports, which can be viewed at [http://www.planning.iupui.edu/evalassess/schoolaccessreport-page.php](http://www.planning.iupui.edu/evalassess/schoolaccessreport-page.php).
- Assume an educated non-specialist audience. Readers may be unfamiliar with your particular unit or discipline and are unlikely to understand acronyms and abbreviations common to your field.

For Questions or Additional Information

If you have questions about writing your PRAC report or would benefit from a workshop or some personal guidance, please contact Caleb J. Keith at ckeith@iupui.edu or (317) 278-2724.