

# Degrees of Excellence Northeastern State University Annual Student Learning Assessment Plan

The history of Northeastern State University dates back to 1846 when the Cherokee National Council authorized establishment of a National Male Seminary and National Female Seminary to fulfill the stipulation in the Treaty of 1835 between the United States and the Cherokee Nation that public and higher education be provided for the Cherokees. Northeastern State University was changed to a state institution in 1909, and still has a proud heritage of serving the Native American people. Today, Northeastern State University is one of Oklahoma's leading comprehensive regional institutions serving students on three campuses as well as online. The institution offers more than 50 undergraduate degrees and approximately 25 graduate degrees, as well as a professional Doctorate of Optometry.

## MISSION

Founded on the rich educational heritage of the Cherokee Nation, the campuses of Northeastern State University provide its diverse communities with lifelong learning through a broad array of undergraduate, graduate, and professional doctoral degree programs. With high expectations for student success, the University provides quality teaching, challenging curricula, research and scholarly activities, immersive learning opportunities, and service to local and professional communities. The institution's dedicated faculty and staff offer a service-oriented, supportive learning environment where students prepare to achieve professional and personal success in a multicultural and global society.

## VISION

Northeastern State University shapes the future of its region as the educational partner of choice, setting a standard of excellence by serving the intellectual, cultural, social, and economic needs of the University's diverse communities.

## DEGREES OF EXCELLENCE

The University Mission and Vision support the institutional priorities of academic and scholarly excellence, student development and success, and institutional effectiveness through dynamic assessment and measurement. Guided by these priorities, NSU established an infrastructure to sustain excellence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century through a culture of assessment and continuous improvement.

The *Degrees of Excellence* institutional learning outcomes articulate high expectations for students' success, and provide an inclusive framework for a distinctive educational experience that emphasizes lifelong learning, intellectual growth, citizenship, and social responsibility. These outcomes build upon the Lumina Foundation's Degree Qualifications Profile and are informed by the American Association of Colleges and Universities' LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes. They reflect NSU's heritage, mission, vision, and values. The *Degrees of Excellence* outcomes allow all NSU stakeholders to more clearly understand the connections between the NSU educational experience and cultivated skill sets needed after graduation. They also provide a foundation for meaningful assessment at the institutional level. These outcomes provide evidence of student learning as well as data which can be used to improve institutional communication, professional practices, and educational quality.

The *Degrees of Excellence* institutional learning outcomes are:

1. *Intellectual skills* – emphasizing analytic inquiry, information literacy, engaging diverse perspectives, quantitative fluency, and communication fluency.
2. *Integrative knowledge* – emphasizing the ability to produce, independently or collaboratively, an investigative, creative, or practical work that draws on specific theories, evidence, tools, and methods from diverse perspectives.
3. *Specialized knowledge in the major* – emphasizing student competency in the program outcomes of the major field(s) of study.
4. *Capstone Experience in the Baccalaureate Degree* – emphasizing the integration of the major with baccalaureate degree expectations reflecting the intersection of academic and post-baccalaureate settings.
5. *Citizenship* – emphasizing leadership and engagement, experiential learning, cultural foundations, and personal and career development.

## PURPOSE OF ASSESSMENT

Assessment demonstrates the relationship between student learning and educational experiences. Evidence gleaned from assessment informs discussion and decisions regarding teaching strategies, curriculum, program outcomes, and future assessments. Faculty and students benefit from clarity of course, program, or degree expectations and standards of evaluation within each. Assessment information allows students and the institution to showcase accomplishments and tell a complete story of academic achievement.

Assessment similarly explores the relationship of relevant variables to the effective implementation of the institutional mission and strategic vision. Student success and community engagement are paramount to the NSU mission and vision. Northeastern State University serves the Northeast Oklahoma region by embracing a culture of learning, discovery, and diversity. Data informed advancement drives the transformative educational environment which prepares our students and community for a globally competitive, culturally diverse, and changing environment.

Additionally, a robust assessment system provides valuable supporting evidence that NSU meets the threshold standards of accountability as defined by our institutional accrediting agency, the Higher Learning Commission. The Higher Learning Commission is a regional accreditation agency that accredits degree granting institutions of higher education that are based in the 19-state North Central region of the United States.

Member institutions are evaluated against five (5) criteria:

1. Mission
2. Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct
3. Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources, and Support
4. Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement
5. Resources, Planning, and Institutional Effectiveness

A comprehensive assessment system provides evidence of NSU's progress toward meeting each of these criteria.

Finally, the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education require each Oklahoma college and university to assess the following four categories: (1) entry level to determine academic preparation and course placement; (2) general education assessment; (3) academic program learning outcomes assessment; and (4) student engagement and satisfaction.

# NORTHEASTERN STATE UNIVERSITY ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

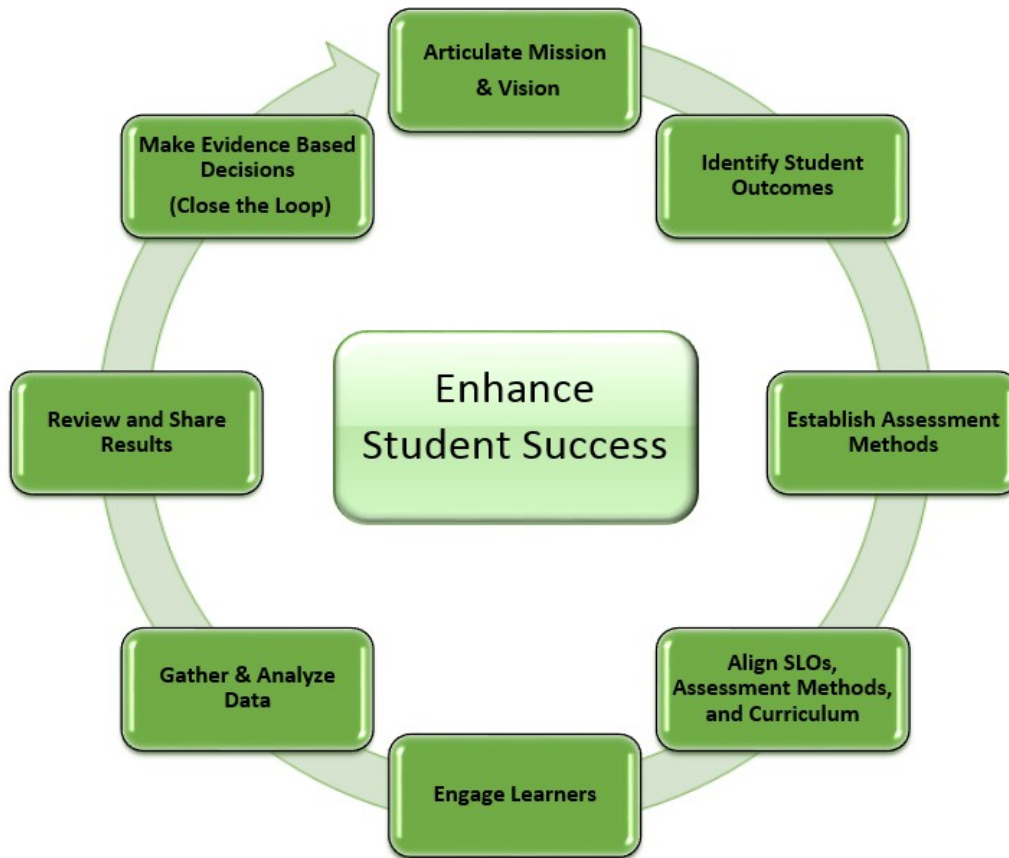


Figure 1: NSU Assessment System

Because, the University’s mission and vision call upon NSU to maintain the highest expectation of student academic and personal success, NSU embraces a mindset of continuous assessment, measurement, and documentation. Student learning is central to this assessment framework and the core of the NSU culture of evidence based teaching and learning. The *Degrees of Excellence* institutional learning outcomes articulate the baccalaureate degree expectations.

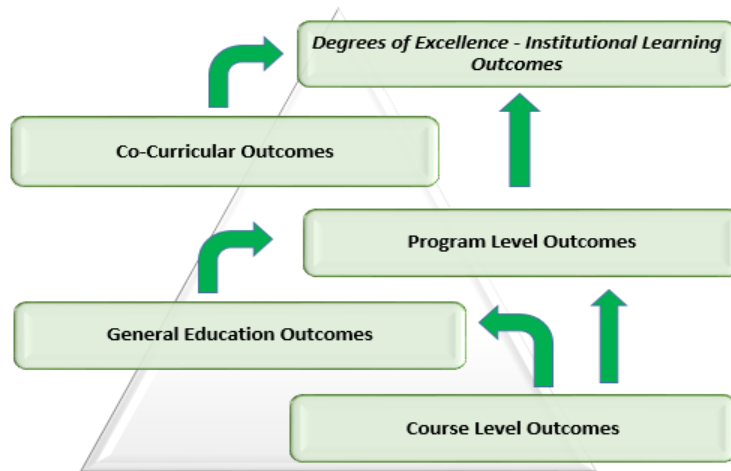


Figure 2. Outcome Alignment to the Degrees of Excellence

Student learning is directly assessed at various levels. The *Degrees of Excellence* institutional learning outcomes serve as a foundation for an integrated campus-wide assessment system, incorporating assessment strategies already in place at the course, general education, program, and co-curricular levels. Program learning outcomes can be easily aligned with the *Degrees of Excellence* institutional learning outcomes. Existing program and course assessments can be used to measure the institutional learning outcomes. The *Degrees of Excellence* institutional learning outcomes serve as benchmarks and a blueprint for current and future work on program and course outcomes.

## ASSESSMENT GOVERNANCE

The Office of Academic Affairs coordinates student learning assessment in collaboration with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness. These offices work closely with the Student Learning and Assessment Committee, the General Education Committee, college assessment coordinators, department chairs, and Student Affairs assessment coordinators.

The NSU assessment process is student-centered and faculty/staff driven. The primary emphasis for student learning assessment is at the program level where faculty establish the appropriate student learning outcomes, develop the curriculum, and determine the strategy to evidence student achievement of learning outcomes. Academic and student support initiatives are developed and assessed at the unit. Institutional assessment efforts, such as student engagement and satisfaction or campus climate surveys, are centrally administered to supplement programmatic assessment initiatives and provide additional information to programs and support units. Data from assessment activities are shared among programs and units, colleges, relevant committees, students, and administration.

Data collected through this integrated assessment process assists the following constituent groups:

- Students to improve their educational experience and personal development;
- Faculty to modify and improve course content and design;
- Programs to modify and improve curriculum, to review the efficacy of learning outcomes, to document evidence of student learning and program success, and to improve assessments;
- Colleges to prioritize the allocation of resources and monitor the quality and alignment of their degree programs to the mission and strategic plan;
- Academic and support service staff to modify and improve student programming and services; and
- Senior administration to evaluate the quality of degree programs and support services and monitor the institution's effectiveness in executing its mission.

### *Coordination of Assessment Activities*

The Office of Academic Affairs coordinates institutional and academic program assessment. The Director of Planning and Assessment coordinates student learning outcomes and institutional assessment in collaboration with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness. The Director of Planning and Assessment works with various university committees, deans, chairs, directors, administrators, individual faculty and staff, and students in advancing these efforts.

Areas involved in delivering academic or student support services report to the division in which they are organizationally aligned. Assessment activities for units aligned to Academic Affairs are coordinated by the Director of Planning and Assessment. Assessment activities for programs within units aligned to the division of Student Affairs are coordinated by Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs. These positions work with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness to provide feedback on data associated with the achievement of the Degrees of Excellence.

### *The Student Learning and Assessment Committee*

The Student Learning and Assessment Committee (SLAC) is the working group for the coordination and oversight of assessment activities related to student learning and the Degrees of Excellence. The Provost designates a committee

chair. The Student Learning and Assessment Committee is comprised of faculty, staff, and students.

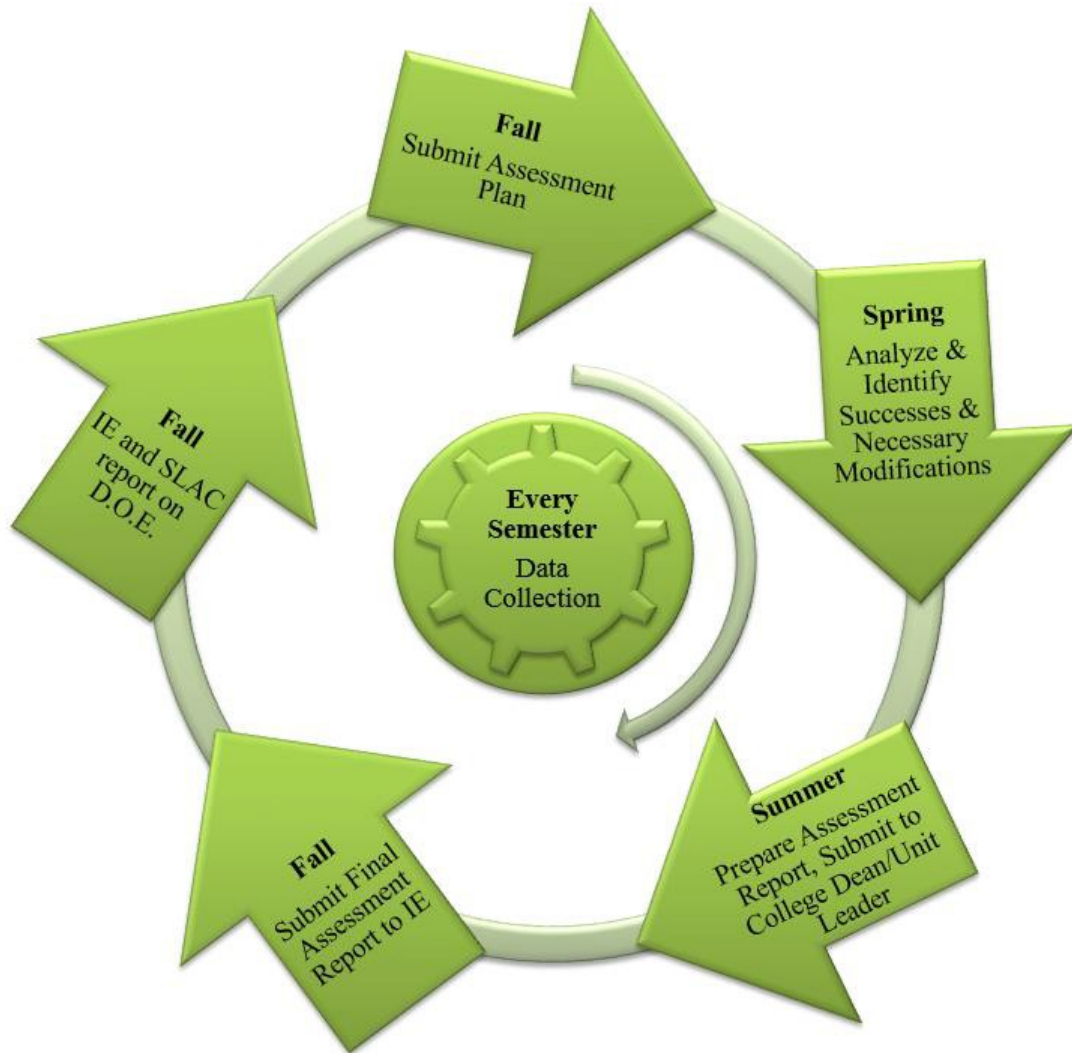


Figure 3. NSU Annual Degrees of Excellence Assessment Cycle

## NSU DEGREES OF EXCELLENCE ASSESSMENT CYCLE

NSU's assessment reporting processes operate on an annual cycle, evaluating the current academic year's data. Student assessment begins when the student is admitted to NSU. NSU conducts assessment relative to remediation based first on ACT sub-test scores. If the entering student does not meet the ACT criteria, secondary testing such as high school GPA in the subject and/or

testing with Accuplacer is performed. Students with deficiencies can remediate through completion of developmental coursework, co-requisite coursework, or sufficient scores on post-course placements tests. NSU assesses the Degrees of Excellence institutional learning outcomes through a course embedded approach. This integrated strategy aligns general education and program/unit outcomes to the Degrees of Excellence. All Degrees of Excellence and general education outcomes are assessed annually. In so far as they align with the Degrees of Excellence outcomes, program/unit level outcomes must be assessed annually. Programs and units maintain the discretion to determine the appropriate assessment cycle for student learning outcomes that are not identified with the Degrees of Excellence. Programs with specialized accreditations adhere to those guidelines.

Every degree program, the general education program, and academic or student support programs with student learning outcomes align their program outcomes to the Degrees of Excellence. Every fall, each program submits an assessment plan to the Student Learning and Assessment Committee, which provides feedback and guidance on the assessment plan. Data collection is a continuing process throughout each academic semester.

Departments and units analyze and discuss the data to identify successes and necessary modifications to course or program outcomes, curriculum, or services provided. The SLAC serves an advisory role for programs and units needing guidance in data analysis and interpretation. HLC and other accrediting agencies recognize this process as "closing the loop." This is not to suggest that modifications to outcomes, curricular, or service initiatives are required at the close of each assessment cycle, but that data are used to support decisions to change or maintain existing processes and curricular designs.

Programs and units prepare an assessment report for initial submission to the appropriate college dean or unit leader for substantive feedback. A final assessment report will be submitted to the Office of Institutional Effectiveness. Institutional Effectiveness, with the assistance of the SLAC, will evaluate the data and provide feedback on the Degrees of Excellence to the NSU community and stakeholders. Figure 3 represents the suggested assessment timeline at NSU. This cycle guides assessment strategies through completion and use the results in a meaningful and informative manner.

NSU assesses student engagement and satisfaction at multiple levels of the student's academic tenure. The National Survey of Student Engagement is administered to freshmen and seniors in the spring term. The results are shared with the academic and student support units. Additionally, students are invited to evaluate every course in which they are enrolled, providing further evidence of student satisfaction.