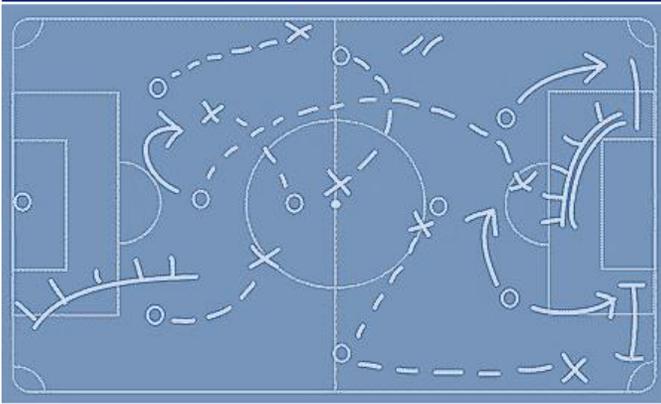


IACBE

Advancing Academic Quality in
Business Education Worldwide



Key Content Areas of an Outcomes Assessment Plan for Business Programs

International Assembly for Collegiate Business Education
11374 Strang Line Road
Lenexa, Kansas 66215, USA





PREFACE

The International Assembly for Collegiate Business Education (IACBE) was founded in 1997 in response to the expressed needs of presidents, chief academic officers, and business deans, chairs, and heads of departments who wanted an accreditation process that was mission-driven and outcomes-based. The IACBE provides specialized accreditation to the business programs of hundreds of institutions of higher education throughout the world whose primary purpose is excellence in teaching and learning. The IACBE’s innovative approach to specialized business accreditation is based on the assessment of educational outcomes and the characteristics of excellence in business education.

This document outlines the required components of an outcomes assessment plan for business programs that are to be accredited by the IACBE. In particular, the document describes the following required content areas:

- I. Mission and Broad-Based Goals
- II. Student Learning Assessment
- III. Operational Assessment
- IV. Linkage of Outcomes Assessment with Strategic Planning
- V. Appendices

In addition, the document identifies the ‘Key Learning Outcomes for Business Programs’ by degree level (i.e., for associate-, bachelor’s-, master’s-, and doctoral-level programs in business). These key learning outcomes are associated with those content- and skills-related areas that comprise typical programs in business.

KEY CONTENT AREAS OF AN OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT PLAN FOR BUSINESS PROGRAMS

Section I. Mission and Broad-Based Goals

- A. The outcomes assessment plan must include a statement of the approved mission of the academic business unit.
- B. The outcomes assessment plan must include a listing of the broad-based goals of the academic business unit. The broad-based goals should represent the general aims or aspirations of the business unit and should flow directly from its mission. In other words, the academic business unit's broad-based goals should be instrumental to mission accomplishment in the sense that achievement of the goals would provide evidence that the academic business unit is accomplishing its mission. Therefore, each broad-based goal should be associated with and mapped to some aspect of the academic business unit's mission. These goals must be subdivided into the following types:
1. Student learning goals; these must be stated from the students' perspective (and not in terms of what the academic business unit will do, will provide, or intends to accomplish), and must clearly describe what students are expected to learn, know, understand, or be able to do as a result of completing their programs of study. In addition, they should encompass the intended student learning outcomes as identified in Section II. Student Learning Assessment below, and should be general aggregates of those outcomes (i.e., each learning goal should have multiple intended learning outcomes associated with it).
 2. Operational goals; these must clearly describe what the academic business unit will do, will provide, or intends to accomplish in terms of its overall organizational and functional performance. In addition, they should encompass the intended operational outcomes as identified in Section III. Operational Assessment below, and should be general aggregates of those outcomes (i.e., each operational goal should have multiple intended operational outcomes associated with it).

Section II. Student Learning Assessment

Student learning assessment must be addressed for each business program to be included in the accreditation review. Therefore, for the purposes of inclusion in outcomes assessment plans, self-studies, and accreditation reviews, we need to specify exactly what constitutes a business program. The IACBE defines a 'business program' as follows:

Business Program: A program of study consisting of an organized set of business and business-related courses, modules, subjects, etc. that satisfies all of the following criteria:

- The program leads to the awarding of a degree, diploma, or other equivalent credential at the associate, bachelor's, master's, or doctoral level;

- ❑ The courses, modules, subjects, etc. in the traditional fields of business education¹ comprising the program constitute 20 percent or more of the total requirements for an undergraduate degree, diploma, or other equivalent credential; or 50 percent or more of the total requirements for a graduate degree, diploma, or other equivalent credential;
 - ❑ The program appears on a student’s official transcript, diploma supplement, or other equivalent record of program completion.
- A. The outcomes assessment plan must state intended student learning outcomes for each business program to be included in the accreditation review. These intended learning outcomes should be appropriate to the program’s area of study and should take the following forms:
1. Business-Related Content Outcomes (e.g., outcomes relating to discipline-specific knowledge, concepts/principles, theories, etc., in the program’s area of study)
 2. Business-Related Professional Skills Outcomes (e.g., outcomes relating to leadership abilities, professional communication skills, ethical reasoning abilities, teamwork skills, quantitative and analytical abilities, information technology skills, etc.)

In developing its outcomes assessment plan, the academic business unit must ensure that the intended student learning outcomes in each business program substantially encompass and are linked to the relevant ‘Key Learning Outcomes for Business Programs’ as identified by the IACBE. These learning outcomes are defined for each degree level (i.e., for associate-, bachelor’s-, master’s, and doctoral-level programs) and are associated with those content- and skills-related areas that comprise typical programs in business. While the academic business unit is not required to use these particular outcomes or the specific wording in these outcomes, and may include additional content- and skills-related intended learning outcomes in its assessment plan, it must ensure, at a minimum, that the content- and skills-related areas that are addressed in the Key Learning Outcomes are substantially incorporated in its own intended learning outcomes. In some cases, certain specialized business programs, as a result of having a different focus than that of mainstream business programs, may not substantially encompass the relevant Key Learning Outcomes. To the extent that such specialized programs are mission-driven, academically rigorous, and market-responsive, some variation from this requirement may be justifiable. Consequently, for any business program included in the accreditation review for which the outcomes assessment plan does not substantially encompass the relevant Key Learning Outcomes for Business Programs, it is incumbent upon the academic business unit to provide a rationale and to justify its case for an exception to this requirement.

These learning outcomes are identified in the section entitled *Key Learning Outcomes for Business Programs* in this document.

The intended student learning outcomes for all programs to be included in the accreditation review must be program-level outcomes. More specifically, the intended student learning outcomes for

¹ The following typical disciplinary areas are considered to be the ‘traditional fields of business education’: accounting, business administration, business ethics, business law, business-related quantitative methods, economics (principles of microeconomics and macroeconomics), finance, human resources, information management, international business, management, and marketing.

associate-, bachelor's-, master's-, and doctoral-level programs must clearly describe what students are expected to know and be able to do at the conclusion of each degree program.

Furthermore, the intended student learning outcomes for all associate-, bachelor's-, master's-, and doctoral-level programs must be appropriate to the degree level with which they are associated. In other words, they must reflect higher orders of learning and skills development at each successively-higher degree level. For example, the intended student learning outcomes for a master's-level program must reflect appropriate master's-level discipline-specific knowledge, skills, abilities, and competencies, and these must be more challenging to acquire than the discipline-specific knowledge, skills, abilities, and competencies for a bachelor's-level program. Therefore, the intended student learning outcomes for all programs to be included in the accreditation review must be formulated so as to represent higher levels of expected student performance as a student progresses from one degree level to the next.²

In addition, the intended student learning outcomes must be measurable, must be stated using active verbs (e.g., according to Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives), and must clearly describe the knowledge, skills, abilities, and competencies that students are expected to acquire as a result of completing their programs of study.

- B. For each program to be included in the accreditation review, the outcomes assessment plan must also identify appropriate measures of student learning (and their associated evaluation rubrics) that will be employed to assess the program's intended student learning outcomes. Furthermore, each intended student learning outcome in each program must be assessed by at least two different measures of student learning, at least one of which must be a direct measure.

Although there must be appropriate measures of student learning for each program to be included in the accreditation review, it is not required that different programs have different learning measures. In other words, it is possible for a single measurement instrument to be used in multiple programs.³

A major purpose of outcomes assessment is to provide a basis for continuous improvement in curriculum, pedagogy, institutional resources, academic support services, staffing, and other aspects of institutional operations that impact student learning. It is therefore important that any needed changes and improvements identified through the assessment process be based on the best possible data, and that assessment results accurately and reliably characterize the institution's business programs. Consequently, the academic business unit should undertake reasonable efforts to ensure that the student learning assessment measures possess adequate degrees of validity and reliability. Accordingly, all instruments that are employed as measures of student learning should actually assess the intended outcomes that they are intended to measure and they should yield similar, consistent results from the measurement of the intended outcomes under varying conditions.

² For guidance on developing intended student learning outcomes that are degree-level appropriate, see the Lumina Foundation's publication entitled "*The Degree Qualifications Profile*." This document is available for download on the IACBE website at: www.iacbe.org/oa-documents.asp.

³ For example, a capstone project in a Strategic Management course could be used as a direct measure of student learning in both a Bachelor of Business Administration program and a Bachelor of Science in Management program.

- C. For each measurement tool (and each associated evaluation rubric) that will be employed in student learning assessment, the outcomes assessment plan must specify the performance objectives (measurable targets/criteria) that will be used by the academic business unit to determine the extent to which the intended student learning outcomes are being achieved.⁴

Section III. Operational Assessment

Since the quality of the academic business unit's performance depends on its ability to manage its human, physical, financial, and technological resources and its educational processes effectively, i.e., on the extent of its operational effectiveness, the academic business unit's outcomes assessment plan must provide for operational assessment.

- A. The outcomes assessment plan must state intended operational outcomes for the academic business unit (i.e., outcomes relating to the effective management of the unit's academic resources and educational processes). These outcomes must be measurable and must clearly describe specific desired results for the academic business unit's critical success factors (CSFs) or key performance indicators (KPIs) relating to its resources and processes that will be evaluated in the determination of the operational effectiveness of the academic business unit.
- B. The outcomes assessment plan must identify the tools, instruments, or methods that will be used to assess the intended operational outcomes.

As in Section II.B above, a major purpose of outcomes assessment is to provide a basis for continuous improvement in curriculum, pedagogy, institutional resources, academic support services, staffing, and other aspects of institutional operations that impact the overall effectiveness of the academic business unit. It is therefore important that any needed changes and improvements identified through the assessment process be based on the best possible data, and that assessment results accurately and reliably characterize the institution's business programs. Consequently, the academic business unit should undertake reasonable efforts to ensure that the measurement instruments employed for operational assessment possess adequate degrees of validity and reliability. Accordingly, the measures, instruments, or methods employed to assess the intended operational outcomes should actually measure the intended outcomes that they are intended to measure and they should yield similar, consistent results from the measurement of the intended outcomes under varying conditions.

- C. For each tool, instrument, or method that will be used in the assessment of operational outcomes, the outcomes assessment plan must specify the performance objectives (measurable targets/criteria) that, if achieved, will be evidence of operational effectiveness of the academic business unit.⁵

⁴ Performance objectives for student learning are the desired measurable results (or targets) for student performance on the learning assessment instruments, tools, and metrics that are used to assess the extent of achievement of intended student learning outcomes. For example, if the academic business unit is using a comprehensive project in a capstone course as a direct measure of student learning, then a performance objective might be that, on the rating scale in the project evaluation rubric (with 'exemplary' being the highest rating), at least 80% of the students will achieve a performance rating of 'acceptable' or higher on each of the evaluation criteria associated with the intended student learning outcomes assessed by the project.

⁵ Performance objectives for operational effectiveness are the desired measurable results (or targets) for the tools, instruments, and methods that are used to assess the extent of achievement of the intended operational

Section IV. Linkage of Outcomes Assessment with Strategic Planning

The extent of the academic business unit's performance and the degree of its overall effectiveness depend on its continuous improvement efforts in meeting future challenges. Since this requires any necessary changes and improvements that are identified as result of the outcomes assessment process to be incorporated into its planning process for the future, the academic business unit must provide for the linkage of its outcomes assessment and strategic planning processes.

- A. The outcomes assessment plan must provide a description of the academic business unit and institutional strategic planning and budgeting processes (structures, steps, timetables, etc.).
- B. The outcomes assessment plan must provide a description of the ways in which the results from implementing the outcomes assessment plan (i.e., changes and improvements needed) are linked to the strategic planning processes of both the academic business unit and the institution.
- C. The outcomes assessment plan must provide a description of the ways in which the academic business unit's outcomes assessment process is linked to the institutional budgeting process.

Section V. Appendices

The appendices constitute the final component of the outcomes assessment plan.

- A. The outcomes assessment plan must include blank copies of all the assessment instruments that will be used as measures of intended student learning outcomes and intended operational outcomes.⁶
- B. The outcomes assessment plan must include blank copies of all the evaluation rubrics associated with the assessment instruments identified in Part A above.

outcomes. For example, if the academic business unit has identified an operational outcome pertaining to faculty teaching and is using a senior exit survey as a measure of this outcome, then a performance objective might be that 90% or more of the students will be either 'satisfied' or 'highly satisfied' with each aspect of faculty teaching as identified by relevant items in the survey instrument.

⁶ For security and copyright reasons, if you are using an examination from an external vendor as a direct measure of student learning, do not include a copy of the exam in your outcomes assessment plan. Most vendors will provide an exam content outline that summarizes the types of questions included on the exam. Please use this content summary for this purpose.

KEY LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR BUSINESS PROGRAMS

In developing its outcomes assessment plan, the academic business unit must ensure that the intended student learning outcomes in each business program substantially encompass and are linked to the relevant 'Key Learning Outcomes for Business Programs' as identified by the IACBE. These learning outcomes, as specified below, are defined for each degree level (i.e., for associate-, bachelor's-, master's-, and doctoral-level programs) and are associated with those content- and skills-related areas that comprise typical programs in business. While the academic business unit is not required to use these particular outcomes or the specific wording in these outcomes, and may include additional content- and skills-related intended learning outcomes in its assessment plan, it must ensure, at a minimum, that the content- and skills-related areas that are addressed in the Key Learning Outcomes are substantially incorporated in its own intended learning outcomes.

Key learning outcomes for:

Associate-Level Business Programs

Graduates of associate-level programs in business should be able to:

1. Describe the introductory concepts of accounting, economics, management, and marketing
2. Use decision-support tools
3. Communicate effectively in oral and written forms

Bachelor's-Level Business Programs

Graduates of bachelor's-level programs in business should be able to:

1. Explain the major concepts in the functional areas of accounting, marketing, finance, and management
2. Evaluate the legal, social, and economic environments of business
3. Describe the global environment of business
4. Describe and explain the ethical obligations and responsibilities of business
5. Apply decision-support tools to business decision making
6. Construct and present effective oral and written forms of professional communication
7. Apply knowledge of business concepts and functions in an integrated manner

Master's-Level Business Programs

In master's-level programs, knowledge of the key content areas and functional disciplines of business is assumed. Graduates of master's-level programs should acquire a depth of knowledge in these areas that

exceeds that of the typical bachelor's degree graduate. Graduates of master's-level programs in business should be able to:

1. Recognize problems
2. Integrate theory and practice for the purpose of strategic analysis
3. Employ and apply quantitative techniques and methods in the analysis of real-world business situations
4. Communicate to relevant audiences; graduates should be able to:
 - a. Compose clear, consistent, and effective written forms of communication
 - b. Compose and present effective oral business presentations
5. Work effectively with a team of colleagues on diverse projects
6. Identify and analyze the ethical obligations and responsibilities of business

Doctoral-Level Business Programs

Graduates of doctoral-level programs in business should be able to:

1. Demonstrate effective research skills; graduates should be able to:
 - a. Formulate a research problem
 - b. Integrate previous literature into an appropriate literature review
 - c. Design a research study
 - d. Analyze data
 - e. Summarize and present research results
 - f. Discuss research results
2. Demonstrate advanced knowledge and competencies in a major field of study in business
3. Create and present advanced forms of oral and written communication
4. Evaluate and assess the ethical obligations and responsibilities of business for the purpose of responsible management