8.2.a

Student Outcomes: Educational Programs

The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of seeking improvement based on analysis of the results in the areas below:

    a. student learning outcomes for each of its educational programs

Judgment

☑ Compliant   ☐ Non-Compliant   ☐ Not Applicable

SACSCOC Reviewer Comments

Non-Compliance

The institution's response is in violation of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) policy, "Reports Submitted for SACSCOC Review," by including live links in its response and electronic documentation that is not consistently bookmarked, indexed, and searchable.

The institution has a policy, Assessment of Student Learning ACAF 3.00, that defines and outlines the assessment of student learning process for its main campus and its branch campuses. The institution documents that its programs identify student learning outcomes through the implementation of its S.M.A.R.T. Learning Outcomes Model (SMART = Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-oriented, and Time-bound). In 2016, the Office of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Analytics (OIRAA), in collaboration with the College of Arts and Sciences, formalized the use of its S.M.A.R.T. Learning Outcomes Model in the review of program learning outcomes for the institution's approximately three hundred educational programs. The institution expects that each academic program at all campuses engage in the institution's assessment process on an annual basis. In 2017, OIRAA staff audited approximately three hundred reports and found that many of the educational programs had difficulty managing and responding to assessment results and using the results for continuous improvement. In spring 2020, the institution formed an ad-hoc committee to address the way the institution reports how assessment results are used to improve student learning. This new process involves a survey of assessment report writers to be launched in fall 2020. The institution admits that using evidence to seek improvement remains challenging for some programs.

The institution reveals in its narrative that it has approximately 300 programs in the assessment cycle and provided access to the assessment reports for all its programs through Assessment Composer (a live link accessed via a username and password provided in the narrative). The assessment reports are substantial and provide outcomes, measures and criteria, methods, results, and use of results. The use of results sections, however, do not consistently provide evidence of seeking improvement. In its narrative, the institution provided a table that presented one outcome from each of five programs as evidence of seeking improvement. The institution refers to these as "only a few examples among many at our university, where assessment results have fostered improvements to educational programs." The sample outcomes data include (a) the name of the college, (b) the program, (c) the learning outcome, (d) the results that prompted change, and (e) the program change. The evidence provided does not appear to meet its ACAF 3.00 assessment policy requirements because the assessment measures are not provided (although the reports in Assessment Composer do). The institution did not provide a rationale to support this sample as representative of the entire corpus of program assessment reports' evidence of seeking improvement. Additionally, the examples are not complete assessment reports. The institution directed the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee to the OIRRA live website to find evidence of documentation of improvements and searching and finding the reports challenged the Committee members. Furthermore, some links were broken, e.g., the link to "templates and other assessment resources" at the end of paragraph 6.

Campus Response

The Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee identified four primary areas of concern related to standard 8.2a (Student Outcomes: Educational Programs). The areas of concern were:

1. Consistent use of assessment results for improvement: "*The assessment reports are substantial and provide outcomes, measures and criteria, methods, results, and use of results. The use of results sections, however, do not consistently provide evidence of seeking improvement.*"
2. Assessment measures absent from sample outcomes data: "*The evidence provided does not appear to meet its ACAF 3.00 assessment policy requirements because the assessment measures are not provided (although the reports in Assessment Composer do).*"
3. Rationale for sample of assessment reports (and complete assessment reports):"*The institution did not provide a rationale to support this sample as representative of the entire corpus of program assessment reports' evidence of seeking improvement. Additionally, the examples are not complete assessment reports.*"
4. Assessment resources: "*The institution directed the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee to the OIRAA live website to find evidence of documentation of improvements and searching and finding the reports challenged the Committee members. Furthermore, some links were broken, e.g., the link to "templates and other assessment resources" at the end of paragraph 6."*

Section 1: Using assessment results for improvement

The University of South Carolina Columbia continuously takes steps to improve academic programs through consistent assessment results and use of results.   Program administrators are expected to meet with faculty engaged in program oversight to discuss assessment results, and determine what improvements should be made to the program in response to the results. So that programs allocate time for these discussions, the Office of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Analytics (OIRAA) provides a proposed timeline for assessment activities for each program on its website. Each timeline calls for an entire semester for analysis, discussion and reporting recommendations for improvement in Assessment Plan Composer (APC). The University of South Carolina encourages that programs take detailed notes during these meetings so that these can be used to document actions the program will take in response to assessment results. OIRAA provides a list of guiding questions for these discussions in the form of an Assessment Action Plan Form on the OIRAA website. Furthermore, in order to help programs use assessment results for improvement, the institution provides the following support:

After the program submits its assessment report in Assessment Plan Composer, the "Use of Results" section for each assessment report is carefully reviewed by assessment staff in OIRAA to gauge whether programs met their intended performance targets and subsequently recommended any actions for improvement. In cases where programs either fail to address how assessment results were used to improve the program, or indicate without justification, why no program changes are recommended, OIRAA notes this in the "Assessment Feedback Form" (Document 01) and sends the report back to the program for revisions. The assessment report will not be approved until the necessary revisions to the impacted "Use of Results" sections are made. The criteria established for Results and Use of Results is based on the following determination:

Rating	Results	Use of Results
Exceeds	Identifies programmatic strengths & weaknesses based on presented data OR Charts and/ or graphs used in order to present data OR Contains relevant trend data	Curricular and/or programmatic changes are described in detail that address the implementation
Meets	Results are presented on same scale as described in measures and criteria from the associated plan AND Explicitly states whether or not LO is met	If changes are recommended: Describes the changes that are recommended to curriculum or assessment measures AND Clearly describes how proposed changes are linked to assessment results If no changes are recommended: Explicitly states why no changes are recommended
Approaching	Results presented with no statement whether or not LO is met	Use of Results simply state that no changes are recommended but no explanation is given for why no changes are recommended
Unacceptable	No data provided OR Results not presented as described in Measures & Criteria	No changes are recommended AND no explanation is given for why no changes are recommended

Table 1 Results *and* Use of Results *Criteria*

Training

The first step in using assessment results for improvement is to collect evidence of student learning in a program and analyze the results that were collected for usefulness. This requires some advance planning and organizing on the part of the academic program. In 2018, the Assistant Director of Assessment delivered individual workshops for programs experiencing significant challenges with organizing their assessment activities. These sessions were followed by a university-wide training session hosted in the university's Center for Teaching Excellence in 2019, titled "Closing the Assessment Loop: How to Leverage Assessment Results to Improve your Academic Program" (Document 02). The aim of this session was to help programs take the next step toward taking proposed actions, implementing them, and determining how the actions taken improved the program.

Consultation

OIRAA staff offer program-specific (one-on-one) consultation on collecting and using assessment results. A list of guiding questions in the form of an Assessment Action Plan Form (Document 03) for these one-on-one discussions is used. This form is also provided to departments and faculty to use when discussing learning outcome results. Guiding questions included on this form include:

- What do the assessment results mean for the program?
- As a result of this assessment, what actions will be taken to improve the curriculum, delivery, or other components of this program?
- What could make the assessment of this learning goal more effective?

Committee support

The university has an Assessment Advisory Committee. The Assessment Advisory Committee (AAC) functions as a learning community of educators and is comprised of representatives from each college and school, along with the Associate Vice President for Planning, Assessment and Innovation Council (PAIC) in Student Affairs/Academic Support. As expressed in the Assessment Advisory Committee's Charge, the committee serves as a channel of communication among faculty and OIRAA. AAC members make recommendations regarding assessment-related policies and assist faculty within their respective college in the development and implementation of meaningful assessment initiatives. In the spirit of continuous improvement toward encouraging programs to use assessment results for program improvement, an ad-hoc committee of the university's Assessment Advisory Committee (AAC) made a significant recommendation in 2020 to replace an unstructured and duplicative assessment report executive summary requirement for colleges and schools.

In order to change how programs report assessment results and how results have been used to improve educational programs, the committee called for a new "Assessment Actions Survey" (Document 04) of assessment report writers to be completed no later than two weeks after submitting the official assessment report for the program. The survey requires programs to answer the following question, "How has the unit's use of assessment results improved educational programs?" Responses to this critical question should help programs better articulate the usefulness of assessment and make it easier for programs to identify where assessment activities have helped to improve or strengthen a program. In addition, from a process improvement perspective, it will help to improve consistency of assessment result reporting.

Additional support actions and initiatives

To address programs that propose no changes over multiple assessment cycles, OIRAA has launched an initiative called, "Digging Deeper: Mining Assessment Data for Program Improvement" (Document 05). This initiative is aimed at addressing the inertia experienced by some programs with regard to changing either the delivery, curricula or assessment components of the program over multiple years. A representative from OIRAA will evaluate the results submitted in the assessment report for the program and initiate a more in-depth conversation of the results with the program director.   The Digging Deeper initiative is designed to spur conversation among program faculty about various elements of the program that are evidenced by the assessment results and to prompt them to consider making one or more changes to the program for improvement. This initiative has the support of the Assessment Advisory Committee.

Section 2: Assessment Measures

The university's policy on degree program assessment, ACAF 3.00 *Assessment of Student Learning* (Document 06) explicitly requires programs to establish assessment measures that are independent from course grades and teaching evaluations. In its initial submission access was given to the university's assessment system, Assessment Plan Composer (APC) and the university chose to create a brief table of sample outcomes data. However, the specific assessment measures associated with the outcomes data were not present. The SACSCOC Off-Site Review team commented, "The sample outcomes data include (a) the name of the college, (b) the program, (c) the learning outcome, (d) the results that prompted change, and (e) the program change. The evidence provided does not appear to meet its ACAF 3.00 assessment policy requirements because the assessment measures are not provided (although the reports in Assessment Composer do)."

Based on the corpus of programs described in section 3 (assessment reports); the following table (Table 2) highlights sample learning outcomes and includes a new column that identifies the associated assessment measures from 15 different programs. The sample outcomes data include, the name of the college, the program, the learning outcome, measures, the results that prompted change, and the program change.

School/College and Program	Summary Outcomes Data with measures and results
Norman J. Arnold School of Public Health **Program:** **M.H.A. Health Services. & Policy Mgmt.**	**SUMMARY (Document 07)**
College of Arts and Sciences **Program:** BS Statistics	**SUMMARY (Document 08)**
College of Arts and Sciences **Program:** MS Geological Sciences	**SUMMARY (Document 09)**
College of Arts and Sciences **Program:** PhD in Comparative Literature	**SUMMARY (Document 10)**

School/College and Program	Summary Outcomes Data with measures and results
College of Education **Program:** MAT Secondary Education – Social Studies	SUMMARY (Document 11)
College of Engineering and Computing **Program:** BS Biomedical Engineering	SUMMARY (Document 12)
College of Hospitality, Retail, & Sport Management **Program:** PhD in Sport & Entertainment Management	SUMMARY (Document 13)
College of Information and Communications **Program:** BAJMC – Advertising	SUMMARY (Document 14)
College of Nursing **Program:** Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN)	SUMMARY (Document 15)
College of Pharmacy **Program:** Pharmaceutical Sciences PhD	SUMMARY (Document 16)
College of Social Work **Program:** Social and Behavioral health with Military Members, Veterans, and Military Families	SUMMARY (Document 17)
Darla Moore School of Business **Program:** BSBA Accounting	SUMMARY (Document 18)
Palmetto College **Program:** Associate of Science in Business	SUMMARY (Document 19)
School of Medicine **Program:** MD	SUMMARY (Document 20)
School of Music **Program:** BA/BM Music	SUMMARY (Document 21)

Table 2 *Representative Sample of Academic Program Assessment Reports by College*

Note on Sample Rationale

The University of South Carolina offers over 300 academic degrees and certificates across a spectrum of 15 schools and colleges plus our two-year programs offered through Palmetto Regional College Campuses. These programs span the Arts and Humanities, Health Sciences, professionally-accredited programs, Natural Sciences, STEM and Social Sciences, and are offered at four levels: Associates, Bachelors, Post-Baccalaureate Certificate, Master's, Doctoral (e.g. PhD) and Professional (e.g., JD. PharmD, MD). The programs chosen for our sample provide broad representation of assessment activities in a rich variety of core disciplines offered at the university, in a scope that illustrates offerings at each degree level. Please note that some programs (for example, the MD, a Professional Health degree) are classified into multiple disciplines.

The sample below is as a "cross-section of assessment" across academic areas and levels of study. For example, the Post-Baccalaureate Certificate in *Social and Behavioral Health with Military Members, Veterans, and Military Families* highlights assessment activities in a program offered by one of our strong professional schools (College of Social Work) featuring a curriculum rooted in the tradition of social science. Similarly, the Bachelor's in Biomedical Engineering provides a window into to STEM-based arena of Engineering while also drawing upon the aspects of health-science disciplines. Three programs are offered as examples from the university's largest college, the College of Arts and Sciences--degrees in Statistics, Geological Sciences, and Comparative Literature--represent strengths in core academic areas.

Table 3 (below) shows the totality of our program offerings across all schools and colleges along with the disciplines represented within a school or college. The "program sample" of 15, referenced throughout our response, should be considered representative of assessment activities across all levels, disciplines, and colleges/schools of the University of South Carolina Columbia. We will draw upon this sample to highlight assessment efforts and full assessment reports will be provided for each program in our representative sample (Table 4). Full assessment reports for each of the university's 304 degree programs will be made available to the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee upon request and during the On-Site visit.

College	Discipline(s) offered	# of programs offered	# programs included in sample	Name of program included in sample
Norman J. Arnold School of Public Health	Health Science Professional STEM	36	1	MHA Health Services & Policy Management
College of Arts and Sciences	Arts & Humanities Natural Sciences Social Sciences STEM	108	3	BS Statistics MS Geological Sciences PhD Comparative Literature
College of Education	Social Sciences Professional	39	1	MAT Secondary Education Social Studies
College of Engineering and Computing	STEM Professional	31	1	BS Biomedical Engineering
College of Hospitality, Retail, & Sport Management	Social Sciences	10	1	PhD Sport & Entertainment Management
College of Information and Communications	Social Sciences	14	1	BAJMC Advertising
College of Nursing	HealthScience Professional	4	1	BSN Nursing
College of Pharmacy	HealthScience Professional	3	1	PhD Pharmaceutical Sciences
College of Social Work	HealthScience Professional Social Sciences	6	1	Certificate, Social Work
Darla Moore School of Business	Professional Social Sciences	19	1	BSBA Accounting
Palmetto College	Arts & Humanities HealthScience STEM Professional	6	1	AS Business
SC Honors College	Arts & Humanities	1	*Not included in sample*	*Not included in sample*
School of Law	Professional	1	*Not included in sample*	*Not included in sample*
Schools of Medicine (Columbia & Greenville)	HealthScience Professional	10	1	MD
School of Music	Arts & Humanities	16	1	BA/BM Music
	Total:	**304**	**15**	

Table 3 *Program Offerings by College and Discipline*

The Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee noted that, "*Additionally, the examples are not complete assessment reports.*"

The table below (Table 4) provides links to the full assessment reports for two reporting periods (Report 1 and Report 2) for each of the 15 programs included in our sample. The documents (Documents 22- 57) are available via .pdfs files by clicking the links in the "Program Sample" column. Rationale for the sample was described above; full assessment reports for each of the university's 304 degree programs will be made available to the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee upon request and during the On-Site visit.

Program Sample
MHA Health Services & Policy Management Report 1| Report 2
BS Statistics Report 1 | Report 2
MS Geological Sciences Report 1 | Report 2
PhD Comparative Literature Report 1 | Report 2
MAT Secondary Education Social Studies Report 1 | Report 2
BS Biomedical Engineering Report 1 | Report 2
PhD Sport & Entertainment Management Report 1 | Report 2
BAJMC Advertising Report 1 | Report 2
BSN Nursing Report 1 | Report 2
PhD Pharmaceutical Sciences Report 1 | Report 2
Certificate SOWK Report 1 | Report 2
BSBA Accounting Report 1 | Report 2
AS Business Report 1 | Report 2
MD - School of Medicine Report 1 | Report 2
BA/BM Music Report 1 | Report 2

Table 4 *Assessment Reports*

Section 4: Assessment Resources

The fourth area of concern noted by the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee states: "*The institution directed the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee to the OIRAA live website to find evidence of documentation of improvements and searching and finding the reports challenged*

the Committee members. Furthermore, some links were broken, e.g., the link to "templates and other assessment resources" at the end of paragraph 6."

To address the final comment made by the SACSCOC Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee regarding the inability to access assessment resources on our site, we have attached a .pdf version of the Institutional Effectiveness Homepage (Document 52), available at https://www.sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/institutional_research_assessment_and_analytics/institutional_effectiveness/index.php. Provided below are .pdf copies of all of the assessment resources linked from that page, including:

<u>Assessment Resources</u>

Assessment Advisory Committee (Document 53)
Degree Program Assessment Business Process Document (Document 54)
Assessment Reporting Calendar and Schedules (Document 55)
Sample Reports (Document 56)

<u>Assessment Toolbox</u>

Assessment Basics (Document 57)
Drafting Goals and Learning Outcomes (Document 58)
Curriculum Mapping (Document 59)
Selecting Assessment Measures (Document 60)
Collecting Assessment Results (Document 61)
Using Assessment Results for Improvement (Document 62)
Closing the Assessment Loop (Document 63)

Sources

8.2a Student Outcomes- Educational Programs Committee Feedback

Document 01_Assessment Feedback Form 2019

Document 02_Closing the Loop Workshop

Document 03_Assessment Action Plan Form

Document 04_Assessment Actions Survey

Document 05_Digging Deeper Guiding Questions

Document 06_ACAF 3.00

Document 07_MHA Health Services & Policy Mgmt

Document 08_BS Statistics

Document 09_MS Geological Sci

Document 10_PhD Comp Lit

Document 11_MAT Secondary Ed

Document 12_BS Biomed Engr

Document 13_PhD SPTE

Document 14_BAJMC Advts

Document 15_BSN

Document 16_PhD Pharm Sci

Document 17_Social Work

Document 18_BSBA Acct

Document 19_AS Business

Document 20_MD

Document 21_BABM Music

Document 22_MHA HSPM 16-17 Rpt

Document 23_MHA HSPM Cyc1 Rpt

Document 24_BS Statistics 16-17 Report

Document 25_BS Statistics Cycle 1 Report

Document 26_MS Geol. Sci. 16-17 Report

Document 27_MS Geol. Sci. Cyc 1 Report

Document 28_Phd Comp. Lit. 16-17 Report

Document 29_Phd Comp. Lit. Cycle 1 Report

Document 30_MAT Sec. Ed. Soc. Stud. 16-17 Report

- Document 31_MAT Sec. Ed. Soc. Stud. Cycle 1 Report
- Document 32_BS BIOMED Eng 16-17 Report
- Document 33_BS BIOMED Eng Cyc 1 Report
- Document 34_PhD Sport & Ent. Mgmt 16-17 Rpt
- Document 35_PhD Sport & Ent. Mgmt Cyc 1 Rpt
- Document 36_BAJMC Advertising 16-17 Report
- Document 37_BAJMC Advertising Cycle 1 Report
- Document 38_BSN Nursing 16-17 Report
- Document 39_BSN Nursing Cycle 1 Rpt
- Document 40_Pharm PhD 16-17 Report
- Document 41_Pharm PhD Cyc 1 Report
- Document 42_SOWK MILITARY 16-17 Report
- Document 43_SOWK MILITARY Cycle 1 Report
- Document 44_UG ACCTG 16-17 Report
- Document 45_UG ACCTG Cycle 1 Report
- Document 46_AS Business Lancaster 16-17 Report
- Document 47_AS Business Lancaster Cycle 1 Report
- Document 48_Medicine - MD 16-17 Assmt Rpt
- Document 49_Medicine - MD Cycle 1 Assmt Rpt
- Document 50_MUSIC BA-BM 16-17 Rpt
- Document 51_MUSIC BA-BM Cyc 1 Rpt
- Document 52_Assessment Homepage
- Document 53_Assessment Advisory Commiteee
- Document 54_degree_program_assessment_business_process
- Document 55_dpa_reporting_timelines_checklists
- Document 56_sample_reports
- Document 57_assessment_basics
- Document 58_drafting_goals_and_outcome_statements
- Document 59_curriculum_mapping
- Document 60_selecting_assessment_measures
- Document 61_collecting_assessment_results
- Document 62_using_assessment_results_for_improvement
- Document 63_closing_the_assessment_loop
- Document 64_CTL_Workshop_Registration_Link
- Document 65_Assessment_Action_Plan_Form