Administrative Assessment

A guide to planning, implementing, and reporting division-wide evaluation and assessment

Office of Institutional Effectiveness
Marymount University
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Administrative Assessment: A guidebook to planning, implementing, and reporting division-wide evaluation and assessment
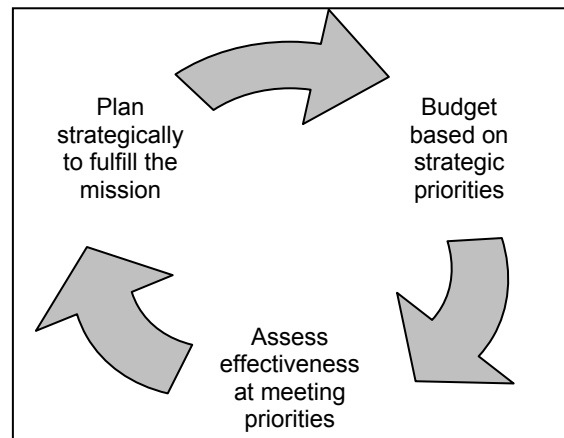
This *Guidebook* outlines the major steps of Marymount University's administrative assessment process and provides suggestions and ideas for making it meaningful and useful. Administrative assessment is one of Marymount's three formal evaluation and assessment mechanisms. *Student Learning Outcomes Assessment,* and *Program Review* and *Administrative Assessment* provide a comprehensive understanding of the University's effectiveness by reviewing, analyzing, and improving the educational experiences. Administrative assessment focuses on the administrative and support services provided by the University. The goals of the process are to:

- Evaluate the effectiveness of Marymount's units at meeting their operational and strategic outcomes,
- Identify strengths and weaknesses in the functioning of units and the services they provide, and
- Develop strategies to improve the Marymount experience for students and others.

Administrative Assessment Activity at Marymount:
Marymount's current administrative assessment process was developed and implemented during 2005-06 academic year. Prior to this process, the University had an evaluation system which requested all administrative units and academic departments to submit yearly reports. In 2004-05 that process was suspended because of spotty participation and a need to address learning outcomes by academic programs.

The new administrative assessment process revolves around division identified goals, which are operationalized into outcomes and assessed by units within the division. By placing assessment reporting and coordination at the division, the new process tightens the linkages between the strategic planning, budgeting, and assessment based on the role of the division on both the Strategic Planning and University Budgeting Committees. Ultimately, the goal is for:

- Divisions' goals to be driven by the University's Strategic Plan.
- Strategic planning to inform budgeting decisions and priorities.
- Assessment to evaluate the use of resources and to inform strategic planning

Calendar of Administrative Assessment Activity

September	• Division develops and presents goals to units
October	• Units establish or revise outcomes to support division's goals
November	• Division collects and reviews outcomes • Division submits Assessment Plan to IE
December	• IE reviews divisions' assessment plan
January February March April May June	• Units collect assessment data needed for planned measures • IE forwards data and analysis from institutional administrative and survey databases • Units analyze assessment results
July	• Division compiles units' assessment reports
August	• Division analyzes results in context of goals • Division submits Administrative Assessment Report to UAC
September	• UAC reviews divisions' reports • Division develops and presents goals to units
October	• Units establish outcomes to support divisional goals • Division formulates appropriate budget requests based on assessment results
November	• UAC makes report to University Budget Committee (UBC) on assessment activity • Division collects and reviews new year's outcomes • Division submits Assessment Plan to IE
December	• IE reviews divisions' assessment plan • UBC reconciles budgets requests with projected budget

The Starting Point: Goals and Outcomes

Goals and outcomes are the building blocks from which administrative assessment is conducted. Goals define the division's direction and are the basis from which units develop outcomes and evaluate effectiveness. Goals indicate the broad thrust of the division's assessment activity and should be directly related to Marymount's Strategic Plan. Outcomes operationalize individual units' role in and support of the divisional goals. Developing goals and outcomes is challenging, but it is crucial that they are well written. They need to:

> **Key Terms**
>
> **Goals** indicate the major priorities of the division during a set period of time.
>
> **Outcomes** are statements regarding expected results of unit and its services.
>
> **Divisions** represent the major administrative areas within the University.
>
> **Units** include the specific offices and service providers which fall within divisions.
>
> **Measurable** reflects the quality of being observable and verifiable.

- Articulate clearly that which is to be accomplished by the division or the unit,

- Can be measured and evaluated by those conducting the assessment activity.

Understanding and Identifying Goals

Goals indicate the major priorities of divisions during a set period of time for assessment purposes, typically an annual cycle. As division-wide statements, they are broad enough to transcend the units housed within the division, but focused enough to be evaluated. Larger divisions often have several goals that they assess, while smaller divisions may limit its analysis to one. Divisions should have a sufficient number of goals to allow all units to participate in the process, but limit them to ensure sufficient resources and time to evaluate them appropriately.

In establishing goals, the best starting point is the *University's Strategic Plan* [1] Often the *Plan* provides actual goal statements through it's *Critical Success Factors* and *Strategic Initiatives.* For example, Academic Affairs uses the five strategic indicators related to Academic Excellence as the basis for its annual

> Example of Goals:
> Provide high-quality academic programs and a learning environment that promotes student success
>
> Enhance the availability and use of Marymount's print and electronic resources
>
> Support the intellectual, emotional and physical growth of students
>
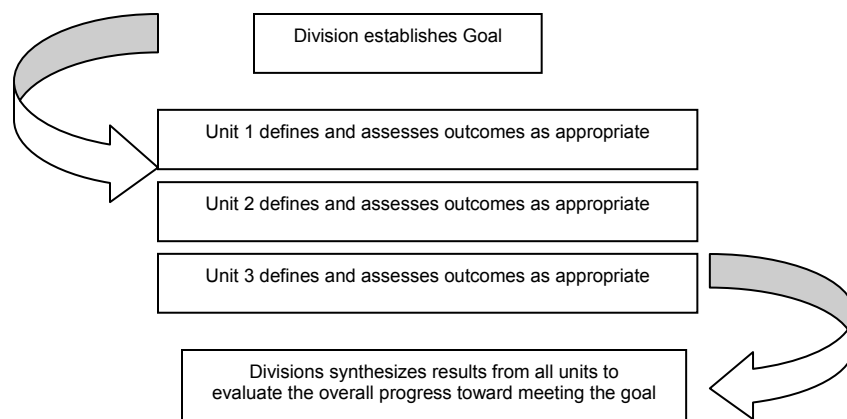> Attract and retain highly qualified professional faculty and staff

assessment activity. Using the *Strategic Plan* as the basis also simplifies the link to planning that divisions are asked to document.

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[1] See www.marymount.edu/planning

Divisions often have there own strategic plans or priorities that are not explicitly stated in the *University's Strategic Plan*, but support the larger institutional direction and growth. Using these types of goals is entirely appropriate for the assessment process. These goals may be shorter or longer term goals, but typically have a limited lifespan. For example, fundraising for a targeted project such as a building, may make a good assessment goal. As long as the goal can be dissected into outcomes for the divisions, it works well. Using these goals can make the assessment process more meaningful because it provides a direct link to staff member's daily work. It is necessary to link these goals to the *University Strategic Plan*, but this may already be done through the division's strategic planning activities.

The relationship between goals and outcomes:
While goals represent the major priorities of the division, outcomes reflect the expected results of units within a division that support the broader goals. Accordingly, every goal statement has several outcomes that support and promote it which are drawn from the activities and services of multiple units. It is not necessary for every unit to have outcomes relating to every goal. It is, however, necessary for all units to have outcomes that support at least one goal divisional goal. Many units may have outcomes that fall under several goals.

The importance of linking the outcomes to the goals becomes more apparent by looking forward into the process. Ultimately, the division will compile and synthesize the outcomes assessment results into a comprehensive analysis of progress toward meeting the goal.

Operational vs. Strategic Outcomes:
There are two types of outcomes used in administrative assessment activity.

   Operational Outcomes reflect the core mission and purpose of the administrative unit by stating the expected results. Operational outcomes are generally assessed to ensure effectiveness of the unit at meeting its mission. Accordingly, operational outcomes are written in present tense.

Strategic Outcomes reflect future expected results of the unit, based on a planned activity. Strategic outcomes are generally assessed as part of the planning process to ensure strategic initiatives have the intended or positive results. Accordingly, strategic outcomes typically are written in future tense.

Example of Operational and Strategic Outcomes:
Goal: Provide high-quality academic programs and a learning environment that promotes student success.

→ Operational: The Registrar's Office maintains accurate, secure student records.

→ Strategic: Over the next year, the Registrar's Office will expand hours of operation to improve student access to services.

Determining which type of outcomes to use is driven by a number of factors. The goal, which also can be either operational or strategic, may dictate the type of outcomes. Current activity within the unit also affects the outcomes used. Units undergoing substantial change often use short-term strategic outcomes because they help to ensure growth occurs in a systematic and beneficial approach. At the same time, units that are more stable in their responsibilities and projects are more likely to use operational outcomes to ensure the effectiveness of services offered. Most often the strongest approach is a combination of strategic and operational outcomes. Together they can provide a more comprehensive view of the division's effectiveness by examining both the daily operations and innovative developments.

Measuring Effectiveness and Collecting Data

Once unit outcomes are developed, the next step of the process is to identify measures to evaluate the unit's effectiveness. Measures come in a wide variety of forms and from a wide variety sources. Sometimes measures require the development and implementation of new tools, but often measures rely on secondary analysis of data that are already collected by the unit, division, or University. Although coming from many different sources, strong measures share three key attributes. They are:

- Related to the outcome being assessed directly and clearly (i.e. the results will answer the questions: "How effectively did the unit meet this outcome?")
- Objective and avoid structural bias (e.g. the results of the measure are not determined by how its tool is written or implemented).
- Analyzable using standard research and evaluation techniques (i.e. the process for evaluating the measure is documented, impartial, and systematic).

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Key Terms

Data include the resulting information from the use of measure

Effectiveness reflects the level of achievement relative to outcomes

Measures are the methods used to gather information on how effectively an outcome is met

Sample is a subsection of all possible events or respondents which reflects the entire population

Structural bias is a flaw in how measures are developed that necessarily lead to positive or negative results

Validity indicates the level to which measures reflect reality

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Quantitative vs. Qualitative Measures:
The selected measure impacts the data generated and the methods used to analyze that data. There are two types of measures used in administrative assessment.

Quantitative measures require numeric analysis (e.g. counts, percentage, and means)

Qualitative measures require analysis of the character or content (e.g. content reviews, theme extraction, and secondary analysis).

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Example of Quantitative and Qualitative Measures:
Outcome: The Registrar's Office maintains accurate student records.

→ Quantitative: Track and count the number of errors on transcripts reported by students.

→ Qualitative: Review the policies used to maintain and update student records.

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The type of measure is sometimes prompted by the nature of the outcome being assessed; however most outcomes can be examined using either (or both) qualitative or quantitative measures. In the example, simply tracking and counting data entry errors on transcripts could provide useful information and patterns to be corrected. At the same time, using a more qualitative measure such as a review of policies used to

update records may illustrate possible holes in the process. Using both measures would provide the richest understanding by providing data on both the seriousness of the issue and an understanding of the process.

Direct vs. Indirect Measures:
In addition to the being classified by the type of data generated, measures are also described by how they relate to outcomes. **Direct** measures examine actual results: **Indirect** measures examine perceptions relative to the outcome. Typically measures that are based on surveys, focus groups, and other methods to gather opinion through samples of respondents are considered to be indirect. Measures that are based on a complete or comprehensive data source that reflect the results of the outcome are considered to be direct.

Based on the example above, both the qualitative and quantitative measure would be considered direct measures because they are drawn from the actual results of the outcomes. However, the same outcome could be assessed using indirect measures. The Registrar's Office could survey students and ask them to indicate their agreement with a statement such as "My transcript is always correct" or conduct a focus group of office staff members on accuracy issues. Using student or staff perceptions of accuracy would provide serve as an indirect measure.

Example of Quantitative and Qualitative Measures: Outcome: The Registrar's Office maintains accurate student records.		
	Direct	Indirect
Quantitative	Compile and count the number of errors on transcripts reported by students.	Survey students on their perceptions of record accuracy.
Qualitative	Review the policies used to maintain and update student records.	Conduct a focus group of Registrar office staff on accuracy issues

While some outcomes may only require one measure to evaluate the unit's effectiveness, in general, it is better to develop multiple measures for each outcome. Varying the types of measures applied to an outcome provides a fuller picture of overall effectiveness by generating more material for the analysis. It also ensures available data in case one of measures is not collected.

Including Institutional Data Sources for Assessment:
IE conducts several annual surveys which can provide the basis for assessment measures. Most of data generated from the surveys is global in nature asking questions regarding students' overall experiences; however some can be customized to provide divisions and units with data directly relating to their outcomes. The following list represents the primary surveys conducted by the IE.

Student Satisfaction Survey – A biennial survey of students' experience with specific offices and services on campus. Each unit designs its own questions. (2006 response rate: 40%)

Faculty and Staff Survey – An annual survey of faculty and staff experiences with specific offices and services on campus. Each unit designs its own questions. (2006 response rate: 40%)

Graduating Student Survey – An annual survey of all graduating students' experiences. It includes global evaluation of all major student services. (2005-06 response rate: 50%)

Alumni Survey – An annual survey of alumni one and five year(s) from graduating from Marymount. It includes questions evaluating their experience, retained connection, and employment and educational outcomes (2006 response rate: 30%)

In addition, Marymount also participates in the *National Study of Student Engagement (NSSE),* a nationally normed survey of first-year and senior students. Survey results are compared to a benchmark group of similar institutions. Individual respondent's results are also provided to the school so that customized analyses are possible. Marymount participates in the NSSE every other year during years that the *Student Satisfaction Survey* is not conducted.

Avoiding Structural Bias:
Structural bias is a flaw in a measure that results in inaccurate data and information based on how the measure operates. It directly impacts the validity of the assessment results and ultimately can lead to inappropriate or wrong conclusions and recommendations. Most often structural bias is unintentionally placed into measures through an assumed level of quality about a unit or service. It can result in either positive or negative results that do not represent reality.

There are a few simple guidelines to limit structural bias in measures:
1) Regardless of the event being assessed, do the tools allow for an equal opportunity for positive or negative results to occur?
2) Do the questions asked address the outcome entirely?
3) Is the measure being applied to all relevant respondents or events? If not, other was the sample drawn to allow a complete picture of the outcome?

Structurally Biased Measure	Potential Solution
Administering survey to students asking them to rate services they received using a biased scale: *Excellent, Very good, Good, Adequate, and Needs improvement.*	Change the scale to allow for equal representation of positive and negative options: *Excellent, Good, Adequate, Needs improvement, Poor (2 positive, 1 neutral, and 2 negative responses)*
Conduct a focus group to represent students' opinions and ask only questions relating to areas for improvement and weaknesses may result in changes that impact things that are done well	Ensure that when asking about problems (or strengths) there is an equal opportunity to discuss the other.
Perform a content review of institutional policy by reviewing only one specific policy on the topic when others exist may cause bias if the various policies compete or conflict in how they address or handle the topic.	First conduct an inventory of all relevant policies relating to the topic, and then assess the multiple policies to ensure consistency and avoid dissonance.

Collecting Data for Analysis:

The key to collecting data is planning. One of the biggest challenges that units face when writing their results is realizing that measure were not implemented. This often results in a scramble for data that may only loosely tie to the outcome. Once completing the outcomes and identifying the measures, simply mapping roles and responsibilities provides an easy tracking system and helps ensure that high quality data are available.

Example of Grid for Tracking Data Collection

	What Needs to be done	Who is responsible	What is the timeframe
Compile and count the number of errors on transcripts reported by students.	Develop an Excel Spreadsheet to enter all errors, date identified, and solution	Associate Registrar will create and monitor spreadsheet All staff will have access to enter data.	Start in Spring Semester and run through June. *Will continue on and be used next year.
Review the policies used to maintain and update student records.	Pull together all office procedures on updating records. Review for: Inconsistencies, errors, and holes.	Registrar will conduct the analysis	Review to be completed in March
Survey students on their perceptions of record accuracy.	Participate in MU Student Satisfaction Survey. Make sure students are asked about their feeling of record accuracy	Transfer Credit Coordinator will work with Institutional Effectiveness draft appropriate question.	• Survey questions due by March 1st • Results available by June 1st.
Conduct a focus group of Registrar office staff on accuracy issues	Focus group to be held as part of staff meeting.	• Registrar will work with Institutional Effectiveness to develop questions. • Graduate assistant will conduct focus group. • Transcript reviewed by Registrar and Associate Registrar	• Focus group in March or April depending on other agenda items. • Review of comments in July.

Analyzing Assessment Results

Once the data have been collected, the next phase of the administrative assessment process is to analyze results. Analysis of the collected data and information is primarily the responsibility of the units within the division. This approach of self-evaluation is based on an assumption that to understand the meaning of the data, effectiveness at meeting the outcome, and interpreting the implications requires someone who is intimately familiar with the working of the unit and services.

Analyzing the Results:
The type of measure used directly shapes the analysis. The approaches used for qualitative and quantitative results vary greatly, but both need to be standardized, unbiased, and documented.

> ### Key Terms
> **Analysis** is the process of evaluating data to determine meaning and relevance which is:
>
> → *Standardized (is applied in a consistent fashion to all available data),*
>
> → *Unbiased (reflects fair and impartial review of all relevant data and results), and*
>
> →*Documented (includes sufficient evidence to illustrate the process).*
>
> **Rubric** a tool defining the characteristics necessary to achieve an outcome that is used as guide in evaluation

Quantitative Data:
Sometimes people avoid quantitative measures because they assume a need for statistical training. While there is a bit of arithmetic involved in most quantitative measures, it is usually relatively simple. For example, if a unit conducts a survey and asks students to rate their level of satisfaction with a service or office, then the analysis may be as simple as reporting how many (or more likely what percentage) of respondents indicated being satisfied or very satisfied. The unit may ask several questions on various services and then compute mean scores for each question so it could make comparisons between the services. This helps to determine those areas with the highest and lowest levels student satisfaction.

One of the strengths of quantitative data analysis is that it relies on set rules that are generally understood or are explainable (e.g. mean).

> Basic Statistics in Quantitative Analysis
>
> **Count:** The number of cases falling into a category
> **Percentage:** Proportion of total cases falling into a category
> **Mean:** Average of a set of scores
> **Median:** Middle value in an ascending list of scores
> **Mode:** Most frequent score
> **Standard Deviation:** Average distance of scores from the mean
> **Percentile:** Percentage of a distribution of scores that is equal to or below a specified value.

This ensures the analysis is unbiased and makes it easy to document.

The primary weakness of quantitative analysis is that it leaves the unit asking questions on the meaning of the results such as: Is 75% of students being satisfied high enough? How are we going to reach that remaining 25%? To address these weaknesses, using benchmarks (external comparison data) or longitudinal (trend) data assist with the interpretation of the results. An additional solution is to use multiple measures to assess effectiveness, which leads to a broader view of the unit and services.

Qualitative Data:
Qualitative data analysis focuses on evaluating the characteristics or qualities of the measure. People are often attracted to qualitative measures (such as focus groups and open-ended survey questions) because they allow respondents to express their perceptions "in their own words". In administrative assessment is it crucial to be mindful the key attributes of analysis (systematic, unbiased, and documented) for qualitative analysis. There is danger of reading a single, strong, well-written comment and acting upon it. There are two strategies that can be useful in conducting qualitative analysis.

Extracting themes to review and analyze qualitative measure can help avoid errors in interpretation. To extract themes:

- Read the entire document keeping notes of the major issues being offered
- Code the issues into substantive themes (e.g. if some comments complain about not finding courses and others are about wanting evening classes, this may reflect one theme about course scheduling)
- Categorize all the comments based on the themes (Note: there will be an "other" category to capture outliers)
- Analyze the resulting categories and content to determine the most pressing issues from the measure

Applying a rubric to qualitative information is an effective method to review documents or conduct a content review of meetings or other activities. Rubrics can be used to review multiple documents (applied to each meeting's minutes) or can be applied to a body of evidence (a handbook). The basic process is to:

- Develop a rubric that illustrates the expected characteristics associated with achieving the outcome
- Review all materials available
- Complete the rubric based on the available evidence

Steps for Developing a Rubric

1) Identify necessary characteristics to display outcome – use internal or external (e.g. professional association) standards
2) Translate into a list of clear evidence-based statements
3) Develop scale to evaluate the level of meeting the statements (e.g. fully met, partially met, not met)

Sample Rubric for evaluating Meeting Minutes relative to developing an employee training workshop and schedule

	Fully Met	Partially Met	Not Met
Documentation of monthly meetings	☐	☐	☐
Representation of appropriate offices at all meetings	☐	☐	☐
Discussion of key elements of occurred during meetings	☐	☐	☐
Development and approval of training session content	☐	☐	☐
Implementation schedule developed	☐	☐	☐

Regardless of the method used for evaluating qualitative measures, using standardized processes focuses the evaluation and promotes easier interpretation of the results. It also has a built-in documentation process by including samples of the rubrics or reports on the major themes.

Wrapping up the Process: The annual assessment report

In the final step of the adminsitrative assessment, divisions report findings and recommendations. Like the development of goals and outcomes in the first section, reporting operates at both the unit and divisional levels. Institutional Effectiveness provides a template to assist divisions with reporting their assessment activity. (See attachment A). The template facilitates reporting of divisional goals, unit outcomes and assessment, and divisional effectiveness and recommendations for improvement. In addition to the templates, divisions provide an executive summary and appendix of supporting documents.

Key Terms
Report includes the unit's outcomes, measures, and results; and division's analysis of goal and recommendations for improvement
Results are the key findings of the assessment activity
Interpretation is the process of explaining the results
Implications provide the unit's planned strategies for using the assessment activity and improving effectiveness
Recommendations are the concrete changes that a division proposes or makes based on the assessment results

    Executive Summary provides the context of the division's assessment activity by outlining the overall process, the goals, and results of the activity. It should also list units participating in the assessment activity and any recommendations based on the activity.

    Appendix provides supporting information and documentation of the division's activity. It includes data reports, copies of rubrics, and other supporting materials that illustrate the process. It is not necessary to include all the data collected, although such information should be available if questions arise.

Reporting unit-level results of administrative assessment:
The final step of the administrative assessment for individual units is reporting the results. The analysis for each outcome includes a brief discussion of the **results** of the measure, an **interpretation** of the results' meaning relative to the outcome, and a statement on the **implications**. When using multiple measures, the **results** section draws on all of the analysis to develop its implications.

Example of writing results section

Outcome	Measures	Results
The Registrar's Office maintains accurate student records.	Compile count of the number of errors on transcripts reported by students. Conduct a focus group of Registrar office staff on accuracy issues	(RESULTS) Over the last year, the office documented 45 errors on students' transcripts. Of these, 80% were caused by mistakes typing and 20% were caused by miscellaneous computer related problems. From the focus group of office staff, one re-occurring theme was that people found it difficult to check work on the screen and would prefer to have a printout to review. (INTERPRETATION) While printing out paper versions of student records changes is possible, doing so may waste paper and lead to more likely violations of student privacy by having an additional paper copy floating around. (IMPLICATION) Over the next year the Registrar will work with Administrative Information Systems to generate a weekly report of records changes that will be reviewed for accuracy and then shredded.

Units also include other relevant information in the results section, particularly if there are any extraordinary circumstances that impacted its effectiveness at meeting the outcome. Organizational or other changes often can impact the unit's effectiveness, and including a discussion may provide useful insights into the assessment process.

Compiling the Final Division-Wide Assessment Report:
After assessing and reporting the results of the individual outcomes, the division compiles the final report. The division:

- Collects and sorts all of the unit's outcomes assessment reports by goal
- Reviews the reports for accuracy and appropriate analysis
- Provides any historic background on the assessment of the goal
- Conducts a secondary analysis of the units' results to evaluate the progress toward meeting the division's goals.
- Develops evidence-based recommendations for improvement based on the unit or division analysis
- Drafts an executive summary highlighting the overall process and providing appropriate additional information
- Compiles an appendix of supporting documents such as survey results, meeting documentation, or any other information that illuminates the assessment process and activity.

> Check list for Divisional Assessment Report
>
> ☑ An executive summary including:
>   o *An outline of the organization structure of the division*
>   o *A discussion of the overall process*
>   o *Highlights of any major challenges faced in the process*
>   o *A list of specific recommendations from the assessment activity*
>
> ☑ One complete template for each goal including:
>   o *A brief history of previous assessment activity related to the goal*
>   o *A discussion of how the goal relates to the University's Strategic Plan*
>   o *Unit-level outcomes, measures, and results*
>   o *A discussion of the division's progress toward meeting the goal*
>   o *Recommendations for improvement based on the assessment activity*
>
> ☑ An appendix of supporting documents including:
>   o *Results from surveys and focus groups*
>   o *Examples of rubrics*
>   o *Other materials with explain the process*

Reviewing the Assessment Report:
The University Assessment Committee (UAC) reads and reviews all administrative assessment reports to ensure they demonstrate the University's standards for assessment.   Two UAC members evaluate the report using a standardized rubric. (See Appendix B) Upon validation, the division's recommendations are compiled in a comprehensive report to the University President and presented to the University Budget Committee. If the report fails to demonstrate the University's standards, it is returned for further analysis, clarification, or revision.

Marymount University
Administrative Assessment Report Review Form

Division: _____

Reviewers: _____

	Met	Partially Met	Not Met
Goal Statements and Objectives/Outcomes:			
Clearly articulated goals	☐	☐	☐
Goals linked to the University's Strategic Plan	☐	☐	☐
Objectives and outcomes support the goals	☐	☐	☐
Objectives and outcomes are assessable	☐	☐	☐
Report includes input from all departments and offices within division	☐	☐	☐

Comments:

	Met	Partially Met	Not Met
Analysis of Effectiveness:			
Appropriate analysis conducted for each outcome and objective	☐	☐	☐
Evidence of critical evaluation of division's effectiveness relative to the goals and objectives	☐	☐	☐
Clear analysis-driven recommendations for improvement	☐	☐	☐

Comments:

	Met	Partially Met	Not Met
Supporting Documentation			
Sufficient information/evidence to understand analysis	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐

Comments:

Overall Comments and Suggestions:

Does the report need to be revised?

❏ No   ❏ Yes → If yes, please describe in detail the additional material and analysis that are being requested

Annual Assessment Plan and Report

Goal: **Is this goal being reexamined?** ❒ Yes ❒ No	**If yes, give a brief summary of previous results and indicate the year/years in which this goal was examined.**

Describe how the goal relates to the Institutional Mission and Strategic Plan:

Outcomes	Measures	Results

Implications

Discuss how well the goal and its outcomes were met:

RECOMMENDATIONS