

Continuous Improvement Reports

Academic Programs

Development and Completion Guidelines

Continuous improvement is a systematic and ongoing process of gathering and interpreting information, then using the results to enhance the work of the program. It is a process designed to answer the question: Are the efforts put forth by the program producing the desired results? The process ultimately establishes direction for improving quality, satisfaction, efficiency, and effectiveness of the program.

Institutions of higher education undertake continuous improvement efforts often in response to external drivers, however, more importantly, should be the internal drive for constant enhancement. To this end, the commitment to the continuous improvement process must have longevity and be strategic in nature.

The program may select one or more persons to lead the assessment effort, however, it is critical for all faculty to be actively involved in designing, implementing, and analyzing the continuous improvement process. Faculty participation and ownership is essential for the long-term success of continuous improvement efforts.

A *Continuous Improvement Report* summarizes the program's assessment efforts from the previous reporting cycle. The following sections of the continuous improvement template are addressed in the *Continuous Improvement Report*: (1) Mission Statement, (2) Outcomes, (3) Alignments with the Winthrop Plan, College Strategic Plan, and University Level Competencies (ULCs), (4) Assessment Methods/Measures and (5) Targets, (6) Assessment Results and Discussion, (7) Documentation, and (8) Continuous Improvement Actions. Section (9) (Language, Grammar, and Formatting) should be considered in the completion of the *Continuous Improvement Report*.

The following sections provide descriptions and suggestions for each component of a *Continuous Improvement Report*.

1. Mission

-Why does the program exist?

The mission is a concise statement that describes the program's purpose and primary functions, identifies who the program serves, and states how the program contributes to the development of its students (i.e., who the program is, what it does, and who it serves). Clearly articulating the focus of the program serves as the foundation for continuous improvement.

It is important to review the program's mission for two purposes. First, does the mission still accurately portray the responsibilities of the program? If not, it may be advisable to revise the mission statement. Second, the outcomes should reflect the program's mission. ***By executing the outcomes, the program is***

actually accomplishing its mission; the true purpose of assessment. If the program is not assessing various aspects of its mission, then the *Continuous Improvement Report* may be incomplete.

Example: The mission of the Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy is to prepare teacher candidates through discipline-specific content and extensive clinical experiences with innovative pedagogies. Our programs produce caring educators who positively impact students, families, and communities.

2. Outcomes

-What does the program desire to achieve?

Identifying clearly defined outcomes is an integral part of the continuous improvement process and should be derived from the program's mission statement. Student learning outcomes (SLOs) clearly state the expected knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that students are expected to acquire and reliably demonstrate by the end of the program. Program outcomes address important programmatic aspects, aside from student learning, particularly as they pertain to the quality and/or productivity of the program.

Generally, outcomes should not change from year to year. An outcome should be able to accommodate a variety of activities from year to year. If, however, the program eliminates an outcome, provide a brief statement at the end of the report explaining why the outcome is no longer included in the *Continuous Improvement Report*.

- An outcome should be carried over from the 2024-25 *Continuous Improvement Report* to the 2025-26 *Continuous Improvement Report* if the outcome is central to the functioning of the program.
- An outcome may be added to a Report, reflecting new projects, aspirations, or goals.
- An outcome may not be carried over from the 2024-25 *Continuous Improvement Report* to the 2025-26 *Continuous Improvement Report* because it was simply a bad outcome, for whatever reason. This is a common occurrence when in the developmental stage of an assessment process.
- An academic unit should strive to include at least two program outcomes and three to five student learning outcomes in its *Continuous Improvement Report*.

As part of assessing student learning outcomes, the academic program should engage in the process of curriculum mapping. This process allows the program to identify the courses in which each student learning outcome is addressed and to determine the level at which the outcome is explored. Within the grid of the curriculum map, the following ratings are used:

- Outcome Introduced (rating = 1) – Students experience initial or early exposure to the outcome (knowledge/skill/value/attitude).
- Outcome Emphasized (rating = 2) – Students experience secondary exposure to the outcome (knowledge/skill/value/attitude), which is the focus of the course.

- Outcome Reinforced (rating = 3) – Students experience a tertiary exposure to the outcome (knowledge/skill/value/attitude), with the course re-emphasizing and deepening the outcome (knowledge/skill/value/attitude).

The curriculum map should be included as part of the program’s Continuous Improvement Report.

Example (Student learning outcome): Students in the chemistry program will effectively communicate scientific findings orally, visually, and in writing.

Example (Program outcome): Support opportunities for student majors to experience a sense of community within the history program.

3. Alignments with the Winthrop: United in Excellence Strategic Plan, College Strategic Plan, and University Level Competencies (ULCs)

-How does the program’s work support the institution?

The continuous improvement efforts of the program should support the work of the college and the institution. In this way, the collective work of all programs within a college and of all units across the institution advances the mission of the University. As appropriate, program outcomes should align with the Winthrop Strategic Plan: United in Excellence and the college’s strategic plan, while student learning outcomes should align with the University Level Competencies (ULCs), specifically identifying the individual goal, initiative, or competency supported.

4. Assessment Methods/Measures

-How will the program determine if the outcomes have been achieved?

Assessment methods/measures are the strategies, techniques, tools, and instruments used for collecting information to determine the extent to which desired outcomes are attained. The methods/measures chosen should allow the program to evaluate its effectiveness, highlighting strengths and areas for improvement.

- Use multiple methods/measures of assessment for each outcome, identifying at least two assessment methods/measures per outcome.
- Employ a combination of direct and indirect assessment methods/measures, if possible. Direct methods/measures include actual evidence of outcome attainment. Indirect methods/measures assess the students’ perception of the realization of the outcome.
- Utilize a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods/measures, if possible.

Example: The Art History Writing Competency Rubric was used to assess students’ research papers in ARTH 451 (Art History Methods). The focus of the paper is on critical theories and methodologies within the discipline. Students develop this paper over the course of the semester, including checkpoints on annotated bibliography, outline, first draft, and peer-reviewed draft. The rubric was used during both the peer and final paper review.

5. Targets

-What level of performance is expected?

Targets are a measure of the performance level expected. It is important to determine how success will be defined for each of the expected outcomes. A target level of achievement, indicating a reasonable level of improvement, should be set for each outcome.

- *When will the program know that the outcome has been accomplished?* This is an important question to answer, as it will drive the program's Actions for the subsequent year.
- A justification for the established target should be provided, indicating why this level of performance is attainable.

Example: 80% of students in the Political Science capstone course will earn a rating of "4-above average" or "5-exceptional" on each dimension of the Writing Reinforcement Rubric (Context of and purpose for writing, Content development, Genre and disciplinary conventions, Sources and evidence, and Control of syntax and mechanics). Additionally, no students will earn a "1-poor" or "2-marginal" rating. The rubric will be applied to a culminating research paper. For the past three years, 75% to 80% of students have earned a "4-above average" or "5-exceptional" rating on various rubric dimensions, but not on all five of them. The program directly addressed this in 2025-26 with required submission of first drafts and peer reviews, so feel confident that students can attain this target.

6. Assessment Results and Analysis/Discussion

-What is the current state of affairs?

Assessment results are the findings gathered from executing the activities. Analysis of the data/information determines the extent to which the program's expected outcomes have been realized. A systematic data collection and analysis process maximize the impact of the efforts. When data are appropriately presented (e.g., table, graph), identification of strengths and areas needing improvement is enhanced.

In analyzing the data, the following should be considered:

- *Were the outcomes attained? Why or why not?* These questions can be answered by indicating if the target was or was not attained.
- *What strengths were reflected? How can these be further strengthened?*
- *What strategies were successful? What strategies were not?*
- *What areas for improvement were identified?*

The Discussion of Assessment Results section of the template provides an opportunity to interpret the data/results and to explain what they mean to the program. This may include providing a context for the data/results, comparing data/results to a previous year(s), etc.

In order to associate a document with a data claim, place the name of a numbered document after the data or assessment tool. A very simplistic example: 15 students (75%) attained a rating of "4-

above average” or “5-excellent” on the capstone oral presentation rubric (1 – Capstone Oral Presentation Rubric; 2 – Capstone Oral Presentation Data Table). Then include these documents, numbered and named in this fashion, as part of the documentation submission. A data claim should not be made without including a specific supporting document.

Example: The Goals and Tactics Rubric was used with the Senior Review course (THA 401) and the Sophomore Review course (THA 201) to assess the acting goals and tactics outcome. The rubric assesses students across five dimensions – goals and connections, tactics and transitions, listening and connections, performance, and demonstration of essential musical notes and story context. Both of these courses are team taught and students are assessed by the two-member faculty team at the end of the course. Assessment involves a series of speaking and small performance parts. (1 – Goals and Tactics Rubric)

Data were collected from one senior practicum course (THA 401) and one class of Sophomore Review (THA 201). Current data (2025-26) reflect evaluations of 24 seniors and 44 sophomores.

2025-26 Sophomore and Senior data representing students receiving a rating of “4-Good/Above Average” or “5-Excellent/Superior” on the rubric include:

<u>Sophomores (THA 201) (n=44)</u>	<u>Seniors (THA 401) (n=24)</u>
27% - Goals and connections	100% - Goals and connections
24% - Tactics and transitions	91% - Tactics and transitions
50% - Listening and connections	92% - Listening and connections
33% - Performance	85% - Performance
27% - Demonstration of essential context	100% - Demonstration of essential musical notes and story context

(2 – Goals and Tactics Rubric 2024-25 Data Table – THA 201 Sophomores; 3 – Goals and Tactics Rubric 2025-26 Data Table – THA 401 Seniors)

This is the second year that the theatre program has used the Goals and Tactics Rubric. Data from our previous administration (2024-25) representing students receiving a rating of “4-Good/Above Average” or “5-Excellent/Superior” on the rubric include:

<u>Sophomores (THA 201) (n=48)</u>	<u>Seniors (THA 401) (n=27)</u>
13% - Goals and connections	86% - Goals and connections

13% - Tactics and transitions

86% - Tactics and transitions

50% - Listening and connections

85% - Listening and connections

25% - Performance

85% - Performance

13% - Demonstration of essential musical notes and story context
100% - Demonstration of essential musical notes and story context

(4 – Goals and Tactics Rubric 2024-25 Data Table – THA 201 Sophomores; 5 – Goals and Tactics Rubric 2024-25 Data Table – THA 401 Seniors)

The program is pleased with these data on a variety of fronts. First, since the same rubric is used for sophomore review and senior review, we expect to see a tremendous amount of growth from the sophomore data to the senior data. The data bear this out.

Second, with actions taken to address the 2024-25 data, we are pleased to see that ratings of “4” and “5” increased from 2024-25 to 2025-26 for the Sophomore Review. The two courses taken prior to the Sophomore Review included more work with students on the musical components of theatre, as well as specific work on transitions. The data support these efforts, with an increase from 13% to 27% for demonstration of essential musical notes and story context and an increase from 13% to 24% for tactics and transitions.

Third, with actions taken to address the 2024-25 data, we are pleased to see that the rubric ratings of “4” and “5” increased from 2024-25 to 2025-26 for the Senior Review. The entire departmental faculty are stressing listening and connections throughout the curriculum. We are spending more time on this in the classroom, emphasizing in productions, and working with peer mentors to reinforce this with students. We feel that all graduating seniors should earn a rating of “4” or “5” on this dimension of the rubric. If their listening and connections ability is not “good,” we have concerns regarding their level of success in a theatre or theatre-related career. The data support these efforts, with an increase from 85% to 92% for listening and connections.

7. Documentation

-How does the program verify its assessment methods and data claims?

Documentation includes the materials/documents that provide evidence of the assessment methods used and the assessment results attained.

- List and number the supporting documentation at the end of the report in the order in which they are presented within the *Continuous Improvement Report*. This may require renaming the document for ease of understanding by a reviewer. For example, *1 – Capstone Oral Presentation Rubric* will be listed at the end of the report in the Supporting Documentation section and in the Assessment Results section. See the last paragraph and the example in the Assessment Results and Discussion section above. The actual document will also be included in the program’s submission.
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- Include titles and dates on documents, spreadsheets, graphs, tables, etc. These titles should match the document name in the list of supporting documents and the electronic file name. Include the number of the document within the electronic file name (e.g., 1 – Capstone Oral Presentation Rubric is the electronic file name for document #1.) Consider highlighting the data within the documents that directly support the results.

8. Continuous Improvement Actions

-What data-informed action will be employed in the next assessment cycle to achieve the desired outcome?

The Continuous Improvement Actions describe the data-informed activities to be undertaken in the subsequent 2 years to enhance student learning and/or program performance.

- A Continuous Improvement Action requires action, not “continuing to monitor.” For each outcome, the Action should answer the question, *What is the program going to do in 2026-28 based on the data gathered in 2024-26 to enhance student learning for this particular outcome?* A specific action for continuous improvement, based on the data gathered, must be developed for each outcome.
- The Continuous Improvement Actions for each outcome should not be the same. Repeating the same Actions for each outcomes does not allow for specific action based on analyzing data by outcome.

Example: To address weaknesses in assessment practices related to collecting baseline data, we will provide additional instruction and support to help candidates with collecting and using baseline data to identify an academic, social, communication, or behavioral need of a student with a disability in a general education classroom setting. This action will be implemented in Fall 2025, within SPED 292 (Case Study), SPED 510 (Behavior Intervention Plan), and SPED 584 (Assessment and Intervention Project). The action will also be implemented during Spring 2026 in SPED 391 (Curriculum Based Measurement Project). The instructor of record will be responsible for providing the additional instruction.

9. Language, Grammar, and Formatting

-Is the story complete and understandable?

The report should tell the story of the program’s work throughout 2024-26. The reviewer is not familiar with all program and will need to have sufficient information to thoroughly understand the program’s assessment efforts.

- Do not use abbreviations that a reviewer may not understand. Use the full name with the abbreviation in parenthesis for the first reference and then the abbreviation in later references. For example, Major Field Test (MFT) would be noted in this fashion the first time it is referenced and, subsequently, as MFT.
- Write in sentences with capital letters and appropriate punctuation; use bullet points, if appropriate.

- Provide enough information so the reviewer can fully comprehend the program's "assessment story," and easily link this year's assessment work to both previous and future years' work.