

Quick Guide to Assessment Data Stewardship for Academic Programs

This quick guide was prepared by the WSU Office of Assessment for Curricular Effectiveness (ACE) and is intended to help WSU programs and faculty consider good practices for collecting, managing, and using program assessment data that align with [WSU's Executive Policy #8](#). ACE is also available to collaborate with WSU undergraduate degree programs to analyze assessment data, present results, and develop assessment archives. Contact us at ace.office@wsu.edu for more information.

Context

Assessment data are valuable tools in making decisions about curricula, teaching, and learning. As such, it is important to both protect data and provide appropriate stakeholders with access to data and summarized results (i.e. information derived from data).

Tips for Academic Programs

- 1. Recognize Responsibility:** Assessment data are valuable resources and must be carefully managed. Data custodians are responsible for safekeeping and appropriate use of data. For program-level assessment purposes, a number of faculty, staff, and administrators may be involved in the collection, use, and storage of student work and student data. Examples of individuals who may have a role in program assessment include faculty assessment coordinators, department chairs/school directors, faculty who teach, advisors, and administrators.

Note: Assessment data may come from a wide range of assessment measures, including capstone papers, senior theses, dissertations, embedded assessments, observations of student performances, portfolios of student work, pre-test/post-test assessments, standardized tests, supervisor evaluations of interns, focus groups, interviews, surveys, and course evaluations.

- 2. Inform All Faculty and Staff about Data Stewardship Policies:** All faculty and staff need to be informed about WSU's current data policies (e.g. [WSU's Executive Policy #8](#)), including when data are not intended for public use, and maintain FERPA training as appropriate.
- 3. Classify Types of Assessment Data and Who Should Have Access:** Program assessment data should be available to those needing the information to inform or perform their responsibilities. Each individual with access to assessment data has the responsibility to use those data and any information derived from them appropriately. Non-public data should be labeled as such (e.g. "for internal use" or "confidential"), and only be used to support assigned roles and duties at WSU.

Note: Programs may decide to categorize the various data about students and student learning that they collect and analyze for program assessment as non-public (i.e. internal or confidential); in general, assessment data are intended for internal use by authorized department faculty and administration for program improvement in support of their assigned roles and duties. Determinations to share data outside the program can be made as needed and care should be taken in presentation (see Tip #8).

- 4. Share Results with Appropriate Constituents:** Programs may decide to limit access to assessment data to authorized department faculty and administration in support of their assigned roles and duties (see Tip #3). Ideally, the summarized results from program-level assessment should be shared widely within the program, i.e. with the department chair/school director, faculty with teaching responsibilities (on each campus, as appropriate), and relevant committees, such as curriculum or assessment committees.

5. Develop an Archive: Assessment data and results should be managed as assets for use by the program. The usefulness and effectiveness of data depend on their being kept accurate and complete. For more program assessment archives, see ACE's [Quick Guide to Program Assessment Archives](#). Each program needs a secure location behind a WSU login for storage of assessment data, results, tools, and reports. This could take the form of a shared drive, SharePoint, or another software or secure storage.

6. Protect Access to Data: Assessment data must be effectively protected from unauthorized acquisition or disclosure as well as accidental or intentional modification, destruction, or loss. This must be done to ensure data confidentiality, integrity and to prevent unnecessary litigation. The most effective approach is to not store sensitive data on mobile devices or media; instead use secure remote access such as your remote desktop or department shared drive to connect to a university server or your office workstation.

Note: Transport of non-public (i.e. internal or confidential) data on portable devices/media, such as laptops or USB drives, should only be done when required to conduct functions associated with assigned roles at the WSU, which includes work as assessment coordinator, assessment committee member, chair and teaching faculty. In that case, confidential data should be stored securely on physically secured storage devices and encrypted and/or password protected, using commercially reasonable business practices.

7. Take Care in Labeling Data and Results: If data or any information derived from data are non-public (i.e. internal or confidential) they should be marked in some way to indicate this (such as a footer or watermark), as a reminder about the intended audience.

8. Take Care in Presentation of Data and Results: WSU has a general policy of not presenting results with group or cell sizes less than five, particularly for demographic information (gender, age, ethnicity, etc.). Instead, it's recommended to group small cell sizes in some other logical way (such as into an "other" category or across multiple years). This policy is intended to decrease the likelihood of unintentional breaches of confidentiality and to avoid reporting where results are unlikely to be representative.

9. Avoid Common Blunders with Assessment Data and Results: Assessment data are usually collected at the program level, but must be protected, maintained, and distributed in the same way as institutional data. Avoid these common blunders:

- Keeping assessment data solely on an individual's laptop or desktop, and not protected, backed-up, or archived
- Presenting or disseminating results from very small groups, increasing the likelihood that individuals represented in the data may be recognized and thus their confidentiality unintentionally breached
- Including names or identifying information in assessment results (or failing to, wherever possible, remove names or identifying information--including student, faculty, and staff--for assessment work)
- Overly restricting internal access and distribution of results, thus preventing use of data to inform program decisions
- Not keeping the intended audience in mind when creating a report or presentation and/or not explicitly indicating on reports or presentations of assessment results if the information is non-public, confidential, public, etc.

10. Questions? Please contact us with questions or concerns as they arise, so we can help you implement good practices that fit your department and context, and support your program assessment work.

- [ACE](#) is a resource for undergraduate programs
- [The Graduate School](#) is a resource for graduate programs
- [The Office of Institutional Research \(IR\)](#) is a resource for all programs