The cycle of student learning outcomes assessments has been completed for academic programs within the College of Arts and Sciences. Thirty-one majors in twenty-one departments have identified and published their learning outcomes, established multi-year assessment plans, and issued annual assessment reports. Faculty document student progress by selecting targeted outcomes, systematically measuring and analyzing the data collected, and discussing the short- and long-term implications for revising and strengthening the curriculum. For example, the Chemistry/Biochemistry department reported a refinement of expected laboratory skills outcomes and assignments. These were more clearly articulated and aligned so that assessments were more effective in capturing the range of skills students were expected to acquire and demonstrate. Knowledge content areas were assessed using the Majors Field test where, in general, student scores are higher than the national average at comparison schools providing strong evidence that USD chemistry and biochemistry majors are learning chemistry at advanced levels.

In the Languages and Literatures department, students in Spanish and French participated in Oral Proficiency Interviews by Computer (OPIc) provided by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages through the ACTFL Language Testing office. Students were assessed for their immediacy skills (listening and speaking). General scores for these outcomes helped to guide specific improvements in curricular design that were incorporated into the department’s self-study as part of the process of program review.

Assessment in the Psychological Sciences department most recently investigated a random sample of capstone-level laboratory research papers using a rubric constructed across 5 criteria that were fully aligned with program outcomes. Using blind review and multiple coders for reliability estimates, most students scored between satisfactory and above average on several criteria and results helped the department faculty distinguish areas for potential strengthening. Student papers from Theology and Religious Studies were also assessed at intermediate levels using departmental rubrics aligned with program-level outcomes. Based on sample scores, faculty have identified skills and content at satisfactory levels and targeted skills in critical analysis that need improvement.

The annual assessment reports provide essential feedback about the general assessment strategies and planning in each program. The College Assessment Team reviews annual reports, provides each program with an evaluation of their assessment using a program assessment rubric, and assists departments in long-range assessment plans. These have been incorporated into the program review process, a six-year cycle for all major programs. Student learning outcomes assessment comprises several central sections of the self-study and contributes directly curricular planning and restructuring, faculty recruitment, and program resource support.