

DEPARTMENT ASSESSMENT MEMOS

In 2026-2027 we will conclude a three-year period in which departments have been asked to undertake **one assessment activity each year** that can serve as a conversation piece for reflecting on teaching practices and making alterations designed to advance student learning. In years one and two of this cycle, departments were asked to focus on an assignment in a course, or a set of similarly focused assignments across multiple courses, that could be used to discuss achievement of at least one department learning goal (a *different* department learning goal was selected in each year). In 2026-27 (year three), departments are asked to use a component of **written comprehensive exams** for the same purpose. Each year, these assessment activities and conversations result in a short memo, generally accompanied by supplemental materials from the assessment activity.

This work and these memos largely reflect the type of conversations departments already have about student learning on a regular basis. The primary differences are that in this circumstance the conversations are focused around a particular learning goal and piece of student work (a component of written comprehensive exams in 2026-2027), and you will take care to document the department's conversation. These memos are the work requested for Dean's Assessment meetings during this three-year period so rather than representing an additional assignment, the work serves the purpose of the annual assignment we have traditionally used (e.g., development and revision of department learning goals; development of course SLOs; assessment brainstorming memos etc.).

Collectively, this work is building a set of annual assessment materials that will be valuable in department reviews and will be included in our June 2027 mid-cycle accreditation report to the Higher Learning Commission as evidence for how we regularly reflect on our teaching and learning practices at the department level. Recall that coming out of our 10-year re-accreditation review, the HLC expressed confidence in the quality of a Wabash education but saw a lack of documentation on the important and regular conversations we have related to student learning.

The development of these assessment projects and memos is intended to be a department activity and should feature department-wide conversation. This is not a project that is exclusively the responsibility of chairs, and it is unlikely to work well if you attempt to organize it in that fashion.

For those departments that have an assessment meeting in Spring 2027 we will discuss your year two memo (the one you produced during the prior academic year), and progress to date on your comps memo (the one you are producing in 2026-27). We can also use the conversation to offer feedback on any obstacles or issues that have emerged. In addition, Dean's Assessment meetings also remain a place that departments can bring forward additional topics of interest to them.

Here are more specific steps to consider in developing your memo:

1. While you are preparing your written comprehensive exams during the fall semester, identify one or two department learning goals that can be assessed or evaluated through one or more questions on your exam. Ideally, at least one selected learning goal will be *different* from what you examined in year one or year two.

2. In advance of grading the written comprehensive exams, have a conversation in the department about the selected goal(s) and how the department determines if students have met that goal. It would be helpful to create a record of the qualities or characteristics that represent meeting the goal so that exam graders have those in mind when they evaluate this year's written exams. You might consider converting these considerations into an evaluation rubric. Regardless, you should have some sort of score sheet indicating achievement (or lack thereof) of the department learning goal and likely key features of it. This will be important in being able to point back to and understand results at a future point in time.
3. It will be most efficient to evaluate or score written comprehensive exams for achievement of your selected learning goal(s) at the same time that you grade written comps. However, your scoring of achievement of learning goals is likely to be different than your actual grading of comps answers because in the latter case it may often be the case that the grading will take into account factors beyond the particular learning goal that is being examined for your comprehensive exam memo.
4. It is important that the department has one or two collective conversations about the comps assessment. These conversations will help you develop your memo. Your conversation can take many different directions but might include reflection on questions like, "What did you learn about student learning from January 2027 written comps? What did you learn about how seniors have fulfilled the identified learning goals?"; "Are comps adequately serving your desired purpose?"; and "How might you make changes to the department's teaching and courses, or alterations to written comps, in light of the results and your conversations?" Other questions are no doubt possible as well.
5. Complete your department assessment memo by no later than May 28, 2027 (please see the report template (<https://wabash.app.box.com/folder/282324078896/?s=f2zvcxkrnzv0ii80njgvx2n3fgr45pl>) that follows these instructions). Include with the memo supporting materials like the exam questions utilized for the assessment and scoring sheets or rubrics used to evaluate progress toward learning goals. Please do not include student names or other identifying information.

If you have an assessment meeting scheduled in Spring 2027, **please submit any in-progress materials related to your assessment project a week in advance**. We should have access to your memo from 2025-2026 and we will also plan to review it. However, let us know if you have made any changes to that memo. May 28 is the date we have set for latest submission of this year's memos so that this work does not impinge too greatly on the summer.

In the "Department Assessment Memo Guidance" Box folder you will find a copy of this information, a fillable assessment report template (<https://wabash.app.box.com/folder/282324078896/?s=f2zvcxkrnzv0ii80njgvx2n3fgr45pl>), department assessment memos from two departments that participated in our 2024 pilot (although they do not focus on comps so their utility may be limited); and notes from a CII meeting that featured a conversation with Charlie Blach on accreditation and department assessment.

If you have questions, please reach out to Jon Jump, Preston Bost, or Todd McDorman and we will seek to offer individual or collective clarifications and support.

The report template pictured below can be found in the Department Assessment Memo Guidance (<https://wabash.app.box.com/folder/282324078896/?s=f2zvcxkrnzv0ii80njgvngx2n3fgr45pl>) folder in Box.