Academic Learning Compact Guide

General information for program coordinators

At a glance

What it is	A short, plain-language statement of a program's mission and how it supports the universit mission, what students will know and be able to do by the end of the program, where and how faculty assess that learning
Who needs one	Every degree program, at every level, and every standalone certificate program
Who completes it	The program coordinator, working with program faculty
Where it appears	FAU's assessment website, where students, families, employers and the community can read it
What you need	The Academic Learning Compact fillable template (Word or PDF), your program's assessment plan and curriculum map, and this guide

What is an Academic Learning Compact?

An Academic Learning Compact is a program's commitment to its students. It states, in everyday language, what graduates of the program will know, think and be able to do by the end of the program, and how faculty will look at student work to confirm that learning.

Florida Atlantic University has an Academic Learning Compact for every degree program, regardless of level, and for every standalone certificate. Each compact is posted on FAU's assessment website so anyone considering, supporting or hiring an FAU graduate can see what the program promises to deliver.

Who reads it

Write for someone outside your discipline. Your readers include prospective and current students, parents and families, academic advisers, employers and community partners, and accreditors.

What it is and what it is not

Your compact draws on the same learning outcomes as your program's assessment plan, but it has a different job. The assessment plan and annual report explain in detail how the program measures learning. The compact summarizes, for the public, what students gain and how learning is assessed.

A compact is	A compact is not
• Written in plain, welcoming language • Focused on the end of the program • About knowledge and skills every graduate will have • Short, usually two to three pages • Addressed to students and the public	• An assessment plan or annual report • A catalog description or a full list of courses (name only the courses where outcomes are assessed) • A place for rubrics, targets, scores or data • Filled with discipline jargon or acronyms • A description of what only top students achieve

What a compact includes

Every compact has four public parts. Behind each compact sits supporting work that is kept on file and reviewed, but not posted.

Published in the compact	Kept on file to support the compact
• **Program mission:** why the program exists, whom it serves and what it prepares graduates to do • **University mission:** Florida Atlantic University's mission, followed by one or two sentences on how the program supports it • **Student learning outcomes:** what graduates will be able to do in three core areas (content/discipline knowledge and skills, communication skills and critical thinking skills), plus optional other skills • **Where it is assessed:** for each core area, the courses where faculty assess the outcomes, as shown on the curriculum map • **Assessment approaches:** a plain-language summary of the kinds of assessment students will encounter and how faculty use the results	• **Curriculum map:** every outcome linked to at least one course, showing where it is introduced, reinforced, mastered and assessed • **Annual assessment plan and results:** all three outcomes assessed every year, each with direct measures, expected results, results, faculty interpretation and actions taken • **Use of results:** evidence that results were shared with faculty and used to improve the program, with approximate dates

> **Good evidence:** Assessment should rest on student work that faculty review directly, such as exams, papers, projects, performances or portfolios. Course grades alone are not accepted as evidence of student learning outcome success. When possible, more than one faculty member reviews the work.

The three core areas and optional other skills

FAU's approved Academic Learning Compact definitions (Oct. 7, 2005) require every compact to address three core areas of learning. Each area matches one of the three required outcomes in your assessment plan: Outcome 1 for content/discipline knowledge and skills, Outcome 2 for communication and Outcome 3 for critical thinking. Programs may choose to add more outcomes. All three core outcomes are assessed every year for every degree program. In each section, check the subcategories your program addresses, then write the outcomes in plain language. Section D is optional and can hold other outcomes the program commits to, such as ethics, leadership or professional practice.

Template section	Subcategories to choose from	Check at least
A. Content/Discipline Knowledge and Skills	**Declarative knowledge:** key vocabulary, history, theories and concepts of the field **Research skills:** finding, gathering, analyzing and reporting information the way the field does **Technical skills:** hands-on tools and methods of the field	Two of the three
B. Communication Skills	**Written communication:** clear, well-organized writing **Oral communication:** presentations that connect with an audience **Other forms of communication:** visual, media, performance or exhibit work **Team/collaborative communication:** contributing to group projects	Two of the four
C. Critical Thinking Skills	**Analytical skills:** weighing evidence, comparing ideas and judging arguments **Creative skills:** combining knowledge to create something new **Practical skills:** applying knowledge to real situations	One of the three
D. Other Skills (optional)	Any additional outcome, such as ethics, leadership, cultural awareness or professional practice. If you include one, it should also appear in your assessment plan.	Optional

Completing the template, section by section

Section	What to include	Suggested length
Program name	The full degree or certificate name, following FAU style (e.g., Bachelor of Science in biology)	One line
Program information	College, department or school, degree abbreviation (e.g., B.A.), CIP code and the program website address (e.g., www.fau.edu/program-name, without http://)	Complete all fields
Our commitment to you	Standard FAU text that is already filled in. Please leave it as is.	No changes
Program mission	Why the program exists, whom it serves and what it prepares graduates to do; mention research, community or professional partners if they are central to the program	One to three sentences
Florida Atlantic University's mission	Standard FAU text (Board of Trustees, June 16, 2026) that is already filled in. Please leave it as is.	No changes
How the program supports the university mission	Start with "The program supports the university's mission by ..." and tie the program to one or two parts of the mission: opportunity and economic mobility; transforming lives through education, discovery and innovation; advancing knowledge that creates meaningful impact; or partnerships that serve our communities. Name what the program actually does, such as research, internships or clinical work.	One or two sentences

Section	What to include	Suggested length
About the program	What students study, what makes the program distinctive and who it is a great fit for	Two to four sentences
A, B and C: checkboxes	Check each subcategory the program addresses, meeting the minimum for each section	See the table above
A, B and C: outcomes	The required outcome for each section (Outcome 1, 2 or 3 in your assessment plan), plus any additional outcomes the program chooses. Begin each with "Graduates will be able to" and cover each subcategory you checked.	One to three sentences per outcome
D: optional outcome	Any additional outcome the program commits to, also written as "Graduates will be able to"	One to three sentences, or delete
A to D: how students show it	At least one type of student work faculty review directly for the outcome, such as an exam, paper, presentation, project, capstone or internship evaluation. Course grades alone do not count.	One or two sentences
A to D: where it is assessed	The courses where faculty assess that area's outcomes, written as prefix, number and title (e.g., ANT 4116 Archaeological Research Methods). List courses marked Mastery or Assessed on the curriculum map, or named as the assessment point in the assessment plan. A thesis, dissertation, qualifying or comprehensive exam, or licensure exam may be listed without a course number. Separate entries with semicolons.	Up to six entries per area
Assessment approaches	A plain-language summary of how the program gathers evidence of learning, such as rubric-scored capstone projects, licensure or field exams, portfolio reviews, or alumni and employer surveys. No scores or targets.	Two to four sentences

Writing strong outcomes

Clear outcomes say exactly what graduates will know, think or do. Each one should be something faculty can see in student work.

- **Start with the graduate.** Begin each outcome with "Graduates will be able to"
- **Use one precise action verb.** Explain, analyze, design, evaluate, create, present, apply, collaborate or lead; avoid "understand," "appreciate" or "be exposed to" on their own
- **Stay within the core area.** Keep each outcome focused on its own area so it matches one outcome in your assessment plan
- **Make it observable.** If faculty cannot point to an assignment where students show it, rewrite it
- **Link it to evidence.** Every outcome needs at least one direct measure in this year's assessment plan and a course in your curriculum map where it is assessed. That course is listed under Where it is assessed
- **Describe the finish line.** Focus on what every graduate can do at the end of the program, not what happens in a single course

Writing tips for the public

- **Write for a student or parent.** Use everyday words and short sentences, fewer than 25 words each

- **Skip the jargon.** Spell out or remove acronyms and assessment terms. Course numbers appear only under Where it is assessed, never in outcomes or other text
- **Keep it real.** Describe what every graduate will achieve, not only the strongest students
- **Read it aloud.** If it sounds like a report to an accreditor, rewrite it for a student

From clinical to customer friendly

The examples below show how to turn assessment language into compact language.

Area	Instead of this	Try this
Knowledge	Students will demonstrate declarative knowledge of discipline-specific theories and concepts.	Graduates will be able to explain the major theories of how people think, feel and behave and use them to make sense of everyday situations.
Technical skills	Students will demonstrate technical proficiency with discipline-appropriate software.	Graduates will be able to use professional data analysis software to organize information, find patterns and share results.
Communication	Students will produce written products that meet disciplinary conventions at a baccalaureate level.	Graduates will be able to write clear, well-organized reports for both expert and general audiences.
Critical thinking	Students will analyze, evaluate and synthesize discipline-specific content.	Graduates will be able to weigh evidence, spot weak arguments and propose practical solutions to real problems.
Assessment approaches	Direct measures include a capstone rubric; indirect measures include an exit survey.	Faculty review senior capstone projects using a shared scoring guide, and graduating seniors share feedback on their learning in an exit survey.

Follow the FAU Editorial Style Guide

Compacts are public documents, so please follow the FAU Editorial Style Guide, which is based on AP style. The most common points for compacts:

- Use Florida Atlantic University on first reference; Florida Atlantic, FAU or university (lowercase) after that
- Lowercase the major in degree names (Bachelor of Arts in history) and use bachelor's degree with an apostrophe
- Use periods in degree abbreviations (B.A., B.S., B.B.A.)
- Do not add a comma before "and" or "or" in a simple series (writing, speaking and teamwork)
- Spell out numbers one through nine; use figures for 10 and above
- Avoid unnecessary capital letters, including for course subjects and job titles
- Write web addresses without http:// (www.fau.edu)

Before you submit: checklist

- ☐ All program information is complete, including the program website
- ☐ Every section is filled in, the gray prompt text is removed, and section D is completed or deleted
- ☐ The program mission states whom the program serves and what it prepares graduates to do
- ☐ Florida Atlantic University's mission is unchanged, and the statement on how the program supports it is one or two sentences

- ☐ Section A has at least two subcategories checked, Section B at least two and Section C at least one
- ☐ Sections A, B and C include Outcomes 1, 2 and 3 from the assessment plan, plus any additional outcomes
- ☐ Every outcome begins "Graduates will be able to" and uses a precise action verb
- ☐ Every outcome has at least one type of student work named under How students show it, not course grades
- ☐ Where it is assessed lists, for Sections A, B and C, the courses (or thesis, exam or defense) where the outcomes are assessed, and they match the curriculum map
- ☐ The assessment approaches summary is written in plain language, with no scores or targets
- ☐ Every outcome appears in the curriculum map, linked to at least one course where it is introduced, reinforced and mastered or assessed
- ☐ All three outcomes are included in this year's assessment plan, each with at least one direct measure
- ☐ The Last updated date in the footer shows when the compact was completed or last revised
- ☐ The compact follows the FAU Editorial Style Guide and program faculty have reviewed it

Submitting and updating your compact

Save your completed compact using the program name and date (for example, BA_History_ALC_9.23.26). Submit it to [office name] at [email address] by [due date]. [Add any approval steps here.]

Update your compact whenever the program's curriculum or learning outcomes change, and enter the new date in the Last updated field in the footer. In the Word version, double-click the footer to reach the date field; in the PDF, click the field at the bottom of any page. Every new degree program and standalone certificate needs a compact before it enrolls students.

Questions

Contact your college assessment representative or [name, title] at [email address] or [phone number].