

LEARNING ASSESSMENT PLAN 2009-10 TO DIRECTOR OF ASSESSMENT BY SEPTEMBER 2009

The Learning Assessment Plan describes an academic program's mission and goals and contains a list of learning outcomes for the program. The Learning Assessment Plan identifies the specific outcomes that will be assessed the coming academic year and the methods that will be used to determine student proficiency.

In *Program Review: Rubric for Assessing the Integration of Student Learning Assessment into Program Review*, WASC outlines criteria for being at the "Developed" stage with respect to an institution's learning assessment processes. To be at the "Developed" stage:

- a) Faculty is required to provide the program's student learning outcomes, annual assessment studies, findings and resulting changes. They may be required to submit a plan for the next cycle of assessment studies.
- b) Internal and external reviewers analyze direct and indirect evidence of student learning and offer evaluative feedback and suggestions for improvement.
- c) A well-qualified individual or committee provides annual feedback on the quality of outcomes, assessment plans, assessment studies, etc. Departments use the feedback to improve their work.
- d) Internal and external reviewers examine samples of student work such as papers, portfolios, and capstone projects. Students may be invited to discuss what they learned and how they learned it.

CONTENT OF THE LEARNING ASSESSMENT PLAN

I. MISSION AND GOALS STATEMENT

The mission and goals statement describes the purpose of the academic program, what it does, and for whom it does it. The mission and goals statement defines the general types of knowledge, skills, abilities and values the ideal graduate develops. It describes what the ideal graduate knows and can do, and the kinds of careers he or she may pursue or advance into. The statement describes characteristics of graduates that are specific to the discipline and program, as well as characteristics expected of all graduates per institutional-level learning outcomes.

II. STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Whereas the mission and goals statement describes the *general* categories of skills, knowledge and abilities possessed by the ideal graduate, student learning outcomes are *specific* skills, knowledge, and abilities that can be demonstrated and measured. Student learning outcomes are succinct descriptions of what students are expected to know and be able to do. All student learning outcomes do not need to be assessed each year, but all student learning outcomes should be listed in the Learning Assessment Plan.

In *Program Learning Outcomes: Rubric for Assessing the Quality of Academic Program Learning Outcomes*, WASC outlines criteria for being at the "Developed" stage with respect to an institution's identification of student learning outcomes. To be at the "Developed" stage:

- a) Learning outcomes focus on the key knowledge, skills and values students learn in the program. It includes relevant institution-wide outcomes (such as communication or critical thinking skills). Outcomes are appropriate for degree-level (undergraduate vs. graduate) and reflect national disciplinary standards.
- b) Each learning outcome describes how students can demonstrate learning such as, "Graduates can write reports in APA style" or "Graduates can make original contributions to psychological knowledge."

III. COMMUNICATION OF STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students should be informed of what is expected of them in terms of their learning. In this section of the Learning Assessment Plan the program indicates where learning outcomes are published or otherwise shared with potential and current students.

In *Program Learning Outcomes: Rubric for Assessing the Quality of Academic Program Learning Outcomes*, WASC outlines criteria for being at the “Developed” stage with respect to an institution’s communication of student learning outcomes to the students. To be at the “Developed” stage:

- a) Students have a good grasp of program outcomes. They may use them to guide their own learning.
- b) Outcomes are included in most syllabi and are readily available in the catalog, on the web page, and elsewhere.

IV. STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES TO BE ASSESSED THE 2009-10 ACADEMIC YEAR

As stated earlier, while it is important that all student learning outcomes for the program are defined, it is not necessary to assess each student learning outcome every year. Each program should assess three to five student learning outcomes for their program the 2009-10 academic year and annually thereafter.

Method(s) of Assessment

For each learning outcome, it is ideal to use multiple methods for assessing student proficiency. The extent to which students are achieving the desired outcomes (e.g., developing the skills, knowledge, abilities, and values the program is intended to instill) can be measured directly and indirectly. Direct assessment methods are superior to indirect assessment methods with respect to assessing student learning.

Direct Methods of Assessment

Direct methods of assessment entail evaluating student work products such as assignments, reports, presentations, portfolios, and examinations to objectively assess how well students meet expectations as defined by the program (not as defined by an individual instructor). Using a rubric, the following can be systematically judged and scored to determine student proficiency:

- Examinations
- Writing assignments
- Homework assignments
- Major projects, theses and dissertations
- Portfolios
- Case studies
- Reflective journals
- Capstone projects

Other direct methods of assessment include reviews of performances, exhibitions or presentations and employer evaluations of externships or job performance. It is also possible to use results of comprehensive exams, certification exams, and licensure exams to evaluate student proficiency.

Capstone Courses

Examination of work products created in capstone courses is a particularly common and effective direct assessment method. The capstone course must be designed to produce work that demonstrates the extent to which students have achieved the program’s learning outcomes. The capstone should be a culminating experience where students demonstrate the knowledge, skills, abilities, and values they have acquired throughout their education. Students should, at the beginning of the course, be aware of the criteria by which their work will be evaluated. Faculty should review and systematically score capstone products to assess student proficiency.

In *Capstones: Rubric for Assessing the Use of Capstone Experiences for Assessing Program Learning Outcomes*, WASC outlines criteria for being at the “Developed” stage with respect to an institution’s use of the Capstone Course. To be at the “Developed” stage:

- a) Relevant outcomes are identified. Concrete plans for collecting evidence for each outcome are agreed upon and used routinely by faculty who teach the capstone course.
- b) Faculty has agreed on concrete plans for collecting relevant evidence for each outcome. Explicit criteria for judging student proficiency has been developed.
- c) Reviewers are calibrated to apply assessment criteria consistently and faculty routinely check for inter-rater reliability.
- d) Results for each outcome are collected, discussed by faculty, analyzed, and used to improve the program.
- e) Students have a good grasp of purpose and outcomes of the capstone and embrace it as a learning opportunity. Information is readily available in advising guides, etc.

During the WASC accreditation visit, it is possible faculty and program administrators will be asked to indicate whether they feel their capstone course is best described as Initial, Emerging, Developed, or Highly Developed per WASC standards, and the rationale behind this judgment.

Student Portfolios

Examination of student portfolios is another common and effective direct assessment method. The student portfolio can be composed of homework assignments, examinations (or specific, relevant, exam items), presentations, research reports, and other materials that have been generated by students over the course of the academic program. Items selected for inclusion in the portfolio (which will then be reviewed and systematically scored by faculty to assess students’ proficiency), should be identified ahead of time as providing a valid measure of student achievement for the learning outcomes being assessed.

In *Portfolios: Rubric for Assessing the Use of Portfolios for Assessing Program Learning Outcomes*, WASC outlines criteria for being at the “Developed” stage with respect to an institution’s use of portfolios and e-portfolios. To be at the “Developed” stage:

- a) Students receive written instructions that describe faculty expectations in detail and include the purpose of the portfolio, types of evidence to include, role of the reflective essay (if required), and format of the finished product.
- b) Appropriate evidence is collected for each outcome; faculty use explicit criteria, such as agreed-upon rubrics, to assess student attainment of each outcome. Rubrics are usually shared with students.
- c) Reviewers are calibrated to apply assessment criteria in the same way, and faculty routinely check for inter-rater reliability.
- d) Results for each outcome are collected, discussed by faculty, and used to improve the program.

Scoring of materials used to assess student learning is almost always done as a collective effort using an agreed upon rubric developed by faculty and/or program administrators. It is generally *not* acceptable to use course grades, or grades an instructor assigned to papers or examinations as standalone measures of proficiency.

Indirect Assessment Methods

Indirect assessment activities can supplement and enrich direct assessments, but should generally not be used in lieu of direct measures. Indirect assessments typically allow students to *reflect* on their learning experiences and

self-report their *perceptions*. Indirect methods are generally better-suited to evaluating aspects of an academic program's performance other than student proficiency. Indirect assessment methods include the following:

- Surveys
- Exit Interviews
- Focus Groups

Comparison of Direct and Indirect Assessment

In a direct assessment of learning, a writing sample could be reviewed and scored by a group of faculty to collectively determine student proficiency with respect to reasoning skills. In an indirect assessment, students might be asked to tell faculty how strong *they think* their reasoning skills are. In the latter example, we measure students' *perceptions*, not reality. For the purposes of assessing student learning, it is clear why we rely heavily on direct measures. If instructors believed indirect measures were fully sufficient to assess student proficiency they might simply ask their students to consider their own skills and abilities and then assign themselves a grade. ☺

While direct measures are essential in assessing students' knowledge and skills, there are many important aspects of the educational experience that go beyond what students know and can do when they graduate. In evaluating other aspects of an academic program, it is perfectly acceptable to rely on indirect research methods. For example, student satisfaction with a program can be examined via a survey. Students' experiences of a program can be explored via focus groups. To identify means by which an academic program can be improved from the students' point of view, it is usually necessary to gather subjective, self-report data. This type of research is not "learning assessment," instead falling into the category of program evaluation research.

The Learning Assessment Plan template is shown below. When returning your completed Learning Assessment Plan to [Director of Assessment] at [email address] feel free to return the entire document.

LEARNING ASSESSMENT PLAN 2009-10

Program:
POC Name:
Title:
Email:

Faculty who participated in the development or approval of this Learning Assessment Plan:

I. MISSION AND GOALS STATEMENT

The mission and goals statement describes the purpose of the academic program. The statement defines the general types of knowledge, skills, and abilities ideal graduates develop and what ideal graduates know and can do. The mission and goal statement describes the kinds of careers the ideal graduate may pursue or advance into. The statement describes characteristics of graduates that are specific to the discipline and program, as well as skills and abilities expected of all graduates.

II. STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Please list all student learning outcomes that are currently defined for the program. The below-listed learning outcomes pertain to the core requirements of a degree program.

<p>III. COMMUNICATION OF STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES The university will be evaluated on the extent to which its academic programs make student learning outcomes known to students. Please indicate how the above student learning outcomes are shared with students.</p>	
<p>Means by Which Student Learning Outcomes are Communicated</p>	<p>Please indicate "Yes" or the Month/Year this will occur</p>
<p>Student learning outcomes for the program are shown at the university web site.</p>	
<p>Student learning outcomes for the program are included in syllabi for required courses.</p>	
<p>Student learning outcomes for the program shown in syllabi for required courses are somewhat consistent across instructors. Learning outcomes reflect the program's goals for the class, each instructor does not create their own, different, learning outcomes.</p>	
<p>Student learning outcomes are shown in the program brochure or other materials provided to potential or existing students. If this is the case, indicate "Yes" and specify where the learning outcomes are shown, discussed, or presented.</p>	
<p>IV. STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES TO BE ASSESSED THE 2009-10 ACADEMIC YEAR Please list 3-5 program-level student learning outcomes (selected from the complete list of learning outcomes shown above) that will be assessed in the 2009-10 academic year and the methods that will be used to determine student proficiency. Please indicate your expectations for student performance for each learning outcome if appropriate. (This is primarily relevant if previous assessments have established a baseline upon which the program is striving to improve.) If faculty will review and score student work products or presentations, please attach the rubrics that will be used.</p>	
<p>LEARNING OUTCOME</p>	
<p>Method(s) of Assessment</p>	
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