



Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes & Accreditation Resource Guide April 13, 2017

Assessment of student learning outcomes is critical to continuous improvement of teaching and learning in higher education. It is helpful to think of the assessment of student learning outcomes at three distinct levels: The course level, the program/credential level and the institution level. Assessment across these three levels combines to help create a culture of continuous improvement and a comprehensive picture of student learning at the institution. The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities' (NWCCU) Element 2.C., Education Resources, and Standard 4, Effectiveness and Improvement, speak to the role the accreditation process plays to help campuses monitor the use of assessment to achieve continuous improvement in student learning. For example, Criterion 4. A.3. requires that, "The institution documents, through an effective, regular, and comprehensive system of assessment of student achievement, that students who complete its educational courses, programs, and degrees, wherever offered and however delivered, achieve identified course, program, and degree learning outcomes..." (NWCCU Accreditation Handbook, 2017, 35).

This document provides a brief description of each level of assessment of student learning outcomes, identifies key NWCCU standards, elements, and criteria related to each level of assessment, and provides a list of resources college faculty and staff can use to find additional information to support their assessment efforts. The document should not be considered complete or exhaustive, but rather should be used as a starting point for improving assessment of student learning outcomes.

Course-Level Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

Course-level student learning outcomes include a combination of course specific learning outcomes and relevant general education learning outcomes identified by the college that all students will achieve. [Under NWCCU](#), the following are some of the key criteria that address course level assessment expectations:

- **2.C.2.** The institution identifies and publishes expected course, program, and degree learning outcomes. Expected student learning outcomes for courses, wherever offered and however delivered, are provided in written form to enrolled students.
- **2.C.5.** Faculty, through well-defined structures and processes with clearly defined authority and responsibilities, exercise a major role in the design, approval, implementation, and revision of the curriculum... Faculty with teaching responsibilities take collective responsibility for fostering and assessing student achievement of clearly identified learning outcomes.
- **4.B.2.** The institution uses the results of its assessment of student learning to inform academic and learning-support planning and practices that lead to enhancement of student learning achievements. Results of student learning assessments are made available to appropriate constituencies in a timely manner.

Resources for Course-Level Review:

- [Association for the Assessment of Learning in Higher Education \(AALHE\)](#) is a non-profit professional association for higher education assessment practitioners. In addition to assessment conference information, publications, and other resources, the website has an assessment [listserv](#).
- [Assessment Update](#): Electronic newsletters, some free, some subscription. The editor is Dr. Stephen Hundley, Senior Advisor to the Chancellor for Planning and Institutional Improvement at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI).
- [National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment \(NILOA\)](#): Established in 2008, NILOA's mission is "to discover and disseminate ways that academic programs and institutions can productively use assessment data internally to inform and strengthen undergraduate education, and externally to communicate with policy makers, families and other stakeholders."
 - See also [NILOA Assessment Briefs for Faculty](#).
- [Alverno College](#): Milwaukee, Wisconsin's *Assessing General Education Learning Outcomes*.
- A set of [assessment resources](#) from the Association of American Colleges & Universities.

Program Review & Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

As noted in the Course Learning Outcomes section above, each college course should have identified student learning outcomes. The collection of courses that make up a college credential should provide the student with a comprehensive set of learning outcomes sufficient to continue to the next level credential/degree or to develop the appropriate knowledge and skill set to begin in the designated career. In addition, *student service support areas and co-curricular programs* contribute to the development of student learning outcomes and can also participate in program review/assessment of student learning outcomes.

NWCCU defines a program as "a systematic, usually sequential, grouping of courses, forming a considerable part, or all, of the requirements for a degree or a credential..."

(<http://www.nwccu.org/Glossary%20and%20FAQs/Glossary/Glossary.htm>). Click on the letter "P" and scroll down to see this definition of program. According to NWCCU, the following are some of the key criteria that address course level assessment expectations:

- **2.C.1.** The institution provides programs, wherever offered and however delivered, with appropriate content and rigor that are consistent with its mission; culminate in achievement of clearly identified student learning outcomes; and lead to collegiate-level degrees or certificates with designators consistent with program content in recognized fields of study.
- **2.C.10.** The institution demonstrates that the General Education components of its baccalaureate degree programs (if offered) and transfer associate degree programs (if offered) have identifiable and assessable learning outcomes that are stated in relation to the institution's mission and learning outcomes for those programs.
- **2.C.11.** The related instruction components of applied degree and certificate programs (if offered) have identifiable and assessable learning outcomes that align with and support program goals or intended outcomes. Related instruction components may be embedded within program curricula or taught in blocks of specialized instruction, but each approach must have clearly identified content and be taught or monitored by teaching faculty who are appropriately qualified in those areas. (See

<http://www.nwccu.org/Standards%20and%20Policies/Accreditation%20Standards/Accreditation%20Standards.htm>)

Resources for Program Review:

- [NILOA – Program Level Assessment](#), click on Program Level Assessment.
- [NILOA – Assessment Briefs for Student Affairs Professionals](#).

Resources for Assessment of Co-Curricular Activities & Support Units:

- [Assessment Commons](#) is “an open learning space that curates content for faculty and assessment professionals through resources and tools for student learning outcomes assessment, teaching and learning, program review and accreditation.”
 - [Assessing academic advising](#)
 - A [specific collection of resources](#) can be found for “Assessing Administrative and Support Units” under the “View Full Resources” tab (scroll down to that heading). Some specific resources listed there include:
 - From Lehman College: [An Introduction to Institutional Assessment](#) and [Inventory of Non-Teaching Unit Assessment Measures](#).
 - From Humboldt State University: [Division of Administrative Affairs Annual Program Review, Evaluation, & Planning \(PREP\) Handbook](#).
- NILOA’s [publications tab](#) has examples of “NILOA Reports,” “Assessment Briefs” and “Assessment in Practice.” See for example, *Occasional Paper: The Role of Student Affairs in Student Learning Assessment* and http://learningoutcomeassessment.org/documents/Cruise-Harper_Assessment_in_Practice.pdf

Assessment & Institutional Accreditation

According to NWCCU, accreditation is “the process by which a private, non-governmental body evaluates an educational institution or program of study and formally recognizes it as having met certain predetermined criteria or standards. The process involves initial and periodic self-study and evaluation by peers...” (<http://www.nwccu.org/Glossary%20and%20FAQs/Glossary/Glossary.htm>). Under Element 2.C – “Education” – the first criterion, 2.C.1, notes, “The institution provides programs, wherever offered and however delivered, with appropriate content and rigor that are consistent with its mission; culminate in achievement of clearly identified student learning outcomes; and lead to collegiate-level degrees or certificates with designators consistent with program content in recognized fields of study.” In addition to the criteria noted above, [the following accreditation criteria](#) also address the role of assessment at the institutional level:

- **4.A.4.** The institution evaluates holistically the alignment, correlation, and integration of programs and services with respect to accomplishment of core theme objectives.
- **4.A.5.** The institution evaluates holistically the alignment, correlation, and integration of planning, resources, capacity, practices, and assessment with respect to achievement of the goals or intended outcomes of its programs or services, wherever offered and however delivered.
- **4.A.6.** The institution regularly reviews its assessment processes to ensure they appraise authentic achievements and yield meaningful results that lead to improvement.

Resources:

- [Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities.](#)
- [NWCCU Accreditation Handbook, 2017 Edition.](#)
- NWCCU also [offers workshops.](#)
- [Council for Higher Education Accreditation \(CHEA\)](#)
- [Association of American Colleges & Universities](#)
- [Regional accreditation and student learning outcomes: Mapping the territory](#) (*NILOA Occasional Paper No.6*, Provezis, S. October 2010, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois and Indiana University, [National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment.](#))
- An example of a [College Assessment Website](#) provided by NILOA and created by LaGuardia Community College

Resources for Possible Assessment Speakers:

- Dr. Nathan Lindsay, Associate Provost for Dynamic Learning and Associate Professor of Educational Leadership, University of Montana, nathan.lindsay@umontana.edu
- Dr. Natasha Jankowski, NILOA University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
360 Education Building, College of Education, Champaign, IL 61820,
niloa@education.illinois.edu
- Sue Bickerstaff, CCRC Senior Research Associate, [Teachers College, Columbia University](#), 525 W 120th St., Box 174, New York, NY 10027, bickerstaff@tc.edu. Bickerstaff has expertise in course level assessment of student learning.
- Trudy Banta, Ed.D., IUPUI, Professor, Higher Education, tbanta@iupui.edu