

Q&A from Idea to Assessment: Crafting Program Learning Outcomes

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1. **What about programs that have stackable credentials, that is they have different levels of certificates. Do you suggest that the PLOs be stacked accordingly?**
 - a. **Answer:** Yes. Developing one or two sub-PLOs for each credential level may be a possible approach. Another idea would be to have the same PLOs for the entire program but the level of learning (i.e. Bloom's hierarchy) or the level of proficiency expected increases with each credential level.

2. **How do you address co-curricular assessment?**
 - a. **Answer:** Standalone co-curricular programs such as a Study Abroad office should be assessed in a similar manner as academic programs. The biggest difference is that co-curricular programs' assessment goals or objectives can rely on indirect assessment measures such as student satisfaction surveys. Co-curricular activities that are part of the academic curriculum (i.e. internships) should be included in all discussions of academic program learning outcomes. If the co-curricular activity is required for all students in the program, then it should be placed in the curriculum map and there should be a discussion about what type of documentation or artifact the student may produce from that co-curricular activity.

3. **Is there a hierarchy for the arts?**
 - a. **Answer:** While there is not a uniform hierarchy for art, there is significant variation within the Bloom's Taxonomy verbs used within the "Creative" level. Additionally, I'd encourage you to seek out discipline-specific organizations within the arts and find out their best practices and recommended learning outcomes. The following is a link to the National Arts Standards, which may be adaptable for your particular situation. <https://www.nationalartsstandards.org/>

4. **Regarding the mapping, and then assessment, is the "required curriculum" (that is used for the PLO), implemented and assessed at the course level, or is there a separate "assignment" that is done for students for purpose of program assessment?**
 - a. **Answer:** Whenever possible, assessment should take place at the course level. That said, there are several technical programs that may have third party credentials that satisfy one or more learning outcomes and those are certainly acceptable. However, aside from those instances, it is best practice to assess using embedded course assignments because the artifact should be the result of an authentic classroom experience in which the student has the opportunity to demonstrate their mastery/proficiency of the program learning outcome.

5. What type of activities do suggest for a new faculty member to prepare PLO's?

- a. **Answer:** First, I would review any existing PLOs for your program. I would also ask for PLOs from your colleagues in other programs across the institution to get a sense of structure and quantity. After that, I would recommend you find PLOs from similar programs at other institutions to see the common skills and knowledge emphasized. There are many great online resource as well, in particular the [assessment page for the University of Hawai'i at Manoa](#) is a resource I use frequently for faculty just starting their assessment journey.

6. How do you get faculty beyond being defensive about assessment?

- a. **Answer:** Focus on students. Faculty, at least the ones with whom I have interacted, started working in higher education because they love students and want to see them succeed. Frame assessment as an opportunity to find out how well students are doing. Additionally, stress that she or he, the faculty member, is not being assessed. Assessment is about student learning and we collect artifacts from your classroom only as a means to an end. Finally, depending on the situation at your institution, I would try to engage as many faculty assessment leaders as possible. If faculty are only getting this message from administration it may ring hollow, but if you have faculty leading assessment it becomes much more powerful.

7. For two-year degrees, specifically A.A. degrees, with only a few 2000-level discipline specific courses which can be taken in any order, how can the introduce/reinforce/master scheme be applied?

- a. **Answer:** This is a common issue for A.A. degrees and it is why integrating learning across the curriculum is so important. First, perhaps this is an opportunity to provide a little more structure within the 2000-level courses to ensure they are taken in a particular order or sequence. If that is not possible, I would encourage you to look at where students are getting these broader skills within the general education curriculum. All learning for your program does not need to happen within your program. Ultimately, students are going to learn how to communicate and think critically in hopefully every course they take, so the burden to introduce, reinforce, and master within a small number of non-sequenced courses should not lay on the program.

8. If the general education courses, as well as the discipline specific courses, can be taken in virtually any order, is the 1-2-3 introduce/reinforce/master scheme applicable at all?

- a. **Answer:** As previously mentioned, perhaps this is an opportunity to scaffold or sequence particular general education or disciplinary courses. Placing some program pre-requisites on courses to create a sequence can be helpful to the students and the faculty in the program. However, if that isn't possible, the IRM model can be adapted to simply become one in which you determine whether a particular outcome is covered or taught in a specific course. Therefore, there may be an infinite number of possible sequences for students to take, but you know that throughout the curriculum the student will be exposed repeatedly to the core

ideas of the program learning outcomes.

9. Good Morning, I would love to know what an assessment retreat looks like. What all does it consist of?

- a. **Answer:** An assessment retreat can take a variety of forms. The population invited to the retreat could be the full-time faculty in one program or every full-time faculty member at the college. In general, you want to give faculty the time and space needed to deal with some aspect of assessment. For example, in my experience we would allot nearly three hours one afternoon before classes began each semester for faculty to review their assessment data from the previous semester and have a discussion about continuous improvement strategies. I, along with other faculty leaders, would facilitate those conversations in each program. The really fun part was when we would mix up faculty so that someone from an Allied Health program, a college transfer program, and an Auto Body program would all discuss their assessment results and ask each other for advice. It was wonderful to see how three different areas would approach the same issue differently. Ultimately, an assessment retreat should have a focused objective and allow faculty the time and space to complete that objective.

10. Since this is being brought to us through Pathways, is there any talk about creating Learning Outcomes for institutional pathways beyond our current course, program and Gen Ed levels?

- a. **Answer:** From my perspective that is an institutional decision. At St. Edward's we have University Learning Outcomes that are separate and distinct from our general education or program learning outcomes. Developing institutional outcomes for Pathways can allow your campus to align your general education and program outcomes to those. Pathways outcomes don't have to be academic in nature but having some of your academic outcomes align with one or two of your Pathways outcomes would get extra buy-in about Pathways from your faculty. I also believe that developing specific Pathways outcomes can allow for your institution to more easily identify where there might be gaps and areas for opportunity and improvement.