

NWACC Learning Assessment Handbook 2023

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Introduction: What and Why

What is learning assessment?

Assessment is the process the institution uses to demonstrate the degree to which it meets its goals and objectives at various levels across the institution. This process includes setting goals and objectives, identifying the means to measure performance, collecting performance results, reflecting on the findings, and taking appropriate action. Assessment is an ongoing repetitive process to ensure a sustained effort to improve. Any endeavor can use the assessment process to demonstrate success and improve effectiveness. This handbook focuses on student learning assessment as practiced at NWACC.

This is a simplified definition of student learning assessment:

**A process of
measuring what students
know (cognitive), think (attitudinal) and can do (behavioral)
to see if it matches what faculty intended for them
to know, think and do
in order to confirm and improve student learning.**

Learning assessment is a simple and intuitive process that teachers employ informally. This handbook does not suggest replacing this usual practice. Rather, it focuses on expanding the practice, as appropriate, to involve multiple sections and multiple faculty in a more systematic and documented process.

Why is learning assessment important?

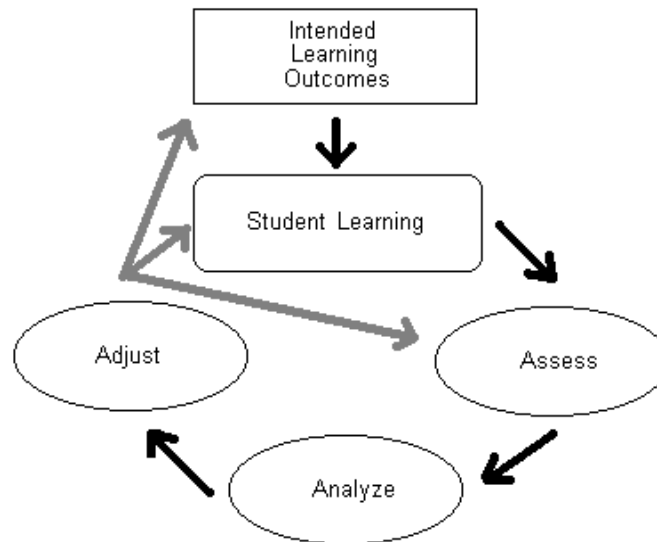
The first line and last line of the definition in bold above explain the purpose and importance of learning assessment. Student learning assessment is a process employed by faculty. The goal of the process is to confirm and improve student learning. Having comprehensive and functional learning assessment is the key means institutions use to maintain the quality and effectiveness of their educational programs. The Higher Learning Commission includes learning assessment specifically in the criteria for accreditation. Here is criteria 4B from HLC Policy CRRT.B.10.010:

4.B. *The institution engages in ongoing assessment of student learning as part of its commitment to the educational outcomes of its students.*

1. *The institution has effective processes for assessment of student learning and for achievement of learning goals in academic and co-curricular offerings.*
2. *The institution uses the information gained from assessment to improve student learning.*
3. *The institution's processes and methodologies to assess student learning reflect good practice, including the substantial participation of faculty, instructional and other relevant staff members.*

What are the steps of the learning assessment process?

To reflect good practice, the learning assessment needs to be a process that includes three key elements. The following diagram illustrates the cyclical nature of the process and its key elements.



Note that the heart of the above diagram is **student learning** and the goal is to confirm and improve student learning. The intended learning outcomes are what faculty intend for students to know, think and do as a result of a student learning activity, course, or curriculum.

Setting **intended learning outcomes** must be done before learning occurs and before the assessment process begins. Although setting the outcome is an initial activity, the ongoing assessment cycle may reveal a need to adjust the outcome.

Distilled down to its simplest elements, the assessment process can be described in three key actions that occur sequentially, and after outcomes have been set and the student learning has happened. **Assess** means measuring student performance or mastery of the intended outcomes. **Analyze** refers to the process of interpreting the results and drawing conclusions. This is the step where faculty examine evidence to confirm student learning. The step also involves proposing possible ways to address deficiencies in instruction or the assessment process. The final step is **adjust**. This involves making changes to improve. Changes can occur in three areas. Student learning (Instruction) may need adjustment. Assessment (the measure or process) may need modified to better gauge the outcome. The outcome may be refined to better express faculty intent for student learning.

What is **not** considered learning assessment?

Class Grades. Assessment focuses on group accomplishments of specified outcomes. A class grade reflects an individual student's overall success on a variety of course outcomes. Grade calculation is typically not uniform between instructors. A test, quiz or assignment within a class may be an assessment measure if the score reflects performance on a single learning

outcome. This simple gradebook illustrates the difference. Notice that students struggle with outcome B compared to the others.

Student	Outcome A	Outcome B	Outcome C	Final grade
Fred	30	30	30	30
Wilma	90	50	100	80
Barney	50	50	80	60
Betty	90	40	80	70
Average	65	42.5	72.5	

While final grades are not helpful for learning assessment, grades on class assignments can be used with limitations. See the section on [How to Identify Assessment Measures](#) for more information.

Faculty evaluation. Assessment is designed by faculty to assist them in evaluating student performance and the instructional process to maintain and improve educational quality. Assessment results reflect student performance, not faculty performance. The faculty evaluation process is separate. A supervisor may ask faculty how they have participated in assessment and how they have used assessment results to improve teaching and learning.

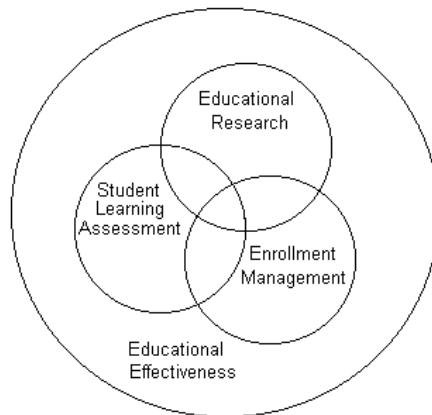
Educational research. Educational research tends to be narrow, discipline specific, and is often not ongoing. Research studies begin with a research question and hypothesis. The conclusions of a research study often put findings in terms of cause and effect. In contrast, student learning assessment begins with clearly stated expectations for student learning and identifies a means for measuring student mastery of those expectations. When students do not achieve the intended learning outcomes, faculty may pose a hypothesis to explain why the outcome was not achieved. Assessment results can lead to educational research activities.

Enrollment management. Enrollment management is concerned with enrollment levels, retention, graduation rates, etc. Learning assessment efforts are focused on what a student learns in a degree program rather than their persistence or completion of that program. Not that retention or completion are of lesser importance. HLC criteria 4C focuses on this aspect of quality.

Institutional effectiveness. Institutional effectiveness means engaging in ongoing and systematic assessment of programs and services with the goal of continuous institutional improvement. Institutional effectiveness uses assessment processes to evaluate various dimensions of success, such as productivity, quality, resource efficiency, and stakeholder satisfaction to determine how effectively programs and services contribute to the college mission, vision, values, strategic goals and community needs. Student learning assessment is just one component of institutional effectiveness.

Program Review. Program review is periodic evaluation of the effectiveness of program within the institution. Learning assessment is a significant and crucial component of a program review but it is not the only component. Program reviews normally consider data gathered from enrollment, retention, and graduation records as well as the degree of student learning. Program reviews are episodic, often focused on resources and presented in terms of what faculty and staff are doing. Student learning assessment is ongoing and focused on what students are achieving. Degree programs commonly undergo program review for external accreditation or to demonstrate viability to governing bodies.

The figure below illustrates the relationship of learning assessment to other activities



How does learning assessment relate to educational effectiveness, efficiency and viability?

The degree of student learning is the primary indicator of educational effectiveness. Efficiency compares input to output. Expenditure per graduate may measure the efficiency of an educational program. For example, it may be more efficient to offer sections with large numbers of students, but it may not produce the degree of learning or retention that small sections can produce. A program can be effective (high degree of student learning) and also be inefficient (use an inordinate number of resources). The opposite is also true. An efficient program may produce graduates that have not gained much knowledge. An institution that produces only a few competent graduates and the rest failing or dropping out is also a concern. To complicate matters a bit more, programs can produce competent graduates efficiently, but the skills these graduates have may not meet the employment demands of the community. Decisions about continuing or discounting programs may not be made based on the degree of student learning alone. Programs may be discontinued even if they produce high quality graduates because they are too costly or do not meet the community needs or fit the college mission. Effectiveness (student learning), efficiency, mission, and community needs are all factors that help determine if a program is viable.

What are characteristics of strong assessment programs?

1. Is systematic, ongoing, and implemented
2. Emerges from and be sustained by the faculty.

3. Is funded and supported by the administration.
4. Provides explicit and public statements regarding the faculty's expectations for student learning. Expectations (goals, outcomes, objectives) that:
 - a. Support institutional mission and objectives.
 - b. Are measurable in terms that can effect change (quantified terms).
 - c. Are bench marked to realistic standards.
 - d. Focus on the knowledge, skill, and/or perspective a student acquires.
5. Documents changes (pedagogical, curricular, and resource related) made to improve student learning.
6. Formally documents learning for external and internal constituencies, disseminates results widely, and describes the program's value and quality.
7. Encourages faculty discussion and collaboration.
8. Integrates the process and timetable of assessment to budgeting and planning so student performance data can influence budgeting and planning decisions.
9. Celebrates successes and is grateful to find weaknesses so they may be addressed.
10. Has specific feedback loops that spell out corrective actions, timelines, and responsible parties.
11. Includes evaluation and improvement of its processes.
12. Is an independent and clearly identifiable component of a more comprehensive program of overall institutional effectiveness.
13. Permeates the culture of the institution (be part of academic job descriptions).
14. Provides faculty development and appropriate compensation for assessment work.
15. Achieves its goal: verification and improvement of student learning.

Assessment Terminology

Please see the [Glossary](#) for definitions of terms commonly used in learning assessment

Assessment Policy and Organization

What policies govern and support student learning assessment?

The significance of and guidelines for learning assessment come from three sources.

College Policy

The College policy 3019 provides guidance to student learning assessment. It may be found here <https://nwacc.policystat.com/policy/5183013/latest/>

This policy provides scope, justification, definitions and responsibilities for learning assessment.

Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Criteria for Accreditation

The HLC is an accreditor of NWACC. Its criteria for accreditation helps guide the college's assessment efforts. The criteria for accreditation is found here

<https://www.hlcommission.org/Policies/criteria-and-core-components.html>

Core components most pertinent to learning assessment are 3.A, 3.B, 4.A, 4.B, and 5.C

The HLC document on assumed practices also provides guidelines for learning assessment:

<https://www.hlcommission.org/Policies/assumed-practices.html>

Assumed practices that are most pertinent to assessment are B.1.h, B.2.d, and C.6.

Program Accreditation

Many individual degree programs can be endorsed by a professional organization through accreditation. The accreditation requirements usually specify certain learning assessment process to be in place.

How is NWACC learning assessment organized and who is responsible?

The learning assessment process should be systematic, documented and integrated into the decision-making function of the college. This requires leadership, organization and delegation of responsibilities. The following describes how NWACC is organized to accomplish the goals set out by policy and the intent of learning assessment.

The Chief Academic Officer (CAO) and his/her designee(s) are responsible for ensuring the learning assessment processes are developed according to accreditation standards and good practice, implemented, and provided with adequate resources for operation. The importance of making learning assessment a priority flows from the top academic leadership. *Academic administrators* (deans, chairs, coordinators, and directors) are responsible for leadership and support in implementing learning assessment processes and using the findings to improve the quality of their programs. Academic leadership communicate the value of assessment, initiate and provide input in establishing assessment processes, learning outcomes and expectations for faculty participation. Academic administrators may assign faculty or staff specific responsibilities. *Faculty and staff* who work directly with students have the primary responsibility for implementing student learning assessment. They identify outcomes, design

measures, develop processes, administer measures, analyze results, and make recommendations for improvements.

How does learning assessment integrate with institutional effectiveness & planning?

Learning assessment is an essential component of overall institutional effectiveness. Here is the link to the College’s Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Strategic Planning (IESP) webpage:

https://www.nwacc.edu/aboutus/collegeleadership/cao/institutionaleffectiveness_strategicplanning/

This site explains the organizational structure and responsibilities for student learning assessment and how it fits into overall institutional effectiveness endeavors.

Learning assessment must begin with learning outcomes. There are different types of student learning outcomes. The table below provides learning outcome types and who is responsible for each.

Student Learning Outcomes Types	Responsible party
Degree/ Credential programs	Program director/coordinator under the supervision of a division dean. Programs do periodically report to the IESP committee and file reports with the IE office annually and accreditation bodies as appropriate as part of program review.
Special (Co-curricular) programs	Coordinator/sponsor of the program under supervision of director of Co-curricular programs and the Office Assessment & Accreditation
Academic support units	Directors of support programs who report to their supervisors and to the Co-curricular Committee
General Education	General Education Assessment committee, a Faculty committee with staff and dean representatives. This committee reports to the faculty senate, CAO and works closely with the deans and IESP.
Course	Typically, formal assessment occurs only courses with multiple sections and multiple faculty. In small programs, learning assessment in courses with only one or two sections may be required for program accreditation or review. The key leader is the subject-area coordinator who reports to their department chair/ dean.

Please see the section on the [NWACC Learning Framework](#) for more background on how these types of outcomes correlate.

Regardless of the type, learning outcomes must be public. Course outcomes need to appear in

the standard course outlines and course syllabi. General education outcomes must be present on the college website and in the catalog. Program outcomes should be part of any public description of the program that may be presented in the catalog, on the college website or brochures.

What is the role of Learning Assessment Coordinators and the Assessment Committee?

General education assessment is embedded in classes across the curriculum. The College is committed to quality education and continuous improvement and has set aside human and financial resources to support learning assessment in the form of Assessment Coordinators. These are specialized staff or faculty (often with release time) who help coordinate General Education Assessment in their divisions and consult with division faculty on assessment activities generally. Assessment Coordinators are appointed by their division dean and report to their dean.

Learning Assessment Coordinator Responsibilities

1. Serve on the Assessment Committee (a Faculty Senate committee and standing college committee), which includes the following:
 - a. Reviewing, revising, and approving the Academic Assessment Plan for Northwest Arkansas Community College.
 - b. Monitoring academic assessment planning to make recommendations to the CAO regarding general education and course level assessment plans, processes, and reports.
 - c. Conveying annual General Education Outcomes (GEO) assessment results and recommendations to the Faculty Senate, Deans and CAO.
 - d. Working in conjunction with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Institutional Research for required external reporting.
2. Coordinate, advocate, and support learning assessment to their respective academic unit which includes:
 - a. Explaining the general purpose, scope, benefit and process of learning assessment.
 - b. Orienting deans, faculty and staff about the college assessment plan and the roles and responsibilities of the academic unit.
 - c. Advising and help identify resources/training on best practices in all elements of learning assessment.
 - d. Coordinating the transfer of General Education Outcome performance data from the unit to the Assessment Committee database.
 - e. Instructing faculty on how to create assessment plans and reports according to college guidelines and best practices.
 - f. Coordinating with the dean in helping faculty understand and execute their responsibilities in learning assessment.
 - g. Assisting in maintaining the academic units' assessment plans (Both General Education and Course Level Plans).
 - h. Coordinating the collection, reporting, use and dissemination of data to all concerned constituents (see [Ongoing Assessment](#) section).
 - i. Helping to orient and train their replacement with an appropriate succession plan to

maintain continuity.

3. Consult with Curriculum Experts on Standard Course Outlines to help ensure
 - a. Outcomes are worded properly (measurable, and written in terms of what students know, think, and can do).
 - b. Faculty understand the significance of learning outcomes in the course planning process.
 - c. Faculty have considered the audiences for the Standard Course Outcomes (SCO) and the stakeholders of the course.
 - d. Outcomes align with/support:
 - i. the course description.
 - ii. Institution learning goals/outcomes related to transfer, work, special programs (see the associate degree program section of the college catalog)
 - iii. program outcomes (both AS/AA and AAS)
 - iv. general education (if applicable)
 - v. ACTS (if applicable)
 - vi. Transfer programs (if applicable), and
 - vii. Course for which the course serves as a prerequisite (if applicable)
 - e. Faculty understand when to list and outcome in the GEO supported section
 - f. Any standard assessment instrument and process follow good practice and aligns with the College's overall assessment plan.
 - g. Faculty are alerted to any other elements of the outline that don't appear to follow the intent or format
4. Serve on Institutional Effectiveness Committee

The General Education Assessment Committee

The Institutional Effectiveness and Strategic Planning website gives the charge and membership of three assessment committees: Co-curricular, Operational Effectiveness, and General Education. Faculty are most likely to be contributing to the general education outcomes and the work of that committee.

NWACC has eight general education outcomes taught and practiced across the curriculum (see [General Education Outcomes Assessment](#) section). Co-curricular programs and academic support units also support these outcomes. Because of the widespread contributions to general education outcomes, a committee with broad representation is best suited to coordinate the effort to assess them. This standing college committee is appointed by and reports to the faculty senate and to the Chief Academic Officer (cabinet representative).

Charge

As a subcommittee of the Faculty Senate, the CAO has appointed the General Education Assessment Committee to support and monitor academic assessment to make recommendations to the CAO regarding, general education and course level assessment plans, processes, and reports. (HLC Criterion 2.D., 3, 4 and 5.D)

- Develop, refine, and facilitate the GEO assessment plan, with approval of CAO, Faculty and Dean's Council.

- Annually collect and compile GEO assessment results into a report.
- Make recommendations regarding the GEO outcomes, the GEO assessment process or teaching and learning.
- Report to Faculty, CAO, Dean's council, and Institutional Effectiveness committee annually.
- Provide guidance and support to faculty for course level assessment process and program assessment.
- Consult and advise on assessment-related elements of the Standard Course Outlines as part of curriculum approval

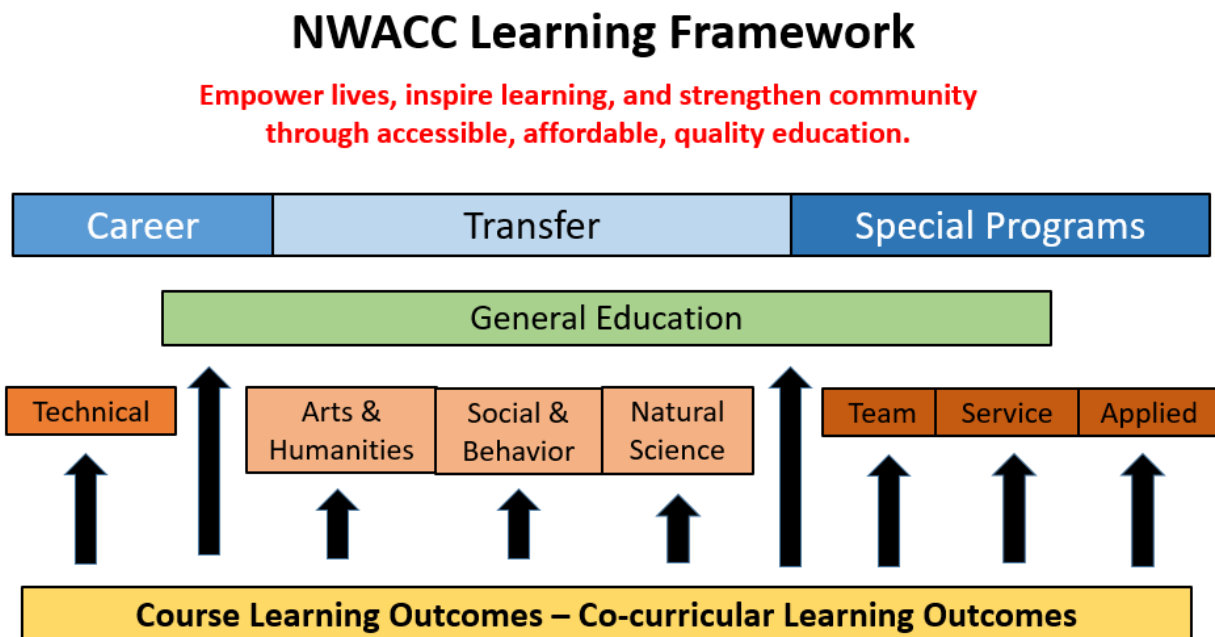
Membership

1. Chair- Appointed by CAO
2. Representative office of Accreditation and Assessment
3. Assessment coordinators from these academic divisions
 - a. Business & Computer Information Systems
 - b. Science & Mathematics
 - c. Communications & Arts Division
 - d. Social & Behavioral Science Division
 - e. Food Studies & Workforce Division
 - f. Health Professions Division
4. Academic support units Representative
5. Co-Curricular programs representative
6. Special Academic Programs representative
7. Academic Deans Council representative
8. Additional faculty interested in participating
9. Ex-Officio: CAO

NWACC Learning Framework

The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) criteria for accreditation (specifically Criterion 3 A&B) expects member institutions to clearly articulate their goals for student learning appropriate to their mission. NWACC public statement of student learning outcomes is found in the section introducing college degree programs of the college catalog. This section describes the goals and outcomes for student learning for its degrees and certificates, for general education and special programs. Please note that HLC refers to degrees and certificates as educational programs (a legally authorized postsecondary program of organized instruction or study that leads to an academic, professional, or vocational degree, or certificate, or other recognized educational credential). What our catalog refers to broadly as special programs, HLC calls co-curricular (Learning activities, programs and experiences that reinforce the institution’s mission and values and complement the formal curriculum. Examples: Study abroad, student-faculty research experiences, service learning, professional clubs or organization, athletics, honor societies, career services, etc.). Our use of the term general education matches HLC (The general education program is appropriate to the mission, educational offerings and degree levels of the institution...it imparts broad knowledge and intellectual concepts to students and develops skills and attitudes that the institution believes every college-educated person should possess).

The graphic below is an attempt to illustrate this section in the catalog. It shows how the course and co-curricular learning outcomes support the educational program goals, outcomes and ultimately, the college mission.



The College Mission (top two lines in red font).

The combined efforts of degree programs, special programs, academic support units, co-curricular offerings help accomplish the college mission. Everything below this line supports the mission.

Curricular and Co-Curricular Programs (blue boxes)

NWACC offers over 40 different degrees and certificates. Curricular programs tend to fall into two categories. Associate of Arts and Science degrees prepare students for transfer to baccalaureate programs. Associate of Applied Science degrees and certificates prepare students for a career, allowing them to enter the workforce directly. Special programs, by themselves, do not result in a credential. Some special programs are credit courses. Examples include developmental courses, Honors, EAST/EMPACTS, Service Learning, Undergraduate Research, Study Abroad. Special programs also include learning activities that students participate in, but not for college credit. Examples include student government, clubs and organizations, sports, and special events (spring arts and culture festival, MLK lecture, concerts, art shows, plays, etc.). Special programs also encompass organizational units that directly support curricular learning outcomes. Examples of academic support areas include the library, tutoring center, math center, and writing center. At NWACC, we often refer to all the special programs that do not result in a credential as co-curricular.

General Education (green box).

In some contexts, general education refers to core courses providing a breadth of knowledge, perspectives, and skills as part of a bachelor's degree. The Arkansas Department of Higher Education has established general education requirements for Associate and Bachelor degrees. At NWACC, we describe general education as eight *learning outcomes* that students who earn an associate degree will acquire regardless of transfer or career emphasis. The green section crosses all three types of programs NWACC offers. General education outcomes are taught and practiced across the curricular and co-curricular offerings. Please see the section on [General Education Outcome Assessment](#) for more information.

Learning outcomes for educational programs (orange boxes)

HLC expects all of NWACC learning programs to publicly articulate their student learning outcomes. Associate of Applied Science career oriented programs include outcomes that can be *technical* in nature. These outcomes may be found in the catalog program descriptions and college website. Transfer degrees require students to take a certain number of credit hours in three domains, Arts & Humanities, Social & Behavioral Sciences, and Natural Sciences. The college catalog states the learning objectives for each of these three domains. The college catalog also describes three areas of learning not considered general education, but part of the higher education's mission. The three areas are 1) teamwork and leadership, 2) community service and civic engagement, and 3) applied learning (including creative work, scholarship and discovery). The college's special programs contribute significantly to these three areas.

Course and Co-curricular Learning Outcomes (bottom yellow box).

Courses compose curricular programs and co-curricular activities support them. Each course, co-curricular activity or academic support unit has learning outcomes. These outcomes are the foundation for everything above,. Course and co-curricular learning outcomes reflect and support the program outcomes (orange) and the general education outcomes (green). The program and general education outcomes meet the goals of our learning programs (blue). Our educational programming supports the college’s mission (top line in red).

Connecting to the classroom

The learning framework attempts to illustrate how the learning in the classroom contributes to accomplishing the college mission as a component of educational programs. Educational good practice recommends that faculty have specific learning outcomes in mind when they develop their lectures and learning activities. Assessments (graded exams, quizzes, worksheets, presentations, portfolios, etc.) determine if students have acquired these outcomes. Student success overall, as reflected in the class grade, is the cumulative accomplishment of the specific course learning outcomes. Course outcomes from a variety of courses support the outcomes for programs and general education.

Here is a table that illustrates the categories of outcomes in a similar fashion as the learning framework figure. Course learning outcomes contribute to the outcomes of programs, general education, in a particular knowledge domain and as a college-educated member of society. While courses are not expected to contribute to all of the educational outcomes, but it would be unusual not to support or practice at least one of them.

Goals for NWACC Educational Programs			
Prepared for a career	Prepared for transfer	Prepared for informed and effective community participation	
Knowledge Domain Outcomes			
Arts & Humanities	Social & Behavioral Sciences	Natural Sciences	Business/Technical
General Education Outcomes taught across the curriculum			
Math	Information Literacy	Writing	Oral communication
Higher Order Thinking	Cultural awareness	Technological Fluency	Reading
Important but Elective Outcomes			
Teamwork/Leadership	Community Service/Civic Engagement	Applied Learning/Research	

Designing a course with the outcomes in mind first is called “backward design”. NWACC Faculty Professional Development Office has developed some training modules to help faculty more intentionally articulate their learning outcomes and develop learning activities and

assessments around these outcomes. Here is a link to the learner-centered instruction modules: <https://nwacc.instructure.com/courses/1289788/modules>

The modules provide insights in effective instruction beyond the assessment process. The following modules are most relevant to assessment practiced by an individual faculty for their own course.

Module 1: Preparation

- Articulates clear learning goals/outcomes
- Assessment Strategies

Module 3: Instruction

- Makes Learning Outcomes Clear to Learners
- Monitoring Understanding, Providing Feedback, and Adjusting Activities

Module 4: Professionalism

- Reflecting on Learning Outcomes

Getting Started

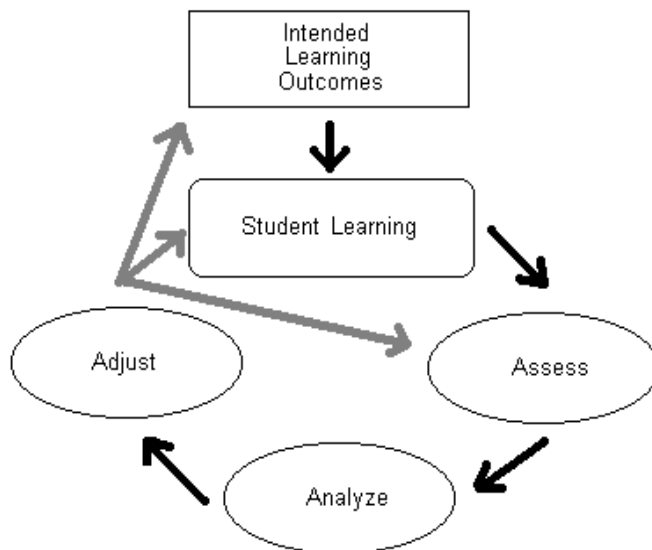
What should be assessed and who is responsible?

The table below lists the different learning endeavors that should be assessed as described in the [Introduction](#) and [Policy & Organization](#) sections. Please see those sections for more information. This handbook will focus on course and curriculum assessment, but the principles can be applied to student activities and academic support units as well.

<i>Learning Endeavor</i>	<i>Notes</i>	<i>Responsible party</i>
Degree/ credential programs	Required by ADHE, HLC and other accreditation organizations, the outcomes assessed state what students will gain (learn) from completing the courses in the credential.	Program director/coordinator under the supervision of a division dean. Programs do periodically report to the Institutional Effectiveness and Strategic Planning (IESP) committee and file reports with the IESP office.
Special Programs (also called Co-curricular programs- do not result in a credential)	Required by HLC, the outcomes assessed state what students will gain (learn) from participating the co-curricular program. Co-curricular includes any student development activity or specialized curriculum that does not result in a credential.	Coordinator/sponsor of the program under supervision of director of Co-curricular programs and the Office Assessment & Accreditation. Special curricular programs may fall under a specific dean.
Academic support units	These units directly support the curricular learning outcomes. Examples include the library, learning labs and tutoring.	Directors of support programs who report to their supervisors and to the Co-curricular committee
General Education	Required by HLC and other accreditation organizations. The college must have specifically stated general education expectations for all students earning an associate degree.	General Education Assessment committee, a faculty committee with staff and dean representatives. This committee reports to the faculty senate, and, CAO and works closely with the deans and IESP.
Courses	While HLC does not require comprehensive assessment for every course, NWACC practice suggests formally assessed learning outcomes in courses with multiple sections taught by multiple faculty. Individual courses may have a formal assessment if needed for program review requirements.	The subject-area coordinator or program coordinator who reports to their department chair/ dean. Some courses provide both program outcome learning and general education learning.

What is involved in setting up an assessment process?

For reference, here is the learning assessment cycle diagram from the [Introduction](#) section. Learning assessment is a reoccurring process completed on a regular basis.



Setting up an assessment process involves

1. Developing intended outcomes (link to how to)
2. Identifying assessment measures and performance criteria(link to)
3. Planning for the assess, analyze and adjust phases, including how often
4. Determining how the process will be documented, disseminated, and archived

1. Developing intended outcomes

Intended educational outcomes are descriptions of what academic departments intend for students to know (cognitive), think (affective) and do (behavioral) when they have completed their course or curriculum.

Intended learning outcomes should be...

- Results oriented. They focus not on what we as instructors will do, but what students ought to know, think, and do. They explain what students should gain from the program/ courses.
- Simple and as straightforward as possible.
- Measurable. Measurable means being able to make a general judgment on whether students know, think or do what we intend for them.
- Reasonable. Neither too difficult nor too easy for students to achieve
- Set first before identifying assessment tools.

For more information, please see the section on [How to Develop Learning Outcomes](#).

2. Identifying assessment measures and performance criteria

Intended outcomes should be measurable. This step involves choosing an instrument to determine if students have acquired the outcome (learned what faculty intended). Once a measurement tool is identified, then proficiency criteria, standards, or benchmarks can be set. It is unrealistic to expect all students to score perfectly on the measure. The performance criteria defines what level of performance on the assessment measure is acceptable and what percent of students should perform at the acceptable level. Without setting assessment criteria, it would not be possible to determine if a learning outcome has been met.

Assessment measures can be categorized as direct or indirect.

Direct measures of student learning:

Pre & posttests, capstone course projects, oral exams, internships, portfolios, exams, laboratory reports, lab practical exams, research papers, juried review and performances. Surveys can be considered direct measures for the affective domain if they are used to document a change in attitude or opinion.

Indirect indicators of learning:

Alumni, employer and student surveys (these usually solicit opinions about learning, but do not provide evidence of learning), exit interviews, focus groups, graduate follow up surveys, transfer studies, length of time to the degree, SAT scores, graduation & transfer rates, job placement data.

Non- measures of learning:

Program and curriculum reviews that are resource-oriented and do not describe student learning, class grades & GPAs, student teacher ratios, class attendance records, enrollment and retention trends, student or faculty diversity, faculty credentials, faculty recognition or publications, class/faculty evaluations, satisfaction oriented surveys

Because an item is in the indirect or non-measure category does not mean it is unimportant or should not be considered in a program's overall effectiveness. The focus here is determining the degree of student learning by evaluating their performance.

NOTE: Asking for demographic data in the measurement instrument can aid in the analysis. We commonly separate students by class delivery format. So consider this as part of the process. For more information, please see the section on [How to Identify Assessment Measures](#).

3. Planning for the assess, analyze and adjust phases

Assess (Measure) student learning

Once an assessment measure and criteria has been selected, the next step is to plan how the measurement instrument will be implemented. Here are some questions to consider in the planning phase:

- Who is going to be assessed and when?

- Who is going to administer the measure?
- Who is going to evaluate/grade it (by what criteria)?
- How are results to be collected across sections?
- Who is going to prepare the results summary and in what form (averages, totals, comparison groups, years, etc.)?

Analyze measurement data and the assessment process

Assessment is a means to improve student performance in academic programs, not an end in itself. Assessment results are only meaningful if they are evaluated based on the expectations (performance criteria). Did the students perform at the level specified? More simply stated, “Did they learn what we intended for them to learn?” If the performance criteria is well defined, then this is a yes or no question.

In planning for the analyze step, identify who will be reviewing the results and when that will happen. Faculty establish the outcomes; faculty select the assessment tools; faculty are responsible for analyzing the results of the assessment. Typically, the coordinator/director will lead the process and will be the one who compiles the data and presents it to the faculty.

Adjust instruction, the outcome, or the assessment process

After analyzing the performance data and drawing conclusions about strengths and opportunities, then adjustments can be proposed. If students met or exceeded the performance expectations, then the best adjustment is to keep doing what you are doing. In other words, no adjustments are needed. Even with acceptable results, faculty may want to make changes (adjust). Adjustments fall in three categories:

1. Refine the outcome to better describe the intended learning
2. Improve the assessment measure or how the data is presented for analysis
3. Make changes to instruction (texts, learning activities, equipment, professional development, personnel, etc.)

See the section on [Ongoing Assessment](#) to learn more about analyzing student performance and making adjustments

How often should an assessment cycle occur?

There is no requirement for how often to conduct the assessment cycle. The goal is to provide enough data to make judgements and to be able to reasonably evaluate the effect of any improvements implemented. Many areas assess students each semester so collecting performance data becomes routine. Even with semester collection, the results may be reviewed by faculty annually rather than every semester. There are advantages to only looking at results every two or three years to allow enough time for changes to have effect. Waiting longer than three years sometimes feels like history and not relevant to the current situation. Plan a process that provides timely information and is worth the effort.

4. Determining how the process will be documented, disseminated, and archived

Documentation is a crucial part of learning assessment. Without proper documentation, there is no way to show students are learning or that assessment is systematic, ongoing, and implemented. In setting up the assessment process, plans for documentation must be included. Here are the key questions to answer in setting up the documentation plan:

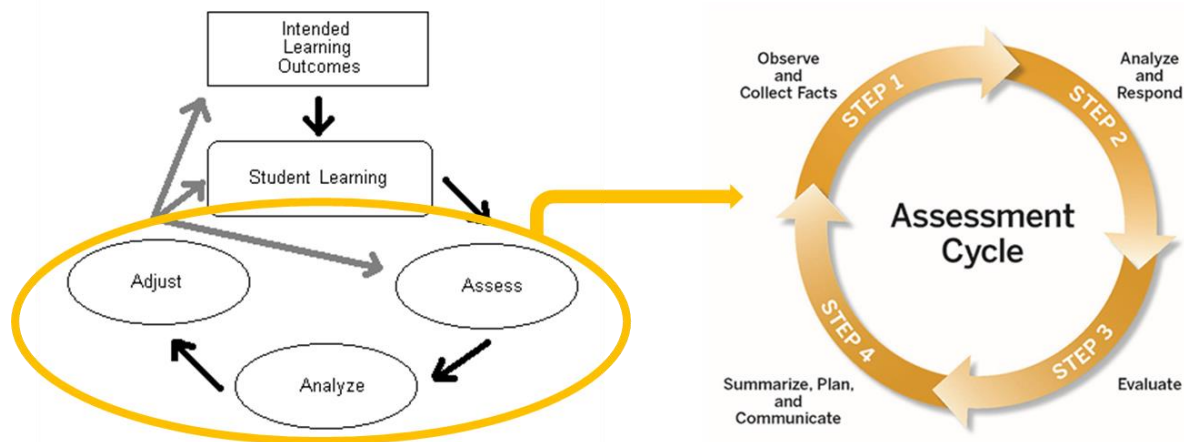
- Who is responsible (usually the coordinator/director for the course or curriculum)?
- Who will get this report (course/curriculum faculty, dean, department chairs, certain committees, office of Institutional Effectiveness & Strategic Planning, etc.)?
- What information is included in the report? (data, analysis, proposed adjustments)
- When will reports be due to constituents?

Please note there are two basic types of documents: plans and reports. Plans document who, what, and when for the assessment process. Reports document student performance results, analysis and adjustments for a particular assessment cycle. Please note that the focus is on student mastery of learning outcomes.

Once the plan has been created, it needs to be properly archived. It is essential for the college to have an official record of assessment plans (and reports on those plans) to demonstrate to a variety of stakeholders that learning assessment is implemented. The college has adopted WEAVE as its means for archiving and retrieving assessment information for various reporting needs. Once a plan has been created, it needs to be entered into WEAVE. WEAVE also uses the plan as means for reporting assessment results and recommendations. For your convenience, please see the [Learning Assessment Plan and Report Guidelines](#) to help in creating plans and reports in WEAVE.

Ongoing Assessment

Once learning outcomes have been developed, measures identified, and the process planned, then implementation begins. In the process, the assess, analyze and adjust steps repeat. Below is an expanded diagram illustrating the repeated activities that occur during assess, analyze and adjust part of the cycle. This section focuses on good practice involved in ongoing assessment. Collecting assessment data but leaving out one of these steps is referred to as “not closing the loop”.



Step 1: Observe and Collect Facts:

This is the “assess” step from the original diagram. Faculty administer the instrument and report the results in course-embedded assessment. The person assigned to lead the assessment process (typically the program coordinator, subject area coordinator or assessment specialist) compiles the results into a report for review. While faculty are interested in how their students perform, the main objective is how all students across sections perform. Results may be separated by delivery format or student population, but is not meant to compare individual faculty or individual students. Individual faculty will find group results helpful in setting performance expectations for their students. A coordinator may produce a report from an individual faculty's sections which should be reviewed by that faculty alone as an aid in self-evaluation.

Step 2: Analyze and Respond:

While the person assigned to producing the report can make some initial observations and conclusions, all relevant faculty need to have an opportunity to contribute to analyzing and responding to the student performance data. During analysis, faculty should ask a number of questions. Did students meet the performance criteria? What are the areas of strength and opportunities for improvement? Do students in different delivery formats perform at the same level? Is there enough data for making definitive conclusions? Were significant differences

based of demographics observed? What other patterns are apparent? What is the performance trend? Did any issues arise from item analysis?

Responding is also part of this step. Do the results reveal a need for action? What action could help improve student performance? What could be the underlying obstacles? How can obstacles be overcome? Are the proposed actions realistic? Can faculty share practices that seem to be effective? One of the primary purposes of learning assessment is generating faculty conversation about teaching and learning. Allow enough time for rich discussion about what's working and what isn't. Share ideas. This step provides an opportunity for faculty to talk about two important topics- student success and course integrity. Rely on the diverse insights of the group to develop consensus on actions.

Do not limit the scope of response. Improving performance is the primary purpose accredited institutions employ assessment. Improvements can involve changing textbooks, ancillary materials or library holdings. Improvements may involve altering the topics covered or time spent on a topic. Perhaps a new type of learning activity or assignment. Improvements may call for new equipment or updated facilities. Perhaps the discussions reveals a personnel need. Is professional development needed? Maybe a prerequisite should be added or eliminated. Having adequate time for conversation and consensus is what makes learning assessment useful to faculty and ultimately benefit students.

Step 3: Evaluate:

Analysis and response focused on student performance, but there is another opportunity for evaluation. First, did the change implemented since the last cycle (if any) make a difference? The point of assessment is to improve student performance. Did the data indicate improvement?

Second, is the outcome appropriate? During each assessment cycle there is an occasion to refine the learning outcomes as a result of faculty conversation about what is important. Articulating the outcome well is crucial because the rest of the process flows from it. The assessment process takes time and effort. Focus on learning outcomes that are most important to the group.

Third, is the assessment process effective? Does the measure need to be adjusted? Can the process be streamlined? Is there additional information that should be collected or can some data be eliminated. Can the results be presented in a more helpful manner to aid analysis? Is the performance criteria set too high or too low? Is our timing of when we collect data and talk about it timely? Is the process worth the effort? If not, what needs to be improved? Like the analysis step, faculty discussion is crucial for creating an effective system with strong participation. Assessment is primarily for faculty to use to improve student performance, not

to satisfy some other party. Accrediting bodies may not care about the specific results, they care that faculty have a process implemented to answer two key questions: Are students learning? How can student learning be improved? Accredited institutions are expected to care enough about these questions to find out and provide evidence that they are doing so.

Step 4: Summarize, Plan and Communicate:

This last phase is follow-up and documentation, both crucial to the assessment process but easy to skip.

Summarize and Plan

It is relatively easy to brainstorm adjustments; it takes more work to implement them. Summarize and plan is something the assessment leader needs to coordinate. The leader is responsible to document the group’s conclusions and prioritize proposals for improvement. The leader needs to organize the plans to implement the improvements. Some adjustments may not be practical or cost effective immediately. Priorities have to be set. Some recommended changes may require approval by college committees or administration (especially those that involve expenditures). Implementation of instructional or assessment adjustments cannot begin until approved and/or funded.

Planning involves identifying what must be done, who is going to do it, and when is the completion deadline. Documenting plans helps ensure action. The assessment leader needs to follow-up on assignments going forward. In some cases, the assessment leader will need to make changes to outcomes on the standard course outline or update assessment plans. Others in the unit may have follow-up tasks based on the recommendations faculty make in response to the findings.

Communicate and Archive

The initial step in communication is to complete an assessment report. The report formally documents key information for the process. See the [Learning Assessment Plan and Report Guidelines](#).

Second, the report is a means to inform all stakeholders. The table below lists stakeholders and their use of the report:

Stakeholder	Use
Faculty	Confirms results, findings, priorities and follow-up responsibilities
Academic supervisors (department chair, program coordinator, dean)	Keeps supervisor informed of assessment in the unit Evidence of unit effectiveness Rational to justify plans and budgets. Evidence for program review Data for program advisory board status reports
Division assessment	Data for General Education Assessment

coordinator	Keeps coordinator informed of assessment in the division. Examples of practices to share with other groups
Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Strategic Planning	Evidence necessary for accreditation Keeps office informed of assessment across campus Creates an idea bank for others

An important final step in communication is archiving the report so the college can maintain a record of findings and responses to the findings. This archive is crucial for demonstrating that our assessment plans are implemented. The college uses WEAVE as its official archive system. The assessment leader enters the assessment plan into WEAVE, then uses the WEAVE plan to archive assessment results. Some reporting to stakeholders can occur using the WEAVE reporting functions.

General Education Outcomes Assessment

Regardless if the degree is oriented toward transfer or career, all students earning an associate's degree will gain general knowledge, skills and perspectives to aid the pursuit of life-long learning. NWACC faculty have identified eight general education outcomes that communicate what students will gain from any NWACC associate degree. While some courses focus on a single outcome, these skills will be developed across the curriculum. The college assesses student achievement of these outcomes with measures that are embedded in courses or co-curricular activities.

Students develop higher order thinking skills.

Higher education goes beyond memorization and basic comprehension. Students must be able to apply, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate what they learn. While most first and second year college courses lay a foundation of basic knowledge of the subject matter, students will also be challenged to use their intellect, to think critically, to solve problems and/or to wrestle with complex issues.

Students gain greater awareness of cultural perspectives.

One of the traditional goals of a college education is to expand students' understanding of the world by presenting them with diverse ideas and attitudes. In America's pluralistic society, awareness of cultural perspectives is essential. An important element of this understanding is recognition of one's own culture and the impact it has on one's perspective. Across the curriculum, students will be exposed to different cultural perspectives to enhance their ability to understand and interact with others.

Students can write clear, coherent, well-organized documents, which are substantially free of errors.

Students can read selections at the college level.

Students can describe the main ideas and supporting ideas in their reading. Students can evaluate written materials objectively.

Students develop effective oral communication skills.

A college graduate should be able to speak effectively. Most NWACC students will develop public speaking skills to inform and persuade others. Some professional program students will focus on interpersonal communication skills essential in performing job-related duties. All students should have opportunities to improve their oral communication skills across the curriculum through class presentations and small group activities.

Students can achieve mathematical literacy.

College graduates should be able to understand and use numerical relationships and basic analysis of data in their roles as consumers, citizens, scholars, and professionals. Graduates should possess the computational, algebraic and quantitative skills necessary to solve problems and evaluate complex situations.

Students will demonstrate technological fluency.

Students need to be able to use technology resources efficiently in a rapidly evolving digital society to learn, work, and thrive. To be fluent in technology means having the confidence and competency to move fluidly among digital environments and incorporate emerging technologies. Technology resources would include digital technology, productivity software, technology-mediated collaboration tools, and discipline-specific applications, as well as those commonly used across disciplines. This outcome encompasses these technological competencies:

1. Design, develop, present, and publish products using digital technology.
2. Create, identify, save and retrieve data/information using digital a content management system(s).
3. Employ technology resources to collect and analyze data, guide decision-making, and solve problems.
4. Recognize responsible digital citizenship by using technology ethically, legally, and securely.
5. Use technology to communicate effectively across multiple channels.

Students demonstrate information literacy.

Information Literacy is a process involving complex skills. Students must be able to: develop and refine their research question, create a research plan, identify information sources relevant to their needs, search those sources effectively, critically evaluate what they find, share their findings ethically, and synthesize their information appropriately for their audience.

Background and History

A faculty committee developed the general education outcomes as part of the assessment plan presented in the January 1995 self-study. They were originally referred to as “institutional outcomes”. The self-study was conducted as part of the college’s accreditation. The meaning and purpose of general education is guided by the Higher Learning Commission, the college’s accreditation organization. The two relevant references are the Assumed Practices: Number: CRRT.B.10.020, B.1.h and the Criteria for Accreditation: Criteria 3, Core Component B. The responsibility for GEO development and assessment is share between faculty and college leadership.

The college recognizes general education courses as part of degrees, but also defines general education through eight general education outcomes taught and practiced across the curriculum. For more information on how general education fits into the college mission, see the [NWACC Learning Framework](#) section.

The General Education Assessment committee coordinates assessment of the eight general education outcomes. This committee reports to the Faculty Senate and the CAO is an *ex officio* member. The eight outcomes are periodically reviewed and updated as part of the ongoing assessment process. The faculty, in collaboration with the academic deans and CAO, must approve any change, addition or deletion of general education outcomes. The GEO committee

can recommend changes to the assessment process and policy with approval of faculty and academic leadership. For more information, see the [Assessment Policy and Organization](#) section.

Assessment Process

The college assesses student achievement of the General Education Outcomes (GEO) with measures that are embedded in courses or co-curricular activities. Faculty and co-curricular leaders pass their student performance data, conclusions and improvement plans on to the GEO committee. This is facilitated by the area’s assessment coordinator who also serve on the GEO committee. Annually, the GEO committee compiles the performance data into a college-wide report. The GEO committee may also make recommendations to the instruction, the assessment process or the GEO outcomes. Please note that analysis, conclusions and adjustments are made at two levels. Faculty teaching the course make very specific changes related to their course and specific outcomes. Faculty typically report these changes to the GEO committee when they supply the student performance results. The GEO committee makes broader judgments and recommendations from data from multiple sources.

Courses with embedded GEO measures

Here is the table showing the courses currently measuring student performance in general education:

Outcome	Courses or activities with embedded measures
Students develop higher order thinking skills.	PSYC 2003, BIOL 1544, ACCT 2023 and ECON 2013
Students gain greater awareness of cultural perspectives.	MUSI 1003, PLSC 2003, ECON 2023, and ACCT 2023
Students can write clear, coherent, well-organized documents, which are substantially free of errors.	ENGL 1023, ECON 2023, and ACCT 2023
Students can read selections at the college level.	<u>ENGL 2213, HIST 2003, and HIST 1033</u>
Students develop effective oral communication skills.	COMM 1303 and OSIM 1103
Students can achieve mathematical literacy.	MATH 1203, MATH 1003, ECON 2023, ACCT 2023 and CHEM 1104
Students will demonstrate technological fluency.	CISQ 1103
Students demonstrate information literacy	ENGL 1023, BIOL 2214 and BIOL 2224

Selecting courses that contribute performance data to GEO committee reports

Determining what courses will participate in GEO assessment is a collaborative process involving the course faculty, assessment coordinators, and academic deans. The GEO

committee uses several guidelines in identifying courses or activities to include in the GEO assessment process.

1. The learning outcomes or required activities clearly support the general education outcome
2. The course has numerous sections and students
3. The course is taken by students pursuing many different degrees
4. There are courses represented across the curriculum and a variety of domains- humanities, social sciences and natural sciences.
5. Performance data can be beginning level students and end of degree students to help gauge growth.

The list of courses with embedded assessment measures is not static. Changes occur regularly as part of adjusting the assessment process.

Timing

Because the assessment process occurs at the course level, course faculty determine the frequency of assessment. Formal GEO assessment may occur every semester, once a year or every other year. The GEO committee makes an annual report over the data collected for each academic year (fall and spring results). Therefore, the annual assessment report may not include all the outcomes on a particular year due to data collection timing.

Dissemination of the annual GEO report

Since the GEO committee reports to the faculty senate and to the college cabinet through the CAO, the GEO report is given to the senate and CAO. Since student performance is a key quality indicator, the GEO report is also given to the Institutional Effectiveness office and committee. It has been a practice to also share the report with the expanded cabinet based on recommendation of the CAO. The senate typically presents the GEO report annually at a faculty business meeting. The assessment chair presents the GEO report to the academic dean's council. The GEO report is used by the college for program and institutional accreditation.

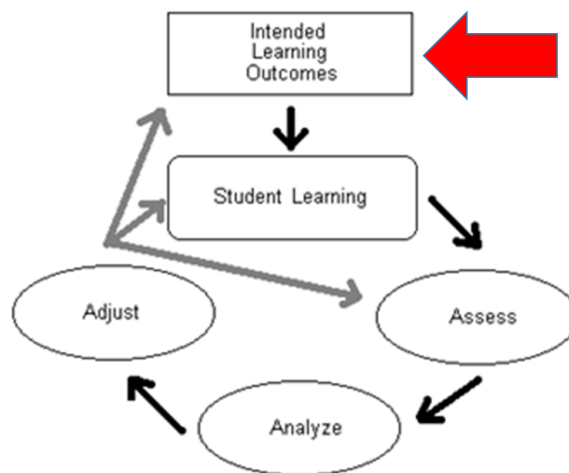
How to Develop Learning Outcomes

The assessment coordinator is the individual faculty can consult with for help in developing learning outcomes for courses or programs. Every course and academic program must have learning outcomes. Part of the curriculum approval process involves review and input from the assessment coordinator on the course level learning outcomes.

Crucial First Step

The first and the most crucial step in the assessment process is developing expectations for student learning (learning outcomes). Once the expectations have been established, the rest of the assessment process can be simply summarized in three questions:

1. How can the learning expectation be measured? (assess)
2. Did the measurement show students performed to the level intended? (analyze)
3. What more can be done to help students meet the learning expectations? (adjust)



How the assessment process develops depends on the learning outcome.

Return on Investment

Perhaps the best way to think about learning outcomes is as a “ROI statement”. Learning outcomes should answer the question “What value will a student gain by investing their money, time and energy into the learning activity?” The learning activity can be a course, a degree program, as special program, a co-curricular offering, or a daily assignment in a class. Writing learning outcomes provides the opportunity to describe to students (and others) the value and goal of student effort.

Categories of Outcomes

In the [NWACC Learning Framework](#), three different categories of required learning outcomes exist in a loose hierarchy: general education, program, and course. The table below describes the differences in the three.

Category	Intended for	Specificity	Determined by
General Education	All students earning an Associate degree	Most General	Faculty and Academic leadership
Program (curricular or co-curricular)	Students in the program	Broad but aimed a group of students with a more specific goal	Program faculty and Deans
Course	Students enrolled in a course, regardless of instructor	More narrow, focused on the course content	Faculty teaching the course, program coordinators

In general, moving from general education to class, the number of outcomes increases and become more specific. Regardless of the category, learning outcomes should

- Focus on what students ought to know, think and do. They explain what students should gain from the program/ courses/ degree. They do not describe what an instructor will do, list of topics covered, or the types of activities students will participate in.
- Be measurable. Measurable means being able to make a judgment on what students know, think or can do.
- Be attainable – the level of difficulty should affirm and expand prior knowledge, but not be unrealistic for the particular student population.

Guidelines for Writing Outcomes

Subject

The subject is always the student. It is best to begin an outcome with “Students will be able to...”. A learning outcome is something students gain if they put forth the effort to participate in the learning activity. The outcome is something students have acquired and they must demonstrate they possess it. Another helpful way to begin is: “Once completing the _____ (activity/course/program), students will be able to...”

Verb

The verb is perhaps the most important part because it will be key in helping determine how to assess the learning. A good approach to picking an appropriate verb is to consider how students would demonstrate what they have learned. Use that as a guide for the verb chosen. Another very helpful consideration is Bloom’s taxonomy. An internet search will provide you with lots of verb lists to choose from when writing outcomes. Here are two links among the many available:

From University of Arkansas: <https://tips.uark.edu/blooms-taxonomy-verb-chart/>
 From Austin Community College: <https://www.austincc.edu/offices/academic-outcomes-assessment/discipline-assessment-cycle/student-learning-outcomes/blooms-taxonomy>

The more descriptive and precise the verb, the easier it will be to choose a way to assess it. Best practice recommends avoiding vague words like “know”, “understand” or even “demonstrate understanding”. How precise a verb is will also depend on the category of outcome (general education, program, and course). Another way to help identify specific and measurable verb is to imagine finishing the sentence with “as evidenced by...”, then choose the appropriate verb by how you will assess the degree of learning.

Domain

An important consideration is the learning domain intended- cognitive, behavioral or affective.

- **Cognitive** (what a student knows): Knowledge, understanding of subject content
- **Behavioral** (what a student can do): skills, performance or application of knowledge, problem solving, analysis or creation
- **Affective** (what a student thinks): attitudes or feelings toward the subject, values, perspectives and ethics. Professionalism is a good example.

The table below provides examples of verbs grouped by the three domains.

COGNITIVE DOMAIN

Level	Cluster	Action verbs
Low	KNOWLEDGE	cite, count, define, draw, list, match, name, recall, recite, record, recognize, record, relate, repeat, select from a list, underline
	COMPREHENSION	Add, compute, convert, describe, discuss, distinguish, explain, express, generalize, identify, locate, paraphrase, predict, report, restate, review, summarize, tell in own words, translate
	APPLICATION	arrange, acquire, adapt, apply, calculate, demonstrate, employ, examine, extrapolate, illustrate, interpret, modify, operate, practice, relate, schedule, sketch, solve, use
	ANALYSIS	Analyze, appraise, calculate, categorize, compare, contrast, debate, diagram, differentiate, estimate, examine, infer, inventory, order, question, separate, subdivide, test
	SYNTHESIS	Arrange, assemble, collect, combine, compose, construct,

		create, design, formulate, generate, integrate, manage, organize, plan, prescribe, propose, rearrange, revise
High	EVALUATION	Appraise, assess, choose, compare, conclude, criticize, discriminate, estimate, evaluate, grade, judge, measure, rank, rate, revise, score, select, support

BEHAVIORAL (PSYCOMOTOR, SKILLS) DOMAIN

Level	Cluster	Action Verbs
low	PERCEPTION	distinguish, hear, see, smell, taste, touch
	SET	access, adjust, approach, locate, place, position, prepare
	GUIDED RESPONSE	copy, determine, discover, duplicate, imitate, inject, repeat
	MECHANISM	activate, adjust, build, demonstrate, illustrate, indicate, load, manipulate, mix, set up
	COMPLEX OVERT RESPONSE	Calibrate, coordinate, execute, fix, maintain, mend, operate
	ADAPTATION	Adapt, build, change, develop, supply
high	ORINATION	Construct, create, design, produce

AFFECTIVE (ATTITUDES) DOMAIN

Level	Cluster	Action Verb
low	RECEIVING	accept, acknowledge, attend, be aware of, develop, pay attention to, realize, receive, recognize, reply
	RESPONDING	accept responsibility for, acquaint self, behave, complete, comply, cooperate, discuss, examine, foster, obey, observe, respond
	VALUING	accept, balance, believe, defend, devote, identify with, influence, prefer, promote, pursue, seek, show interest, value
	ORGANIZING	Adapt, Adhere to, codify, discriminate, display, favor, judge, order, organize, prioritize, relate, systemize, weigh
high	CHARACTERIZATION	Advocate, develop lifestyle, internalize, justify, verify

Program Outcome Considerations

Program level outcomes describe the knowledge, skills, and attitudes students gain in completing an educational program. Under the leadership of division chairs and/or program coordinators, program faculty establish the program level outcomes. Input from advisory board or employers can help inform program outcomes. If the program has external accreditation, the program outcomes may be defined by the accrediting body. These outcomes form the basis

for program level assessment of student learning, an important element of program review.

To begin identifying outcomes on the program level, program faculty should consider the promises, stated or implied, made to students and the public in the school's mission statement, mission objectives, degrees and programs offered. These promises reveal the intended educational outcomes for students. The catalog, promotional brochures, and the criteria and proposal documents (presented to the state when the program was approved) are good places to begin looking for these "promises."

Here are some questions to consider when writing program level outcomes:

1. Do the outcomes reflect the goals of preparation for career or transfer?
2. Do the outcomes reflect what the college catalog and other publications state about the program?
3. Who are the parties that will accept our graduates/ curriculum and do the outcomes reflect their expectations for the graduates?
4. Do the outcomes reflect what the community expects from graduates of this degree?
5. Do the outcomes reflect what the state expects from graduates with this degree?
6. Do the outcomes align with any accrediting body or professional organization expectations for what graduates should know, think, and do?

Course Outcome Considerations

Course outcomes appear in the standard course outline and in class syllabi. Faculty teaching the course, advised by the appropriate academic administrator, write course outcomes. Here are questions or areas to consider when writing course outcomes. See the [Standard Course Outline](#) section for more background on this document.

Below is a list of questions to ask when developing course outcomes.

1. If you are writing outcomes for an Arkansas Course Transfer System (ACTS) course, could the general reader see that the outcomes reflect what ACTS requires? (Note: ACTS outcomes or descriptions are NOT required to be listed *verbatim* in an SCO. Our courses can have topics or outcomes beyond ACTS to meet needs of other stakeholders. Some ACTS outcomes phrasing do not reflect good practice.)
2. Do the outcomes align with program objectives and outcomes?
3. Does the accrediting body prescribe the outcomes for this course?
4. Have professional organizations developed outcomes that can inform what you choose?
5. Do the outcomes reflect the course description?
6. Do the course topics or required learning activities suggest an outcome that supports one of the general education outcomes, listed below?
 - Students develop higher order thinking skills.
 - Students gain greater awareness of cultural perspectives.
 - Students can write clear, coherent, well-organized documents, which are substantially free of errors.
 - Students can read selections at the college level.

- Students develop effective oral communication skills.
- Students can achieve mathematical literacy.
- Students will demonstrate technological fluency.
- Students demonstrate information literacy.

(For more information, see the [General Education Outcome Assessment](#))

7. Do the course topics or required learning activities suggest an outcome that supports one of the special outcomes, listed below?
 - Teamwork and leadership skills
 - Community service and civic engagement
 - Applied learning (including creative work, scholarship and discovery)
8. If the course is a prerequisite, is an outcome needed to reflect the needs of the subsequent course?
9. If the course is intended to transfer to a particular institution or program, is an outcome needed to meet that requirement?
10. If the course is included in a technical credential, is an outcome needed to support the appropriate program outcomes?
11. If within a transfer-oriented degree distribution area, do the outcomes reflect the goals of the domain? (see the table below)

Art & Humanities	Social & Behavioral Science	Natural Science
<p>Courses in this domain explore the aesthetic qualities that define us as humans and concepts such as beauty, love, hate, truth, hope, and despair. These concepts seem unique to the human experience. Students will understand that the arts are essential to what it means to be human. Exploration provides students with a deeper and richer perception of themselves and the world around them. Students will recognize our interconnectedness and broaden their cultural perspective. Arts & Humanities studies also</p>	<p>Courses in this domain look at the world from the perspective of human actions and interactions. This perspective can be studied through examining either current issues or past events. Social and behavioral science studies provide students with insight into the complexities of human behavior and culture. Students will learn the methods of inquiry and critical thinking skills that have been used to answer broad-based questions in this domain. These courses will also increase students' awareness of cultural differences and openness to new ideas.</p>	<p>Studying the natural sciences will acquaint students with the fundamental principles of the natural world and processes used in science to uncover these principles. Students will gain core scientific knowledge appropriate to freshmen and sophomore years and necessary for success in upper division courses. Science is more than a body of knowledge; it is also a process. Students will gain understanding of the scientific method and principles of inquiry. Knowledge and the process both have relevance to everyday life. Students will recognize the implications of science in making choices on</p>

serve to liberate and awaken one's own creativity.		personal, community and global issues.
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Outcomes as an instructional technique

The articulation of learning outcomes can become a technique for designing a course. The learning outcomes on the Standard Course Outlines are typically few and very general. An instructor could choose to develop more very specific outcomes (sometimes called learning objectives) that support the course outcome. This would involve writing outcomes for each chapter or unit exam. Each learning activity has an unspoken goal for student learning. Communicating that learning objective to students can help student understand how to focus their study.

Designing a course oriented around the intended learning outcomes is called “backward design”. For much more information on backward design, please see the professional development models for learner-centered instruction provided for all NWACC faculty at: <https://nwacc.instructure.com/courses/1289788/modules>

The modules here provide good practice on much more than the assessment cycle. The modules most relevant to developing class level learning outcomes are:

Module 1: Preparation

- Articulates clear learning goals/outcomes

Module 3: Instruction

- Makes Learning Outcomes Clear to Learners

How to Identify Assessment Measures

Assessments measures are instruments that determine student performance on learning outcomes. In developing assessment measures for formal assessment processes, faculty should consult with their assessment coordinator. Formal assessment measures (those used by all faculty who teach a particular course) should be listed in the standard course outline. When identifying a measure, a performance target criteria should be included also.

What are the problems with using course grades for assessment?

Assigning scores to student performance is what faculty do. It is called grading. Can grades be used to report student performance? The answer is yes and no.

The table below illustrates the relationship between specific outcomes and course grades for students. In this example, the instructor identified the following five outcomes to be used to determine student grades.

- I. Recall vocabulary for the discipline
- II. Describe the major principles of the discipline
- III. Apply the concepts of the discipline to solve problems
- IV. Use critical-thinking skills to evaluate an article from the discipline
- V. Write a research document with at least five references

Students could earn a maximum of 10 points for each outcome.

Outcome	Students:						Outcome
	Fred	Barney	Wilma	Betty	Mickey	Minnie	Average
I	7	10	9	10	10	8	9.0
II	7	7	7	9	10	2	7.0
III	10	8	10	10	8	4	8.3
IV	7	10	5	9	8	4	7.2
V	5	7	4	8	4	2	5.0
Average	7.2	8.4	7	9.2	8	4	
Grade	C	B	C	A	B	F	

Comparison of grades to outcome assessment

Class grades (the columns) give individual student performance over a number of learning outcomes. Note that three students passed the course (Fred, Wilma and Mickey) without mastering all of the intended outcomes. Assessment of student learning is concerned with student achievement of a particular outcome (the rows). In looking at the rows, the students as a group did well at mastering Outcome I but did not perform well on Outcome V.

If a common assignment (row) is given across sections (different instructors) and the grading is somewhat consistent, then this would provide helpful learning assessment information.

The outcome determines the measure

Identifying measures should only occur after the learning outcome has been drafted. Many faculty find that thinking through how to measure the outcome provides more insight into the learning intent. While having the measure dictate the outcomes is not appropriate, it is good practice to revisit and refine the outcome during measure development as needed. The refining the outcome in light of the measure can improve clarity for faculty and students.

The WEAVE system does have measure selection list that can help identify the variety of measures that can be selected. This list is found when entering the measure in the academic assessment template,

Guidelines and considerations in choosing or creating assessment measures:

- Keep the learning outcomes as the focus
- Review the assessment options already in use
- Consider the resources available
- Consider specific requirements placed upon the program
- No single measure is perfect- consider a variety of measurement tools if possible and/or when appropriate.
- Determine when the measures will be given, who will take it, who will administer it, and who will evaluate it. Is the measure worth the time or expense?
- Decide if all students should be assessed or if a sample is sufficient.
- Identify what steps can be taken to motivate students to do their best. Should the measure be linked to grades?
- Decide if the measure is valid by ensuring the test content matches the outcomes to be measured
- Ascertain the reliability of the measure. How consistent are scores over time and across alternate forms?
- Is the measure appropriate to population?
- Is normative data available?
- Explore the need to ask for demographic information with the instrument.
- Keep in mind the focus of assessment is the aggregate accomplishments by students of intended educational outcomes. The accomplishment of these outcomes reflects on the effectiveness of an educational program- not an individual student or instructor.

Assessment measures can be quantitative.

Traditional examinations are examples of quantitative instruments. Cognitive outcomes are most often measured through testing. Tests can be standardized or locally developed.

Standardized tests are:

- Relatively easy to administer
- Minimal time investment
- Objective

- Nationally normed
- Statistically valid and reliable
- Not always reflective of a course or program's specific outcomes
- Relatively expensive to purchase and score
- Not always compared to an appropriate national normative group, and
- Lacking feedback specific enough to make changes.

Locally developed tests are

- Reflective of specific intended outcomes
- More available to detailed analysis
- Flexible in format
- Lacking in external credibility or comparative data, and
- Time and effort intensive locally for developing, analyzing, and maintaining.

Assessment measures can be qualitative.

Qualitative assessment activities include portfolio reviews, public performances, oral examinations, self-evaluations, or service projects. While judgments can be made as if the student successfully accomplished what was intended, the results are not easily assigned a numerical value. Complex skills or affective outcomes can be assessed with qualitative measures.

Limitations to qualitative assessment include:

- Identification of specific criteria for assessment and standards for success is difficult.
- Objectivity of the evaluators
- Consistency of judgments

Norming of assessment scoring can overcome some of the limitations of qualitative assessment. Norming involves a group of raters scoring of student work in relation to criteria in a rubric or assignment standard. Participants discuss the student work to come to agreement of the level of performance that should be assigned to each level of the criteria (what constitutes excellent, adequate, and inadequate). Participating in a norming session allows faculty to come attain agreement on how standards of performance are applied. Norming by multiple raters to evaluate student work ensures the reliability and validity of the assessment data.

Measuring Affective Outcomes

Affective measures identify changes in feelings, values, ethics, or morals associated with a discipline. To identify this change, student attitudes should be identified coming in to serve as a benchmark. Attitudinal surveys then can be given to graduates, exiting students or alumni. Here some examples of measure for affective outcomes:

- Pre and post activity disposition surveys
- Reflective or self-evaluations of attitudes or perspectives
- Demeanor observations in internships or clinical settings

- Responses to ethical scenarios
- Adherence to professionalism standards during class activities
- Participation in professional development plans

Portfolios

Portfolios can be used in assessment particularly for collection of work over time that demonstrates improvement. Complex skills (like writing or critical thinking) or affective outcomes might utilize portfolio assessment. Portfolios are easy to collect but difficult and time consuming to analyze to produce meaningful feedback. For portfolios to be used effectively, they should:

- Contain specific items (artifacts)
- Have evaluation protocols to help establish level of “quality” of work
- Be evaluated by faculty trained in the scoring rubric to help insure consistent evaluation, and
- Be closely linked with goals and objectives for student learning

Project-based Learning

Project or product based learning involves evaluation of the result of student work. Projects are complex and can encompass multiple learning outcomes. Evaluation of work can involve self, peers, faculty, customers/ clients, public or professionals. An end of semester presentation, report, or debriefing can serve as an outcome assessment opportunity. Evaluation can come from an individual or panel. Rubrics are particularly useful in judging projects and products.

External Sources

Using external evaluators or evaluations is legitimate. The opinion of those practicing in the field is particularly useful to those preparing for a profession. Some external groups also create assessment instruments. Professional organizations develop exams testing knowledge considered standard for the discipline. Some groups offer exams with recognized credentials that may be earned in conjunction with the class but awarded by those outside the college.

Rubrics

Rubrics are a wonderful tool for assessing student learning. Rubrics define the outcome, identify traits or elements of the outcome, and describe standards or examples of expected performance. Time and effort are required to develop a good rubric, but the benefits are worth it. Rubrics help faculty be consistent in scoring complex or subjective student products. Rubrics help students understand what is expected, which usually results in better products. An online search can provide many resources for learning to create rubrics. There are many rubrics already created for particular outcomes. Using or modifying a rubric created by a recognized academic group can help establish the expectations for NWACC students that are similar to other programs nationally. Using created rubrics might help ensure validity and reliability. Using pre-made rubrics can also save time. Here is a recommended introduction to rubrics: <http://ii.library.jhu.edu/2014/11/21/creating-rubrics/>

The assessment committee has collected some rubrics faculty can adopt or adapt related to assessing general education outcomes and important but elective outcomes. Please see the [Sample Rubrics](#).

Using a common rubric for different assignments

Another possibility is using a common rubric on different assignments given by different instructors. The benefit of this approach is that faculty do not need to agree to use identical assignments. The downside is faculty must agree on the rubric and agree to give assignments addressing common outcomes to an equivalent level of rigor. Norming the grading and assignments is helpful here.

An example for the Information literacy Outcome:

To be able to use the rubric, the assignment must require students to:

- locate specified information on a particular topic
- use at least 3 different sources
- evaluate the suitability of resources, and
- cite their information in a scholarly format or style.

“One size fits all” Information Literacy Outcome rubric

Info Literacy outcome	Full credit	Majority credit	Half credit	Minimal credit	No credit
Students can locate the information requested	All information is provided	Not all, but more than half of the information is provided	About half of the information is provided	Less than half of the information is provided	None of the information is provided
Students can use the number of different sources requested	The full number are used and perhaps more	Not all but more than half the number are used	About half of the number are used	Less than half of the number are used	No sources are used
Student use sources that are appropriate	All are appropriate	Not all but more than half are appropriate	About half are appropriate	Less than half are appropriate	None are appropriate
Student documents references in the format requested	All are cited properly	Not all but more than half are cited properly	About half are cited properly	Less than half are cited properly	None are cited properly

Setting Performance Criteria

The performance criteria defines what level of performance on the assessment measure is acceptable and what percent of students should perform at the acceptable level. Setting these benchmarks is necessary for making judgements about success. Using an externally standardized measure has the benefit of comparing student performance to students at other institutions. For measures developed internally, patterns of performance over time may be needed to set realistic criteria.

Performance criteria have two aspects. The first is the level of performance deemed acceptable or proficient. Second, given the population of students and performance on a particular day, how many should score proficiently. With internal measures, time may be needed to settle on that expectation. While faculty strive for 100% of the students scoring 100%, this is unrealistic or perhaps indicates an expectation that is too low. The rigor of the outcome and type of measure has will influence the criteria.

The Standard Course Outline Assessment Elements

Overview

The standard course outline (SCO) is the college's public statement describing the course. This document is developed by faculty experts when a course is initially approved and may be modified from time to time, following policy and procedural guidelines (see college policy 3023- Developing and Revising Credit Courses). Once approved, the course is placed in the college information system and catalog, then the full outline is posted on the college web page. It is intended as source of information for these audiences:

- Academic administrators share the SCO with new faculty. New faculty use the SCO to design their course and create their unique syllabus.
- Discipline faculty use the SCO to adjust the course based on the assessment process or external factors.
- Assessment committee uses the SCO to map and monitor the learning outcomes across the curriculum.
- Degree program coordinators use the outcomes and topics to show recruits, employers, transfer institutions, or accreditors where students acquire specific knowledge skills and attitudes explicitly stated or implied in their programs.
- Advisors use the outcomes and topics to help students decide to enroll in programs or courses
- Chief Academic Officer uses the SCO to show how courses meet ACTS requirements
- Transfer institutions would review the SCO to determine if the course is equivalent for transfer credit.
- General public (potential students, potential faculty) would use the SCO to better understand our course offerings

A class syllabus is much more detailed and prepared by the instructor for students during a particular semester. Faculty use the SCO as a foundation for their syllabi, but add instructor/semester specific information about required materials, activities, grading, class policies, schedule, etc.

Elements

Here are the elements of the SCO. For a more complete description, see the standard course outline document attached to college policy 3023- Developing and Revising Credit Courses.

- Discipline code & number
- Title
- Description
- Prerequisite

- Credit hours
- Semesters offered
- Contact hours for students & Load hours (compensation for faculty)
- ACTS equivalent
- Grade mode
- Learning outcomes
- General education outcomes supported (optional)
- Standard practices (optional)

Elements relevant to learning assessment

Learning Outcomes

From the perspective of the learning assessment, the learning outcomes are the foundation of the course. The intent of the learning assessment process is to help faculty determine if students are meeting each of the outcomes regardless of the overall grades in the course. The learning outcomes broadly define what students will know (cognitive), think (affective) and do (behavioral) after successfully completing the course. They need to be appropriately written and measurable. They should align with the [NWACC Learning Framework](#) and follow the guidelines established in the college's assessment plan. If an outcome is listed, then faculty will include it in their syllabus, design activities that help students accomplish it, and use an assessment to measure student performance.

Student learning outcomes fall into three categories: course specific, program related, and general education related. Though for a particular course, there may be no outcomes that are program or general education related.

Course Specific. These outcomes are related most directly to the course description. If the course is a prerequisite, it should have outcomes that prepare students for success in the subsequent course.

Program related. If the course is a required part of a degree program, the learning outcomes in the course must align with the educational goals of the program. Consult with the program coordinators to ensure the outcomes reflect the needs of the degree. If the course is part of a liberal arts discipline area of a transfer degree (i. e. natural sciences, social sciences, arts and humanities) there should be outcomes that align with the intent of the discipline. Many courses also support one of the domains of special program outcomes. The course outcomes should be included that show they support these areas.

General Education related. The College has identified a set of learning outcomes for students earning Associate degrees (see below). While specific courses focus on one of these outcomes (such as a math class support mathematical literacy), general education outcomes are typically

taught across the curriculum. A general education related outcome is usually phrased in a manner that makes it relevant to the course content, but it clearly supports the broader general education outcome.

The important point is that course outcomes not only identify the value of the course it self, but supports the learning outcomes of broader academic programs. It may support a degree program that prepares students for a profession or general education or other important, but optional, outcomes pertinent to higher education .The following figure lists the categories of higher-level outcomes that may be reflected or supported by course learning outcomes. See the [NWACC Learning Framework](#) section for more explanation.

General Education Outcomes			
Higher Order Thinking	Cultural Awareness	Technological Fluency	Reading
Math	Information Literacy	Writing	Oral Communication
Important but Optional Outcomes			
Teamwork/Leadership	Community Service/Civic Engagement	Applied Learning/Research	
Knowledge Domain Outcomes			
Arts & Humanities	Social & Behavioral Sciences	Natural Sciences	Business/Technical

General Education Outcomes supported

The College has identified eight general education outcomes for all students earning associate degrees. See more about this in the section on [General Education Outcomes Assessment](#) or the Catalog Statement on general education. The purpose of this section is to help recognize where in the curriculum students are acquiring or practicing the general education outcomes.

This section simply lists the general education outcome(s) that the course content, outcomes, or learning activities aligns with or supports. Some courses will have formal general education related outcomes and assessments; other courses may ask students to practice or build on one of them. This may come in the form of a required learning activity. For example, assigning a research paper might have students practice information literacy or using formulas to solve problems or make predictions helps students achieve mathematical literacy. Some courses do not substantially support the general education outcomes, so this section would be left blank for them.

Standard Practices

This section is also very relevant to learning assessment. A standard practice is a course requirement that has been dictated by the needs of the degree program or formally adopted by a process that conforms to the Academic Freedom Policy. Anything listed in this section would be present in the course regardless of the instructor, semester, or mode of delivery.

Standard practices are optional. What appears in this section will vary significantly by discipline and may be absent for many courses. Standard practices are only needed when it is important to have uniformity in student experience in some aspect of the course. Items listed in the standard practices must be included in the course regardless of format or faculty. Below are categories and examples of what may be standard practice.

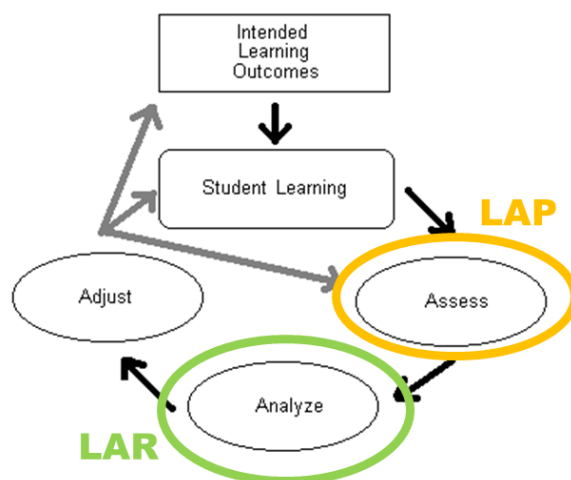
- Topics list (a more detailed list than what is included in the course description that defines the scope of the course)
- Learning activities (required assignments, field trips, labs, performances, etc.)
- Assessments (required common exams, quizzes, or other graded assignments given in all sections. If a course has a formal process for assessing student performance of a learning outcome, then it needs to be listed and briefly described here).
- Grading guidelines that applies to all sections (grading scale, amount of proctored work, limitations for retakes, etc.)

How much detail should be in the standard practices? Consider the audiences. The SCO is used to help new faculty understand expectations for students. Consulting with the division's assessment coordinator can help the course expert determine what should be included as a standard practice. Use the Academic Freedom Policy as a guide in the process of identifying what is required as standard practices and what is at an individual instructor's discretion. See Policy 3022 on Academic Freedom.

Assessment coordinators assist faculty in developing strong outcomes, appropriate formal assessment measures, and processes. In fact, Assessment Coordinator's consultation about the assessment elements of the SCO is necessary in the curriculum approval process (see Policy 3023 Developing and Revising Credit Courses and related procedures).

Learning Assessment Plan and Report Guidelines

Once the outcome has been drafted and the measure identified, then the assessment plan can be created. The *Learning Assessment Plan (LAP)* outlines the assessment process, from administering the measure to disseminating reports to relevant stakeholders. In the assessment diagram below, the plan describes what has to be done to do the *assess* step—collect the data that measures student learning. The plan should also identify who will do the analysis, create the report, and disseminate it to which stakeholders and when each step will occur.



The LAP forms the foundation for producing a *Learning Assessment Report (LAR)*. The LAR documents that the LAP has been implemented. In the assessment cycle, the LAR also represents the *analyze* step and identifies the intentions to *adjust* outcomes, assessment or student learning. It is crucial that the college can produce reports as part accountability to stakeholders and to guide making adjustments. This section of the handbook provides guidance on creating both documents specifically for measures administered in courses.

The college is using WEAVE software to archive and retrieve both LAPs and LARs. WEAVE users should seek training from the [Office of Accreditation and Assessment](#). College units outside of instruction will be archiving their assessment plans and reports in WEAVE also. For course related outcomes, please use the WEAVE *academic template*. Other templates are in WEAVE, but are for other units and purposes. This section will relate the generic process of creating plans and reports to the WEAVE academic template structure and terminology. These guidelines will address key elements in the order that they appear in the WEAVE academic template.

Learning Assessment Plan (LAP)

As the key elements of a LAP are described below, please note that **WEAVE field names are in bold and red**. Since courses are related to academic degrees, they will be designated in WEAVE as a degree type plan or simply **degree plan**. To create a course-related LAP using WEAVE, be sure to choose the **academic template**.

The *time frame* the LAP covers

Part of the planning process involves the timing for the assessment process. Will data collection take place every semester, year, or every other year? Will the data be combined over multiple collecting dates before reporting? In WEAVE, the **reporting period** refers to the academic year the data was collected. Other timing issues should be included in the WEAVE **Action Plan** section, discussed later on.

Who will be assessed

Identify the students who will be assessed by using the name of the course where the measure is given. For consistency and clarity in WEAVE, please use the prefix, course number and title (example: BIOL 1003 Basic Biology). In WEAVE, the course name will become the **Project** title.

Identify the *broader institutional programs* the learning outcome supports

Identifying how the course student learning outcome being assessed supports the larger college mission is important in determining institutional effectiveness. One of the benefits of using WEAVE is its ability to connect many different sources of evidence to gauge the quality of different types of educational opportunities the college offers. It is good practice to specify which program the outcome being assessed primarily supports. In WEAVE, a broader educational program is called a **goal**. Choose the goal(s) the learning outcomes being assessed best supports. Currently, this field is open to provide lots of options for specific needs. For more background on how course learning outcomes in a course support broader institutional goals, please see the section on the [NWACC Educational Framework](#). Refer on the WEAVE training materials for more guidance on using this field.

The *learning outcome* being assessed

The learning outcome is the heart of the process and must be stated clearly in the LAP. In WEAVE, it is simply called **outcome**. This is the outcome listed in the standard course outline and syllabus for all instructors teaching the course.

Identify *specific program* or college initiative the outcome being assessed supports

To be able to use the student performance data from a course for program review, accreditation reporting, general education monitoring, or other college effectiveness evaluation, it needs to be connected to a specific program(s). In WEAVE, this is the **Supported Initiatives**. The course learning outcome being assessed may support a particular general education outcome, special programs outcome, and a degree / certificate program outcome. Please refer to the WEAVE training materials for guidance on what to enter into this section of the template.

Who is going to do *what, when*

The core of the LAP describes the tasks related to collecting, analyzing and making adjustments to the student performance data. In WEAVE, this is the **Action Plan** section. The action plan can be written as a narrative or list of steps. It can be brief or very detailed. It is recommended to write this section in such a way that someone new could take over the duties of the person responsible.

As you write this section, consider these questions:

- Who will administer the measure & when?
- Who will evaluate/grade the measure & when?
- How will performance data be collected & compiled across sections & when?
- Who will summarize and present the data to faculty & when?
- Who will write the final Learning Assessment Report with conclusions and recommendations/ adjustments?
- To whom will the report be submitted & when?

This section should also specify the data to be collected:

- Number of sections offered in the assessment period
- Number of sections assessed
- Number students enrolled (or number invited to participate)
- Number of students assessed (number participating of those invited)
- Number scoring at the proficient level

Please identify all data by format

If instruction is offered in different formats, it is important that the college makes an effort to ensure that all formats are equivalent. So data collected may need to be identified as Face-to-face, Online, Remote Synchronous, Hybrid, and Concurrent (specifically those taught on high school campus).

Describe the data analysis needed

The person who is collecting/compiling the data for report often needs to do some analysis with the data- totals, percent, averages, trends, gains or losses, etc. It is helpful in the assessment plan to specify the types of data analysis, charts and graphs are necessary for stakeholders to easily understand and respond to the results.

The assessment measure

In WEAVE, this field is called the **measure**. A name is sufficient but include a brief description, if helpful to the reader. In WEAVE, there is a drop down to identify the type of source of evidence.

The performance criteria

In this section, please describe two types of criteria. The first is the level of performance acceptable as proficient. WEAVE calls this the **target**. Second, indicate how many students in the cohort should score proficiently to be acceptable to faculty. In WEAVE, put the acceptable number of students scoring proficient in the description section.

Measure's level of rigor or development phase

In our efforts to assess student growth, we can look at the sophistication or rigor of the measures. Does the learning activity measure student knowledge and ability that faculty

expect (ideally) at the end of 60 hours of course work, in their first semester, or something in between? Classify the rigor of the assignment as one of these three:

1. Beginning
2. Developing
3. Achieving/Practicing/ Excelling

In WEAVE, this should be included in the description section.

Learning Assessment Report (LAR)

The LAR documents the analysis and adjustment elements of learning assessment reports and needs to provide context for the reader. A LAR should include much of the same information included in LAP. At a minimum, a report needs to have this “context” information:

- Time frame
- Course assessed
- Outcome
- Measure and performance criteria

When using WEAVE, the LAP (retrieved as a **project**) is used as a template for reporting. This means all the identifying information in the LAP is automatically linked to the data.

Results & Analysis

This is where the assessment data about student performance is reported. This section can include the raw data, but it is recommended that the data be presented in a meaningful way. Analysis implies manipulating the raw data and presenting it in summary tables, charts and graphs. Ideally the types of tables, charts and graphs are defined in the LAP. If not, remember the audience, which is typically the faculty who teach the course. Present the data to enable faculty to make their conclusions and recommendations). Their findings are then recorded in the next section. In WEAVE, the Results and Analysis information is recorded in the section called **Assessment Results**. It can either be entered directly into the space provided or attached as a separate document.

Conclusions & Recommendations

This section represents whole point of doing all the data collection and analysis- to confirm and improve learning. In This section addresses these questions:

1. Did an acceptable number of students demonstrate proficiency?
2. What were the strengths in student performance and/or the process?
3. What are the opportunities for improvement in student performance and/or the process?
4. Is there a need to refine or reconsider the learning outcome(s)?
5. If a change was implemented in this cycle, did the change improve student performance or the assessment process?
6. What adjustments will be pursued in the next cycle and who will implement them?

Question 1 must be answered clearly. In WEAVE this should be entered in the **status** field. The rest of the findings should be recorded in the WEAVE **review, discussion and sharing** section.

They can either be entered entirely, or enter only highlights and include the details as an attachment.

Dissemination

The LAP and LAR need to be shared beyond the faculty who create them. The LAP identifies who should receive these documents and when. This information can be shared as separate document, but it is recommended that WEAVE report generating capability be used to disseminate the LAR.

Glossary of Planning & Assessment Terms

*Compiled from the following sources: James & Karen Nichols; Chapman University, Orange, CA; Coastal Carolina University, Conway, SC; Lehman College, Bronx, NY; Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL
Modifications made to match some terms defined in this handbook*

Accreditation	The designation that an institution functions appropriately in higher education with respect to its purpose and resources. (Regional accrediting agencies accredit an entire institution. Professional accrediting agencies accredit professional programs.)
Administrative/Educational Support Unit	Any department of the institution that is not instruction but supports the educational and operational functions of the institution. (Also known as Non-Instructional or AES Unit.)
Assessment	The systematic collection, review, and use of information about a process undertaken for the purpose of improving the process.
Assessment Coordinator	The administrative position responsible for coordinating assessment activities for the College.
Assessment of Student Learning	A process of measuring what students know (cognitive), think (attitudinal) and can do (behavioral) to see if it matches what faculty intended for them to know, think and do in order to confirm and improve student learning.
Assessment Plan	The initial assessment document that describes the assessment strategy for a department or unit of the institution.
Assessment Report	The summary assessment document that records the decisions, actions or recommendations of a department or unit of the institution based upon the results or findings of that unit's assessment activity.

Benchmark	A description or example of institutional performance that serves as a standard of comparison for evaluation or judging quality.
Characteristics of Excellence	The MSCHE document that describes fourteen standards of institutional quality expected from accredited educational institutions and the minimum requirements for each known as “fundamental elements”.
Competency	(1) Level at which performance is acceptable. (2) A group of characteristics, native or acquired, which indicate an individual's ability to acquire skills in a given area.
Confirmative Assessment	Assessment normally performed after the summative assessment has been complete for some time, and its purpose is to confirm that the instruction is still effective weeks, months, and even years later.
Criterion-referenced Assessment	Criterion-referenced tests compare a person’s knowledge or skills against a predetermined standard, learning goal, performance level, or other criterion. With criterion-referenced tests, each person’s performance is compared directly to the standard, without considering how other students perform on the test
Culture of Assessment	An environment in which continuous improvement through the systematic collection, review, and use of information is expected and valued.
Culture of Evidence	(1) An environment in which important decisions are based on the study of relevant data. (2) An environment in which the use of research and/or assessment results to guide policy and decisions is expected and valued.
Diagnostic Assessment	A form of pre- or post-assessment where teachers can evaluate students’ strengths, weaknesses, knowledge and skills at the beginning or end of their instruction.

Direct Measures of Learning	Students (learners) are asked to demonstrate knowledge and skills they have learned rather than reflect upon it.
Educational Programs	Educational endeavors offered to students that fulfil the college mission and vision. Curricular programs- courses whose successful completion earn a credential. Co-curricular programs- courses offered for purposes other than a degree or other recognized student activities that complement the college educational mission and help students acquire specific learning outcomes.
Educational Unit	Any department of the institution that is responsible for the educational functions of the institution. (Also known as Instructional Unit.)
Embedded Assessment	A means of gathering information about student learning that is built into and a natural part of the teaching learning process.
Evaluation	(1) When used for most educational settings, evaluation means to measure, compare, and judge the quality of student work, schools, or specific educational programs. (2) A value judgment about the results of assessment data. For example, evaluation of student learning requires that educators compare student performance to a standard to determine how the student measures up. Depending on the result, decisions are made regarding whether and how to improve student performance.
External Examiner	Using an expert in the field from outside your program, usually from a similar program at another institution to conduct, evaluate, or supplement assessment of your students. Information can be obtained from external evaluators using many methods including surveys, interviews, etc.
Focus groups	Typically conducted with 7-12 individuals who share certain characteristics that are related to a particular topic, area or assessment question. Group discussions are conducted by a trained

	<p>moderator with participants to identify trends/patterns in perceptions.</p>
Formative Assessment	<p>The process of gathering and evaluating information about student learning during the progression of a course or program and used repeatedly to improve the learning of those students.</p>
Goals	<p>Goals describe the purpose (answers the question “why”) for what your unit does or the services that your unit provides. They are used to express intended results in general terms. The term goals are used to describe broad learning concepts.</p>
Higher Learning Commission (HLC)	<p>The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) is an independent corporation that was founded in 1895 as one of six regional accreditors in the United States. HLC accredits degree-granting post-secondary educational institutions in the United States. HLC is as an institutional accreditor, accrediting the institution as a whole. <i>NWACC is accredited by HLC.</i></p>
Indirect Measures of Learning	<p>Students (learners) are asked to reflect on their learning rather than to demonstrate it.</p>
Institutional Effectiveness	<p>The documented process of measuring how well an institution is achieving its mission and addressing its strategic plan for the purpose of continuous improvement of <i>student learning, student development, and administrative unit operations.</i></p>
Interviews	<p>Conversations or direct questioning with an individual or group of people.</p>
Ipsative Assessment	<p>Assessment that measures or tracks the progress of the individual by comparing their performance against their own previous performances. The “personal best” performance is established as the standard against which the outcome is judged. (Also known as Self-referenced Assessment.)</p>

Key Performance Indicators (KPI)	Quantitative data which measures progress (or lack thereof) towards achieving a strategic goal
Measurements	Design of strategies, techniques and instruments for collecting feedback data that evidence the extent to which students demonstrate the desired behaviors (learning)
Methods of Assessment	Techniques or instruments used in assessment.
Mission	Defines the fundamental purpose of an organization or an enterprise, succinctly describing why it exists and what it does to achieve its Vision.
Norm-referenced Assessment	Norm-referenced measures compare a person's knowledge or skills to the knowledge or skills of a norm group of peers.
Objectives	Objectives identify the measurable activity being undertaken to achieve a goal and are used to express intended results in precise terms. Further, objectives are more specific as to what needs to be assessed and thus are a more accurate guide in selecting appropriate assessment tools.
Outcomes	The learning results—the end results—the knowledge, skills, attitudes and habits of mind that students <i>have or have not</i> taken with them as a result of the students' experience in the course(s) or program.
Portfolios	Collections of multiple student work samples usually compiled over time and rated using rubrics.
Qualitative Methods of Assessment	Methods that rely on descriptions or perceptions rather than numbers. Quantitative Methods of Assessment Methods that rely on numerical scores or ratings.
Rubric	A set of categories that define and describe the important components of the work being completed, critiqued, and assessed. Each category contains a gradation of levels of completion or competence with a score assigned to each level

and a clear description of what criteria need to be met to attain the score at each level.

Self-referenced Assessment

Assessment that measures or tracks the progress of the individual by comparing their performance against their own previous performances. The “personal best” performance is established as the standard against which the outcome is judged. (Also known as Ipsative Assessment.)

S.M.A.R.T. Objectives

Written objectives that are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and timely.

Strategic Planning

A disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it.

Summative Assessment

The gathering of information at the conclusion of a course, program, or undergraduate career to improve learning or to meet accountability demands. When used for improvement, summative assessment results impact the next cohort of students taking the course or program.

Surveys

Inquiries commonly used with open-ended and closed-ended questions. Closed ended questions require respondents to answer the question from a provided list of responses. Typically, the list is a progressive scale ranging from low to high, or strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Task

A piece of work to be done or undertaken; usually done or assigned as part of one’s duties. Related words include function, operation.

Unit

An individual, group, department or division of the institution given responsibility for the implementation of institutional effectiveness (ie. planning and assessment).

Vision

Defines the way an organization or enterprise will look in the future. Vision is a long-term view, sometimes describing what the organization wishes to be in the future.

Sample Rubrics

The following rubrics are included as resources for faculty as options are not intended to be exclusive recommendations.

Rubrics available:

[Essay Grading Rubric](#)

[Grading Rubric for Written Assignments](#)

[Information Literacy Rubric-1](#)

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Essay Grading Rubric

	Criteria	Excellent	Adequate	Needs Work
Organization	Title, Introduction, Conclusion	Title includes both subject and a hint about the thesis or point of view; engaging introduction that prepares the reader accurately for the body paragraphs; thought-provoking or interesting conclusion that ties everything back together and takes the thesis further	Most but not all of the qualities listed under "Excellent" - there may be roughness or confusion in the introduction or conclusion	No title; introduction and/or conclusion seem to have little to do with the body of the essay
	Thesis/Focus	Excels by responding to the assignment with a clear argumentative thesis in the first paragraph that continues to be the focus of the paper	Has a clearly stated argumentative thesis that the paper basically focuses on.	Thesis is implied or absent, or is stated, but the paper doesn't connect back to it
	Organization	one main idea per paragraph, good use of transitions, clear topic sentences, smooth connections between paragraphs, if an order is set in the introduction, it is followed	mostly one idea or point per paragraph, some transitions, mostly clear topic sentences, okay connections between paragraphs	many ideas per paragraph, missing topic sentences, abrupt transition, and/or missing or rough connections between paragraphs
Development	Development: Support	Uses specific, concrete, relevant details, examples, evidence and numerous references to source material to substantiate and explain thesis	uses support, but it may be insufficient in some areas, or connections between the evidence and ideas might not be clear	lacks sufficient details and examples to support ideas; has insufficient or irrelevant evidence
	Development: Analysis	explains the connections between evidence and main ideas thoughtfully and thoroughly, makes connections explicit, discusses implications, relevance or significance.	mostly explains connections between ideas and evidence, although explanation may be incomplete, or may be missing in some paragraphs. Little discussion of facts and info	does not clearly explain connections between evidence and ideas; does not elaborate beyond basic or obvious conclusions, and/or analysis is too general or brief to be convincing
Mechanics	Sentence Craft & Style	Demonstrates excellent use of language; precisely chosen words, complex and varied sentence structure; appropriate tone and style	adequate use of language, although some words may be vague or imprecise; sentence structure may be simple or awkward in spots, mostly appropriate tone and style	vague and abstract language; words misused; sentences may be monotonous or choppy tone or style may be inappropriate for the assignment
	Mechanics: (Grammar and spelling)	is almost entirely free of spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors (one per page or less)	contains a few errors which may distract the reader but not impede meaning (about 2-3 errors per page)	has frequent or extensive errors in diction grammar, punctuation, spelling (more than 4 errors per page)
	Mechanics: MLA	Has smoothly used signal phrases and parenthetical citation in-text; has a citation for every fact or quote; has correctly formatted Works Cited page with few or no errors	mostly cites in-text correctly, but doesn't introduce citations smoothly or uses signal phrases/parenthetical citation inaccurately; Works Cited page has more than a few errors	missing many in-text citations, missing Works Cited page, Works cited page contains only URLs or has other significant omissions or errors

Grading Rubric for Written Assignments

Levels of Assessment

Criteria	Inadequate=D (Below Standard)	Adequate=C (Meets Standard)	Above Average=B (Exceeds Standard)	Exemplary=A (Far Exceeds Standard)
Organization	Writing lacks logical organization. It shows some coherence but ideas lack unity. Serious errors.	Writing is coherent and logically organized. Some points remain misplaced and stray from the topic. Transitions evident but not used throughout essay.	Writing is coherent and logically organized with transitions used between ideas and paragraphs to create coherence. Overall unity of ideas is present.	Writing shows high degree of attention to logic and reasoning of points. Unity clearly leads the reader to the conclusion and stirs thought regarding the topic.
Level of Content	Shows some thinking and reasoning but most ideas are underdeveloped and unoriginal.	Content indicates thinking and reasoning applied with original thought on a few ideas.	Content indicates original thinking and develops ideas with sufficient and firm evidence.	Content indicates synthesis of ideas, in-depth analysis and evidences original thought and support for the topic.
Development	Main points lack detailed development. Ideas are vague with little evidence of critical thinking.	Main points are present with limited detail and development. Some critical thinking is present.	Main points well developed with quality supporting details and quantity. Critical thinking is weaved into points	Main points well developed with high quality and quantity support. Reveals high degree of critical thinking.
Grammar & Mechanics	Spelling, punctuation, and grammatical errors create distraction, making reading difficult; fragments, comma splices, run-ons evident. Errors are frequent.	Most spelling, punctuation, and grammar correct allowing reader to progress though essay. Some errors remain.	Essay has few spelling, punctuation, and grammatical errors allowing reader to follow ideas clearly. Very few fragments or run-ons.	Essay is free of distracting spelling, punctuation, and grammatical errors; absent of fragments, comma splices, and run-ons.
Style	Mostly in elementary form with little or no variety in sentence structure, diction, rhetorical devices or emphasis.	Approaches college level usage of some variety in sentence patterns, diction, and rhetorical devices.	Attains college level style; tone is appropriate and rhetorical devices used to enhance content; sentence variety used effectively.	Shows outstanding style going beyond usual college level; rhetorical devices and tone used effectively; creative use of sentence structure and coordination
Format	Fails to follow format and assignment requirements; incorrect margins, spacing and indentation; neatness of essay needs attention.	Meets format and assignment requirements; generally correct margins, spacing, and indentations; essay is neat but may have some assembly errors.	Meets format and assignment requirements; margins, spacing, and indentations are correct; essay is neat and correctly assembled.	Meets all formal and assignment requirements and evidences attention to detail; all margins, spacing and indentations are correct; essay is neat and correctly assembled with professional look.

More help on getting better grades: <http://home.snu.edu/~hculbert/survive.pdf>

Information Literacy Rubric- Lake Washington Institute of Technology

Definition: The ability to recognize when information is needed, to choose the appropriate tools to locate the required information, and to effectively gather and evaluate the information.

Criteria	Mastering	Achieving	Developing	Beginning
Identify an information need	Demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of what information is needed	Clearly identifies an information need	Identifies an information need, but struggles with articulating it	Develops a general topic and struggles to pinpoint the information need
Formulate a research plan	Creates an organized research plan, including a topic, keywords, and outline of steps to follow with set deadlines for each step	Develops a research plan that includes a topic, key words, and basic steps to follow	Research plan includes a topic and key words	Research plan only includes the topic to be addressed
Select and use tools	Selects and uses tools to locate resources; needs no assistance with how to use the appropriate tools	Selects and uses tools to locate resources; requires minimal assistance on how to use appropriate tools	Has limited strategies for selecting and using tools to locate resources; requires repeated assistance with how to use appropriate tools	Has limited strategies for selecting and using tools to locate resources; requires extensive assistance with how to use appropriate tools
Gather information	Gathers extensive information from a variety of valid and reliable sources including journals, texts, and technology specific to the subject. Clear evidence of search/selection criteria	Gathers information from multiple valid and reliable sources. Evidence of search/selection criteria	Gathers information from sources that are limited to one or two resource types. Some evidence of search/selection criteria	Gathers information from one source; minimal evidence of search/selection criteria
Evaluate and synthesize information	Considers context, data, assumptions, and evidence; eloquently integrates multiple viewpoints; implications are clearly developed. Advanced evidence of selection based on quality or appropriateness	Considers context, data, assumptions, and evidence; integrates multiple viewpoints; implications are developed. Evidence of selection based on quality or appropriateness	Discerns fact from opinion and begins the rough integration of multiple viewpoints; implications are considered but are not clearly developed. Some evidence of selection based on quality or appropriateness	Little evidence of evaluation and identification of implications. Minimal evidence of selection based on quality or appropriateness
Use information responsibly and ethically	Presents a comprehensive list of appropriately cited references used in information gathering	Attempts to cite references and sources appropriately	Cites references and sources, but does not use a citation format	Uses information in assignments without identifying sources
Apply technology, software, and electronic tools to enhance learning	Applies appropriate technologies, software applications, and electronic tools to complete assignments and enhance information sharing with no assistance	Applies appropriate technologies, software applications, and electronic tools to complete assignments and enhance information sharing with minimal assistance	Demonstrates willingness to learn use of technologies, software applications, and electronic tools and requires repeated assistance to complete specific tasks or to use particular features	Demonstrates minimal use of technologies, software applications, and electronic tools and requires extensive assistance to complete specific tasks or to use particular features

Information Literacy Rubric (APPROVED BY APAC and GE ASSESSMENT- Cal-Poly)

CORE COMPETENCY: Information Literacy at or near graduation

GE SLO Find, evaluate, use, and share information effectively and ethically

Institutional Learning Outcome: Locating, assessing, using and communicating quantitative and qualitative and scientific information, among a wide variety of sources, methods and tools.

	Introductory	Developing	Mastery
Find appropriate sources of information for their question.	Accesses information randomly, retrieves information that lacks relevance and quality.	Accesses information using variety of search strategies and some relevant information sources. Demonstrates ability to refine search.	Accesses information using effective, well- designed search strategies and most appropriate information sources
Evaluates information and sources critically	Shows an emerging awareness of present assumptions (sometimes labels assertions as assumptions). Begins to identify some contexts when presenting a position.	Identifies own and others' assumptions and several relevant contexts when presenting a position.	Thoroughly (systematically and methodically) analyzes own and others' assumptions and carefully evaluates the relevance of contexts when presenting a position.
Uses sources ethically, according to established academic standards.	Fails to properly identify sources of information and ideas according to the standards of ethical use of intellectual property. Does not include a functional bibliography and/or in-text citations. Uses source material as indirect quotes without adequate paraphrasing	Properly identifies all sources of information and ideas according to the standards of ethical use – may be minor mistakes. Includes a bibliography or in-text citations which may contain minor formatting errors or omissions. Attempts to paraphrase or summarize Cited material but poorly worded/rephrased.	Properly identifies all sources of information and ideas according to the standards of ethical use and intellectual property. There are no noticeable mistakes. Bibliography and in-text citations are consistent with each other and in proper formatting for the subject area. Effectively paraphrases or summarizes Ideas/information from the cited source materials using original language.
Shares their findings through effective synthesis, analysis and interpretation of the information they have found.	Does not develop insight, or does not include a range of sources and perspectives. Demonstrates little or no synthesis of arguments/ideas: unable to integrate sources with each other or with one's own argument. Misrepresents other positions on the topic, or fails to identify or acknowledge other views.	Develops some insights based on some sources and perspectives. Demonstrates some engagement with sources tending toward summary rather than higher-level synthesis. Represents some other positions, with varying degrees of accuracy – may fail to acknowledge some major perspectives	Develops meaningful insights based upon variety of sources and perspectives. Demonstrates sophisticated level of creative, critical analysis. Accurately represents major/leading positions on the topic.

Scoring Rubric for Oral Presentations- NWACC

Category	Scoring Criteria	Rating		
Topic & Organization	Speaker honors time limit	Needs Improvement	Satisfactory	Excellent
	Acceptable thesis stated in introduction	Needs Improvement	Satisfactory	Excellent
	Conclusion acknowledges thesis	Needs Improvement	Satisfactory	Excellent
	Topic & Organization assessment:	Needs Improvement	Satisfactory	Excellent
Content & Citation	Main points relate to thesis	Needs Improvement	Satisfactory	Excellent
	Main points supported by credible sources	Needs Improvement	Satisfactory	Excellent
	Speaker appropriately cites required number of sources	Needs Improvement	Satisfactory	Excellent
	Content & Citation assessment:	Needs Improvement	Satisfactory	Excellent
Delivery	Minimal use of vocal fillers	Needs Improvement	Satisfactory	Excellent
	Appropriate posture and movement	Needs Improvement	Satisfactory	Excellent
	Extemporaneous delivery with minimal reading and appropriate eye contact	Needs Improvement	Satisfactory	Excellent
	Delivery assessment:	Needs Improvement	Satisfactory	Excellent
OVERALL				
		<i>Needs Improvement</i>	<i>Satisfactory</i>	<i>Excellent</i>
LETTER GRADE OR NUMERICAL SCORE:				