Principles and Practices of Student Learning Assessment

at Loyola University Maryland

Established 2011; Revised 2021; Approved by Academic Senate October 26, 2021

The following is a set of principles and practices to guide the assessment of student learning at Loyola University Maryland. [1] These principles and practices are guided by best practices of student learning assessment and Loyola's Jesuit values, specifically core values of Academic Excellence and the Constant Challenge to Improve.

The principles articulated here will be long-standing but reviewed periodically as necessary. The principles will underpin assessment activities at Loyola within academic departments and for University-wide initiatives, such as assessing learning outcomes related to the Core Curriculum. The practices listed here are not exhaustive of possible best practices. Instead, these practices are meant to help faculty members apply the principles through assessment activities.

Loyola University Maryland is committed to maintaining an ongoing program of student learning assessment and will provide appropriate resources to facilitate and improve the quality of student learning assessment at the University. The following principles guide our work.

Principles

1. **Assessment is a reflective, systematic, and ongoing process.** The purpose of assessment is to improve student learning. This is accomplished by using student learning assessment results to improve academic support for students, program structure, course content, and pedagogy. Program learning outcomes are assessed on a regular basis, with a cycle that allows faculty members to observe and document the impact of continuous improvement on student learning over time.

2. **Faculty members drive assessment.** Faculty members have the primary responsibility to develop, implement, and revise student learning assessment plans and activities. In addition, successful student learning assessment requires faculty members, administrators, staff, and students to collaborate across functional areas of the University.

3. **Assessment is flexible and uses multiple measures with an emphasis on direct evidence.** To assess student learning, faculty members use a variety of methods appropriate to the unique goals, outcomes, and academic content of their disciplines. In addition, faculty members must incorporate direct evidence of student learning into assessment practices for outcomes that are knowledge or skills based. Multiple measures (i.e., evidence and artifacts of student learning) provide a more holistic, comprehensive understanding of student learning achievement, and thus, provide faculty members more meaningful evidence for decision-making about the improvement of programs.

4. **Assessment plans should be inclusive, equitable, and sustainable.** Faculty members will integrate and

---

[1] Established originally in 2011-12 by the Student Learning Assessment Committee, a standing committee of the Academic Senate. Revised in spring 2021 by the Committee on the Assessment of Student Learning, the reconstituted standing committee of the Academic Senate devoted to student learning assessment across the University. This draft includes expectations from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education and best practices shared at the 2020 IUPUI Assessment Institute by Wanda Baker of Council Oak Assessment.

implement equity-minded assessment plans considering the usual constraints of faculty time and departmental resources. Student artifacts should be collected with future data disaggregation in mind to ensure that examinations of inclusive academic excellence and conversations about equity

5. **Assessment will drive decision making in planning and improvement processes.** Faculty members, administrators, staff, and students will use assessment results to drive curricular and pedagogical change or to improve academic support. Decision makers will not use student learning assessment to evaluate individual faculty members or to make comparisons across programs, departments, divisions, or schools. Evaluators will follow equity-minded strategies and will not use the assessment results to compare individual students or groups.

Practices

1. Student learning outcomes should be explicit. They should clearly state what students are expected to know, be able to do, and/or value at the end of a program of study.
   a. Number of learning outcomes: Degree and academic programs should have no fewer than three and no more than seven learning outcomes, with exceptions made to meet requirements of disciplinary accreditation.
   b. Alignment of learning outcomes: Program learning outcomes (PLOs) should align with but not duplicate institution learning outcomes (ILOs). This alignment provides a coherence of the academic programs with Loyola's educational mission.
      i. PLOs of undergraduate programs should align with the institution-level *Undergraduate Learning Aims*, with connections made through the assessable learning outcomes.
      ii. Similarly, PLOs at the graduate level should align with the institution-level *Graduate Learning Goals*.
   c. Expectations of Student Achievement: Programs should specify the expected level of proficiency for each of the program learning outcomes so that assessment of student learning may demonstrate whether students accomplish educational goals consistent with their programs of study.
      i. The expected level of proficiency is typically indicated by the verb in the program learning outcome statement.
      ii. The use of the revised Bloom's Taxonomy is one way to develop clear expectations in learning outcomes statements.
      iii. The University provides Guiding Questions for the development or refinement of program learning outcomes.
   d. Mapping the Outcomes: Degree programs should produce a curricular map to demonstrate educational experiences are relevant to and interrelated with the program learning outcomes and to indicate where and at what level these learning outcomes are embedded within individual courses in the program.

2. A program assessment plan should clearly identify the cycles of program learning outcomes assessments, including collection of evidence of student learning, analysis, and tracking actions for continuous improvement.
   a. Assessment Cycle: All program learning outcomes should be assessed at least twice within a six-year period.
      i. This cycle should be consistent, sustainable, predictable, and dependable.
      ii. The goal of repeated assessments is to take and then monitor the results of a "close-the-loop" action for continuous improvement of student learning.
   b. Assessment of Mastery: Programs should focus, primarily, on assessing mastery level achievement of the learning outcome (i.e., evaluate student work completed toward the end of

the program).
  - i. Faculty members can conduct summative assessments of what program completers know and can do.
  - ii. The curricular map serves as a resource to identify the appropriate courses from which to obtain artifacts of student work at the mastery level.
- c. <u>Use of Multiple Measures</u>: Multiple measures of student learning achievement should be used for each program learning outcome.
  - i. If possible, aim to use two forms of direct evidence and one of indirect evidence.
  - ii. Faculty members can make this practice sustainable by focusing on the specific part of an exam, assignment, project, etc. that is related to the program learning outcome, and can keep the scope of the assessment narrowly focused on the program learning outcome achievement.
  - iii. If possible, faculty members can identify types of measures that will predictably be sources of direct evidence across years, course sections, instructors, etc.
- d. <u>Artifact Collection</u>: Programs should plan to collect artifacts of direct and indirect evidence each year.
  - i. Ensure all faculty (i.e., tenure, tenure-track, and clinical or teaching faculty) teaching the relevant courses are aware of the plan and committed to providing the artifacts.
  - ii. If assessments are embedded within courses, collect and store all completed rubrics and/or data related to the assessment.
- e. <u>Establishing Timelines</u>: A timeline should be included in the program assessment plan that clearly identifies each year's artifact collection, learning outcome analysis, and tracking of actions for continuous improvement. The timeline should display a full six-year cycle and then should be refined or repeated for the next six years.
  - i. Departments that teach core curriculum courses should adhere to a cycle of Loyola's university-level assessable learning outcomes assessments, to be determined in collaboration among the UCC, the department, the associate dean for the humanities and the core curriculum, and CASL.
    1. This can either occur concurrently with program outcomes assessments or can be woven into the assessment plan as the singular assessment in a particular year.
    2. Consult with the department chair and the associate dean for the humanities and the core curriculum to determine whether stand-alone or concurrent assessments fit the program the best.
  - ii. Programs that conduct academic program review or disciplinary accreditation can pause assessment reporting during the year of self-study/review. This should be documented within the assessment plan timeline. The program should still collect student artifacts during that year.

3. Each program should <u>set clear standards</u>. The success of the program in achieving its learning outcomes should be evaluated relative to clearly defined standards and by using appropriate and specific evidence of student learning.
   - a. <u>Standards</u>: Programs should identify agreed upon standards of student achievement for each measure of direct and indirect evidence of student learning.
     - i. The standard defines or categorizes what mastery looks like (e.g., "80% of students will be rated as meeting or exceeding mastery of the learning outcome on the established rubric for the program learning outcome.").
     - ii. Set the standards in advance of conducting assessments.
     - iii. Make the standards ambitious but attainable.
     - iv. If the standards are not met once student artifacts are analyzed, take an action to improve student learning and re-measure the program learning outcome with the same standards during the next instance in the assessment cycle.

b. <u>Direct Evidence of Student Learning</u>: Programs should use direct evidence to assess outcomes related to skills and knowledge.

c. <u>Rubrics</u>: Programs should use rubrics with agreed-upon criteria to evaluate student work when direct evidence is subjective in nature (e.g., a piece of written work as opposed to a standardized test).

d. <u>Comparison of Results to Standards</u>: Programs should tabulate, analyze, and aggregate data from direct and indirect assessment to compare results to previously determined standards.

e. <u>Equity-minded Strategies</u>: When assessing diversity, equity, and inclusion, evaluators should frame results in the context of the standards and use equity-minded strategies, including disaggregation of data by race/ethnicity, gender, and other demographic attributes, if available, and avoid comparisons across individuals and groups. Instead, the disaggregated data should be compared against the standard for achievement, and actions for continuous improvement should be taken to enhance learning for all students.

f. <u>Retention of Evidence</u>: Programs should retain evidence (completed rubrics, test scores, student samples, etc.) used in assessing student learning for seven years and provide this evidence for review when requested.

4. Direct evidence for assessing student learning should come from <u>embedded coursework</u>. This approach minimizes the burden of assessment on students and faculty members.

a. <u>Identification of Courses</u>: The curricular map is a good resource to identify courses from which programs will collect assessment evidence.

b. <u>Sources of Student Mastery</u>: Evidence gathered near the end of the program of study is particularly helpful in assessing the ability of students to apply the knowledge and skills they have acquired over time. Capstone courses and senior portfolios, where offered, are good sources of this type of evidence.

c. <u>Sampling</u>: If a program gathers student work as evidence of learning that is from a subset and not from all students in that program, the work should consist of an appropriately representative sample of students or course sections. The sample should only include work of program majors. The sampling plan should be determined in advance.

   i. When measuring aggregated data from a sample of student work, programs should compile course-based sources to present evidence about aggregations of students and not particular course sections, students, or instructors.

   ii. When assessing diversity, equity, and inclusion, programs should use disaggregated data by race/ethnicity, gender, and other demographic attributes, if available, to measure outcomes of these efforts.

5. Programs should be <u>assessed regularly</u> and should document their assessment activities annually.

a. <u>Guidance for a Diversity of Program Sizes</u>: The type of engagement in annual assessment may vary across programs.

   i. Regardless of size of program, each year,[2]
      1. At least one student learning outcome should be assessed;
      2. The extent of student achievement should be analyzed and documented for the learning outcome(s) assessed;
      3. The assessment report must clearly articulate whether the measures and the overall program learning outcome(s) were met, according to the program's

---

[2] There are exceptions to this rule: programs with no active majors in key assessment courses (e.g., no graduating seniors), programs undergoing program review or disciplinary accreditation self-studies, programs in the midst of a substantial MHEC-level curricular overhaul or substantial assessment overhaul may report these activities in lieu of the PLO report, if approved to do so by the program's dean's office.

established standards of mastery, to determine whether students have accomplished educational goals consistent with their programs of study;

4. Documented assessments should include analysis of the past use of results to improve educational effectiveness and/or planned future actions to improve educational effectiveness as a result of the current year's assessment findings; and

5. Sufficient support should be provided to the faculty members charged with assessment so that assessment of student achievement can be sustained and the results can be communicated to stakeholders.

   ii. Programs with a large number of graduating majors in any given year will likely complete assessment for one or two learning outcomes each year. In such cases,
   1. Programs might use samples of student work to conduct assessment of student learning (see 4.C)
   2. Programs should ensure the cycle of assessment allows an outcome to be re-assessed at least once within a six-year period.

   iii. Programs that graduate few majors each year may collect and evaluate data for one or more outcomes each year, but not complete the tabulation and analysis phases of assessment until they have several years' worth of data from which to make valid summary conclusions about student learning. In such cases,
   1. Programs should collect data and/or artifacts of student learning every year for all program learning outcomes;
   2. Programs should define a cycle that includes analysis of at least one program learning outcome every year; and
   3. Programs should ensure the cycle of assessment allows an outcome to be re-assessed at least once within a six-year period.

b. Reporting Platform: The University has implemented Watermark, a University-wide assessment reporting platform, to facilitate the reporting of program level student learning assessment results. The program's assessment report should be completed in the system to maintain one centralized repository and to allow for precise institution-level insights about student learning.

6. Support: Programs will seek assistance if needed. Programs that need help with designing their assessment plans or analyzing their assessment data should consult CASL in addition to the resources found online at: https://www.loyola.edu/department/academic-affairs/resources/assessment-of-student-learning.

Bibliography

Adkison, B. & Fadden, J. *Rapid and Effective Faculty-Led Change in Assessment*. (2020, October). Urbana, IL: University of Illinois and Indiana University, Assessment Institute. https://assessmentinstitute.iupui.edu/program/2020-important-links.html

Baker, Wanda. *Assessment Checkup: Does Your Assessment System Need a Tune-up?*. (2020, October). Council Oak Assessment. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois and Indiana University, Assessment Institute. https://assessmentinstitute.iupui.edu/program/2020-important-links.html

Fassett, K. T. *A Conceptual Framework and Strategies for Examining High-Impact Practices*. (2020, October). Urbana, IL: University of Illinois and Indiana University, Assessment Institute. https://assessmentinstitute.iupui.edu/program/2020-important-links.html

Haeger, H. & BrckaLorenz, A. *Assessing the Impact: Building a Model for Measuring Learning Across High-Impact Practices*. (2020, October). Urbana, IL: University of Illinois and Indiana University, Assessment Institute. https://assessmentinstitute.iupui.edu/program/2020-important-links.html

Haeger, H. & BrckaLorenz, A. *Equity and Inclusivity in the Assessment of High Impact Practices*. (2020, October). Urbana, IL: University of Illinois and Indiana University, Assessment Institute. https://assessmentinstitute.iupui.edu/program/2020-important-links.html

Henning, G., Ackerman, A., DeSantis, M., & Carpenter, R. *Fireside Chat on Equity and Assessment: Examples from Practice*. (2020, October). Urbana, IL: University of Illinois and Indiana University, Assessment Institute. https://assessmentinstitute.iupui.edu/program/2020-important-links.html

Hong, R. C., & Moloney, K. (2020, October). *There is no return to normal: Harnessing chaos to create our new assessment future.* (Occasional Paper No. 49). Urbana, IL: University of Illinois and Indiana University, National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment.

Hurtig, J. K. & Kim, E. *General Education Assessment Reformed: Course-embedded Assessments Followed by Faculty Online Forums and Focus Groups*. (2020, October). Urbana, IL: University of Illinois and Indiana University, Assessment Institute. https://assessmentinstitute.iupui.edu/program/2020-important-links.html

Loyola University Maryland. *Mission, Vision, and Core Values Statements*.

Loyola University Maryland. (2017). *Seven Areas of Focus for the Strategic Plan*.

Montenegro, E., & Jankowski, N. A. (2020, January). *A new decade for assessment: Embedding equity into assessment praxis* (Occasional Paper No. 42). Urbana, IL: University of Illinois and Indiana University, National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA).

Montenegro, E., & Jankowski, N. A. (2017, January). *Equity and assessment: Moving towards culturally responsive assessment.* (Occasional Paper No. 29). Urbana, IL: University of Illinois and Indiana University, National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA).

Office of Academic Affairs, Loyola University Maryland. (2020). *Academic Goals*.

Phillips, G. A., Shanks, K., & Burke, K. *Inviting Students to the Table: Leveraging Students to Do Student Assessment*. (2020, October). Urbana, IL: University of Illinois and Indiana University, Assessment Institute. https://assessmentinstitute.iupui.edu/program/2020-important-links.html

Singer-Freeman, K., & Robinson, C. (2020, November). *Grand challenges in assessment: Collective issues in need of solutions* (Occasional Paper No. 47). Urbana, IL: University of Illinois and Indiana University, National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment.