

## Assessing Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)

### What is assessment of program learning outcomes?

Assessment is the ongoing process of using a variety of sources to determine what constitutes acceptable evidence of student learning and then documenting that evidence. Assessment aims to answer: by the end of the program, to what degree have PLOs been met (or unmet?)

### Why is assessing PLOs important?

Loyola expects that all academic units are actively assessing PLOs each year. Assessment of PLOs is a key component of Loyola's regular [academic program review process](#) and is required for the University's accreditation by the [Higher Learning Commission](#). Assessment helps you determine if students are achieving PLOs and what actions need to be made in the program to continuously improve.

### Before you begin the assessment process, consider these ideas.

The better you prepare for the assessment process, the more useful the results will be. The more measurable and specific the PLOs are, the easier the assessment process will be.

- What evidence of student learning are you looking for (refer back to PLOs)? What assessment data already exists?
- How well have you defined what constitutes acceptable evidence of student learning (e.g., by creating rubrics, etc.)?
- Will different strategies be used? By using a variety of strategies, you enable students to showcase learning in different way. A combination of direct and indirect methods should be used to gather data from multiple sources.
  - Indirect (e.g., student focus groups, exit interviews)
  - direct (e.g., review of papers or portfolio using a rubric)
- What will you do with the evidence you gather?
- How many student works will be assessed? How will the work be selected?
- Who are the stakeholders interested in viewing the results?
- How will the data be organized, documented, stored, accessed, and protected?

### During the assessment process, consider these ideas.

The process of doing the assessment will help you to continuously refine your PLOs to determine if the PLOs are measurable and appropriate. The process will prompt you to reflect on how the program's courses and activities support students' learning.

- Does the information you are gathering allow you to measure students' achievement of PLOs? If not, do the PLOs need to be changed?

- What PLOs do students seem to be achieving? What PLOs are students struggling with?
- Who is involved in designing, carrying out and then interpreting the assessment?  
Participation in the process can be a valuable experience for faculty and will make the findings more likely to be used.

After you complete the assessment process, consider these ideas.

Now that you have taken the time to gather all of this data, you will want to be sure to use it. Good assessment then always includes a description of what actions you will take based on the evidence found.

- What curricular, co-curricular, or instructional modifications will you make based on your findings? What supplemental supports might be beneficial? What good practices need to be continued or expanded?
- How will you decide what changes to make and who will make them? (e.g., change a PLO, add a new course, etc.)
- How will the results be linked to curricular and education planning and resource allocation?
- How will the data be analyzed, presented, documented and shared?
- When will changes be made? Is there a timeline?

### Additional Resources

Ebner, R. (2017). Rebranding Student Learning Assessment. *Faculty Focus*. Retrieved from <https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/educational-assessment/rebranding-student-learning-assessment/>

Ewell, P., Paulson, K., & Kinzie, J. (2011). Down and In: Assessment Practices at the Program Level. *National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment*.

Kelly, V. (2013). Assessing Assessment: Five Keys to Success. *Faculty Focus*. Retrieved from <https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/educational-assessment/assessing-assessment-five-keys-to-success/>.

Praslova, L. (2010). Adaptation of Kirkpatrick's four level model of training criteria to assessment of learning outcomes and program evaluation in higher education. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability*, 22(3), 215-225.

