



**ACADEMIC PROGRAM  
ASSESSMENT  
RESOURCE HANDBOOK**

University Assessment Committee  
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## What Is Assessment?

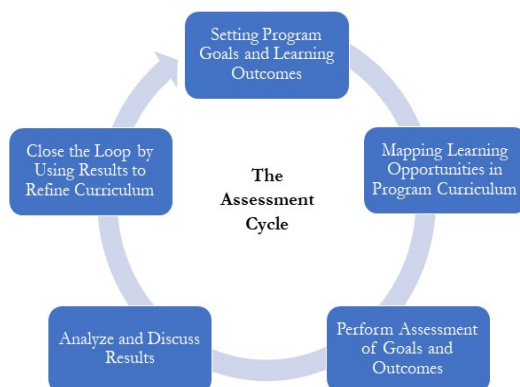
In education, assessment generally refers to “the wide variety of methods or tools that educators use to evaluate, measure, and document the academic readiness, learning progress, skill acquisition, or educational needs of students” (<https://www.edglossary.org/assessment/>). Assessment is a cyclical process in which results of assessment activities can be used to guide programming and curriculum to improve student outcomes (see figure 1 below).

Assessment is conducted at multiple levels in the University including individual courses, academic majors or programs, and university wide programs (i.e. the liberal arts curriculum program).

**This handbook is focused on assessment at the academic major or program level.**

At the academic major or program level, assessment results can be used for:

- Planning and improving the program curriculum;
- Identifying strengths and weaknesses of a program or course;
- Writing grant applications and reporting on grant requirements for curriculum development or enhancement; and
- Assisting in institutional accreditation.



*Figure 1. The Assessment Cycle*

**The goal of this handbook is to provide reference materials and resources to academic programs or majors at Eastern Connecticut State University to aid in planning and implementing annual assessment activities.**

Depending on the goals of the program or major, the type of assessment (activities and outcomes) may differ. Academic programs and majors should consider multiple approaches to assessment in order to make assessment meet the program or major's needs.

**Programs and majors should consider the following in creating an approach to assessment:**

- 1. What is our unit of analysis? Are we assessing individuals, programs, or the institution?**
  - a. Assessment of Individuals: Using an individual student and their learning as the level of analysis (e.g. improvement in a student's knowledge of a subject during a course).
  - b. Assessment of Programs: Using the department or program as the level of analysis (e.g. level of research abilities of seniors in a major).
  - c. Assessment of Institutions: Using the institution as the level of analysis (e.g. ability of Eastern students to work in teams).
  
- 2. When should assessment happen? Are we interested in knowing how our students perform at the conclusion of their educational experience or do we want to know how students progress through their educational experience?**
  - a. Formative Assessment: Gathering information about student learning during the progression of a course or program, usually repeatedly, to improve learning of current students.
  - b. Summative Assessment: Gathering information at the conclusion of a course or program to improve learning for subsequent student cohorts or to meet accountability demands. [Note: not every program learning outcome needs to be assessed in all courses and not all course learning outcomes need to be used for program assessment]
  
- 3. How do we measure student performance? Do we want to examine student work (direct) or do we ask them about their perspectives of their educational experience (indirect)?**
  - a. Direct Assessment of Learning: Gathering evidence, based on student performance that demonstrates learning itself (e.g. most classroom testing for grades is direct assessment within a course; evaluation of student portfolios from a capstone course is direct assessment of the program).
  - b. Indirect Assessment of Learning: Gathering reflections about learning or secondary evidence (e.g. student survey).
  - c. Embedded Assessment: Means of gathering information about student learning that is a natural part of, and built into, the teaching-learning process (e.g. student research report).

**To design effective curricula and conduct assessment to meet program goals, program learning outcomes must be clearly articulated.**

*Clearly articulated learning outcomes can inform programs and instructors how to design courses to best meet the needs of the program, inform program management and course scheduling, and can articulate to students what is expected of them as individuals educated within the program's discipline.*

## How to Write Learning Outcomes

**The strategic needs of the program should drive the creation of appropriate learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are statements of what students are expected to learn, when they are expected to learn it, and to what degree learning is expected.**

In writing learning outcomes for academic programs or majors, it is essential to discuss the **mission** of program or major and the goals that faculty have set for students.

While faculty set many goals for students within their courses, writing learning outcomes at the program or major level should focus on the essential components of what **all** graduates from the program or major should be able to demonstrate.

Once a program or major has identified their learning outcomes, they should begin drafting the language of the learning outcomes to make them “assessable”. In other words, learning outcomes should be written in a way that is measurable.

*Bloom's taxonomy provides a good starting point in identifying program or major learning outcomes.*

### Bloom's Taxonomy

Bloom's taxonomy provides an organizing structure for planning learning outcomes by asking programs to determine what it means to be a student educated in their discipline. The bottom of the pyramid displays the basic cognitive process of remembering information. The complexity of the cognitive processes by which knowledge is used increases with each step in the pyramid. Programs can refer to these processes when determining learning outcomes that vary in terms of complexity and skill.

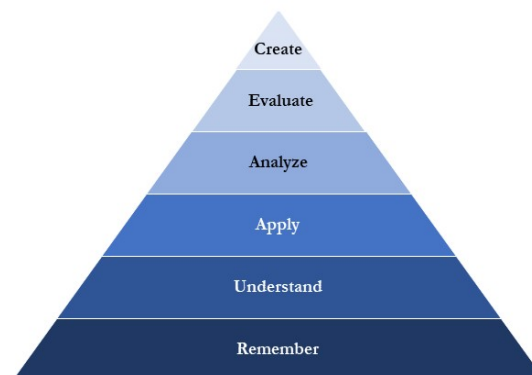


Figure 2: Bloom's Taxonomy, revised. Source: *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*. 2001. Anderson, Lorin W., David R. Krathwohl, Peter W. Airasian, Kathleen A. Cruikshank, Richard E. Mayer, Paul R. Pinitich, James Rath, Merin C. Wittrock, (eds.), New York: Longman.

## The SMART Approach

*The SMART approach provides guidance in articulating learning outcomes in a way that is “assessable.”*

The SMART approach originated in business management and was used to set business and performance goals (see Doran, 1981). This approach has been adapted for use in the articulation of learning outcomes in education. To generate learning outcomes that are effective, the SMART approach suggests that outcomes be “specific,” “measurable,” “attainable,” “relevant,” and “timely.”

### *Specific Learning Outcomes*

The first criteria to consider in writing learning outcomes is specificity. Learning outcomes should describe what is to be learned. Providing specific descriptions of what is to be learned limits room for interpretation and makes goals of the program or course clear. To meet the “specific” component of the SMART approach, use a formula to help articulate specifically who will learn what, where, how, and to what extent. The following table utilizes some examples from Eastern’s academic programs to illustrate how to apply a formulaic approach to articulating learning outcomes.

*Table 1: Formula for writing “specific” learning outcomes*

Who is expected to learn?	+ When is learning expected? Where learning is expected?	+ What learning is expected and to what degree?
(Audience)	(Condition)	(Behavior+ <b>Degree</b> )
All Music majors	Upon completion of a BA in Music with a concentration in performance...	...will be able to interpret and <b>effectively</b> communicate music from a varied repertoire and to perform <b>stylistically</b> across a variety of time periods and genres.
All Biology majors	Upon completion of a BS in Biology will be able to...	...apply quantitative reasoning to examine the relationships between variables through the lens of ratios, rates, percentages, probability, or proportional relationships when approaching or solving problems or when interpreting results or situations.
All Business majors	Upon completion of a BS in Business will be able to...	... <b>effectively</b> communicate business data and information and offer a <b>clear</b> viewpoint to the audience both orally and in writing.

## *Measurable Learning Outcomes*

Ensuring learning outcomes are based on observable actions is essential to conducting assessment. To meet the “measurable” component of the SMART approach, be sure to use clear action verbs in learning outcomes (avoid vagueness).

Academic programs typically expect students who complete the program to have gained both knowledge and skills. By using action verbs and specific language, programs can better reflect on what the student has gained in the program.

Consider the two following learning outcomes.

*Learning Outcome A: Students who complete this program will have an understanding of our discipline.*

*Learning outcome B: Students who complete this program will be able to explain the major theories of the two main subfields of our discipline.*

The first learning outcome is vague and does not specify what it means to understand the discipline or how a student might demonstrate their understanding. In the second example, students are required to explain the major theories of two main subfields of the discipline. This is more specific and indicates that some assignment requires students to specifically demonstrate their knowledge of the major theories of the discipline.

The following table provides some examples of these action verbs related to Bloom’s taxonomy that help to better specify learning outcomes.

*Table 2: Bloom’s Taxonomy of Action Verbs*

<b>Knowledge</b>	<b>Comprehension</b>	<b>Application</b>	<b>Analysis</b>	<b>Synthesis</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
Count	Associate	Apply	Analyze	Combine	Appraise
Define	Compute	Calculate	Arrange	Compile	Assess
Describe	Convert	Change	Categorize	Compose	Compare
Identify	Defend	Classify	Combine	Create	Conclude
Label	Discuss	Complete	Deconstruct	Design	Contrast
List	Distinguish	Compute	Design	Devise	Criticize
Match	Estimate	Construct	Detect	Explain	Critique
Name	Explain	Demonstrate	Develop	Formulate	Determine
Outline	Extrapolate	Divide	Diagram	Generate	Interpret
Point	Generalize	Examine	Differentiate	Group	Judge
Quote	Infer	Graph	Illustrate	Integrate	Justify
Recall	Paraphrase	Interpolate	Infer	Modify	Measure
Recite	Restate	Interpret	Outline	Order	Rank
Recognize	Summarize	Manipulate	Relate	Organize	Rate
Repeat		Modify	Select	Plan	Revise
Select		Operate	Separate	Propose	Support
State		Practice	Subdivide	Rearrange	Test
		Show	Utilize	Reconstruct	
		Sketch		Relate	
		Solve		Summarize	
		Subtract		Transform	
		Translate			
		Use			

### *Attainable Learning Outcomes*

Learning outcomes should be attainable by students. If learning outcomes cannot be met by students, the results of assessment are not helpful for program management. To meet the “attainable” component of the SMART approach, it is important to think about how the learning outcomes relate to the entire program. Do the learning outcomes allow for variation in levels of performance at different points in your academic program? Do some learning outcomes only apply to certain stages of your program and not others? Answers to these questions will guide your assessment planning and ensure that you are measuring student learning in a manner that allows assessment information to be used effectively for program management.

### *Relevant Learning Outcomes*

Aligning your student learning outcomes with your program goals will help your program use assessment results to manage your academic program. To meet the “relevant” component of the SMART approach, ensure that your program has identified the goals that drive it. For example, a program that highly values students’ ability to conduct applied research as a program goal should ensure that the skills and knowledge needed to conduct applied research in the discipline are clearly articulated in a learning outcome. If your program’s learning outcomes are not aligned with your program’s stated goals, it may be worth considering adjusting your learning outcomes or re-examining the goals of your program.

### *Timely Learning Outcomes*

Timing matters in assessment because assessment requires faculty time and resources. Ensuring your learning outcomes are timely is helpful to using limited faculty time and resources efficiently. To meet the “timely” component of the SMART approach, think about the key milestones of your program. What do you expect students to know and when? Goals should be focused on the time when skills or knowledge are acquired. Learning outcomes should reflect the “when” by stating whether learning is expected at completion of a specific course or at the completion of the program.



## Developing an Assessment Plan for Learning Outcomes

As assessment plan has various components starting with the learning outcomes and including curriculum mapping, benchmarking, developing a schedule, collecting and analyzing data, and writing and reporting results. A good assessment plan includes information on all these components and is used by programs to guide ongoing academic assessment.

### 1. The Starting Point: State Expected Learning Outcomes

Academic programs should clearly state their program-level learning outcomes. Programmatic decision making should keep these learning outcomes in focus when making curricular and assessment decisions.

### 2. Constructing a Curriculum Map: Identify Where Expected Learning Outcomes are Addressed

*All learning outcomes for an academic program need not be represented in every course.* Rather, they should reflect learning across the entire program's curriculum. Learning outcomes for the program articulate the knowledge and skills students completing the program are expected to gain. A Curriculum Map allows programs to demonstrate where students will acquire the desired knowledge and skills articulated in the expected learning outcomes. The Curriculum Map can then be used to design appropriate and effective evaluation of student learning. ([Learn more about Curriculum Mapping](#))

### 3. Approaching Assessment and Benchmarking: Determine Methods, Criteria, and Expected Level of Student Performance

Faculty teaching in academic programs should be deciding the most appropriate methods and criteria for assessing student learning outcomes. It may be appropriate for different methods to be used depending on the outcome being assessed. For example, a multiple-item test may be appropriate for assessing foundational subject matter knowledge, while a portfolio of artifacts might be appropriate for assessing skills that are expected to be acquired in a culminating experience. Ultimately, the approach to assessment must be determined by faculty based on the expected learning outcomes and where in the curriculum each is being assessed. ([Find Assessment Resources Here](#))

### 4. Planning to Address all Learning Outcomes: Establish a Schedule for Assessment

It is not necessary for programs to assess all outcomes every year. Rather, it is important for assessment to be ongoing. It is recommended that academic programs establish a schedule for reviewing each individual program learning outcome. A rotation of learning outcomes to

be assessed should be developed for planning purposes. This should include planning about the timely deployment of the assessment tool, identification of assessors, and collection of assessment data. ([Find Sample Assessment Plans Here](#))

#### 5. Conducting Assessment: Identify and Collect Baseline Information

The program assessment plan should include how the program will identify and collect baseline information. Initial assessment efforts may be needed to create acceptable student performance baselines. Faculty expertise should guide the determination of such baseline measures within each program.

#### 6. Conducting Assessment: Analyze Data

Assessment data should be analyzed and utilized for programmatic purposes. The data should be evaluated for accuracy and saved. Ideally, assessment data should help build a longitudinal narrative about how the students in the program develop the knowledge and skills articulated in the learning outcomes. The data should also demonstrate the impact of curricular or program changes.

#### 7. Understanding the Assessment Data: Write a Report on Findings

One way to understand assessment data is to translate it into a report that reflects desired program goals and criteria and whether these were met. Specific evidence from the assessment may be used to discuss findings and conclusions that program faculty arrive at. This articulation process is useful for the final stage of closing the loop on assurance of learning.

#### 8. Closing the Loop: Make Determination(s) for Action Based on Identified Issues

Assessment is not simply a compliance or reporting activity. It is, foremost, a means for making programmatic improvements that reflect the learning needs of the students and the goals of academic programs. To this end, “closing the loop” is the desired outcome of the assessment process. If the expectations set for program assessment were not met, the program must decide on action(s) to take to resolve the deficiencies. This might include, for example, adding to or modifying the curriculum, adding an extra-curricular learning component, or any other programmatic change. Please note that it may be appropriate for programs to repeat assessment with a different group of students if there is reason to be concerned with the reliability and/or validity of the results. If the expectations were met the program needs to provide evidence indicating such findings.

## Assessment and Academic Freedom<sup>1</sup>

“Academic freedom is the indispensable requisite for unfettered teaching and research in institutions of higher education.” (AAUP)

Academic freedom allows us to pursue the scholarly profession according to the standards of the profession. It includes the responsibility to adhere to the standards of the scholarly profession for research and teaching.

*Some common **myths** related to academic freedom include:*

- Academic freedom allows faculty to disregard any course descriptions and/or faculty approved goals for the course and teach whatever and however they want.
- Higher education institutions are here to further an individual institution’s or individual faculty member’s personal, intellectual, ideological, or financial interests.
- Academic freedom only involves right and freedoms and not duties and responsibilities.
- The campus/administration cannot specify job-related procedures and requirements for faculty members.

Academic freedom and the assessment of student learning are NOT incompatible goals. To uphold academic freedom as it pertains to outcomes assessment, ask the following questions.

1. Are assessment efforts faculty driven?
2. Do assessment experts educate, guide, and coordinate these efforts?
3. Are faculty free to contribute to plans, to analyze measures, to discuss uses, and to voice opinions?
4. Did faculty identify learning outcomes? Did faculty create plans to ensure their students meet the learning outcomes?
5. Do the campus’s requirements associated with assessment provide flexibility for disciplinary differences?
6. Do learning outcomes and assessment help faculty accurately represent the methods and subject matter of their scholarly community?
7. Do the assessment approaches generate faculty discussions that inform pedagogy and curricular revision?
8. Is the institution’s definition of academic freedom being followed?

*If you believe your academic freedom has been violated by the student learning outcomes assessment process, please contact the [ECSU-AAUP President](#).*

<sup>1</sup> Some information for this section is taken from Stitt-Bergh, M. Gorski, K. (2020 AALHE Conference). Other information is from the [AAUP site on academic freedom](#).

## Frequently Asked Questions About Assessment

**Q. *What is the difference between grading and assessment? (In other words, why are grades not considered assessment?)***

**A.** Grading is the evaluation of individual student performance on a discrete task (e.g. a research report) or the course itself. Program assessment measures students' learning across the entire program. Grading usually incorporates non-instructional measures (attendance) or those that are not direct measures of learning (e.g. participation). Course grades are based on a variety of criteria while program assessment is based on a specific program goal. In-class assessment should not be used as a proxy for assessment because assessment seeks to understand student learning across time and context.

**Q. *What is the difference between learning outcomes and course objectives?***

**A.** A learning outcome is what we expect students to know or be able to do when they complete an assignment, course, or program. Course objectives are what the *instructor* intends to cover or the larger disciplinary questions the course addresses. Learning outcomes are what the student learns.

**Q. *What are direct vs indirect measures of learning?***

**A.** Direct measures of learning look at work that students have produced: a paper, a project, or a performance. Indirect measures of learning are artifacts used as proxies of learning, for example student evaluations, reflections, or syllabus or assignment reviews. In direct assessment, a professional (i.e. program faculty or assessment committee) determine what has been learned by students, while in indirect assessment, the student decides what he or she has learned.

**Q. *What is a Curriculum Map and why might my program want to create one?***

**A.** A Curriculum Map is a visual representation of where and how the learning outcomes are integrated in a program's curriculum. Its purpose is to show how each course interacts with the program's stated learning outcomes. An academic program might want to create a curriculum map for numerous reasons, such as ensuring that program learning outcomes and program curriculum are consistent, assessment planning, and implementation and tracking of curricular changes.

**Q. *What is a rubric?***

**A.** A rubric is a guide used in the evaluation of an assignment. A rubric can also serve as a guide for students, so that they understand clearly what the expectations are for a given assignment. A scoring rubric is a tool used for larger scale assessment.

**Q. *What does "closing the loop" mean?***

**A.** When we do assessment, our goal is to understand what students are learning and whether they are learning what we want them to; we also need to understand where that learning is happening and how it is introduced and reinforced throughout the curriculum. As we collect information about what students are not learning (or learning in ways that are not desirable), we develop a strategy for dealing with that problem; thus, we close the loop. For example, we might find that in an assessment of writing skills, students struggle to

successfully *synthesize* information they have found through research. To address this, we might decide to introduce this skill earlier in the curriculum through short, low-stakes assignments. Then, at a later point in the curriculum, we would reinforce the skill by ensuring that all faculty teaching 300 level courses create assignments that require the synthesis of sources. We've closed the loop when we have put into place curricular or instructional processes that address the problem. In a later assessment cycle, we would look to see if those changes have made a difference and adjust accordingly.

***Q. Does it really matter if my program completes student learning outcomes assessment?***

**A.** Yes! Student learning outcomes assessment is important to the university for several reasons:

- It means that our programs can demonstrate the integrity of the curriculum by demonstrating in an objective way that students are meeting basic learning goals.
- It means that programs can make more informed decisions about how to change the curriculum in the future and the administration can make more informed decisions about hiring in the future.
- Assessment results can be used to apply for grants or other funds to identify and support programmatic needs.
- Our accreditors require that assessment be completed and that programs follow through with closing the loop.

***Q. What kinds of resources are made available from the university, to my program, to complete student learning outcomes assessment?***

**A.** Current resources for academic programs are funds to pay for survey instruments. Academic programs are encouraged to seek needed resources from the office of the Provost.

***Q. Is assessment used in the evaluation of faculty for promotion and tenure?***

**A.** No. Assessment is **not** an evaluation of individual faculty members. Rather it is an evaluation of how a program meets its learning goals. For instance, no assessment should single out individual faculty. It should be about the program. If any faculty member were to find themselves in a situation where assessment results became part of a performance evaluation, please contact AAUP immediately. Participation in programmatic or university-wide assessment is generally considered a component of service to the department or the university unless it is compensated with load credit. If a faculty member receives FLCs for completing assessment, those responsibilities are then part of the primary area of evaluation, teaching or other load credit activity.

***Q. Do we have to assess all our students?***

**A.** No. You may use appropriate sampling strategies.

***Q. What are some appropriate sampling strategies?***

**A.** Appropriate sampling strategies will depend on the size of the student population in each program. In small programs a representative sample would be adequate. What constitutes representation would be determined by the program and the mechanism for sampling should be a part of the assessment plan.

*Q. Do we have to do assessment every year?*

**A.** Yes, assessment should be an on-going process. However, you do not need to assess every student every year, nor do you have to assess every learning outcome every year. Your assessment plan should identify areas that need improvement in your program, and from that you can choose to focus on one or two areas each year.

*Q. What are some ways to assess our program?*

**A.** Examples of programmatic assessment include but are not limited to:

- Pre-packaged exams like subject area tests from the GRE or any other appropriate existing evaluation tools.
- Program designed assessment like a test, portfolio review or assignment evaluation.
- Samples of programmatic assessment models can be provided. Interested programs should consult with the assessment coordinator.

*Q. Is retention a learning outcome?*

**A.** No. Learning outcomes are measurable skills or knowledge. Retention is not an assessment of student learning.

## Common Misconceptions

### Common Misconception #1

#### **We must assess all our learning outcomes at once.**

This is a common misconception that many have. It makes the task of doing assessment overwhelming and unachievable. The reality is that student learning assessment can and should be ongoing. Academic programs should choose a limited number of outcomes to assess at any given time. The decision of how and when to assess each learning outcome is up to each program to decide depending on program goals, assessment tools, and programs needs. However, not doing assessment is not an option.

### Common Misconception #2

#### **Closing the loop means that the academic program must be changed.**

While sometimes student learning assessment will bring to light areas that might need curricular improvement or changes, the reality is that often relatively minor adjustments of pedagogy, assignments, or other course requirements can effectively close the loop and produce better outcomes in the future.

### Common Misconception #3

#### **If student learning assessment identifies areas of improvement it is a negative reflection on individual faculty members.**

The intent of student learning outcomes assessment is programmatic enhancement. It is not for the purpose of singling out or comparing faculty to each other. Assessment plans should include assessment methods that anonymize faculty and student information to avoid misuse of assessment data. Any assessment design that singles out individual faculty members is not meeting the intent of programmatic assessment and the assessment should be changed.

### Common Misconception #4

#### **We do not really have to do outcomes assessment.**

This common misconception often arises in programs where there has been no observable penalty for not completing student learning outcomes assessment in the past. However, every academic program is required by accreditation standards to complete student learning outcomes assessment. This requirement comes from pressure at the highest political levels to have colleges and universities prove that their students are leaving college with certain levels of competencies in key areas. The accrediting agencies (which are private non-profit organizations) have kept national legislation from being passed by incorporating these requirements into the accreditation standards. Every program that does not complete student learning outcomes assessment is lending to a case that there should be national qualifying exit exams or national governmental accrediting bodies for all college students in all fields.

**Common Misconception #5****Learning outcomes are the same as program outcomes.**

Learning outcomes describe what students are expected to know, do, and value (for instance, have a knowledge base and/or a set of skills upon completion of a program). Program outcomes are what programs are expected to accomplish (for instance, covering certain areas in a field or having a percentage of students complete graduate work).

**Common Misconception #6****Requiring faculty to engage in assessment is a violation of their academic freedom.**

As long as faculty are responsible for establishing goals for student learning, for designing and implementing programs of general education and specialized study that intentionally cultivate the intended learning, and for assessing students' achievement, assessment efforts are not incompatible with academic freedom.



## Glossary of Terms

**Academic Program Assessment:** Evaluation of whether an academic program (major, LAC) has met its stated learning outcomes.

**Assessment Plan:** Program document that identifies student learning outcomes and plans for curriculum mapping, benchmarking, scheduling assessment, collecting and analyzing data, and writing and reporting results.

**Benchmark:** Expected level of mastery or performance related to a student learning outcome. Expectations may be based on external norms or internal performance standards. A program can use its own data as a baseline benchmark against which to compare future performance.

**Bloom's Taxonomy:** A framework for categorizing learning goals, originally comprised of six areas: Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation. Later, the taxonomy was revised to include the following: Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyze, Evaluate, and Create.

**Curriculum Map:** A diagram of the curriculum that reveals how and where a program will produce the learning outcomes. May identify gaps or redundancies that interfere with the ability of the academic program to meet the identified learning outcomes. Used to align curricular and programmatic goals with course content.

**Direct Assessment/Measures:** Gathering evidence, based on student performance that demonstrates learning itself (e.g. most classroom testing for grades is direct assessment within a course; evaluation of student portfolios from a capstone course is direct assessment of the program).

**Embedded assessment:** A means of gathering information about student learning that uses assignments that are also evaluated for a grade. Can assess individual student performance or, when aggregated across students, provide information about the course or program. Can be formative or summative, quantitative or qualitative. The grade on the assignment is independent of and unrelated to the programmatic assessment. Example: as part of a course, expecting each senior to complete a research paper that is graded for content and style, but is also assessed for advanced ability to locate and evaluate Web-based information (as part of a college-wide outcome to demonstrate information literacy).

**External assessment:** Use of criteria (rubric) or an instrument developed by an individual or organization external to the one being assessed. Usually summative and quantitative. Example: GRE exams.

**Formative Assessment:** Gathering information about student learning during the progression of a course or program, usually repeatedly, to improve learning of current students.

**Grades:** Evaluation of a student's performance in a course. This includes evaluation across a variety of course components (tests, participation, projects, etc.)

**Indirect Assessment/Measures:** Gathering reflections about learning or secondary evidence (e.g. student survey).

**Learning Goals:** The process that a student experiences where the result should be to master the student learning outcomes.

**Learning Outcomes:** A programmatic statement of the set of knowledge and skills that students need to have acquired upon completion of the program. Also known as student learning outcomes.

**Local assessment:** Means and methods that are developed by an institution's faculty based on their teaching approaches, students, and learning goals. Can fall into any of the definitions here except "external assessment," for which is it an antonym. Example: use of students' writing about a topic across multiple points in their undergraduate program as an assessment of the development of writing competence.

**Rubric:** A tool used to interpret and evaluate students' work against a set of criteria and standards.

**SMART Goals:** Goal setting approach that requires effective outcomes to be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely.

**Summative Assessment:** Gathering information at the conclusion of a course or program to improve learning for subsequent student cohorts or to meet accountability demands.

## Resources

[Assessment Commons](#)

[Assessment Institute](#)

[Association of American Colleges and Universities \(AACU\)](#)

[AACU LEAP Challenge](#)

[AACU Curriculum and Assessment](#)

[AACU Publications](#)

[AACU VALUE Rubrics](#)

[Association for the Assessment of Learning in Higher Education](#)

[National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment \(NILOA\)](#)

[NILOA Assessment Best Practices](#)

[NILOA Assessment Plans](#)

[NILOA Curriculum Mapping](#)

[NILOA Degree Qualification Profile](#)

[NILOA Reports](#)

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