

Senate Ad Hoc Committee on Learning Outcome Assessment
Final Report
June 14, 2017

This is a final report from the Senate Ad Hoc on Learning Outcome Assessment. This ad hoc committee submitted a proposal to create policy governing when and by whom program learning outcomes will be assessed. The proposal specifically is to add to existing University Policy 6-001 a new section that focuses on curriculum management and learning outcome assessment. This policy change was approved by the Senate on April 3, 2017.

Background

In the fall of 2015 the Senate impaneled this ad hoc committee and charged it to bring forward a proposal for a University Policy which will establish University-wide requirements for program learning outcomes assessment, and thereby bring the University into compliance with the commitments from the NWCCU accreditation review. The 2015-2017 Ad Hoc Committee members included: Margaret Clayton, Nursing; Robert Nathan Mayer, Family and Consumer Studies; Paul Jewell, Geology & Geophysics; Rachel Hayes-Harb, Linguistics and Office of Undergraduate Research; Bill Johnson, Geology & Geophysics; William Nesse, Mathematics; Ann Darling, Office of Undergraduate Studies. Mark St. Andre, Office of Undergraduate Studies was included in our conversations as an assessment expert. Additionally, Senate Policy Liaison and Professor of Law Bob Flores was assigned by the Senate Leadership as ex officio to provide the committee technical assistance in the task of drafting a proposed policy.

This committee reviewed the recommendations from the prior ad hoc committee as well as explored best practices from peer institutions including the University of Arizona, University of Washington, University of Nebraska and UCLA. On our behalf, Prof. Bob Flores as Senate Policy Liaison visited and met with administrators at the University of Arizona who administer their well-developed program, and held related discussions with representatives of PAC12 member institutions through the periodic meetings of the PAC12 Academic Leadership Coalition.

With the background of the combined extensive groundwork of a prior Senate committee, multiple discussions with the Senate Executive Committee and Senate, and this committee's additional research and deliberation, we now bring forward the requested proposal for a University Policy for a system of learning outcomes assessment processes, as well as reporting on accomplishments completed or underway for developing related guidance materials.

Policy Proposal

The proposed Policy is one important part of a multi-faceted approach the University is engaged in to implement Learning Outcome Assessment ("LOA"), and integrate it into the management and administration of curricula across the institution.

Guiding principles for the overall project have been to (i) ensure that all important decisions about curriculum planning and assessment are being made primarily by the faculty of the unit which offers the curriculum, (ii) ensure that all academic units are regularly conducting assessment of the effectiveness of their curricular offerings, (iii) assign to appropriate central offices the responsibility of providing units with resources, guidance and other assistance for implementing LOA, and the responsibility to oversee the regular assessments process, and (iv) implement LOA in a lean and efficient manner, keeping to a minimum the demands implementation imposes on individual academic units and central resources, while adequately responding to the accreditation concern and serving the University's commitment to

excellence in the teaching mission.

The main functions of the proposed Policy will be to clearly communicate to academic units the obligation to regularly conduct assessments, and to put in place procedures for conducting those assessments and submitting reports about them to a central office.

Earlier it had been contemplated that this project would result in an entirely new University Policy focused solely on LOA. Ultimately, our Committee concluded that it was a much wiser approach to add the LOA topic to the existing Policy which addresses the roles of faculty and the University's academic units, and describes the fundamental characteristics academic units must have to be authorized to offer curriculum. Accordingly, the proposal is to revise existing Policy 6-001 Academic Units and Academic Governance, adding the LOA requirements to a section of 6-001 which governs the "Creation, Review, and Discontinuance of Academic Units." The new content will describe "Principles for initial establishment and subsequent review of academic units with curricular responsibilities." Placing the LOA topic within the Policy governing creation and periodic review of units ensures that the LOA concepts and processes are fully integrated into the structure of each academic unit from the time the academic unit is being initially created, and on through every major seven-year review cycle.

In brief, the proposed policy language accomplishes the following:

- Places responsibility for the creation and assessment of program learning outcomes *in the hands of the faculty* of an academic unit, by placing this LOA work in the context of curriculum management processes, and requiring written descriptions of those curriculum management processes to confirm the primacy of the faculty as decision-makers.
- Rather than create a whole new structure and process (with attendant added burdens and resource requirements) the proposed language inserts learning outcome assessment into the ongoing process of program reviews conducted *every seven years* (in most cases by the Graduate School).
- Rather than structure reporting on program learning outcome assessment on an *annual* schedule (as was recommended by the first Ad Hoc Committee and is followed by some universities) the policy instead adopts what is effectively a *biennial* schedule (requiring one full report integrated with the seven-year cycle self-study of the academic unit, and two interim reports within the *seven-year* cycle).