Align, Assess, Evolve, Excel:

WOU's Plan for Academic Effectiveness

"Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better."

~ Maya Angelou

Academic Effectiveness Office of Academic Affairs Western Oregon University

Updated: March 2018

The purpose of academic effectiveness: Why?

The work of academic effectiveness aligns Western Oregon University's (WOU) programs and actions with our goals for students, puts critical inquiry at the heart of our teaching, provides a systematic way to improve student learning, and facilitates cross-disciplinary conversations about teaching and learning. It is a *process* that leads to programmatic excellence that is documentable, widespread and sustained.

- Through *alignment*, we make our institution and program goals and practices transparent to all of our students. That transparency contributes to leveling the playing field among all students, from those steeped in the culture of higher education to our first generation college students.
- Through *study*, we strengthen our understanding of our students and how our curriculum affects them. That knowledge informs *change* efforts.
- Through *conversations across disciplines*, we share and learn with each other about new ways to help students learn. That collegiality benefits students and makes our work more rewarding.
- Through *collaboration*, we strengthen a cross-disciplinary community that positions us to tackle larger challenges. We build shared norms, dense networks of communication and trust, social capital that strengthens WOU.

Through the work of academic effectiveness we align, assess and improve our academic and co-curricular programs, courses and pedagogy. We are able to systematically evolve in response to needs of our students, changes in our disciplines, and shifts in the broader world.

Participants in the work of academic effectiveness: Who?

WOU's *faculty* determines goals for student learning, designs and implements the curriculum to help students achieve those goals, and assesses student learning. As a community of teachers, WOU's faculty studies the effectiveness of our curriculum, courses and pedagogy, continually seeking to improve our students' learning, be that within a program or department faculty or university-wide. WOU's university-wide assessment of student learning happens in *Professional Learning Communities* (PLCs), cross-disciplinary groups of faculty with interest and expertise in the broad and general skills our Undergraduate Learning Outcomes (ULOs) and Graduate Learning Outcomes (GLOs) prioritize.

Responsibility for WOU's vision and policies for academic effectiveness is *shared by faculty and administration*. The Assessment Facilitation Steering Committee (AFSC), a faculty-led joint committee of faculty and administration, advises the Provost on assessment policy, procedures and outreach, and coordinates with academic units and Faculty Committees responsible for curriculum. AFSC's members support and advocate for academic effectiveness across the university.

WOU's *administration* champions and resources academic effectiveness by providing professional development opportunities, institutional research, technology support, communication channels, and process facilitation. In addition, administration is responsible for reporting our process and results to our accrediting agency, the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU). Academic Effectiveness efforts are coordinated by the Associate Provost for Academic Effectiveness, in consultation with faculty and other academic and student affairs administrators.

University-wide goals for students: Where (are we going)?

Academic effectiveness focuses on assessing student learning in our programs and across all graduates.

Undergraduate Learning Outcomes (ULO's)

Outcomes: At WOU, all of our undergraduate degrees and certificates provide graduates with the opportunity to develop college-level proficiency in the areas of:

- Written Communication
- Quantitative Literacy
- Inquiry & Analysis (which significantly overlaps with Critical Thinking)
- Integrative Learning
- Diversity*

*Diversity as an outcome is under development. It is a melding of two distinct outcomes – Intercultural Knowledge & Competence and Global Learning – developed by the American Association of Colleges & Universities' (AAC&U) Liberal Education America's Promise (LEAP) initiative to identify essential learning outcomes of a liberal education.

Our undergraduate general education courses support the ULO's by providing a foundation in these ULOs upon which degree programs build. (We assess our ULO's outcomes in general education courses and in culminating experiences in academic programs.)

Standards: WOU uses the AAC&U VALUE (Valid Assessment of Undergraduate Education) rubrics as a basis for assessing student achievement of these skills as they graduate. Students complete (1) exit projects (e.g., theses, capstone projects, internship papers, portfolios) or (2) assignments in advanced courses. The faculty then collectively studies samples of this work, in light of the criteria and standards in the VALUE rubrics, to assess our graduates' proficiency in these skills. Samples of student work from general education courses (e.g., signature assignments or assignments aligned with rubric features) are reviewed for progress towards mastery. Student work and results of review are retained by WOU.

Targets for student achievement: Interdisciplinary Faculty PLCs determine targets for student success in these skills. See Appendix A for the process by which the Quantitative Literacy targets were set (since they preceded the formation of the PLC).

Graduate Learning Outcomes (GLO's)

Outcomes: At WOU, all of our graduate degrees and certificates provide graduates with the opportunity to develop and demonstrate graduate-level proficiency in a set of graduate-level outcomes outlined in the Lumina Foundation's *Degree Qualification Profile*:

- Writing
- Analytic Inquiry
- Additional goals to be identified upon completion of program goal alignment project

Standards: The Graduate Assessment Working Group reviewed, revised and approved a standard for graduate-level writing in September 2016, and a standard for graduate-level analytic inquiry in December 2016 (See Appendix B).

Targets: The target for success was established by faculty consensus among the Graduate Assessment Working Group. Faculty defined success as: 100% of graduates of WOU graduate programs fully or mostly meet each criteria of the Writing standard.

Academic Program Learning Outcomes

WOU's graduate and undergraduate programs, specializations, endorsements and certificates engage in program-level of assessment of program learning outcomes, which are also aligned to ULO's or GLO's as appropriate. For externally accredited programs, external accreditation processes constitute program assessment; results of that work are provided to the university. All other programs engage in a university-designed program assessment process.

General Education Learning Outcomes

The General Education Committee proposed and WOU's Faculty Senate approved the following outcomes for general education in July 2017:

- 1. Put into practice different and varied forms of knowledge, inquiry, and expression that frame academic and applied learning. (Intellectual foundations and breadth of exposure) (ULO: Program outcome)
- 2. Demonstrate the ability to evaluate information and develop well-reasoned and evidence-based conclusions. (Critical thinking) (ULO: Inquiry & Analysis)
- 3. Articulate the challenges, responsibilities, and privileges of belonging in a complex, diverse, interconnected world. (Citizenship) (ULO: Diversity)
- 4. Integrate knowledge, perspectives, and strategies across disciplines to answer questions and solve problems. (Multidisciplinary learning) (ULO: Integrative Learning)

In 2017-18, a special General Education Task Force designed a general education curriculum to support students in achieving these outcomes. We expect the new curriculum to be in place by 2019-20 at the latest. An assessment plan will be developed for the new curriculum to track progress on these goals for student learning.

Evidence of student learning: What (are we looking at)?

Direct Evidence of Student Learning

We study direct evidence (where students demonstrate knowledge or skill) to confirm that students achieve the program or degree learning outcomes. Most commonly, we use assignments embedded in existing courses, culminating projects and/or reflections on culminating experiences. This includes student work coming out of co-curricular activities. PLC review provides validation and continued reflection on effectiveness of these instruments. Workplace supervisor evaluations of intern or employee skills may also provide direct evidence of learning, if the evaluation is well-aligned with the dimensions of the skill.

While useful and of interest as indirect measures, student perceptions of instructional quality, learning environment, course or program rigor, and their own learning are not direct evidence of learning. Nor is job placement or career success post-graduation. These measures may, however, be relevant to other aspects of WOU's mission fulfillment.

Academic Program Assessment

The *learning outcomes* of academic programs usually include mastery of specialized knowledge in the field. The Degree Qualifications Profile refers to this as "proficiencies involving terminology, theory, methods, tools, literature, complex problems or applications and cognizance of limits" (<u>http://degreeprofile.org/read-the-dqp/the-degree-qualifications-profile/specialized-knowledge/</u>).

Direct evidence of mastery of specialized knowledge in undergraduate and graduate programs may include:

- Portfolio
- Capstone project or paper
- Thesis, research paper or poster
- Essay
- Oral presentation or oral examination
- Examination question (embedded in advanced courses)
- Performance or exhibit
- Standardized national subject area examination

There are advantages and disadvantages of each kind of evidence (see

http://www.wou.edu/cai/files/2016/09/types_of_assessment-uvu.pdf). And, with any artifacts representing student learning, it is important to isolate what is being assessed from other aspects of the evidence (e.g., focusing on the evidence that the student possess "specialized knowledge" rather than the quality of the writing and/or presentation). For this reason, assessment of learning outcomes is distinct from grading: While grading is ultimately holistic, and a useful measure of an individual student's overall achievement, it does not generally provide sufficient information on distinct features of student learning that can be used to improve the curriculum.

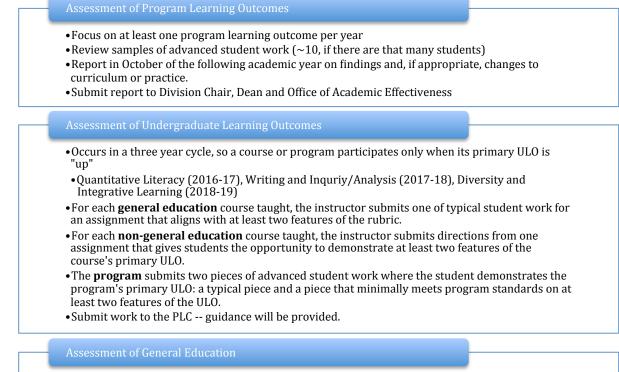
University-wide outcomes for our undergraduate and graduate students (i.e., ULO's and GLO's) generally reflect skills and dispositions, as do some program learning outcomes. Skills and dispositions are best assessed using direct evidence in the form of authentic student work, work students complete as part of their degree program or in co-curricular activities. Assignment or project design is key: For students to practice skills and for assessment to be useful, student work should align with the proficiencies we seek to measure.

Authentic student work may include:

- Portfolio
- Capstone project or paper
- Thesis, research paper or poster
- Essay
- Oral presentation or oral examination
- Examination question (embedded in advanced courses)
- Performance or exhibit
- Statements/self-reflection about learning, service projects, internships and other high impact experiences

Again, there are advantages and disadvantages of each source of evidence, and it is vital to isolate the skill or disposition assessed from other proficiencies that the student work may reflect.

Evidence of student learning: What (do I submit), when and where?



- Under development as new general education curriculum is designed.
- Presently general education courses are assessed for their contributions to WOU's ULO's

A regular cycle of academic effectiveness activities: When?

Assessment of graduate and undergraduate **academic program outcomes** occurs annually. Programs generally focus on 1-2 program outcomes per year, and all program outcomes are assessed within a three year cycle. Accredited programs use processes in support of accreditation to assess and report program outcomes.

	Focal ULO(s)	Planning for next year
2016-17	Quantitative Literacy	Form Writing, Inquiry & Analysis PLCs
2017-18	Writing, Inquiry & Analysis	Form Integrative Learning, Diversity PLCs
2018-19	Integrative Learning, Diversity	Reconvene Quantitative Literacy PLC and an additional PLC if needed (sixth outcome)
2019-20	Quantitative Literacy and possibly an additional outcome	Reconvene Writing, Inquiry & Analysis PLCs

Assessment of ULO's and GLO's follows this schedule:

2020-21	Writing, Inquiry & Analysis	Reconvene Integrative Learning, Diversity PLCs
2021-22	Integrative Learning, Diversity	Form Assessment of Assessment Task Force
2022-23	Assessing Assessment	Reconvene Quantitative Literacy PLC and an additional PLC if needed (sixth outcome), pending review of assessment process
2023-24	Quantitative Literacy and possibly an additional outcome, pending review of assessment process	Form Writing, Inquiry & Analysis PLCs, pending review of assessment process

	Focal GLO(s)	Planning for next year
2016-17	Writing, Analytical Inquiry	Assess pilot project, and identify 1-2 GLO's for 2017-18
2017-18	Applied and Collaborative Learning	Identify 1-2 new GLO's
2018-19	Writing, Analytic Inquiry	Prepare for Writing, Analytical Inquiry or alternative approach

Studying student learning: How?

Our work has three stages: *Align, Assess* and *Evolve*. Alignment and assessment provide meaningful and actionable data about student learning that can be used to improve our work.

Align: Planning for Assessment

University-wide alignment (work completed in 2016-17)

- Establish ULO's and GLO's.
- Confirm program learning outcomes and their alignment to ULO's/GLO's, making adjustments as necessary.
- Confirm course goals and their alignment to ULO's/GLO's, making adjustments as necessary. A single "primary ULO" is identified for all undergraduate courses.
- Develop database of program and course alignments.
- Develop and disseminate a curricular map of general education.
- Develop and publish criteria for success (e.g., targets for student learning, rubrics for assessment).
- Identify and/or develop embedded assignments aligned to selected ULOs in all courses. (Supported by on-going professional development)

Academic Program Alignment (work ongoing in most programs, initiated in all in 2016-17)

- Establish program outcomes.
- Confirm course goals and their alignment to program outcomes, making adjustments as necessary.
- Develop and disseminate a curricular map of the program.
- Develop and publish criteria for success (e.g., targets for student learning, rubrics for assessment).
- Identify and/or develop embedded assignments aligned to program outcomes in all program courses.
- Disseminate the "program assessment plan", which is a synthesis of the prior bullets.

Assess: Studying student learning

<u>ULO/GLO assessment</u> (annually for different ULO's/GLO's)

- Instructors (of general education courses) and undergraduate programs (drawing from culminating experiences in programs) retain samples of student work. (See Appendix C for more detail about what kinds of work and how many samples.)
- Instructors submit samples of student work in response to a call for student work by the PLCs that are active in a given year. (See Appendix C for more detail.)
- PLCs meet to review assignments and student work, and provide feedback to the university on assignment design, student achievement, and emergent collective expectations and observations about student performance.
- PLCs report to Faculty Senate, via appropriate committees, about overall assessment results.
- For GLO's, the role of PLCs is filled by the Graduate Assessment Working Group.

Academic program assessment (work ongoing in most programs, initiated in all in 2016-17)

- Instructors and/or programs retain samples of advanced student work each year.
- The program faculty, as a whole or in an assessment sub-committee, reviews assignments and student work, and provides feedback to the program and its faculty on assignment design, student achievement, and emergent collective expectations and observations about student performance.
- Program assessment leaders summarize findings in the "program assessment report" and submit this to the Division, College and Academic Effectiveness staff.
- Assessment findings are also disseminated to program faculty.
- (The process is the basic university model of student learning assessment for nonaccredited programs. Accredited programs may use and report on other processes, and non-accredited programs may use supplementary approaches.)

Closing loops: So what and what next?

Ultimately the work of academic effectiveness reveals our strengths and successes, and provides evidence to inform improvement. That brings us to the third stage of our work.

Evolve: Using results to drive improvement in student learning

ULO's: What's next?

- The General Education Committee reviews assessment results from the PLC process to identify gaps in general education overall and recommend steps to the university to improve student learning.
- Academic programs and instructors who teach general education courses review assessment results to identify gaps in their courses and identify course or pedagogical changes to improve student learning.
- All undergraduate programs review assessment results from the PLC process to better understand student competencies developed in WOU's general education program.

GLO's: What's next?

• The Graduate Committee reviews assessment results from the Graduate Assessment Working Group to identify gaps in graduate education overall and recommend steps to the university to improve student learning in graduate programs.

Academic Program Outcomes: What's next?

• The faculty, in graduate and undergraduate programs, reviews assessment results and reports, and uses the findings to identify areas for improvement in curriculum, courses or pedagogy. Changes implemented to improve student learning are described in annual program assessment reports, and assessed in future assessments of the outcome.

The work to align, assess and evolve is supported by ongoing professional development: Opportunities to refine and improve assignment design, explore new technologies and pedagogies, share teaching strategies across disciplinary areas. Professional development is coordinated by the Center for Academic Innovation, in consultation with the Assessment Facilitation Steering Committee and other key stakeholders.

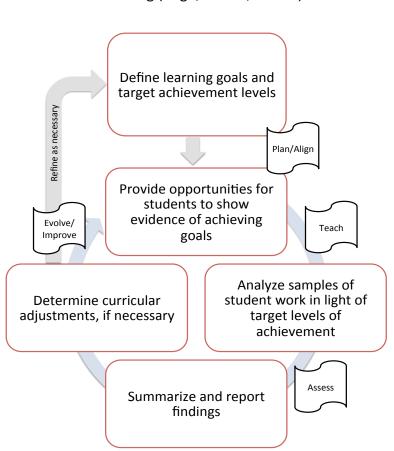


Figure 1: Program Assessment Cycle Fits In Our Teaching (Align, Assess, Evolve)

Academic Program Review

Policy and procedures for regular Academic Program Review are under development. Academic Program Reviews will commence in Fall 2017.

Assessing Assessment

We expect to make on-going adjustments and adaptations to the academic effectiveness process. Beyond that, we plan a year of assessing assessment in 2022-23 to do a full review of our process – strengths, areas for improvement, its effects on curriculum and learning – to inform academic effectiveness practices going forward.

Infrastructure to support Academic Effectiveness

Through its planning and budgeting process, WOU is developing infrastructure to support the work of academic effectiveness. In 2016, WOU created an Associate Provost position to lead academic effectiveness work. In 2017, WOU established and staffed the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness, including hiring a Director of Institutional Research. In fall 2017, WOU adopted TK20, an accreditation and assessment management platform that we will us to organize and manage assessment activities and reporting.

Appendix A: Setting targets for ULO and GLO achievement

Undergraduate Learning Outcomes

In 2014-15, a lead faculty member in Mathematics, in consultation with faculty across campus who are invested in courses aligned with quantitative literacy, undertook the work of exploring expectations of faculty around Quantitative Literacy and articulating the emerging consensus. The General Education Committee endorsed these thresholds, and Faculty Senate received a report on them. In the future, the setting of expectations will be the first task of Professional Learning Communities focused on specific ULO's.

The Quantitative Literacy Professional Learning Community (PLC) is working with the following expectations of achievement for:

- The BA degree
 - Milestone/3 for Interpretation, Calculation and Communication
 - o Milestone/2 for Representation, Application/Analysis and Assumptions
- The BS degree
 - Capstone/4 for Interpretation
 - Milestone/3 for Representation, Calculation, Application/Analysis, Assumptions and Communication

We aim for 100% of embedded assignments to offer students the opportunity to demonstrate these levels of achievement. In review of student work, we aim for XX% of student work samples to meet or exceed these targets.

Note: We expect it will take multiple iterations of the PLC review process to reach these targets. From the outset, we are planning to work closely with faculty in developing assignments that align with quantitative literacy criteria, because without such assignments students do not have the opportunity to practice or demonstrate their level of achievement.

In Spring 2017, in preparation for assessment of Written Communication and Inquiry & Analysis ULO's in 2017-18, faculty PLC's around those ULO's will undertake a similar examination and dissemination of WOU expectations and how they align with the VALUE rubrics.

Similarly in Spring 2018, in preparation for assessment of Integrative Learning ULO in 2018-19, the Integrative Learning Faculty PLC will develop and disseminate the consensus standard for Integrative Learning.

Diversity is more complicated, however. At this time, WOU requires "Diversity" courses of students but there is poor alignment between the articulation of the skills we seek to develop and the courses we require students to take. By Spring 2018, faculty will complete a review of the two VALUE rubrics that relate to our understanding of Diversity and reach consensus on the criteria and achievement levels we expect. When that work is complete, the consensus will be

disseminated and instructors will better understand what it means to "align" with Diversity and can shape their courses and embedded assessments accordingly.

Graduate Learning Outcomes

The Graduate Assessment Working Group reviewed, revised and approved a standard for graduate-level writing in Fall 2016. The target for success was established by faculty consensus. Faculty defined success as: 100% of graduates of WOU graduate programs fully or mostly meet each criteria of the Writing standard.

Appendix B: Standards for graduate level writing and analytic inquiry

RUBRIC: "Analytic Inquiry is... the core intellectual skill that enables a student to examine, probe and grasp the assumptions and conventions of different areas of study, as well as to address complex questions, problems, materials and texts of all types." -- DQP, p. 16

Competencies in analytical inquiry are cumulative. Graduates demonstrate skills expected at their current level, but also those expected at previous levels. Student work should be designed to allow students to demonstrate the appropriate level of competency. It is up to each field to determine what these competencies look like in practice in their fields, and what constitutes proficiency and sufficiency. Developed by WOU's Graduate Assessment Working Group, December 2016.

Feature	Key characteristics of the feature	Proficient	Suffic	cient	Not Sufficient
Skills expected in Master's level work					
Analysis*	Disaggregates ideas/techniques/methods at the forefront of the field				
Creative synthesis	<u>Reformulate and adapt</u> principal ideas/techniques/methods at the forefront of the field				
	The skills below are developed prior to en evaluators to focus on the graduate level may be helpful to review the four features	skills listed above. If studer s below as a diagnostic tool.	nt work is insuf	ficient in the	graduate-level skills, it
		Proficient or Sufficient		Not sufficient	
Question/proble m generation and framing	<u>Identifies & frames</u> a problem or question in the field				
Use of field's tools	Distinguishes among elements of ideas, concepts, theories or practical approaches suggested by that field.				
Comparison with another field	Compares and contrasts theories/approaches to the problem/question from that field and at least one other field.				
Evaluation	Evaluates theories and approaches to the problem/question – strengths, weaknesses, applicability, gaps, assumptions				

*Analysis is the process of breaking complex topics or issues into parts to gain a better understanding of them (I&A, LEAP)

2016-17 Assessment of General Graduate Learning Outcomes: Writing and other forms of communication

All WOU graduate degree recipients are expected to meet WOU's standard for graduate-level writing. At a minimum, this means they should "meet most parts" of each of the first five criteria, and "meet" the last criteria. In addition, graduate students are expected to demonstrate communicative skills using at least one additional form of media (e.g., oral presentations, ASL, websites, video, visual aids such as charts and graphs), and to demonstrate fluency in communication to specialty and general audiences. These criteria may also be used for communication via alternative media.

Aspect of Writing	Mastery standard for WOU graduate degree recipients	How much of the standard does the writing sample meet?	Comments
Context of and Purpose for Writing Includes considerations of audience, purpose, and the circumstances surrounding the writing task(s).	Demonstrates a thorough understanding of context, audience, and purpose that is responsive to the assigned task(s) and focuses all elements of the work.	Meets completely Meets most parts Meets some parts Meets few or no parts	
Content Development	Uses appropriate, relevant, and compelling content to illustrate mastery of the subject, conveying the writer's understanding, and shaping the whole work.	 O Meets completely O Meets most parts O Meets some parts O Meets few or no parts 	
Genre and Disciplinary Conventions Formal and informal rules inherent in the expectations for writing in particular forms and/or academic fields (please see glossary).	Demonstrates detailed attention to and successful execution of a wide range of conventions particular to a specific discipline and/or writing task (\$) including organization, content, presentation, formatting, and stylistic choices	 Meets completely Meets most parts Meets some parts Meets few or no parts 	
Sources and Evidence	Demonstrates skillful use of high- quality, credible, relevant sources to develop ideas that are appropriate for the discipline and genre of the writing	Meets completely Meets most parts Meets some parts Meets few or no parts	
Control of Syntax and Mechanics	Uses language that skillfully communicates meaning to readers with clarity and fluency, and is virtually error- free.	Meets completely Meets most parts Meets some parts Meets few or no parts	
Sophisticated Standard for Graduate-Level Writing		O Meets O Does not meet	

Appendix C: Samples of student work

- For *programs*, the samples align with GLO's or ULO's identified by programs for alignment. The samples are usually produced by students late in their academic program, to demonstrate cumulative learning.
- For *courses*, the samples align with the "primary ULO" identified by the course. The samples are course assignments that provide students the opportunity to demonstrate the target skill.
- Each *instructor* of a course with that year's Primary ULO submits materials from an aligned assignment *once* during the year, irrespective of how many times the instructor teaches a section of that course during the year.
- Courses that satisfy general education requirements submit assignment instructions and one piece of work per year, a piece of work that is modal or typical of students. Nongeneral education courses submit assignment instructions. Instructors also submit information on the course, instructor expectations of students, and observations of student achievement.
- Some courses have multiple instructors and the instructors coordinate their assignments. In that case, the course coordinator can submit a single assignment/student work sample for the coordinate course. It is expected that faculty who teach the course will meet to discuss the selection before it is submitted.
- Faculty are provided with a link to submit materials electronically. The link is accessible from the Academic Effectiveness webpage or from the email call for submissions.