

# Graduate Learning Outcomes Western Oregon University



Presented to the Faculty Senate  
by the Graduate Studies Committee  
March 2, 2020

# Graduate Learning PLC, 2018

1. Determine a framework for graduate learning outcomes that would promote faculty buy in and jumpstart the assessment process in graduate programs at WOU
2. Explore graduate program exit projects and other artifacts to understand commonalities in the graduate student experience at WOU, especially as aligned with determined graduate learning outcomes
3. Establish a PLC that would work on these goals consistently and continuously for the next few years as a compliment to the curriculum and policy work of the Graduate Studies Committee as established by the Faculty Senate. It was our hope that this group would serve as an advocacy arm in establishing a collective voice for positive changes in graduate program learning.

# Meetings and Process

The GS PLC met monthly starting in October of 2018. Each meeting was approximately 1.5 hours. Meetings were held monthly, excluding January, and occurred on the following dates:

October 25, 2018,  
November 8, 2018,  
December 4, 2018,  
February 14, 2019,  
March 14, 2019,  
April 18, 2019,  
May 5, 2019

# History of GLO Work

- The history of establishing institution-wide learning outcomes for graduate programs at WOU is a history of good intentions mixed with many stops and starts that did not get very far.
- Conversation began in 2016 with a piloting of writing assessment using the Lumina Foundation's Degree Qualifications Profile as implemented by the Graduate Programs Director in the Faculty Senate Graduate Studies Committee. Members of this committee were asked to attend a rubric analysis meeting one year after the rubric was introduced to the committee, to review student writing samples.
- The Graduate Director then moved on to analyzing analytic inquiry and collaborative learning in much the same fashion. A rubric was introduced, the group was convened a few months later to look it over with sample assignments being analyzed. Participation decreased and faltered over the year. There were not set dates for analysis and no PLC was established to complete the work.

Presented to faculty senate in 2017:

<https://wou.edu/facultysenate/files/2017/07/GLOReportFacultySenate11July2017.pdf>

# Foundation to Current GLOs

- At the first meeting of the GS PLC, it was determined that the DQP was not working for faculty to align their programs with the defined outcomes.
- Rubrics felt restrictive and the process of retrofitting an established rubric to programs was not conducive to faculty buy in. Faculty were skeptical of the process of using university generic outcomes, because at the graduate level, learning outcomes are much more specific to specialized programmatic knowledge.
- PLC wanted to define expectations but would rather see a framework where everyone was empowered to and required to produce clear, crisp outcomes for their program and go through the process of showing what the program is accomplishing, with a framework that was loose enough to align with specific high level knowledge that is indicative of graduate level work.

# NWCCU Guideline 2.C.15

*NWCCU--Graduate programs intended to prepare students for research, professional practice, scholarship, or artistic creation are **characterized by a high level of expertise, originality, and critical analysis.** Programs intended to prepare students for artistic creation are directed toward developing personal expressions of original concepts, interpretations, imagination, thoughts, or feelings. Graduate programs intended to prepare students for research or scholarship are directed toward advancing the frontiers of knowledge by constructing and/or revising theories and creating or applying knowledge. Graduate programs intended to prepare students for professional practice are directed toward developing high levels of knowledge and performance skills directly related to effective practice within the profession*

# Framework as Guidance

- Framework for graduate program outcomes must be consistent with a mission for graduate work in general AND the expectations of disciplines and professions that are designed in specific disciplinary nomenclatures that are sensitive to the differences of programs, including greater depth, increased demands of knowledge in the research literature, and application of that knowledge in specific applied skills.
- We sought a framework that allowed us to also provide “transformative experiences” in connection to a shared definition of what graduate work can be and is for our students, with the hope that this would one day lead to establishing a mission statement for graduate studies at WOU..
- We wanted to have enough room within this framework for it to be nimble, and to have flexibility and agency to make our programs move forward and use our expertise as graduate faculty and coordinators.

# Difference from Undergraduate PLC work

- A key difference in our PLC work from undergraduate PLC work previously done was that prior PLCs were working with established learning outcomes,
- Our work was less formal as we were creating an outline for a new framework.
  
- We took detailed notes at our meetings and crafted a structure and framework that would provide us with baseline data for the next data cycles, from emerging needs analyses of programs and goals each had for graduate study.



# Framework for Graduate Learning Outcomes Built on Three Pillars

CORE CONTENT KNOWLEDGE (2019-2020)

APPLIED SKILLS (2020-2021)

DISPOSITIONS AND VALUES (2021-2022)

# Examples--Core Content Knowledge

For this pillar, we established the following sentence stems to guide our work and help inform our thinking about this outcome:

- Students will develop a thorough understanding of core foundational principles that underlie\_\_\_\_\_ (discipline)
- Students will learn fundamental\_\_\_\_\_practices which will enhance their ability to understand\_\_\_\_\_ and to develop better systems that\_\_\_\_\_
- Students will examine (and critique) theoretical frameworks that inform the discipline\_\_\_\_\_

# Putting this together

Coordinators define what CORE CONTENT KNOWLEDGE looks like in their discipline through examining projects and assignments that demonstrate learning of key concepts in the discipline (established by standards in the field, external accreditation, etc. )

These will vary by discipline in what is produced, but will have some commonality of concept in how knowledge is demonstrated and defined

From this, we are creating a rubric that allows us to say what a graduate student who has “mastered” core content knowledge in a discipline would “look like” as they meet standards defined by discipline, but also by graduate studies and our mission for graduate work at WOU (from NWCCU: characterized by a high level of expertise, originality, and critical analysis).

# Our Work This Year and Onto Next Year...

- Core Content Knowledge
- Faculty will submit assessment plans for this part of the framework this year, collecting and examining artifacts throughout this year to:
  - Establish a baseline process for assessment analysis in connection to outcomes by creating a rubric for common definitions that represent what a graduate student would demonstrate if they attained “core content knowledge”
  - Provide exemplars across programs that demonstrate this learning outcome
  - This process will provide a foundation to work from for the other data cycles of examining “applied skills” and “values and dispositions”.