

Best Practices for Program Learning Outcome (PLO) Assessment

Supporting Meaningful, Sustainable, and Program-Centered Assessment Practices

Purpose

This document provides **guidance on best practices** for assessing Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs). These practices are **not rules or mandates**; instead, they are a resource to support your program as they build consistent, meaningful, and sustainable assessment processes that prioritize student learning and program improvement.

1. Align Courses and Program Learning Outcomes

- Use the [Course-to-PLO Mapping Template](#) to identify which courses meaningfully support each PLO.
- **Tip:** When mapping, think about the student's development across the entire program, not course by course. Not every PLO belongs in every course. Instead, identify where students actually build and demonstrate the skills or knowledge that align with each outcome.

2. Collect Assessment Data for All PLOs Each Cycle

- Collect **assessment data for all PLOs every fall semester** to support a consistent and ongoing cycle.
- Use end-of-course summative assessments as evidence of learning. Programs should collaboratively choose a single major summative assignment for each course, ensuring alignment and consistency across faculty teaching that course.
- All data will be collected through Canvas.
- Faculty should link the appropriate PLO(s) to the selected assignment, allowing Canvas to gather and organize results for program-level analysis.

3. Facilitate Faculty Discussions in the Spring

- Schedule **spring discussions** to review the PLO data collected through Canvas.
- Include all faculty who teach in the program, including associate faculty, in ways that work for their schedules and responsibilities.
- Discussions may take place through multiple modalities to maximize participation:
 - In-person meetings
 - Zoom meetings (with AI-generated notes or transcripts as documentation)

- o Email-based dialogue
 - o Canvas discussion boards
- **Goal:** To engage the full program faculty in thinking together about trends, strengths, challenges, and opportunities for improvement.

4. Reassess and “Close the Loop”

- After reviewing data and identifying next steps, programs should reassess the same PLOs in the next cycle to determine whether actions taken led to improvements.
- Maintain a narrative connection:
Data → Discussion → Program-Level Action → Reassessment
- **Example (Program-Level, Non-Capstone):**
A program noticed through its fall PLO data that students across several courses struggled with identifying credible sources. As a program-level response, faculty collaboratively created a short “source evaluation mini-lesson” that each instructor agreed to embed in their course during the next cycle. When reassessed the following fall, the Canvas data showed improved performance in source credibility across the courses that implemented the mini-lesson.

5. Use Multiple Sources of Evidence Over Time

- As you strengthen your assessment practices, you may begin to incorporate multiple sources of evidence for a richer understanding of learning:
 - o Direct evidence (shared assignments, performance tasks, projects)
 - o Indirect evidence (student or alumni surveys, reflections, feedback)
- Triangulating data supports a broader, more accurate picture of student learning across the program.

6. Apply Shared Rubrics and Ensure Consistency

- Over time, programs may develop **shared rubrics** aligned with PLOs to promote consistency across sections and faculty.
- Consistency increases the reliability of results, making program-level conversations more meaningful.

7. Focus on Improvement, Not Compliance

- Assessment is ultimately about **strengthening student learning**, not completing reports.
- Encourage open, constructive conversations about what the data reveals.
- Celebrate areas of growth, identify shared concerns, and use results to guide thoughtful program decisions.

Conclusion

By grounding assessment in consistent data collection, inclusive faculty dialogue, and thoughtful program-level action, programs can build a meaningful and sustainable assessment cycle. These practices help ensure that PLO assessment supports continual improvement, clear evidence of learning, and a shared understanding of student achievement across the curriculum.