

# **PLU ACADEMIC PROGRAM ASSESSMENT GUIDEBOOK AND RESOURCES**

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**PLU Academic Assessment Guidebook  
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## What is Academic Assessment?

**Assessment** is the systematic collection of information about student learning, using the time, knowledge, expertise, and resources available, in order to inform decisions about how to improve learning. (Walvoord, p. 2)

At its most basic assessment is comprised of:

1. Articulating goals for student learning
2. Gathering evidence about how well students are meeting the goals
3. Interpreting evidence against predetermined standards/expectations
4. Using the evidence for the improvement of student learning

*In other words: assessment is saying what you do, doing what you say, seeing how well you did it, and then doing it better.*

### Types of Assessment

Assessment is often referred to as either *direct or indirect* and as *formative or summative*.

#### Indirect Assessment

Indirect assessment include asking current and past students how well they thought they learned, or inquiring about variables related to student learning such as satisfaction and engagement. It may also involve tracking related indicators of learning such as graduate school placements and job placements.

#### Commonly employed indirect assessments:

Surveys and questionnaires  
Interviews  
Focus groups  
Reflective essays

#### Direct Assessment

Direct assessment includes the demonstration of learning itself. Direct assessments require students to use their knowledge, skills and abilities in order to complete the selected task.

#### Commonly employed direct assessments:

Standardized/published exams and inventories  
Embedded class assignments and course activities  
Papers, projects, experiments, presentations, demonstrations,  
reports, case studies, service projects etc.

Oral exams/competence interviews  
Portfolios  
Observation

**In essence, indirect assessment asks *about* student learning while direct assessment requires a direct demonstration of learning.** Strong programmatic assessment will use both types in ways that inform one another and inform the teaching and learning process.

#### Formative Versus Summative Assessment:

***Formative assessment*** is assessment designed to give feedback on, and to improve, the process of learning. It captures student's progress toward the desired outcome.

Formative assessment is typically embedded classroom assessment that may take the form of drafts of papers, practice performances, response papers and other learning activities that contribute to the final desired outcome. Formative assessment in a program may involve evaluating papers in a 200 or 300 level course on a specific learning objective that is then re-evaluated as part of a capstone assessment.

***Summative assessment*** is assessment done for the purpose of providing an evaluative summary and capturing student achievement. Summative assessment typically occurs at the completion of a major classroom assessment, course, or program of study. The evaluation of comprehensive portfolios or capstone papers are common examples of summative assessments used at the program level at PLU.

### What is Program Assessment?

***Program assessment*** is an on-going process that is designed for the purpose of monitoring and improving student learning within a given academic program.

Quality program assessment is comprised of:

- ✓ Clearly established program mission and goals
- ✓ Explicit statements of what students are expected to learn (learning objectives)
- ✓ The intentional alignment of the curriculum to the stated learning objectives
- ✓ The collection of empirical data/evidence that indicate student attainment of the objectives (qualitative or quantitative)
- ✓ The interpretation and application of collected data/evidence for the purpose of improving student learning
- ✓ Accurate and regular documentation of the above
- ✓ Regular review of the assessment process and findings in relation to program growth and development.

Thus, it follows that the commonly identified and understood steps of program assessment include:

1. **Develop learning objectives that reflect the program's mission and goals**
2. **Check for alignment between the curriculum and the learning objectives**
3. **Develop an assessment plan**
4. **Collect and interpret assessment data**
5. **Use results to improve the program**
6. **Routinely examining the assessment process and correct it as needed**
7. **Document all assessment work and report as necessary**

Each of these steps is elaborated on briefly below.

### Steps of Program Assessment

#### **Step 1: Develop Learning Objectives**

*Learning objectives* are clear, concise statements that describe how students can demonstrate their mastery of a program goal. Learning objectives are student-focused (not faculty focused) and are anchored in verbs that identify the actions, behaviors, dispositions and ways of thinking or knowing that students should be able to demonstrate.

There are a number of things to keep in mind when designing learning objectives. These are:

1. Effective program learning objectives should:
  - a. Focus on the learner, not the teacher (what the learner will learn, NOT what the instructor will teach).
  - b. Explain how students can demonstrate mastery of the desired objective (identify the desired outcome)
  - c. Use action verbs that specify definite, observable behaviors
  - d. Use action verbs that properly identify the depth of processing required
  - e. Differentiate between value added or absolute expectations (are student required to 'improve' [value added] or are they required to perform at a specific, absolute level). Both are acceptable, but each demands its own type of attention in the assessment plan.
  - f. Incorporate or adapt professional organization outcome statements when they exist
  - g. Reflect the mission and goals of the University and the program
  - h. Be collaboratively authored and collectively accepted

(modified from Allen, p. 38 & Maki, p. 60)

2. The most effective learning objectives may often be phrased in ways that include both the desired outcome as well as the appropriate/relevant process (or

processes). This is because strong assessment practices reflect not just the desired outcomes, but also acknowledge the thoughtfulness and alignment of the learning processes used to achieve the outcome. However, when first writing program based learning objectives, the focus should be on clearly identifying the desired outcome.

Effective student learning objectives utilize phrases such as:

Upon completion of this degree, the learner will.....(*place desired outcome here*) through or as a result of or by (*place appropriate process here*)

Or

When they complete our program, students will be able to....(*place desired outcome here*) through or as a result of or by...(*place appropriate process here*).

3. Strong learning objectives lend themselves to appropriate evaluation (either qualitative or quantitative). The selection of the action verb in the objective is critical to this end. What you indicate the student should achieve is what you should then evaluate in your assessment plan. For example, if you say students will 'demonstrate' a particular skill or competency, then the actual demonstration of that skill or competency is what should ultimately be evaluated against established criteria. If students are simply asked to 'describe' the same competency rather than 'demonstrate' it on the assessment selected, it will not be possible to fully evaluate the program's success at achieving the outcome as stated.

A common tool that is helpful for selecting appropriate action verbs when writing objectives is known as Bloom's Taxonomy. A summary of action verbs based on Bloom's Taxonomy is located in the resource section of this manual. Other taxonomies and tools exist and can be used when writing learning objectives.

4. Program objectives may look and be less specific than individual course objectives. Oftentimes course objectives will specify a) the behavior/skill or ability b) a condition or process and c) the specific criterion. For example, a course learning objective might read: "Students will be able to perform one classical composition on a given instrument in front of the class with no more than three identifiable errors." In contrast, a program learning objective might state: "Students will master classical music performance on a selected instrument." Aligning the curriculum to this objective will identify where the mastery is developed within the program. Evaluating a final jury performance against an established set of criteria (e.g., a rubric established by the faculty)

may serve as the final outcome by which the success of the program in meeting this objective is ultimately evaluated.

### Approaches to developing learning objectives

There are a number of processes that can be used in developing or refining learning objectives. There is no one right procedure. Basic approaches tend to fall under one of the following types (and you may have your own based on the faculty culture, disciplinary practices and history within your own unit or program).

**Top down approach** – in this approach an existing document (or documents) is modified at the program or departmental level to reflect specific disciplinary and departmental goals. At PLU this document would be the ILOs. Or, there may be learning objectives from governing bodies, accrediting agencies or other sources that can serve as the starting point to be modified by the faculty as appropriate.

**Bottom up approach** – in this approach all faculty in a department or program identify the learning objectives that are already being met in individual classes (and are hopefully already stated on course syllabi). The faculty create a master list of all of these objectives and work together to identify common objectives as well as to identify unique or missing objectives. A final list of objectives is then developed and is refined into a cohesive and inclusive document. In this approach you are building objectives off of current practices within the department or program. Various ethnographic processes fall under this general category as well.

Regardless of the process used, it is critical to foster full involvement and work to develop consensus among all faculty in the department or program. Assessment works best when there is investment and ownership in the desired outcomes and the overall assessment plan.

Finally, learning objectives often go through refinement or modification as the assessment process unfolds over time. Difficulty in gathering or interpreting assessment data may reveal a weakness in some element of the assessment process, or it may reveal a weakness in the way an objective is stated (e.g., the objective does not accurately convey what it is the department actually values and is actually evaluating). It is okay to modify and refine objectives at any point in the assessment process. When this occurs be sure to document the change and the reason for it.

### **Step 2: Aligning the Curriculum**

Curriculum alignment is a critical element of assessment that often drives curricular revisions within classes and within programs even prior to the collection of assessment data or its evaluation. The process involves identifying where in the curriculum each of

the objectives is being met and reflecting on the overall picture. This is essentially conducting what is known as an ‘assessment audit’.

Alignment efforts can be simple simplistic, but should become more nuanced over time. An initial alignment effort may simply ask faculty to ‘check off’ which department objectives are being addressed in each of their classes. A master chart for each degree is then developed that indicates which objectives are being met and how often (some will have one check, some will have many, and occasionally, some will have no checks and will quickly demonstrate holes in the curriculum). A more refined approach will have faculty identify how objectives are being satisfied in their classes, not simply identifying if they are being addressed. Most typically this practice will identify whether an objective is “introduced”, “practiced” or “mastered” within a given course (and may also record the classroom based assessment used to demonstrate the claim). Such alignment analysis allows the faculty to better see if the overall curriculum is cohesive and if it provides for the systematic development of learning.

An example of a general alignment chart is provided below and a good resource on this step can be found in *Assessing Academic Programs in Higher Education* by Mary Allen (chapter 3), or *Assessment Clear and Simple* by Walvoord (Chapter 3 and Appendix K).

Sample Curriculum Alignment Chart					
Course	Objective 1	Objective 2	Objective 3	Objective 4	Objective 5
<b>101</b>	I				I
<b>152</b>		I			I
<b>201</b>	P		I		P
<b>220</b>	P		P		P
<b>310</b>		P			
<b>238</b>	D				D
<b>410</b>			D		
<b>480</b>	D			D	D

I – introduced, P = practiced, D = demonstrated

Adapted from: Allen, p. 43; for additional example charts see Walvoord, Appendix K, or Maki, P. 49-57

### **Step 3: Developing an Assessment Plan**

An assessment plan essentially describes what will be done when, who will do it and what will happen as a result. Developing and implementing an assessment plan is challenging. It is important to remember that part of the on-going assessment process itself involves modification of to the assessment plan. Doing assessment well not only informs student learning, it also informs the assessment process. Therefore, it is acceptable, and expected, that a program’s assessment strategies will change and evolve over time. It is acceptable and encouraged to start simplistically and add more nuance to the efforts over time, when appropriate.

**Assessment plans can be conceived of and presented any number of ways. However they are presented, the following components should be clearly articulated within the plan:**

1. Identification of the learning objective or objectives being assessed in the plan  
Note: Not all learning objectives need to be assessed every year. The goal is to assess all elements of the program over time. It is typical for a department to evaluate all learning objectives within a 3-7 year cycle.
2. How the objective(s) is/are aligned to the program (in which courses they are addressed)  
Note: It is a common, effective and efficient practice to utilize embedded classroom based assessments for program assessment purposes. This is why it is important to know the alignment of the curriculum with the department objectives.
3. A clear description of the assessment strategy or strategies being employed (e.g., indirect measures such as a survey, focus group or interview; direct measures such as standardized exams, portfolio evaluation, capstone presentation evaluation etc).  
Note: It is far better to utilize fewer strategies and to make use of the information that emerges than to conduct assessments 'for assessment sake' and never make sense of the collected information. In the case of academic assessment, less is very often much more.
4. The criterion by which the outcome will be evaluated for the purpose of program assessment.  
Note: This often employs the use of a basic rubric or other evaluative tool designed to look specifically at the variable or objective of interest. If existing classroom assessments are used for program assessment, it is most common for those assessments to be given a 'second read' by faculty other than the course instructor. The grading rubric or evaluation criteria an individual faculty uses to grade the assessment for the student will likely be different from the rubric used to evaluate the program objective(s) of interest. It is also important to remember that program assessment should deal with students in aggregate and with respect for student confidentiality, privacy and anonymity.
5. A systematic method for collecting and interpreting evidence.  
Note: Again remember, not all objectives need to be evaluated every year. Similarly, not every student needs to be evaluated on every objective. It is common and acceptable to use sampling procedures for the purposes of programmatic assessment. These should be determined in advance and should be clearly articulated in the assessment plan.

A well written assessment plan brings clarity to the process and allows for potential challenges or problems to be identified and fixed before the assessment is executed. In addition, a well written plan can easily become a report of the year's activities by adding a section that addresses the findings and recommended changes that resulted. Creating a clear plan each year and using it as the basis for reporting results is an excellent way to 'close the loop' and create a train of documentation that readily supports a commitment to on-going assessment. Plans need not be long or complicated.

#### **Step 4: Collecting and Interpreting Assessment Data**

This is the execution of the established plan as described followed by the application of professional judgment in identifying and reflecting on the indicators that emerge. Rich and thoughtful discussion among faculty is one of the true benefits of engaging in academic assessment efforts. It is not necessary to hire experts or others to interpret most programmatic assessment data (especially when embedded assessments are harnessed for programmatic review). Assessment need not yield perfect results in order to generate meaningful program improvements. Remember, assessment is inherently a reflective process, not a scientific one.

#### **Step 5: Using Results to Improve the Program (closing the loop)**

Making sense of assessment efforts and using them to improve student learning is at the heart of the assessment process. Well written objectives, a well aligned curriculum and a clear assessment plan will all contribute greatly to the ability to effectively 'close the loop'.

It is important to remember that academic assessment efforts do not prove or disprove anything. The process is a sort of 'action research', not a controlled experiment. It is up to the professional expertise and judgment of faculty to make sense of the data and information collected, and to do so for the purpose of informing pedagogy, curricular, resource, or other changes with the hope of improving the teaching and learning process. In this way, academic assessment should be viewed as the gathering of indicators for the purpose of informing local action. When done well it both answers and raises questions and feeds itself in a sort of cyclical way. The difficulty for many is in understanding that there is no end point to the well done assessment process, and in accepting that not all efforts will yield big ideas or major changes. It is important to acknowledge, track and report small findings and changes as well.

Most faculty are inherently inquisitive and are naturally inclined toward analysis and evaluation. It is likely that departments will gravitate toward assessment techniques that utilize disciplinary strengths and common practices in this regard. 'Closing the loop' occurs by incorporating changes into our classes after engaging in departmental discussion on pedagogy and/or curriculum and after reviewing assessment data and

information collected. Typically, however, we fail to track and report our judgments and their associated actions and so it appears that the loop hangs open.

To close the loop:

1. Conduct your assessment as planned.
2. Clearly identify the strengths and weaknesses uncovered during the assessment process. RECORD AND REPORT THESE.
3. Identify concrete actions that can be taken to try to improve on weaknesses and to harness strengths. RECORD, REPORT AND MAKE THESE CHANGES.
4. Keep minutes and notes from department/curriculum/assessment meetings, particularly noting any related actions taken throughout the year.
5. Incorporate the above actions into the assessment plan for the next year. Be sure that the revised assessment plan and information/data collected will provide indicators as to the effectiveness of changes made to curriculum, pedagogy etc. WRITE THE REVISED PLAN OUT.

Follow your plan. Report your findings and proposed actions. (go back to #1 & repeat)

Closing the loop simply involves taking action based on findings and keeping track of the variety of changes and improvements that result. Closing the loop might also involve the affirmation of an existing practice based on evidence collected.

### **Step 6: Examining the Assessment Process**

As previously stated, not only does the assessment process inform pedagogy, curriculum and learning, it also informs the process itself. If assessment efforts did not yield the richness of information hoped for, or did not answer the questions needing answered, then it is important to critically evaluate the plan being followed. It may help to recruit an external reviewer or reviewers to evaluate the plan, review the evidence collected and the conclusions reached, in order to make recommendations for improving the process. Even if assessment practices are working and faculty are satisfied with the improvements the process yields, it is a best practice to periodically undergo such an external review (every 4-7 years). Disciplinary accrediting bodies serve this purpose for some programs.

### **Step 7: Document and Report Work**

It is a necessary and best practice to document and report all assessment work. This is typically done as part of a department's annual report, or as a separate annual assessment report. It is essential that assessment efforts be collected in order to satisfy accountability concerns, and also to provide academic administrators with an opportunity to monitor, celebrate and convey achievements and improvements as well as to identify and attend to collective areas of need in the academic sector.

## Commonly asked questions

*What are the distinguishing features of, and differences between, a program mission statement, a set of program goals, and stated learning objectives at the program level?*

**The mission statement** communicates the broad vision of the fundamental purposes and values of a program. It should be consistent with the University's mission statement, and should be written in language that is widely understood by multiple constituents. It may provide the historical and philosophical grounding of the program, the types of services and training provided, important characteristics of program participants and graduates, or other information deemed essential to the program.

**Program goals** are broad statements concerning the knowledge, skills, abilities and values faculty expect graduating students to achieve. Program goals might also exist around matters of faculty-student engagement, civic engagement, community leadership or other defining features of a program. Program goals are generally too vague to guide the assessment of student learning, or to be the sole source for guiding curricular development.

**Learning objectives** operationalize program goals into concrete terms that are measurable, quantitatively and/or qualitatively. Learning objectives are student-focused (not faculty focused) and are anchored in verbs that identify the actions, behaviors, dispositions and ways of thinking or knowing that students should be able to demonstrate. The *Integrative Learning Objectives* are institutional level outcome statements that should become more specific at the program level, reflecting the ways of thinking and knowing that are expected within a discipline, profession or field of study.

*Why should faculty do assessment?*

All faculty members already engage in the assessment of student learning. It is a natural and necessary element of good teaching. Faculty regularly engage informal and formal assessment practices as a way to gather feedback and information that can inform their pedagogy and curriculum. At the program level assessment ensures that the cumulative learning over time and across courses reaches the level and expectations the faculty as a whole hold for their program. Assessment done well can inform local action and promote improvements to curriculum, pedagogy, resource utilization and allocation and planning decisions within a program. These are goals and desires most faculty already value and are willing to support.

*How can we do assessment well without a greater commitment of human and financial resources?*

Assessment of student learning is already occurring in every course. Taking advantage of this reality is not only the most efficient and practical approach to program assessment, it is also the most authentic. Faculty already engage in the scholarship of teaching and most faculty are genuinely committed to improving their teaching and their student's learning. Additionally, most departments encourage discussions of pedagogy and curriculum, and all departments should. Making these existing practices explicit and organizing them around clear student learning objectives is the practice of academic assessment. It is true that large scale, complex and nuanced assessment would require the commitment of additional resources. It is also true that meaningful improvements to pedagogy, curriculum and learning can occur through simple assessment strategies that take advantage of a program's existing practices. Assessment does demand time and energy to be done well and so does require an investment and a commitment to self-reflection and self-improvement. However it need not be burdensome, complex or overly taxing.

*How can we be assured that assessment data won't be used against a department if it shows a weakness in a program?*

Assessment needs to be an honest and safe practice if it is to be truly effective. The purpose of academic assessment is to foster improvement. This is not possible if weaknesses are immediately exploited or used as points of attack. It is critical that departments, programs and institutions allow for 'safe zones' to exist into which honest reflection can occur. If improvement is valued, weaknesses that are found in the assessment process will be attended to with extra effort and/or additional resources in order to foster positive change. This is a critical point that must be understood and honored at all levels of academic leadership. However, assessment may also yield patterns of deficiencies that are not able to be corrected over time. Such realities must also be dealt with honestly and appropriately.

*Isn't grading a form of assessment and can't course grades or GPA constitute sufficient assessment data?*

Course grades and grade point averages do offer some information about student learning, but are too vague to be used for the purpose of programmatic assessment. Course grades cannot be deciphered in a way that allows faculty to determine which learning objectives were met adequately within the course or program.

Patterns in course grades, however, may be used in conjunction with curricular alignment charts to identify potential areas that may need to be the subject of a department's assessment efforts.

## **Selected Resources**

## Action Verbs Based on Bloom's Taxonomy

Selected Action Verbs Commonly Used in Writing Learning Objectives					
<b>Cognitive Domain:</b>					
Knowledge	Comprehension	Application	Analysis	Synthesis	Evaluation
cite define describe identify indicate know label match name recall record repeat select state	arrange classify describe defend diagram discuss estimate generalize infer paraphrase predict report review translate	apply change compute discover illustrate interpret manipulate modify organize perform prepare produce solve translate use	analyze appraise calculate compare contrast criticize debate determine distinguish examine identify select solve test	arrange assemble categorize collect combine compose construct create design formulate generate modify produce revise	assess conclude discriminate estimate evaluate grade interpret judge justify measure rate score support value
<b>Affective Domain:</b>					
Receive	Respond	Value	Organize	Internalize	
acknowledge ask attend concentrate discuss focus follow listen retain take part	cite clarify react contribute examples interpret perform present provide question respond seek clarification	argue challenge confront criticize debate justify persuade refute	arrange build compare contrast defend develop formulate modify prioritize relate reconcile	act display influence practice solve	
<b>Psychomotor Domain:</b>					
Imitation	Manipulation	Precision	Articulation	Naturalization	
adhere copy follow replicate repeat	build execute implement perform re-create	calibrate control complete demonstrate perfect show	adapt construct combine coordinate integrate formulate modify master	design invent manage specify	

A modification of Bloom's Taxonomy (Anderson et al., 2001: A taxonomy for learning, teaching, and assessing: A revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of educational objectives. Addison-Wesley).

## **9 Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning**

1. **The assessment of student learning begins with educational values.** Assessment is not an end in itself but a vehicle for educational improvement. Its effective practice, then, begins with and enacts a vision of the kinds of learning we most value for students and strive to help them achieve. Educational values should drive not only **what** we choose to assess but also **how** we do so. Where questions about educational mission and values are skipped over, assessment threatens to be an exercise in measuring what's easy, rather than a process of improving what we really care about.
2. **Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time.** Learning is a complex process. It entails not only what students know but what they can do with what they know; it involves not only knowledge and abilities but values, attitudes, and habits of mind that affect both academic success and performance beyond the classroom. Assessment should reflect these understandings by employing a diverse array of methods, including those that call for actual performance, using them over time so as to reveal change, growth, and increasing degrees of integration. Such an approach aims for a more complete and accurate picture of learning, and therefore firmer bases for improving our students' educational experience.
3. **Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes.** Assessment is a goal-oriented process. It entails comparing educational performance with educational purposes and expectations--these derived from the institution's mission, from faculty intentions in program and course design, and from knowledge of students' own goals. Where program purposes lack specificity or agreement, assessment as a process pushes a campus toward clarity about where to aim and what standards to apply; assessment also prompts attention to where and how program goals will be taught and learned. Clear, shared, implementable goals are the cornerstone for assessment that is focused and useful.
4. **Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes.** Information about outcomes is of high importance; where students "end up" matters greatly. But to improve outcomes, we need to know about student experience along the way--about the curricula, teaching, and kind of student effort that lead to particular outcomes. Assessment can help us understand which students learn best under what conditions; with such knowledge comes the capacity to improve the whole of their learning.
5. **Assessment works best when it is ongoing, not episodic.** Assessment is a process whose power is cumulative. Though isolated, "one-shot" assessment can be better than none, improvement over time is best fostered when assessment entails a linked series of cohorts of students; it may mean collecting the same examples of student performance or using the same instrument semester after semester. The point is to monitor progress toward intended goals in a spirit of continuous improvement. Along the way, the assessment process itself should be evaluated and refined in light of emerging insights.
6. **Assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved.** Student learning is a campus-wide responsibility, and assessment is a way of enacting that responsibility. Thus, while assessment efforts

- may start small, the aim over time is to involve people from across the educational community. Faculty play an especially important role, but assessment's questions can't be fully addressed without participation by student-affairs educators, librarians, administrators, and students. Assessment may also involve individuals from beyond the campus (alumni/ae, trustees, employers) whose experience can enrich the sense of appropriate aims and standards for learning. Thus understood, assessment is not a task for small groups of experts but a collaborative activity; its aim is wider, better-informed attention to student learning by all parties with a stake in its improvement.
7. **Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about.** Assessment recognizes the value of information in the process of improvement. But to be useful, information must be connected to issues or questions that people really care about. This implies assessment approaches that produce evidence that relevant parties will find credible, suggestive, and applicable to decisions that need to be made. It means thinking in advance about how the information will be used, and by whom. The point of assessment is not to gather data and return "results"; it is a process that starts with the questions of decision-makers, that involves them in the gathering and interpreting of data, and that informs and helps guide continuous improvement.
  8. **Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change.** Assessment alone changes little. Its greatest contribution comes on campuses where the quality of teaching and learning is visibly valued and worked at. On such campuses, the push to improve educational performance is a visible and primary goal of leadership; improving the quality of undergraduate education is central to the institution's planning, budgeting, and personnel decisions. On such campuses, information about learning outcomes is seen as an integral part of decision making, and avidly sought.
  9. **Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public.** There is a compelling public stake in education. As educators, we have a responsibility to the publics that support or depend on us to provide information about the ways in which our students meet goals and expectations. But that responsibility goes beyond the reporting of such information; our deeper obligation--to ourselves, our students, and society--is to improve. Those to whom educators are accountable have a corresponding obligation to support such attempts at improvement.

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## **INTEGRATIVE LEARNING OBJECTIVES OF PACIFIC LUTHERAN UNIVERSITY**

Pacific Lutheran University's Integrative Learning Objectives are designed to provide a common understanding of how learning at PLU is targeted. These objectives offer a unifying framework for understanding how our community defines the general skills or abilities that should be exhibited by an individual who is granted a PLU bachelor's degree. Therefore, they are integrative in nature.

University policy, adopted by the Deans' and President's Councils in the summer of 1998, lodges responsibility for the singularly academic components of assessment directly with academic departments, schools, and cross-disciplinary programs and their administrators. The Integrative Learning Objectives (ILOs) are intended to provide these units with a conceptual reference in their efforts to build on and reinforce the goals of the General University Requirements in their own particular curricula, as well as to assist the university in such assessment related activities as general student and alumni surveys. Academic units may refer to the ILOs in their annual assessment reports. Not all ILOs are expected to be dealt with equally by every program, much less by every course. (Any change in the current university policy that lodges primary responsibility for academic assessment with academic units and programs will include consultation with the faculty through its standing governing structure.)

The ILOs do not represent, by themselves, all of our understanding of education. Rather, they are a part of a more complex web of education. One can conceptualize the outcomes of a PLU education in three general categories: knowledge, skills or abilities, and values and attitudes. These outcomes occur simultaneously at the individual course, program or major, and institutional levels. Work to develop and measure or evaluate the learning outcomes of students is connected to and informed by the learning outcomes set by groups of faculty in departments, schools, and programs. Likewise, these activities are guided by the outcomes established by the whole faculty for all PLU graduates. Students' perceptions of the educational process should provide useful feedback at all three levels.

The ILOs, which relate primarily to the skills/abilities domain at the whole institutional level, range from the ability to critically analyze and resolve complex issues and problems to being able to work in and understand constantly changing environments, cultures, and times. They transcend disciplines and specialized knowledge, but are not meant to replace or change the contextualized knowledge base of disciplines and fields. They are meant to serve as a useful framework that unifies education throughout Pacific Lutheran University while disciplinary study provides students with the knowledge and understanding of a field that will allow them to function effectively in their chosen area. With respect to this base of knowledge, these global statements can be made:

The PLU graduate is expected to have a broad knowledge of the basic liberal arts and sciences.

The PLU graduate should have an understanding of the interconnections among these basic liberal arts and sciences that provide the broad framework for living with the complexities of life.

The PLU graduate is expected to develop an in-depth knowledge of a specified area of knowledge designated as a major within the university.

The PLU graduate should have an understanding of the interconnections among the basic liberal arts and sciences and the in-depth knowledge of her/his specified major area.

## **The Integrative Learning Objectives**

In addition to the knowledge base described above, and an awareness of how different disciplinary methodologies are used, every student at Pacific Lutheran University is expected to develop the following abilities:

### **A. Critical Reflection**

1. Select sources of information using appropriate research methods, including those employing technology, and make use of that information carefully and critically.
2. Consider issues from multiple perspectives.
3. Evaluate assumptions and consequences of different perspectives in assessing possible solutions to problems.
4. Understand and explain divergent viewpoints on complex issues, critically assess the support available for each, and defend one's own judgments.

### **B. Expression**

1. Communicate clearly and effectively in both written and oral forms.
2. Adapt message to various audiences using appropriate media, convention, or styles.
3. Create symbols or meanings in a variety of expressive media, both verbal and nonverbal.

### **C. Interaction with Others**

1. Work creatively to identify and clarify the issues of concern.
2. Acknowledge and respond to conflicting ideas, principles, and traditions, identifying common interests where possible.
3. Develop and promote effective strategies and interpersonal relationships for implementing cooperative actions.

### **D. Valuing**

1. Articulate and critically assess one's own values, with an awareness of the communities and traditions that have helped to shape them.
2. Recognize how others have arrived at values different from one's own, and consider their view charitably and with an appreciation for the context in which they emerged.
3. Develop a habit of caring for oneself, for others, and for the environment.
4. Approach moral, spiritual, and intellectual development as a life-long process of making informed choices in one's commitments.
5. Approach one's commitments with a high level of personal responsibility and professional accountability.

### **E. Multiple Frameworks**

1. Recognize and understand how cultures profoundly shape different assumptions and behaviors.
2. Identify issues and problems facing people in every culture (including one's own), seeking constructive strategies for addressing them.
3. Cultivate respect for diverse cultures, practices, and traditions.

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