

## **GLOSSARY**

### **Academic Unit**

An academic unit is defined as a department or school whose mission is teaching and research and it houses the academic degree programs. Point Loma Nazarene University has seventeen academic units. These include all academic departments (e.g. Psychology, Biology, Chemistry, etc.) and schools (e.g. Education, Business, Nursing, etc.).

### **Accreditation**

Accreditation is a voluntary process involving an association of schools and/or colleges to encourage high standards of education. Accreditation indicates that the Commission judges that the institution, in a manner consistent with Commission standards, offers its students on a satisfactory level the educational opportunities implied in its objectives and is likely to continue to do so, *WASC Handbook of Accreditation, (revised August 2011)*.

### **Accrediting Association (regional)**

Regional accreditation is a voluntary, non-governmental association established to administer accrediting procedures and standards for universities but not specific academic programs. A listed accrediting body is one that is officially listed by the Secretary of Education because it is used as part of the Department of Education's processes for determining institutional eligibility for certain federal funds. There are five senior college and university regional accreditation associations: Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, New England Association of Schools and Colleges, North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, and the Western Association of Schools and College Accreditation Commission (WASC).

### **Accrediting Association (specialized, professional)**

**Several PLNU academic programs also** adhere to specialized accreditation that certifies the professional standards and quality of the program. For example, the School of Education is required by the State of California to be accredited by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) and to meet these Standards for credentialing programs. The Program Review Committee works with the academic units in coordinating the timing of the internal program review cycle and specialized accreditation reviews.

### **Alignment (curriculum)**

Alignment means that curriculum is coherent; it has a common framework that provides linkages among curriculum, instruction/learning experiences and assessment. An example is a tool that facilitates an alignment to a curriculum map.

### **Assessment Plan**

Each academic unit is required to have assessment plans for the academic programs it offers. A plan outlines the student learning outcomes and program objectives, the direct and indirect assessment methods used to demonstrate attainment of each outcome, a brief explanation of the assessment methods, and an indication of which outcomes are addressed by each method, the intervals and semesters at which evidence is collected and reviewed, and the individual(s) responsible for the collection and review of the evidence.

### **Capstone or Culminating Experience**

A capstone, or culminating experience, is generally located in a capstone course in the senior year of college. It consists of a learning experience, performance task, paper or project on a topic chosen by the student or by the instructor. In some majors the culminating experience consists of writing an academic paper with a literature review or completing an Honors Thesis. In other majors, the culminating experience may be a singing recital or an art exhibit. In the sciences, students may take a standardized test, e.g., the Biology field test, at the end of their last course in the program as their culminating experience.

### **Goals (program or academic unit)**

These are broad statements of what an academic unit or program aims to achieve and they serve as guiding aims to achieve through Learning Outcomes. **Course Goals** - are broad, general statements of what a course aims to achieve. *Example:* "This course will introduce students to design methods and quality art" or "This course will expose students to federal and state government requirements for personal privacy, search and seizure."

### **Institutional Effectiveness Committee**

The Institutional Effectiveness Committee is chaired by the Director of Institutional Effectiveness and reports to the President (or designee). It is comprised of twelve faculty and staff.

Major responsibilities:

1. Advise the Director of Institutional Effectiveness on issues related to institutional assessment.
2. Facilitate the assessment program for the university in order to support institutional effectiveness.
3. Provide support for academic, administrative, and co-curricular leaders in their work to review program objectives, means of assessment, criteria for assessment, results of assessment, and use of results.
4. Receive and review annual assessment reports from all institutional units.
5. Ensure that the institutional assessment program is linked to the university's strategic plan and the academic planning process.

### **Mission or Statement of Purpose**

The Program's mission, or statement of purpose, should provide an overview of the department/program's philosophy, goals, and objectives. Basically, it should embody the program's purpose and the faculty's priorities for the program (**Allen, 2004**).

### **Program (academic)**

The academic program is a set of courses, units and other requirements leading to an academic degree (e.g. M.B.A., B.S. Chemistry, B.A. Sociology, etc.).

### **Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)**

Statement of the cumulative knowledge, attitudes, and skills that students should know, acquire, or is able to do at the end of an academic program. These are readily measured:

*Example:* "Students with an MS in Research and Evaluation will demonstrate proficiency in using statistical software to analyze large data sets."

*Example (GE Program Learning Outcomes):* As a result of the GE program, “Students will demonstrate understanding of analysis, criticism, and advocacy in the context of deductive and inductive reasoning,” or “Students can perform computations and symbolic manipulations.”

### **Program Review**

The Program Review process examines the effectiveness of an academic program. The academic program review process is applied to degree programs, stand-alone minors, General Education, and academic centers and institutes. The process provides feedback (a) to the academic unit primarily responsible for the program, (b) to the appropriate academic administrators, and (c) to external units in the form of confirmation of the existence of the APR process and in the form of summaries of the outcomes.

### **Program Review Committee**

The Program Review Committee is comprised of five faculty and is chaired by the Provost (or designee), provides oversight of the program review process and coordinates with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and the Institutional Effectiveness Committee.

Major responsibilities:

1. Provide evaluative feedback to departments/schools who have submitted program review documents.
2. Provide summative recommendations to APC or GSC regarding programs that have undergone program review.
3. Provide information to administrative units regarding the resources required to implement program improvements.
4. Prioritize program improvement recommendations and deliver these to the appropriate administrative units.

### **Stakeholder**

A stakeholder is anyone who has a vested interest in the outcome of the program or project. For example, the stakeholders of the University will include such diverse groups as the faculty, students, alumni, community groups, administration, and bondholders.

### **Standards (accreditation)**

Accreditation standards are a level of accomplishment all students are expected to meet or exceed. Standards do not necessarily imply high quality learning; sometimes the level is a lowest common denominator. Nor do they imply complete standardization in a program; a common minimum level could be achieved by multiple pathways and demonstrated in various ways. Examples: carrying on a conversation about daily activities in a foreign language using correct grammar and comprehensible pronunciation; achieving a certain score on a standardized test (**Leskes, 2004**).

### **Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)**

Learning outcomes are the end rather than the means. Learning outcomes describe what a student will be able to KNOW, UNDERSTAND or be able TO DO at the end of a course. SLOs answer the question, “How will the student be different as a result of taking your course?” The learning outcomes are “the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and habits of mind that students will take with them from learning experience” (Linda Suskie, **Assessing Student Learning**, 2009, p. 117). They may be stated in terms of expected knowledge, skills or attitudes. These outcomes must be consistent with the mission of the department, college, and university. (**Assessing Academic Programs in Higher Education**, Allen, 2003).

- *Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILO)* – broad, over-arching learning outcomes that describe what our graduates should know, understand or be able to do.
- *School or Department Learning Outcomes*- academic units with multiple programs and different degree levels may define learning outcomes that align all of the programs with the desired outcomes of the academic unit.
- *Program Learning Outcomes (PLO)* - learning outcomes at the program level. These outcomes are overarching learning outcomes that describe learning obtained across multiple courses in the curriculum. Program student learning outcomes are broad descriptions of what students will be able to know, what they will be able to do, or how they will think about the discipline or approach problem solving after they finish your program. Although these outcomes are broad and general, they must still be written in language that clearly implies a measurable behavior or quality of work.
- *Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)*—Statements of what students are expected to know, understand and be able to do by the time they complete the course. For students it may be easier to communicate the learning outcomes in language like: *You will* instead of the *student will* – it personalizes the learning for them. CLOs are more specific learning outcomes that identify learning in an individual course. Course CLOs will be more detailed and specific than program PLOs because they describe the unique skills and knowledge associated with a specific course. However, they should be general enough to provide flexibility and accommodate variation in specific content as the field evolves over time. For example, a course CLO might state that student will be able to describe contemporary models and theories within a specialty area. Omission of the specific models and theories to be described allows an instructor to add newly-emerging theories and models without rewriting the CLOs for the course.

Course learning outcomes should be clearly related to course topics, assignments, exams, and other graded work.

### **Teach-Out Plan**

A Teach Out plan is required by WASC when an academic unit decides to close an educational degree program. The academic unit should consider the following options:

1. The institution teaches out currently enrolled students; no longer admits students to programs; and terminates the program, the operations of a branch campus, or the operations of an institution after students have graduated.
2. The institution enters into a contract for another institution or organization to teach out the educational programs or program. Such a teach-out agreement requires Commission approval. Southern Association of Schools and Colleges

<http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/081705/teach%20out.close%20institution.pdf>

### **Value added**

The increase in learning that occurs during a course, program, or undergraduate education. Can either focus on the individual student (how much better a student can write, for example, at the end than at the beginning) or on a cohort of students (whether senior papers demonstrate more sophisticated writing skills—in the aggregate—than freshmen papers). Requires a baseline measurement for comparison.

## Value-added vs. Absolute Learning Outcomes

- **Value-added Learning Outcomes** – State that students will improve. Value-added learning outcomes describe the increase in learning that occurs during a course, program, or undergraduate education. These learning outcomes require a baseline measurement for comparison, such as a pre-test/post-test or a similar mechanism.
  - **Absolute Learning Outcomes**- Absolute Learning Outcomes state that students will be competent, so pre/post test data analysis is not necessary.
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## References and definitions adopted from the following links:

Allen, Mary J. *Assessing Academic Programs in Higher Education*. Boston, MA: Anker Publishing, 2004.

Allen, Mary; Noel, Richard C; Beth, M; and McMillin, Daniel J. *Outcomes Assessment Handbook*. American Association for Higher Education (AAHE). Available at: <http://www.aahe.org/>

Erwin, Dary, Council of the National Postsecondary Education Cooperative Student Outcomes, 2000 <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2000/2000195.pdf>.

Leskes, Andrea. "Beyond Confusion: an Assessment Glossary." *Peer Review*. Winter/Spring 2002. <http://www.aacu.org/peerreview/pr-sp02/pr-sp02reality.cfm>.

Suskie, Linda. *Assessing Student Learning*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Jossey-Bass, 2009.

[WASC Evidence Guide, January 2002 \(updated September 8, 2008\) link](#)

[WASC Handbook of Accreditation/ 2008 \(updated August 30, 2011\) link](#)