Program Learning Outcome FAQs

What Is a Program Learning Outcome?

A Program Learning Outcome (PLO) is a statement that describes the essential knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors students are expected to have when they graduate from a particular program.

What is Outcomes Assessment?

Outcomes Assessment is the cyclical process of identifying expected outcomes, assessing the extent to which the outcomes are achieved, and providing evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results.

What is the Purpose of PLO Assessment?

The purpose of the annual PLO assessment is to identify areas of learning where students are weak and for faculty to collaboratively formulate a plan of action to strengthen those areas within the entire program. In order to assess a program, faculty must review content, delivery, and assessment measures. Generally, student work nearing graduation is assessed at first to evaluate the “end product” of learning.

Faculty members are encouraged to use methods of assessment that reveal weaknesses; this may involve submitting results with low success rates with respect to the target in question. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness considers this a mark of an effective assessment.

Why Do We Have to Assess PLOs?

Assessing educational programs represents good practice in higher education and establishes levels of accomplishment for continuous improvement.

By assessing students nearing graduation, faculty members receive information about their program’s end product. If graduating students are not meeting a program’s learning outcomes, that information can be used to look back throughout the entire program to see where that particular learning area is introduced, reinforced, and mastered.

To develop, revise, or teach curriculum at the course level, it is beneficial to have a clear understanding of how the course is expected to contribute to the achievement of one or more of the program learning outcomes.