Overview Report of Program Assessment Reporting Academic Year 2017-18

# Overview of Current Practice

Western Oregon University defines programs to include majors, minors and certificates at the graduate and undergraduate level; general education; and co-curricular and academic support services in Academic Affairs. The basic assessment strategy established in 2015-16 is for all programs to determine their Program Learning Outcomes (PLO) and to align at least one PLO to an Undergraduate Learning Outcome (ULO) or Graduate Learning Outcome (GLO). Programs also ensure that their courses align to at least one PLO or ULO/GLO and clearly identify on all course syllabi the PLOs and ULOs featured in that course. For program assessment reporting, each program is responsible for annually selecting at least one PLO to focus on, using the instruments, assignments and strategies that the program determines to be appropriate. Engaging in conversation with all members of the program based upon the assessment information, and reporting on those conversations, including any curricular decision making, is an important element of the strategy.

# Overview of Results

## Reporting Trends

For the 2017-18 academic year, Tk20 had 57 programs identified as available for assessment reporting.[[1]](#footnote-1) A summary of the reporting status is provided in Table 1. Forty-five programs (35 undergraduate programs, 5 graduate certificates, 7 graduate programs) filed assessment reports by December 15, 2019. Two undergraduate programs notified the Office of Academic Effectiveness that they were unable to collect data or complete reports for the year. One undergraduate program requested an extension and one program identified that they were engaged in program review and were postponing their report to the completion of that review. One graduate certificate program did not file a report. One graduate program had just launched so did not yet have activities on which to report. Division Chairs identified four programs in Tk20 that should have been consolidated with other programs in the system and one program that needed to be added to the system. One group filed a single report for three separate programs, treating those as a single program, even though the three have some different learning outcomes. As the assessment report primarily focused on a learning outcome common to the programs and followed the review year for those programs, this consolidation is likely a reflection of that review process. After adjusting for the programs identified as either inactive or consolidated with another program, there were 50 programs available for assessment, yielding a reporting rate of 88% as of December 15, 2018.

Table 1: Number of programs completing assessment reports. Incomplete reports include programs requesting extensions or deferring to program review, claiming an inability to report, or simply not reporting.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Program type | Complete reports | Incomplete reports | Identified changes to program status in Tk20 |
| Undergraduate  | 35 | 4  | 5  |
| Graduate | 7 | 0 | 1 |
| Graduate certificates | 4 | 1 | 1 |

## Filing and archiving of assessment reports

Of the 45 reports filed, 24 (53%) were not filed directly into Tk20 but emailed to either Interim Associate Provost Erin Baumgartner or Project Manager Beverly West, who then completed the Tk20 input. The majority of these emailed reports were submitted by individuals who indicated either a lack of familiarity with Tk20 or an attempt to use Tk20 that resulted in some technological barrier; two program reports indicated a desire for more assistance and training in Tk20 use. A small number of programs also identified the use of Moodle as their primary data archive. Given the instability of Moodle, this is an undesirable practice. Other programs, currently departmental archives (ranging from papers maintained in filing cabinets, to un-networked hard drives, to password-protected networked University drives) noted a desire for a more centralized and strategic University assessment data archival system. Most programs painted in very broad strokes when describing the location and status of assessment data. Unsurprisingly, about a half dozen of program assessment coordinators new to the process expressed frustration and a lack of clarity as to the necessary practice or availability of assessment data. This information taken together indicates a need for a higher level of training and targeted use of Tk20 for assessment and for explicit instructions in Tk20 to describe in detail the status and storage of data so that subsequent assessment coordinators are better able to follow up.

## Program Learning Outcomes

Reporting on learning outcomes varied greatly by program. The number of outcomes in a program ranges from three to nine total outcomes (mean = 3.58, median = 3, mode = 3). The majority of programs (29) reported on some subset of their outcomes (mean = 1.76, median = 1, mode = 1). A large number of programs (16) reported in some way on all of their learning outcomes. Six of these programs used a single “holistic” assessment instrument to gather data on all of their outcomes. In most cases such an instrument was an optimal fit to one “primary” outcome but poorly aligned to the other “secondary” outcomes, based upon the description of instruments and the discussion of the data (if presented). There was only one program that stood out as using a holistic instrument (capstone experience) to effectively assess multiple program outcomes with demonstrated alignment of the instrument to all outcomes. Four programs (including those that did not file reports) did not clearly report on any of their program outcomes; two of these programs did make note of discovering, via their attempt to work with their outcomes, that those outcomes were so difficult to assess that they intend to revise their outcomes and the associated assessment plans.

Generally, programs primarily relied on a capstone experience, portfolio, or proficiency exam to provide their assessment data. The few programs that did gather assessment data via coursework focused only on a single course or small cluster of courses taken later in program course of study. There were no programs that provided any information on course alignment or contributions of multiple courses in a program.

Alignment of assessment planning and/or collected data to programmatic learning outcomes was clearly identified in 33 programs. Partial alignment[[2]](#footnote-2) was evident in 6 programs, while alignment was not evident in 10 programs (including those that failed to report).

Slightly over half of the programs provided actual assessment data (25); 10 provided partial or anecdotal data and 14 did not provide any data. Thirty-one programs demonstrated evidence of curricular decision-making driven by their review of outcomes assessment. In three cases, programs that did not collect data or collected very limited data used the challenges they faced in carrying out their assessment plan to drive their decision-making around refining their program outcomes and associated assessment plan. Five of the programs that were able to collect data indicated that through that process, they identified a need to adjust their outcomes and/or their associated assessment planning.

## Graduate programs and Graduate Learning Outcomes

In 2016, the Graduate Studies committee identified the Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) model as a potential one for assessment of Graduate Learning Outcomes. No graduate programs submitting reports for 2017-18 identified explicit alignment to any element of the DQP framework. For the majority of Graduate programs and certificates, professional credentials or external accreditation standards were identified as paramount measures. One graduate program noted that they would no longer be accredited by an external accreditor and would be developing a new assessment plan.

## Undergraduate programs and Undergraduate Learning Outcomes

Based upon a review of assessment instruments (or the description of the instrument if the instrument itself was not provided) and the data presented, the majority of undergraduate programs (Table 2) did not either explicitly describe efforts to specifically address Undergraduate Learning Outcomes (ULOs) or articulate programmatic thinking around their alignment to ULOs. A handful of programs identified direct or adapted use of one of the rubrics associated with a ULO, primarily Inquiry and Analysis. The majority of programs articulated aspirations or strategies for collecting data that implied some form of connection to a ULO without actually identifying an outcome or providing a clear strategy for alignment. Only three programs had reports that did not provide either an explicit or implicit connection to a ULO, based upon the description of the assessment data. The majority of undergraduate programs provided language that could be construed as aligning to at least one ULO, but did not describe any deliberate effort to align with or collect assessment data in support of a ULO.

Table 2: Alignment to Undergraduate Learning Outcomes. *Explicit alignment* describes programs that clearly and purposefully identified how their program learning outcome and associated assessment of that outcome aligned to a ULO. *Implicit alignment* describes programs that included a description that could be construed to align to a ULO, but without clearly and purposefully identifying that Outcome.

NA = Not applied, W = Written Communication, QL = Quantitative Literacy, IA = Inquiry and Analysis, IL = Integrative Learning, DGL = Diversity and Global Learning.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Alignment to ULOs | Explicit alignment to ULO | Implicit Alignment to ULO |
| ULOs | NA | W | QL | IA | IL | DGL | NA | W | QL | IA | IL | DGL |
| Programs with alignment | 26 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 15 | 8 | 6 |

## Program Assessment Gaps

There are notable gaps in Program Assessment. Programs that meet WOU’s definition of a program but did not file any assessment plan or report for 2017-18 include:

* General Education. The contributions of General Education to meeting the Undergraduate Learning Outcomes is currently assessed via the University Professional Learning Community process. With the adoption of the revamped General Education Program (including General Education Learning Outcomes) by WOU for the 2019-20 academic year, it is anticipated that the PLCs will continue to function as one component of General Education program assessment, but there should be an expectation for the submission of a General Education program assessment report.
* Honors. The Honors program has identified program learning outcomes, but has currently not been included in program assessment reporting. The status of Honors as an alternate General Education program at WOU should allow for targeted program assessment reporting concurrent with General Education assessment.
* Interdisciplinary Studies. Interdisciplinary Studies has also identified program learning outcomes but has not yet engaged in program assessment reporting. As the number of students completing Interdisciplinary Studies is growing at WOU, this program should be included in program assessment planning and reporting in the immediate future.
* All Applied Baccalaureates. As many of the Applied Baccalaureates are built upon existing Undergraduate or Graduate programs, it might be assumed that program assessment reporting includes students completing AB degrees. This is unclear, however, as no program assessment report touched on or mentioned any consideration of AB students as part of the reporting or provided clarification regarding AB completion. As there are also Applied Baccalaureates (e.g. Liberal Studies) that are not connected to existing assessed academic program, the exclusion of AB programs from program assessment is an obvious oversight that needs to be remedied.

# Recommendations

## Improve Graduate program assessment as part of University assessment

The majority of Graduate programs reporting focused on either professional preparation benchmarks or standards set by external accreditors. None of the WOU graduate programs appears to perceive an affiliation between their program and the proposed DQP outcomes. As a result, graduate program assessment does not have any consistency or institution-specific identity and therefore the opportunities for graduate programs to engage in continuing effectiveness through sharing data and learning from one another are limited. At this time, the Graduate Professional Learning Community is examining a model for building a shared framework of desired attributes of WOU graduates, to which each graduate program would align learning outcomes appropriate to their role in student professional preparation. Program assessment for Graduate programs should then be structured within Tk20 to utilize the model developed by the Graduate PLC.

## Refinement of Tk20 for more effective data collection

Some minor adjustments to the Tk20 reporting system and training for faculty in use of the system is a relatively low-effort way to greatly improve program assessment reporting. Tk20 needs to be updated to reflect current program structure, including consolidating programs as indicated by program coordinators and Division chairs and clarifying the need for reporting on programs that were not addressed in program reporting this year. We anticipate this will also enable programs to use Tk20 to archive assessment data and to provide a stronger system for maintaining assessment plans and data over time even as program assessment coordinators change within a program.

Through Winter and Spring 2019, we plan to offer regular opportunities for Tk20 training (weekly one-hour sessions held at different days and times to optimize the ability of all faculty to attend). These sessions will accomplish several goals: 1) identification of all program reporters needing Tk20 access, 2) training of program reporters in effective use of Tk20, including clarification of data management plans 3) gathering of information from program reporters regarding their needs to better use Tk20 to gather, organize and report assessment information, and 4) provide program reporters with a greater understanding of how their program fits in the broader assessment picture, and how various outcomes align and support each other. Our goal is for all programs to enter their assessment plans into Tk20 for the 2019-20 academic year; individuals who are unable to enter their information can schedule one-on-one appointments for a Tk20 tutorial so that they are provided the support they need to enter information.

## Strengthen alignment to Undergraduate Learning Outcomes

The connection to ULOs in the reports was weak in the majority of programs. Some small refinements to assessment planning and reporting will optimize information gathering on the ULOs addressed by programs. Currently, the focus on ULO reporting is primarily via Professional Learning Community data collection on courses that have identified alignment to ULOs. This has potentially encouraged a disconnect between program assessment and ULO assessment. Although programs are also required to align at least one program outcome to ULOs very few described exploring this in their reports. The addition of a required reporting element on ULO alignment, data collection, and decision making specific to the ULO identified by a program will make it easier and more transparent for programs to report on their work with ULOs as related to their program learning outcomes. The majority of programs that did describe explicit ULO alignment identified Inquiry and Analysis, likely because Inquiry and Analysis was a targeted ULO for PLC reporting this year. It would be fairly straightforward to take advantage of both current practices by asking all programs that have a program learning outcome aligned to a particular ULO to focus on that ULO as a cohesive annual effort, much as has been established by PLC practice. This would also allow for the continued use of PLCs as an element of General Education assessment while capturing broader ULO assessment via program assessment.

The biggest shortfall in program assessment reporting was the lack of information on how specific courses integrate into program fulfillment. Most programs focused on a capstone project, exit exam, or single upper division class. No program described how multiple courses aligned to a particular program outcome or identified integrated course planning to meet learning outcomes. Ultimately, we should be working to using Tk20 to provide for course assessment as a component of program assessment, but a small first step should be to include a required element in Tk20 to identify all classes that align to the learning outcome under assessment for the year. In the next round of reporting we might also ask for identification of the assignment(s) used to assess that outcome. The next step would be to request the student assessment data (i.e. typical student performance) on the assignment for each course that aligns to the outcome. By taking these modest steps one at a time, we would work toward reporting on each learning outcome with consideration of how classes contribute as we continue to build our culture of assessment.

## Clarify assessment planning and reporting practice to ease reporting and enable analysis of University-wide assessment.

Tk20 reporting was built around a historic assessment form to ease the transition from the previous reporting mechanism to Tk20 use, but these forms are fairly scant and programs use them in a variety of different ways. Graduate programs all build reports based around their various accreditation or professional preparation requirements. It is thus somewhat challenging to identify and describe institutional trends based upon program assessment reports. By making some modest adjustments the forms that programs use to plan and report their work, we can refine and align the reporting process. These adjustments include strengthening the connections to Undergraduate (or Graduate) Learning Outcomes and clarifying classes aligned to outcomes, as outlined above.

One of the strongest elements of program reporting was the identification, by a variety of programs, of shortcomings in their outcomes and assessment plans, as well as the relatively high proportion of programs that did describe outcome-driven curricular planning. This reflective practice indicates that the time is ripe to provide opportunities for faculty to come together and learn from the program assessment reports of their colleagues.

WOU needs to support a professional development day that allows faculty to not only come together *within* programs to work on their assessment planning and reporting, but to then come together *across* programs to compare and contrast their achievement of University learning outcomes. This would provide the opportunity and the right environment to engage in strategic conversations around how to engage in continuing effectiveness, based not only on what they’ve learned about their own program but on what they’ve learned from *other* programs. Optimal times for such an “assessment-fest” would be during Fall Kickoff week (which would be more effective if extended to two weeks), immediately post-finals during Fall term, or on a selected day during Winter term in which classes are cancelled in support of this activity (this, along with MLK day, would balance out the two-day Thanksgiving holiday in Fall and the two days dedicated to Showcase and Memorial Day in Spring). It is also recommended that WOU search for and hire an assessment specialist with professional background in higher education assessment to lead this continued shift to an assessment-based culture of teaching and learning.

1. To be available for assessment reporting in Tk20, programs must be listed in Tk20’s organizational hierarchy and have at least one outcome listed. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Partial alignment refers to programs that addressed more than one outcome in their report, but did not present information well-aligned to all outcomes addressed. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)