Alignment of Learning Outcomes with Course and Program

A learning outcome is a clear and specific statement that identifies what students must demonstrate at the level and standard required to successfully pass their study at program and course levels. Read more [here](#).

When you're using the constructive alignment approach to curriculum design, one basic activity is to choose and develop learning activities that are aligned with intended learning outcomes. That is, they are:

- likely to lead to students achieving the specified learning outcomes for a particular teaching session, course, or program
- practical and appropriate to use within your current context and with available resources.

Select activities that will elicit actions related to the verbs in the learning outcomes. Learning activities should give students opportunities to develop and ultimately demonstrate their learning. Choose or design activities that allow students to progress through a range of levels of complexity as they work towards achieving deeper understanding in a particular area.

Biggs's structure of the observed learning outcome (SOLO) taxonomy (1982) supports this approach. The SOLO taxonomy provides a systematic way to describe how a learner's performance grows in complexity when mastering many academic tasks.

For example, as they progress towards the ability to conceptualise at a higher level than they have dealt with in teaching sessions or materials, students will need to move through the following levels:

- unistructural - characterised by verbs such as memorise, identify, recognise
- multistructural - characterised by verbs such as describe, list, classify
- relational - characterised by verbs such as apply, integrate, analyse, explain
- extended abstract - characterised by verbs such as theorise, generalise, reflect.

How might your learning activities provide students with opportunities to progress through these levels? Once you start thinking about this, you might want to change the verbs that form the basis of your learning outcomes.

Aligning learning outcomes with teaching goals

We call the process of aligning learning activities, learning outcomes and assessment with the course and program goals "curriculum mapping". When we conduct curriculum mapping at program level, we connect these 3 elements with the development of the program's stated goals or graduate attributes.
Course mapping

With aligning (or curriculum mapping), staff review a given course’s:

- learning outcomes
- content
- learning activities and
- assessment

to identify where and how graduate attributes are taught, practised, and assessed within the course.

Often this exercise shows that many graduate attributes are already being developed, but not in an explicit way. Mapping can reveal opportunities align aspects of course design in new or better ways, or to introduce new learning or assessment activities, and so on.

Analysing a completed curriculum map, you might see gaps where you could embed attributes, or identify areas of over-concentration where one aspect of the course is responsible for developing several attributes.

Although you can map individual courses, it is most useful if you consider and conduct course design and mapping as part of a program review and revision process. To begin this process, Faculties or Schools translate University-wide attributes into a set of discipline specific program attributes.

Program mapping

Once you have mapped individual courses, you can collate the results and map the desired skills, knowledge and/or attributes across the entire program. Not every course can be expected to develop skills, knowledge and graduate attributes.

Like course mapping, program mapping can reveal gaps and areas of over-concentration. You will be able to see whether the program currently integrates all its specified attributes and how effectively it does so.

What happens after curriculum mapping?

As one important outcome of this review process, you might revise course and program outlines so that they include clear statements of the graduate attributes each course or program is to develop.

Curriculum mapping and program review processes are most successful when Faculties use their particular learning and teaching goals as a base.

Curriculum mapping is not a predetermined process - a tick-the-box approach has limited use. Tools for curriculum mapping should help staff identify processes relevant to their particular learning and teaching context.

Further information

- Graduate Capabilities
Program-Level Learning Outcomes

Strategic goals and priorities for learning and teaching 2016-2025

Setting up and revising a course or program

See Assessment pages for alignment of assessment with learning outcomes