

# Frequently Asked Questions

1. **How will the program-level learning outcomes be used?**

As envisioned by the North West Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) charge, it is expected that they will inform a regular program review cycle in which program coordinators and faculty teaching courses in the program will systematically review student learning assessment data, identify any gaps in student performance relative to the program's learning outcomes, and make appropriate changes in the core courses. It is expected that in the future the results of these program review cycles will become more and more central to NWCCU and disciplinary re-accreditation reviews, as well as BYU's ongoing internal review of departments.

It is also expected that advisement office staff will use program learning outcomes to assist students in selecting majors and minors.

In addition, the University Curriculum Committee will at some point ask that proposed curriculum changes be justified in light of a program's learning outcomes.

2. **What is considered to be an academic program?**

Academic programs are considered to be all undergraduate majors and minors as well as all graduate degrees.

3. **Who is writing the learning objectives for the University Core?**

Undergraduate Education will take responsibility for GE courses. Religious Education will take responsibility for religion courses.

4. **Are we supposed to write learning objectives for courses, or just for programs?**

The immediate focus is on programs, not on courses. However, it is important that the implications for the learning activities embedded with a program's core courses be carefully considered when writing program-level learning outcomes. To guide the discussion of how program-level learning outcomes can be incorporated into course-level learning outcomes, you might construct a blank matrix showing program-level learning outcomes as columns and core courses as rows.

5. **Must published learning outcomes be assessable?**

Yes. Given that the intent of this initiative is to focus and continually enhance student learning within an education program, it is important that students' performance relative to each expected learning outcome is measured on a regular and systematic basis. Without the aid of direct measures of student performance, it is impossible to determine if specific expected learning outcomes are being achieved.

While it's true that some program-level learning outcomes may be so general that they can't be measured, per se, generally more specific versions of each program-level learning outcome can be incorporated into core courses as course-level learning outcomes.

Additionally, student performance relative to these course outcomes can be used as direct evidence of program-level student achievement.

6. **What kinds of assessments should we have in mind when writing program-level learning outcomes?**

It is recommended that students' performance on each learning outcome be evaluated using multiple kinds of assessments. Specifically, it is advisable to use both direct measures (e.g., students' performance on outcome-related course assignments and exams, capstone projects) and indirect measures (e.g., student surveys, employer survey, alumni survey), with special emphasis being placed on direct measures of program outcome-related student performance in core courses. (See examples of direct and indirect forms of assessment.)

**7. How do we know if the learning goals previously developed as part of the accreditation process will satisfy the current assignment to write learning outcomes?**

Generally speaking, learning goals are broader and more difficult to assess than learning outcomes, which are written as statements of expected learning. As noted in the attached document, "Guidelines for Writing Expected Learning Outcomes at the Program Level," the general format for a learning outcome is: Program graduates will be able to (action verb + \_\_\_\_\_).

In addition, program-level learning outcomes should serve as effective links between university-level learning outcomes and course-level learning outcomes (with each descending level being more specific and more readily assessable). In writing program learning outcomes, it is important to anticipate how they will be used in the future to guide a regular program review process, serving as a set of standards against which student performance will be assessed and subsequent changes made in related course assignments, etc.

**8. Who should be involved in the development of program-level learning outcomes?**

While colleges and programs will likely involve a different mix of individuals in drafting the program-level learning outcomes, it is likely that active participants will include program coordinator and curriculum committee members (where applicable), faculty teaching the required courses and key electives, and a representative from the advisement office. It is expected that all faculty teaching courses in a program will have an opportunity to review and comment on learning outcome drafts. At some point in the process, it is advisable to also include student inputs. Key external stakeholders may also provide value inputs.

**9. How can we begin the conversation? How can we get the faculty engaged in the subject matter?**

Here are some recommended discussion starters. What is most important for students to learn in this program? What should graduates of this program be able to do? How do this program's learning outcomes reflect the Aims of a BYU Education and requirements of applicable accrediting bodies? For a longer list of relevant questions see, Student Learning Assessments, 2003, p. 22 (attached).

**10. Where do we post our program-level learning outcomes?**

All programs will post their program-level learning outcomes on a Program-level Documentation website, a website that can be easily edited by all program coordinators and others to whom they assign editing rights. The website is located at [learningoutcomes.byu.edu](http://learningoutcomes.byu.edu).