



Assessment Guide

This glossary will serve as an institutional reference for assessment work. Having common language around assessment will allow us to work more efficiently.

- **Assessment:** A process of measuring student learning to improve teaching and learning across the institution. Assessment is continuous in that it is an ongoing structure that relies on using benchmarked performance objectives to improve future instruction, curriculum, or anything else impacting learning. Assessment can measure learning at any level of the institution:
 - **Classroom Assessment:** Determines how well students are learning or learned in a class
 - **Program-Level Assessment:** Determines how well students are learning or have learned in their program
 - **Institutional-Level Assessment:** Determines how well students are learning or have learned considering a variety of institutional factors

Good assessments are ones in which instructors and students clearly understand which learning outcomes are being assessed, as well as how and why, with the format of the assessment in alignment with the instructional techniques used to teach the learning outcome.

Types of Learning Assessment		
Type	Definition	Tools Used to Assess
Direct Assessment	Structured assessments where students directly demonstrate the skills they've learned.	● Tests & Quizzes ● Papers & Discussion Boards ● Presentations ● Structured Activities & Assignments ● Demonstrations ● Portfolios ● Self-Reflections
Indirect Assessment	Collecting information about how students think and feel about the learning process.	● Surveys ● Questionnaires ● Classroom Evaluations ● Interviews ● Surveys ● Discussions ● Self-Reflections
Formative Assessment	Measuring student learning during the learning process, potentially to make instructional adjustments depending on the pace of their learning.	● Class Discussions ● Discussion Boards ● Homework ● Activities, both in- and out- of class ● Student communication styles, frequency, and body language ● Information about other student needs

Summative Assessment	Student learning measured at the end of the learning process to determine whether students can demonstrate the learning outcome.	• Tests & Quizzes • Papers & Discussion Boards • Presentations • Structured Activities & Assignments • Demonstrations • Portfolios • Self-Reflections
Pre-Assessment	Measuring student abilities and competencies prior to entering a program. Many times third-party assessments are used. Only certain programs have pre-assessments.	• Orientation Surveys • Pre-tests • First-Day Activities • Writing Samples
Post-Assessment	Measuring student abilities after they have completed a program.	• Tests & Quizzes • Papers • Presentations • Projects • Portfolios

- **Assessment Plans:** Each program at NLU has multiple learning outcomes. An Assessment Plan is an annual document that lays out how we will assess our student achievement of each outcome to determine where and how we need to improve. An annual Assessment Plan is a list of the Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) and how each one will be measured.

Good assessment plans are as simple as possible and align four elements together. This formula is followed for each of the program's learning outcomes.

Align:

- One Program Learning Outcome (PLO)
- One performance measure (the student activity) per PLO
- One PLO Target (a measurable target, usually numerical, to assess student performance on the activity)
- One point of time in the course (beginning, middle, or end)

Good assessment plans are very specific:

- Avoid using a final exam or paper wholesale, as these require multiple learning outcomes to perform well on and therefore it is difficult for the total score to speak to one specific program learning outcome.
- Instead, refer to a specific part of a rubric that directly speaks most directly to the learning outcome, or, rather, would clearly demonstrate to the faculty that the student can perform the learning outcome.

- **Curriculum Mapping:** Aligning large-scale learning goals with small-scale learning goals, such as University Learning Outcomes (ULOs) to Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) to Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs).
- **Evaluation:** The general process of determining, through systematic means, how well a particular unit (such as an individual, program, department, or institution) is functioning. Evaluation is typically direct and summative. The word “evaluation” should not be used interchangeably with the word “assessment.”

Assessment vs. Evaluation	
Assessment	Evaluation
Measures student learning	A general method for discerning quality
Geared toward improvement	Judges a final product
Formative and Summative	Summative
Produces information to be acted upon	Arrives at an overall score

- **Grading:** Giving a mark or score to a piece of student work depending on that student’s performance and according to pre-arranged grading criteria. Grading and assessment are not the same: grading focuses on student performance on an assignment (which may incorporate multiple learning outcomes) while assessment focuses on student learning (outside of a grading structure).
- **Institutional Assessment:** The systematic process of measuring whether our students are learning what we say they are going to learn in our classes, programs, and other areas of the institution, such as Student Affairs.
- **Measure:** Determining the attribute of something. (For example, determining a level of student learning.)
 - **Direct Measure:** Assessments that specific measuring of a student’s skills and/or learning. (For example, how well they perform on an exam.)
 - **Indirect Measure:** Assessments that measure student attitudes or opinions about the learning process. (For example, how well they felt they performed on the exam.)
- **Outcome:** A statement describing what a student will be able to do at the conclusion of learning that they were not able to do prior to instruction. Good learning outcomes use strong verbs (often using [Bloom’s Taxonomy](#) as a reference) and are specific, measurable, agreed upon with the student, reasonable, and time-referenced (SMART).

Creating Strong Learning Outcomes	
Follow a Formula	Stem + Knowledge/Skill that students will learn Stem: “At the end of the learning process, students will be able to...” Knowledge/Skill: “make scrambled eggs.”
Use Action Verbs	Describe <i>exactly</i> the action the student will be able to complete at that particular course level after learning that they were not able to do before. Bloom’s Taxonomy is a common reference used to find verbs.
Make them SMART	Specific: What do we want the students to learn to do? Measurable: How will we know whether the students learned it? Actionable: What can the students realistically learn? Relevant: Why is this important? Time-Bound: Over what time period?
Learning Outcome Examples for PLOs	Students will be able to: ● Demonstrate self-awareness of the impact of their own social and cultural identities and biases. (ISPP) ● Apply allergy awareness, safety, environmental stewardship, nutrition and science, and sanitation in culinary situations. (AAS CUL) ● Identify and analyze the scope of conditions that promote or inhibit human functioning. (BA Human Services) ● Communicate actionable insights to inform stakeholder decision-making via a compelling narrative. (MS BDA) ● Make instructional decisions that effectively support the learning process of students. (M.Ed.)
Learning Outcome Examples for CLOs	Students will be able to: ● Compare and contrast major sociological theories and how they apply to social issues. (SOC 101) ● Apply essential quantitative skills for use in the hospitality industry, including recipe scaling, unit conversion, and recipe costing. (KCUL 101) ● Students will demonstrate foundational knowledge underlying the science of psychology in history and systems of psychotherapy. (PSYD 700) ● Evaluate the different types of business structures and ownership models. (BUS 101)

Learning Outcomes at National Louis University	
NLU has a number of different types of learning outcomes that work together, or are scaffolded, into a system that supports students from the classroom to their degree.	
Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)	Skills students learn in the classroom by the end of the course. CLOs build on each other throughout a program.
Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)	The sum of the skills students are to have learned upon completion of a program, whether that program is undergraduate, graduate, certificate, or doctoral.
University Learning Outcomes (ULOs)	Skills students will have learned by the end of their entire education.
Module Learning Outcomes (MLOs)	Skills students learn upon completion of a learning module (for programs that use them).
Certificate Program Learning Outcomes	Skills students learn upon completion of their certificate coursework at NLU
Student Affairs Outcomes (SAOs) (also called Co-Curricular Outcomes)	Non-academic skills students acquire outside the classroom during their time at NLU.
Remember: No matter the level, all learning outcomes must be SMART.	

- **Program Learning Outcomes:** Each Program Learning Outcome (PLO) needs four things:
 - **Assessment Measure:** Usually a specific rubric element from an assignment, paper, quiz, or exam from a particular course in the program. *Example: Final Research Paper, Content Section of Rubric*
 - **Assessment Measure Target*:** The score that demonstrates to us that students have learned and can perform the PLO. *Example: 3 or higher on a 4-point scale on the Assessment Measure*
 - **Assessment Measure Goal*:** The percentage of students (Ns included) who we want to meet the goal. *Example: 80% of students will meet the target*
 - **Time in the program when the PLO will be measured:** Beginning, Middle, or End of Program. Each PLO needs an End of Program measure, but some may have Beginning and Middle measures depending on what we want to know.
**Targets and Goals should be set based on historical data and other strategic considerations; they should not be arbitrary.*
- **Rubric:** A document, usually in a table format, with a list of student outcomes and a description of the different levels of achievement for each of those outcomes that is typically used for evaluating and grading classroom assessments. While rubrics are commonly thought of as a grading tool, going through a rubric with students can be an equally powerful teaching tool.

Attributes of Effective Rubrics

Good rubrics do the following things:

- Outline 3-5 skills the students will demonstrate on the assessment
- Include 2-4 performance levels with clear, measurable descriptions of student performance at different levels (for example: “Below Expectations; Meets Expectations; Exceeds Expectations) for each skill
- Align descriptions of student performance with the expectations for the learning they will demonstrate on the assessment, in line with instruction and CLOs
- Clearly describe different levels of demonstrable performance with even increases in performance between levels
- Can be used as instructional tools prior to the assessment to teach what students will be doing and communicate to students the instructor’s expectations
- Are reevaluated after use with each class to see if improvements can be made

- **Scaffolding:** Sequencing activities to initially meet students at their ability level and then increasing the complexity of each subsequent activity to “scaffold” or bridge the student to achieving the learning outcome. Scaffolding scales in that it happens in a single class session, throughout a course, throughout a program, or institutionally.
- **Target:** A description of a level of performance used to assess student learning.