



**Report and Recommendations for the Adoption of Revised Institutional Learning Outcomes
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Presented by the University Assessment Council

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Introduction

In academic year 2015/2016, Provost Robbyn Wacker charged the University Assessment Council to lead a campus-wide initiative focused on revising the University of Northern Colorado's (UNC) institutional learning outcomes (ILOs). The current ILOs were created in the 1990's and have become outdated and not widely known or used at UNC. The need to revise the current ILOs was identified as part of UNC's 2015 Higher Learning Commission (HLC) self-study. The University Assessment Council developed a first draft in spring 2016, and information from campus surveys and feedback meetings was used to make revisions. A final version that reflects broad input from the UNC community is presented in this report. The proposed ILOs are intended to apply to undergraduate and graduate students at UNC. They are organized into five categories that reflect important institutional goals for students.

Definitions and Purpose

Student learning outcomes (SLOs) are statements that describe what students should know or be able to do as a result of an educational experience. SLOs provide a framework for making decisions about what and how educational content is covered, assignments and activities, and how students will demonstrate their learning. SLOs also communicate to educators, students, and other stakeholders what students are expected to learn through participation in an educational experience. Educators identify SLOs at multiple levels, from single lessons or activities to course, program, and institutional levels. Ideally, SLOs across these levels align, with the broadest statements of learning at the institutional level, increasing in specificity through the remaining levels (see figure 1).

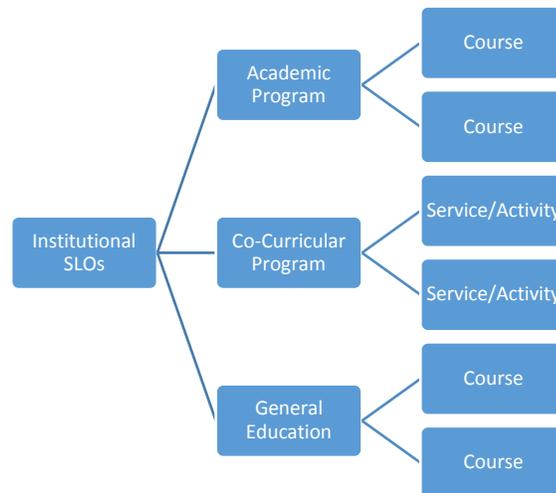


Figure 1: Learning outcomes alignment across levels

Institutional learning outcomes (ILOs) describe what all graduates of an institution should know or be able to do by the time they graduate. ILOs are broad statements of the transferable knowledge, skills, and dispositions that the institution expects of all its students. Institutions create ILOs through collaborative processes involving faculty and student services professionals, with additional input from students, alumni, and other stakeholders. ILOs are written broadly to be applicable to all programs at the institution. Some programs will not address all of the institutional learning outcomes; however, the

cumulative educational experiences in and out of the classroom should provide opportunities for students to attain all of the learning outcomes.

Program learning outcomes describe what students in a curricular or co-curricular program should know or be able to do by the time they complete the program. Academic and co-curricular programs develop SLOs that are specific to program missions and disciplines. These SLOs are typically broad statements of the foundational knowledge, skills, and dispositions students would need to be considered competent in an area of study. Program SLOs are developed collaboratively by program faculty and/or staff. In addition to program mission and disciplinary standards, programs may also consider accreditation criteria, employer and alumni input, and feedback from students. Programs use their SLOs to make decisions about curriculum, services, and activities to ensure that students have sufficient opportunities to become proficient in the learning outcomes the program has identified.

General education learning outcomes (Liberal Arts Core at UNC) are a type of program SLOs that describe what students are expected to know and be able to do after completing the general education curriculum. At UNC, general education SLOs are developed through a combination of state-mandated competencies and learning goals identified by faculty as unique to UNC. As with other program-level SLOs, general education SLOs communicate what students are expected to learn and guide decisions about LAC courses and curriculum.

Course and activity-level learning outcomes are developed individually or collaboratively by faculty or staff. At this level, the SLOs are more specific and linked directly to content knowledge, skills, or dispositions. Course/activity SLOs should expand on and align with the program SLOs. Table 1 shows an example of SLOs from the institutional to the course/activity level.

Table 1. Example of SLOs from institutional to course/activity level [do we need to add LAC]

Institutional Learning Outcomes	Program Learning Outcomes	Course/Activity Learning Outcomes
Students will express ideas through multiple media and modes of communication.	<u>Academic Program</u> : Students will be able to present the results of laboratory research relevant to a biological sub-discipline.	Students will use graphs and figures to explain research results.
		Students will orally describe their research in a poster session at Research Day.
	<u>Co-curricular Program</u> : Students on the Programming Council will be able to produce an effective marketing campaign for informing the student body of events and activities.	Students will write text for social media marketing of events.
		Students will use Microsoft Publisher to design flyers and posters.
	<u>General Education</u> : Students will be able to write and express ideas across a variety of genres and styles.	Students will adapt an argument to a variety of genres and media to suit different audiences and purposes.
		Students will critique their own and others' work in written and oral formats.

Institutional Learning Outcomes	Program Learning Outcomes	Course/Activity Learning Outcomes
Students will evaluate the social, economic, political, and environmental consequences of individual and group actions.	<u>Academic Program</u> : Students will employ economic theory to analyze a social problem and evaluate alternative public policy choices.	Students will describe how economic trade-offs and social values impact public/private social policy.
		Students will analyze the success or failure of economic policies to achieve intended public policy outcomes.
	<u>Co-curricular Program</u> : Students will be able to engage in thoughtful dialogue regarding funding priorities, initiatives, and programs.	Students will evaluate the impact of student fee allocations on the campus community.
	<u>General Education</u> : Students will be able to critically analyze complex, interdependent structures and constructs and their implications for individuals, groups, communities, or cultures.	Students will analyze the effects of current, past, and future energy and resource use.
		Students will explain the connections between local action and global impact regarding environmental issues.

Institutional Learning Outcomes Development Process at UNC

In 2015, UNC completed a comprehensive self-study review for reaffirmation of accreditation with the Higher Learning Commission. The self-study identified a need to revise the current ILOs, which are outdated and not well known by the majority of campus (HLC Self-Study, 2015). Provost Robbyn Wacker charged the University Assessment Council to lead a campus-wide initiative on revising the ILOs in academic year 2015/2016. The University Assessment Council is a representative body that includes faculty from each college, Faculty Senate, Graduate Council, Provost’s Leadership Team, and student services representatives. The Provost’s charge called for a process that was inclusive and transparent; offered broad opportunities for input from faculty, staff, and students; and resulted in a set of clearly articulated learning goals that reflect the values and priorities of the UNC community.

The University Assessment Council created an initial draft of ILOs after consulting a variety of publications and resources, including but not limited to UNC’s Mission and Values, UNC’s Strategic Framework and Nine Core Plans, Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) Essential Learning Outcomes, Degree Qualifications Profile, examples from other institutions, and the book, *What Is College For?* by Lagemann & Lewis. Provost Wacker distributed a letter to the campus informing members of the initiative’s purpose and goals and inviting broad participation. A website was developed (www.unco.edu/institutional-learning-outcomes), and the site was regularly updated as revisions to the ILOs were made based on campus feedback.

A survey was distributed to all UNC employees and random samples of students and alumni in spring 2016. The survey asked participants to rate their agreement with 17 ILO statements from the initial draft. Participants were also asked for feedback on whether each statement applied to

undergraduate students, graduate students, or both. Participants could also provide written suggestions for changes and overall feedback. One hundred and sixty-five individuals completed the survey, with 75 of these individuals providing written feedback. An executive summary and full results of the survey can be found online on the ILO website (www.unco.edu/institutional-learning-outcomes). There was general agreement that the learning outcomes in the first draft should be included in UNC's ILOs, with 75% or more respondents agreeing that each statement should be included. In addition, the majority (58% or higher) thought the draft ILOs applied to both undergraduate and graduate students. The University Assessment Council used the results of the survey to revise the first draft.

In fall 2016, the University Assessment Council hosted 13 feedback meetings with faculty, staff, undergraduate students, graduate students, and alumni. Fifty people participated in these meetings. As with the survey, there was general agreement that the concepts represented in the second draft were relevant and appropriate for UNC to include in new ILOs. Participants provided additional feedback to identify language that was problematic or confusing in the second draft and also identified concepts that were missing from the draft, most notably, concepts related to diversity and equity and students' sense of self and well-being. A third draft was disseminated on campus with an invitation to provide feedback via a Qualtrics survey. Two individuals offered feedback. Feedback received about the first and second drafts indicated that introductory statements for each group of ILOs were confusing to stakeholders and that they preferred simpler categorical descriptions of the ILOs based on common themes. At each stage of revision, the University Assessment Council worked to identify the collective voice of the campus and make revisions that reflected the feedback received from surveys and meetings with stakeholders. In developing the final version of the ILOs, the University Assessment Council was guided by a set of evaluation questions:

1. Does the revised ILO reflect feedback from constituents?
2. Is the revised ILO written in clear language?
3. Is the revised ILO measurable?

A table showing the progression from the first to the final version of new ILOs for UNC can be found in the appendix. A full report of the findings from the feedback meetings is available on the website.

Recommendation for UNC Institutional Learning Outcomes

Based on feedback provided by faculty, staff, students, and alumni, the University Assessment Council recommends that UNC adopt the following institutional learning outcomes to apply to all students enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programs. These ILOs are organized thematically to emphasize common themes.

1. *Mastering Foundational Skills*
 - a. Describe how knowledge is discovered in various fields of study.
 - b. Apply critical thinking to analyze, integrate, and evaluate information.
 - c. Apply ethical principles to evaluate and make decisions.
 - d. Make informed decisions using numeric and scientific information.
 - e. Express ideas through multiple media and modes of communication.
2. *Strengthening Interactions with Others*
 - a. Develop the capacity to understand and interact effectively with others whose identities, beliefs, behaviors, and values differ from their own.

- b. Demonstrate teamwork skills that enable collaboration.
 - c. Develop and sustain mutually beneficial relationships.
 - d. Demonstrate the capacity to engage in civic, social, and political responsibilities.
3. *Connecting Ideas and Experiences*
- a. Apply multidisciplinary perspectives to gain new insights into issues and concepts.
 - b. Describe issues from diverse cultural, socioeconomic, geographic, and global perspectives.
 - c. Evaluate the social, economic, political, and environmental consequences of individual and group actions.
 - d. Connect experiences in and out of the classroom.
4. *Developing Professional Competence*
- a. Use the tools, terminology, and methods related to their program of study.
 - b. Apply the standards and practices of their major or program of study.
5. *Engaging in Healthy Behaviors*
- a. Describe factors that impact the health and wellness of individuals and their communities.
 - b. Reflect critically on their own personal growth.
 - c. Demonstrate practices that promote health and well-being.

Next Steps

Upon adoption of the new ILOs, the University Assessment Council will develop an assessment plan, in consultation with faculty and staff, to enable the university to assess the ILOs. The assessment plan will identify where and how student outcome data will be collected, responsibility for collecting and analyzing data, and mechanisms for sharing the results with stakeholders. Where feasible, the University Assessment Council will identify existing assessment data that could be used for assessing the ILOs (e.g., program assessment reports, institutional surveys, etc.). In addition to developing the assessment plan, the University Assessment Council will also create new or adapt existing rubrics to differentiate student learning at the undergraduate and graduate levels. As with the development of the ILOs, the University Assessment Council will work with the larger university community to gather feedback and secure support for the ILO assessment plan and rubrics. The plan will be developed in academic year 2017/2018.

Academic and co-curricular programs will not be asked to revise current program-level learning outcomes or to conduct additional assessments beyond current practice. They will, however, be asked to provide information about which ILOs are addressed in their program-level learning outcomes and to continue providing assessment reports as per the current annual and five-year program review processes. Once the assessment plan is implemented, if it is found that some ILOs are not being addressed or that students are not meeting expectations, this information will be shared with academic and co-curricular programs to determine future actions, which may include additional revision to the ILOs to reflect faculty and staff priorities for student learning or changes to curriculum or programming.

In addition to developing an assessment plan, the University Assessment Council will develop procedures for communicating the new ILOs to the campus community. It will also make recommendations for resources and professional development that may be needed to fully adopt and assess the new ILOs at UNC. The impetus for this project emerged from the 2015 HLC self-study. In 2019, UNC will submit an Assurance Argument to the HLC, in which the institution must demonstrate

progress made towards areas identified in the 2015 self-study. The revision of the ILOs is an important indicator of UNC's commitment to meeting the criteria for accreditation, and more importantly, our commitment to articulating meaningful learning goals for students, assessing those goals, and using the information to improve learning. The ILOs presented in this report represent the viewpoints of campus stakeholders and provide clear communication about the learning UNC intends for all of its students.