



Learning Outcomes and Assessment Principles and Procedures

Prepared by the Assurance of Learning Subcommittee

A subcommittee of Academic Planning and Priorities Committee and Teaching and Learning
Committee of Senate

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Background

In 2014 the Centre for Student Engagement and Learning Innovation put forward a proposal for the development of a [Learning Outcomes and Assessment Advisory Committee Plan](#). This plan referenced TRU's [Academic Plan](#), and provides historical background on the formation of a plan to implement a Learning Outcomes and Assessment Initiative. Since 2014, TRU has been making consistent progress toward the development of program and course level learning outcomes, largely because of the good work and legacy of this previous committee.

With support from the Centre for Excellence in learning and Teaching (CELT), and under the direction of the Teaching and Learning Committee of Senate, the Learning Outcomes and Assessment Task Force (LOATF) proposed the following principles and procedures to guide institutional and program level learning outcomes assessment.

Purpose

The *Learning Outcomes and Assessment (LOA) Principles and Procedures* are intended to serve as a guide for faculty members and curriculum committees to foster holistic curriculum planning and design, as well as continuous quality improvement that leads to student achievement and success.

Purpose of Assessment

Assessment is defined as “a systematic process for understanding and improving student learning” (Massa & Kasimatis, 2017). Built into this definition is the understanding that assessment is not a one-time event but rather an ongoing process embedded into curriculum planning and design. Moreover, fundamental to this definition is the belief that assessment does not stop after data has been collected. Instead, data is used to understand what and how much students have learned, and why students have or have not learned. This then should inform improvement. Assessment is essentially about and for *learning*. It aims at improving student understanding. It is a method for demonstrating our commitment to delivering quality education as a result of ongoing and systematic planning and evaluation processes.

Things it is Not

A learning-oriented approach to assessment requires faculty to engage in meaningful conversations about their students, including achievement of learning outcomes. Engaging in this dialogue requires vulnerability, trust, and collaboration. For this reason, the *LOA Principles and Procedures* are focused on learning and improvement and are **not** about the evaluation of individual faculty members.

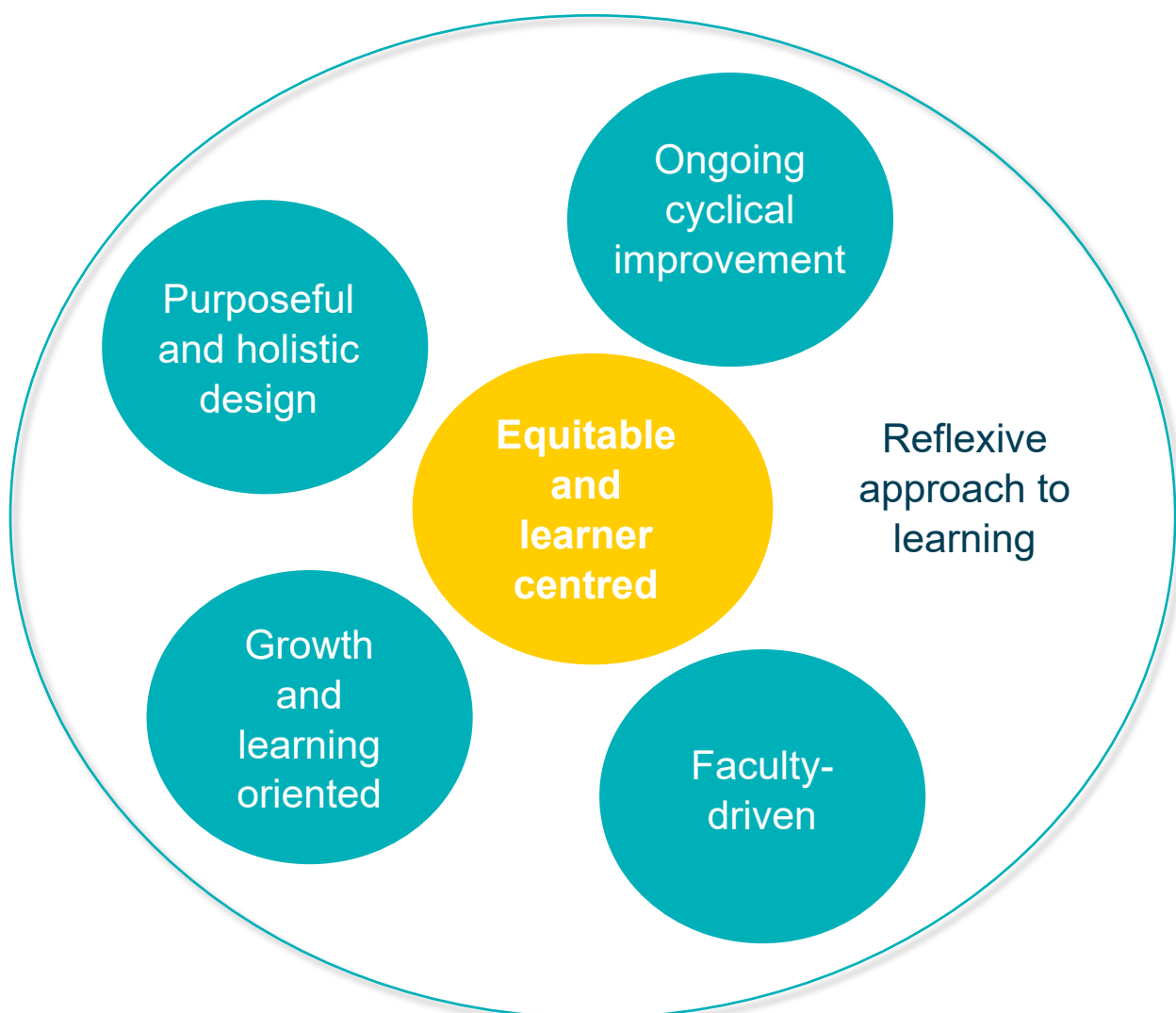
Principles of Effective Assessment

The *LOA Principles* outlined below emerged from a collaborative review and synthesis of external and internal sources conducted by LOATF. Foregrounding this review was a strong desire to establish principles that are relevant and meaningful to faculty and students at Thompson Rivers University (TRU). The subsequent six (6) principles reflect research-informed practices and foundational TRU policies relating to collegial governance, including faculty ownership and autonomy.

As shown in **Figure 1**, the six principles are interconnected and underpinned by a reflexive approach to learning, at the heart of which is an equitable and learner-centred mindset.

Figure 1

Principles of Learning Outcomes and Assessment at Thompson Rivers University



1. *Equitable and Learner-Centered*

Assessment reflects the diversity of student learning and serves students' cultural and personal goals. A variety of assessment methods provide equitable opportunities for learning and support students' individuality and intellectual growth. The way in which students' knowledge is assessed does not privilege one learner over another. When appropriate, students are given choice and flexibility.



Do we know who our students are and how we can best serve them? Do the evaluation methods assess student learning or do they assess test-taking skills?

2. *Growth and Learning-Oriented*

All students have the capacity to learn and grow. Learning will occur because assessment activities and educational experiences are purposefully designed to foster curiosity, creative and critical thinking, resiliency, self-regulation, and academic integrity. Assessment methods are a combination of both formative and summative. Moreover, assessment tasks have clear expectations and transparent design, and demonstrate alignment between assessment criteria and course learning outcomes. In addition, students engage in structured opportunities to reflect on their learning and integrate new understanding into their personal and professional growth.



Are assessment tasks designed to foster student confidence in their ability to learn or to cause unnecessary anxiety? What have students learned as a result of experiences in your classroom/program?

3. *Purposeful and Holistic Design*

The process of assessment informs curriculum design. Individual assessment tasks and the overall assessment plan aligns with learning outcomes at the course, program, and institutional level. As such, assessments are deliberate and benefit both students and faculty. Faculty use assessment as part of a comprehensive design to support student learning. Assessments are scaffolded so that evaluation of student learning builds on earlier work and sets students up for success in their subsequent courses. In addition, assessment activities reflect the variety of assessment forms, which may include authentic, experiential, and team-based learning opportunities.



Are assessment tasks developed with the course and program learning outcomes in mind? Do student activities build upon work done at the lower level? Do they set students up for success at the upper level?

4. Ongoing Cyclical Improvement

Assessment methods receive regular review by faculty at the program and departmental level. Dialogue about student achievement and program effectiveness is informed by the evolving nature of best practices within the discipline. Assessment methods are sustainable and reflect established and emerging knowledge in the field. Assessment results are used for improvement. Furthermore, an institutional framework supports a scaffolded approach to curriculum development and follows a clear, transparent, and collegial process that is time-bound in accordance with cyclical program review.



Do structured opportunities exist for cross-disciplinary, cross-functional, and diverse teams to collaborate and reflect upon the effectiveness of courses and programs?

5. Faculty-designed for Learning

Faculty are the experts and are best positioned to make decisions with regard to the ways and means by which assessment of learning takes place. Assessment planning is led by faculty with the intent to benefit student learning and development, and follows existing governance structures, including Faculty Council Bylaws. Assessment strategies reflect the work and knowledge of the discipline and are purposefully tied to program and departmental values.



Do assessment strategies reflect the principles and knowledge of the discipline? Do faculty-led committees have established practices for reviewing curricula, analyzing student learning, and planning for instructional improvement?

6. Reflexive Approach to Learning

As part of scholarly teaching, faculty regularly collect and use assessment data to inform teaching and learning. A reflexive approach is a process towards better assessment and learning that involves intentionally reviewing and regularly collecting and using assessment data to inform teaching and learning as part of an ongoing learning towards change. Students and faculty recognize that learning involves continuous improvement that is driven by curiosity and creative inquiry. To ensure that student evaluation and assessment methods, and the tools and activities used to measure student achievement, are supporting a process of continuous improvement, they must be reviewed critically and collegially.



Is what we are doing effective? How do we know? Are we consumed with counting things at the expense of measuring impact and outcomes?

Procedures

Integrating and translating the six *LOA Principles* into practice requires intention. The *LOA Principles* should guide conversations and decisions about program and course design. When the principles are explicit points of reference about how we can engage in effective assessment practices at TRU, learning activities and evaluation methods will reflect the university's values of curiosity, lifelong learning, diversity and inclusion, and sustainability.

Table 1 shows the alignment between the six *LOA Principles* and TRU policies. In addition, it identifies the institutional procedures for enacting the principles at the course, program, and institutional level. Further, individual and collective responsibilities for enacting the principles are outlined.

Table 1

Policies, Procedures, and Oversight for Enacting Principles of LOA Assessment

Principle	Description	Level	Policy and Procedure	Oversight / Responsibility
Equitable and Learner-Centered	When appropriate, students have a choice regarding how they demonstrate their learning.	Course	BRD 10-0 Academic Accommodations	Faculty
Growth and Learning-Oriented	A variety of assessment methods are used, including peer and self-assessment and authentic tasks. Methods of evaluation are transparent and provide a variety of ways to demonstrate learning, they reflect cultural and individual diversity.	Course	BRD 10-0 Academic Accommodations ED 8-3 Course Outlines	Faculty
Purposeful and Holistic Design	Learning activities and evaluation methods are deliberate and aligned to course learning outcomes.	Course	ED 8-3 Course Outlines Program Review Handbook (Curriculum and Assurance of Learning)	Faculty in consultation with Program Chair
	Students are aware of the course learning outcomes and can clearly see the linkage between outcomes and course assignments.			
	There is coherency between course, program, and institutional learning outcomes.	Program Institutional	Program Review Handbook (Curriculum and Assurance of Learning) EPC <i>Operating Procedures</i> (PLOs and Curriculum Map) DQAB Criteria and Guidelines	Faculty in consultation with EPC; APPC; Senate
	Student learning is scaffolded across their program for increasing depth and level of student learning, which students demonstrate through multiple methods of assessment.			

Principle	Description	Level	Policy and Procedure	Oversight / Responsibility
Rigorous, Ongoing Cyclical Improvement ❖ Faculty-Driven ❖ Reflexive Approach to Learning	Faculty-led committees have established practices for reviewing curricula, analyzing student learning, and planning for improvement. Faculty-led cross-disciplinary teams, representative of the courses that comprise programs of study, review student learning outcomes and work collaboratively to improve student achievement of learning outcomes.	Program	ED 8-4 Program Review Faculty Council Bylaws	Faculty in consultation with Curriculum Committee; Program Chair; Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching
	TRU has a well-defined system for evaluating the effectiveness of institutional and program level learning outcomes assessment. The system includes professional development, timelines for review, and accountability measures to ensure student learning outcomes are being achieved.	Program Institution	ED 8-4 Program Review Program Review Handbook (Curriculum and Assurance of Learning) Educational Programs Committee (EPC) Terms of Reference Academic Planning and Priorities Committee (APPC) Terms of Reference	Faculty-led Program Review Teams with APPC oversight; EPC; Dean; Program Chair; Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching

Faculty Resources

TRU will invest resources in appropriate professional development and program-level support in order to ensure faculty have the required knowledge and guidance when developing assessment strategies.

The Office of Quality Assurance and the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching offer support and resources to assist in the development of effective assessment procedures. This includes, but is not limited to:

- a dedicated, interactive webpage that will engage the university community in collaboratively building resources and examples from diverse disciplines to illustrate specific principles in action;
- examples for how each principle statement can be applied to include disciplinary diversity, course-level applications, or signature pedagogies;
- communication strategies to increase students' knowledge of the principles and how they can use it to inform their conversations with faculty; and,
- opportunities to participate in interdisciplinary communities of practice that include regularly scheduled teaching and learning events and peer-to-peer learning.

Ongoing Review

To ensure that the implementation of the procedures effectively addresses the principles set forth in this document, the procedures outlined here will be revisited every three years by the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee, and necessary adjustments made in consultation with TRU stakeholders.