The UDC Project on Learning Outcomes Assessment
Guide for Linking Learning Outcomes and Courses, Developing Syllabi, and Considering Career Pathways
Spring Semester 2011

During spring semester 2011, the UDC will embark upon the next steps in our university-wide process to strengthen academic programs and improve student learning. This brief guide, prepared by UDC's Leadership Group on Assessment, is designed to help UDC Department Chairs, Program Directors, curriculum committee members, and faculty members with the second phase of this process. Following on the work each program has done during the fall to re-examine and adapt program objectives and student learning outcomes, we are moving forward to focus on

(a) Clear links between Student Learning Outcomes and Courses,

(b) The most effective use of syllabi, and

(c) A pilot round of limited data collection, in which programs look at student performance on 2-3 outcomes for analysis and program-level decision-making, and

(d) Next steps toward identifying a link between the objectives of each degree program and student careers goals or potential career pathways.

These critical steps will help put in place a clearer, more effective and transparent approach for tracking and raising the level of student learning.

No later than fall 2011 we will address the use of rubrics, other assessment strategies, and a full plan and schedule for "closing the loop," including data collection, analysis of student performance, and using that feedback to make changes that will help improve student learning.

In the sections that follow we describe the methods we will follow in this second phase of the Assessment Project, benefits of following this approach, recommended practices, and guiding questions. Finally, the manual is supplemented by the following:

- A sample matrix that will be used to indicate the alignment between a program's student learning outcomes and its courses;
- A sample syllabus with a guide on essential elements (to come in February);
- Assessment Group resource contact people for the initiative;
- A sample career pathways map, links to helpful information, guides, and examples for identifying key workforce skills, competencies, and potential career pathways related to your program.

Steps for Phase II in Spring 2011

Part One:
- Prepare a matrix showing how student learning outcomes are distributed throughout the entire program curriculum. Student learning outcomes should be listed on the first column, with courses listed across the top row (see matrix template). Programs will identify which outcomes are addressed in which classes *(programs may choose to use either the Word version, attached to this guide, or the Excel version of the matrix which is attached in a separate file*
- Discuss as a group whether the program's student learning outcomes are adequately and appropriately addressed in courses to ensure that a cohesive vision for the program's curriculum

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and instructional practices (as articulated in program objectives and SLOs) is reflected in the courses and will achieve the program's desired goals.

- Students should have the opportunity to achieve any given SLO in 2-3 courses, so that they are not limited to one possible course that addresses the required outcomes during their years of study at UDC.

Part Two:
- Review the "model" syllabus provided by the Assessment Project (available later in February). There are 3 critical elements for each syllabus. The steps are:
  - Make certain the **program's syllabi** present clearly written, measurable student learning outcomes as the guides for the course. These outcomes should be transparent to students and professors—they serve as a contract between them.
  - Ensure that the **course content**…readings, instruction, presentations, etc…are directly aligned with the student learning outcomes. This examination of course content may call for some adjustments in the way a course is presented.
  - Make certain to include **assessments** that directly, transparently gauge whether students have achieved the student learning outcomes. These assessments can be part of a test, essay, performance, internship or other tool. This tool may be graded or ungraded, as long as it clearly assesses the achievement of specific outcomes.
- Reach out to Assessment Group resource contact people, other departments/programs, and other university and community resources whenever needed. We will work with on a pilot for collection, analysis, and decision-making about 2-3 outcomes this semester.

Part Three:
- Identify 2-3 student learning outcomes as part of a pilot round to take the assessment process from beginning to end in a single semester—which is part of a continuous process.
- Make certain the outcomes are directly tied to course content and assessments.
- Collect aggregated data on student performance on those 2-3 outcomes at the end of the semester. Document this.
- Discuss the evidence with colleagues and make decisions about how to improve the approach to these outcomes. Document the conversation (briefly) and the decisions made.

Project Products for Academic Year 2010-2011

Phase I Products (from fall and early spring, 2010-2011)
- A clearly written, measurable set of program objectives that reflect faculty members' vision for the program for the next five years or more. These will be worded in terms of **student** achievement in the overall program.
- Linked to each program objective, a set of student learning outcomes that describe what a student will be able to do or will know at the end of a course. The full group of these outcomes allows the program to fulfill the program objectives.

Phase Two Final Products
- A matrix that displays all of a program's student learning outcomes and indicates which courses offer the content, assignments and assessments that allow students to achieve the outcomes;
- A "model" or "master" syllabus that presents student learning outcomes in clear, direct language and indicates that students are expected to demonstrate knowledge, skills, ability or habits of mind, and aligns outcomes, assignments, and assessments;

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- We will continue to emphasize the link between students' career goals/potential career pathways and the program objectives and learning outcomes you have developed. We encourage academic programs to consider how their current curricula, and potential changes/additions to the curricula, can promote students' career readiness.
- A pilot round of evidence in which the program will analyze, discuss, and make decisions for improvement of student learning.

Key Dates and Steps
- *Week of January 31-February 4*: Assessment Group members meet with Department Chairs and Program Directors as a group for an update on each program's Program Objectives and Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) and to begin Phase II work with alignment of SLOs and courses.
- *February 4 to February 25*: Assessment Group members will serve as resources throughout this period as each program develops a course/SLO matrix.
- *February 25*: Each program/department electronically submits to its Assessment Group representative a Matrix showing which Student Learning Outcomes are taught in which courses.
- *Week of March 7-11:* Assessment Group members meet with department or program leaders to offer feedback on matrices. Next step will be introduced: Syllabi. Assessment Group members will discuss an approach to updating syllabi.
- *March 11-April 8:* Assessment Group members available to discuss syllabi.
- *April 8*: Programs/departments electronically submit electronically 3 "model" or "master" syllabi to the Assessment Group member they have been working with.
- *Week of May 2-6:* Assessment Group members meet with department/program leaders to discuss the Assessment Group's comments, questions, and suggestions for syllabi.
- *May 13:* Program/department leaders submit a single polished model/master syllabus with required elements to Assessment Group and to Deans.

Templates and Examples
- Use the templates and samples provided in the appendices for the Student Learning Outcome/Course Matrix.
- A model syllabus will be provided to each program in February to guide an examination and potential reconfiguration of syllabi.

Key Guiding Questions
1. Do all Student Learning Outcomes appear in the program's courses?
2. Are your Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) addressed in 2-3 courses, so that students have more than one opportunity to achieve each one?
3. Do any courses need to be adapted to ensure that the course content and assessments are clearly aligned with the SLOs and offer up-to-date approaches to teaching and learning the content?
4. What kinds of experiential, research, and community engagement opportunities are (and should be) available to students that may help address the program's Student Learning Outcomes?
5. Do your course syllabi transparently present an alignment between Student Learning Outcomes, course content, and assessments?
6. Do your objectives, outcomes, and matrix reflect the key career competencies for success in the workforce, in general, and specifically for career sectors and occupations related to your program area that have the largest growth potential locally and nationally?
7. How is the pilot round organized and scheduled? Does it allow for the broadest possible participation by faculty members in the program?
8. Are the pilot plan, schedule, assessment results, discussions, and decisions clearly documented?

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Reasons for Paying Close Attention to Learning Outcomes Assessment

- By examining the full spectrum of a program's courses, faculty members can identify where each of its student learning outcomes are offered in the curriculum. The program will have the opportunity to re-align course content as needed to ensure that rich and effective material is offered to students as they seek to achieve the outcomes.
- A cohesive syllabus that indicates a clear set of learning outcomes and how they are linked to course content, assignments, and assessments offers students a clear guide to success in a course.
- In an overall sense, the assessment of learning outcomes offers an opportunity to strengthen the focus on overall program objectives, and to continually improve their curriculum, course content, and pedagogy.
- The establishment of documented plans for continuous assessment of student learning outcomes is the key—as programs follow the plan, produce evidence, and use it to make decisions for improving student learning, the assessment practice can fulfill its promise.
- A thorough assessment system becomes a tool for recruiting and retaining students by showing students the specific skills and competencies that they will develop during their time in the program, and how their course of study prepares them for specific career sectors and occupations, particularly those with growth potential in the Capital Region;
- A well-executed assessment system will ensure that UDC can meet the assessment and evidence of learning requirements set by the Middle States accrediting body, and strengthen the ability of degree programs to meet the requirements of discipline-specific accrediting organizations.
  Appendix A: Template for a Student Learning Outcome/Course Matrix

Learning Objective and Course Matrix (sample to be adapted by programs)

Program Objective	Student Learning Objective	Course #	Course #	Course #	Course #	Course #	Course #
1	1-1	x		x			x
	1-2				x		
	1-3			x		x	x
	1-4	x				x	
	1-5			x			
2	2-1				x		x
	2-2		x			x	
	2-3	x	x		x		x
	2-4		x	x		x	
	2-5	x	x		x		
	2-6						x
	2-7				x		
3	3-1			x			
	3-2	x		x			x
	3-3	x		x		x	
	3-4	x					
	3-5	x			x		x
	3-6			x			
4	4-1					x	
	4-2		x				x
	4-3		x			x	
	4-4		x				
	4-5		x				x