

University of the District of Columbia (UDC) Guide for Developing Program Objectives, Learning Outcomes, and a Career Pathways Map

At the Provost's request, UDC is engaging in a university-wide process to strengthen academic programs and improve student learning through the development of an assessment system that includes Program Objectives, Student Learning Outcomes, rubrics and other assessment strategies, and data collection and analysis on student performance.

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 initial phase of this process. In Phase I, we will examine:

- Program Objectives;
- Student Learning Outcomes; and
- The first part of a Career Pathways Map for each degree program

In the sections that follow, definitions are provided for each of these components; the benefits of this initiative are outlined; and guidance is offered on the development process including key dates and steps, recommended practices, and guiding questions. Finally, the manual is supplemented by appendices that include:

- Appendix A: Templates with completion instructions/guidance for the Program Objectives, Student Learning Outcomes, and Career Pathways Map;
- Appendix B: Internal UDC examples of Objectives and Outcomes from the General Education curriculum;
- Appendix C: Assessment Group resource contact people for the initiative
- Appendix D: Links to helpful resources and exemplars that include discussions of Program Objectives, Student Learning Outcomes, and career pathways information;

Definitions

- *Program Objectives*: A description of the skills and knowledge all student majors in a discipline will have upon completion of the program.
- *Student Learning Outcomes*: The knowledge, skills and habits of mind that students take with them from a learning experience (usually a course).
- *Career Pathways Map*: A visual map that identifies for students the career sectors and specific occupations related to the field of study, and that illustrates for students clear pathways and concrete opportunities for developing the academic, career development, and other kind of competencies needed for these professions.

Key Benefits

- Carefully defined objectives and outcomes lead to improved student learning and the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competencies that prepare students to succeed in careers and in lifelong learning;
- The Assessment Project offers an opportunity to strengthen programs' approach to curricular development, course offerings, and pedagogy. We will also work to establish transparent, documented plans for the continuous assessment of data on student learning outcomes;
- 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 strengthens the ability of degree programs to meet the requirements of discipline-specific accrediting organizations

Development Process

Phase One Final Products

- A written set of Program Objectives;
- A written set of specific, measurable Student Learning Outcomes for each Program Objective;
- A brief narrative of how the Program Objectives and Learning Outcomes reflect the mission and goals of the degree program and UDC more generally;
- A career pathways map with completed Columns A-C, which includes identified career sectors and specific occupations associated with the degree as well as an identification of the most important Student Learning Outcomes for these professions.

Key Dates and Steps

- *September 7 & 10:* Assessment Group members meet with Department Chairs and Program Directors as a group to present and discuss Program Objectives and the development process
- *September 28:* Assessment Group members meet with Departments Chairs, Program Directors and any interested faculty members to discuss progress, serve as resources, and initiate the work on Student Learning Outcomes.
- *November 2:* Programs electronically submit draft Program Objectives and Student Learning Outcomes to the Assessment Group for review.
- *November 16:* Assessment Group returns Objectives and Learning Outcomes to the degree programs with feedback.
- *December 14:* Programs electronically submit revised Program Objectives and Learning Outcomes to Deans and to the Assessment Group.

Recommended Practices

- Use the templates provided in the Appendices for the Program Objectives, Learning Outcomes, and Career Map;
- Discuss the Objectives, Outcomes, and Career Map as a group to develop a cohesive vision for the program's curriculum and instructional practices that indicates how the program will move beyond its current status and closer to achieving its desired goals;
- Focus on ensuring that your Objectives and Outcomes are as concrete, specific, and measurable. This is essential to helping your program accomplish the ultimate goal of improving student learning;
- Review the identified model examples and resources, and encourage faculty to conduct their own research to find other best practices and models;
- Reach out to Assessment Group resource contact people, other departments/programs, and other university and community resources whenever needed.

Key Guiding Questions

1. How do your Objectives, Outcomes, and Career Map reflect your goals and ambitions for the program?
2. What are the three-four peer and aspirant colleges and universities that have programs most aligned with yours and what can you learn from their assessment and career development efforts?
3. How do the Objectives, Outcomes and Career Map address the findings from your academic program review?

4. How can your Objectives, Outcomes, and Career Map flow logically from and build on, rather than overlap with, the General Education curriculum Objectives and Outcomes?
5. Are your Objectives and Outcomes clearly measurable? Will they provide the kind of evidence your program needs to assess and improve student learning?
6. How do your Objectives, Outcomes, and Career Map make your program distinctive and position it to attract and retain students within the competitive Capital Region marketplace? Do they prepare students to succeed in the 21st century workplace?
7. What professional competencies are essential for graduates in your field? What are common career paths and the greatest growth sectors and occupations in your field locally and nationally?
8. What kinds of experiential, research, and community engagement opportunities are (and should be) available to students by your degree program, as well as by the larger University and community, in general and in relation to program-specific career sectors?