2015-16
Learning Outcomes Assessment
Handbook
# Table of Contents

Purpose ........................................................................................................................................... 3

Introduction .................................................................................................................................... 3

The Role of Learning Outcomes Assessment ................................................................................. 4

Accreditation and Learning Outcomes Assessment ........................................................................ 4

Accountability, Quality, and Continuous Improvement ................................................................. 5

Learning Outcomes at Zayed University ....................................................................................... 5

  Course Learning Outcomes ........................................................................................................... 6

  ZULOs, MALOs, and GPLOs ......................................................................................................... 7

  Qualifications Framework Emirates Learning Outcomes .......................................................... 8

  QFE and Program Learning Outcomes ....................................................................................... 10

The Assessment Model ................................................................................................................... 10

  Closing the Loop .......................................................................................................................... 12

The Assessment Calendar ............................................................................................................... 13

  Assessment Calendar Guide and Checklist .................................................................................. 13

Assessment Plans ............................................................................................................................ 15

  Course Files ................................................................................................................................ 16

Assessment Reports ....................................................................................................................... 17

Administration of Learning Outcomes Assessment ..................................................................... 18

  Professional Development ......................................................................................................... 19

  Technology .................................................................................................................................. 20

References ....................................................................................................................................... 21

Appendix A ...................................................................................................................................... 22

Appendix B ...................................................................................................................................... 23

Appendix C ...................................................................................................................................... 25

Appendix D ...................................................................................................................................... 26
Purpose

The purpose of this handbook is to guide faculty and administrators engaged in the learning outcomes assessment program within their college or department. It describes the philosophy and background of Zayed University as an outcomes-based institution, clarifies the types and relationships between learning outcomes, explains the close relationship between accreditation and assessment, and lays out the process and procedures that should be undertaken to conduct successful program-level learning outcomes assessment.

Introduction

Named after the United Arab Emirates’ first President, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahayan, a man of great vision committed to national development and education, it is fitting that the university bearing his name has been committed to educational innovation and quality especially as it pertains to student learning and learning outcomes assessment. Beyond recognizing the responsibility that the name Zayed University demands, the commitment to quality flows directly from the institution’s Vision, Mission, and current Strategic Objectives.

Vision

Zayed University will be the leading university in the United Arab Emirates and recognized globally for its participation in educational and cultural achievements and enrichment of economic and social development.

Mission

Zayed University will prepare qualified graduates who are able to contribute to building the nation through offering specializations and programs of study which match international standards and by providing an excellent learning environment to strengthen the role of the university as a leader in the progress of scientific research and community service.

Strategic Objectives

In order to fulfill this mission, leadership of Zayed University has established the following strategic objectives for 2014-2016:

1. Establish a cutting-edge educational environment that promotes creativity and innovation.
2. Prepare qualified graduates who are able to contribute to the development process, and who are productive in their nation, empowered with critical thinking skills, and open to the world around them.
3. Deliver high quality education that focuses on enriching students’ knowledge and skills.
4. Upgrade the University's research level.
5. Ensure provision of all administrative services in compliance with quality, efficiency and transparency policies.

Learning outcomes assessment is well-aligned with Zayed University’s 3rd strategic objective (above) and demonstrates our commitment to quality (See Appendix A for recently updated policy on Learning Outcomes Assessment).

The Role of Learning Outcomes Assessment

Recent years have witnessed a shift in the use of assessment data, from a purely summative role to one in which assessment data is used to inform and enact program level improvements to increase student learning. Systematic learning outcomes assessment plays a key role in supporting a culture of learning at Zayed University and benefits students, faculty and the administration. Students gain an improved program and should learn more. Faculty gain an organized method of improving student learning across an entire program. The administration is able to demonstrate a high level of accountability to stakeholders. Systematic learning outcomes assessment which effectively utilizes assessment data to implement program improvements is also, increasingly, a requirement for accreditation.

Accreditation and Learning Outcomes Assessment

As part of its institutional commitment to quality, Zayed University began to work very early in its existence towards international accreditation through the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), one of six US regional accreditors. This accreditation is seen as international stamp of approval and quality. Zayed University was first accredited by the MSCHE in 2008 and was re-affirmed in 2013. It remains one of only 2 Middle Eastern and one of only 17 international universities accredited by the MSCHE. The MSCHE along with other accreditors including the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), basically the accreditor of the accreditors, holds the assessment of learning outcomes to promote student learning and program improvement as the fundamental element of their existence. CHEA, for example, bestows only one annual award; Outstanding Institutional Practice in Student Learning Outcomes\(^1\), which focuses on assessment of learning outcomes. Because of the tight relationship between accreditation, learning outcomes assessment, and quality, a number of Zayed University programs have gone on to achieve disciplinary accreditations by the professional accrediting body in their respective fields. To date, the College of Business (AACSB), the College of Education (NCATE), the College of Technological Innovation (ABET), the College of Arts and Creative Enterprises (NASAD), and the College of Communication and Media Sciences (ACEJMC) have achieved professional accreditation.

At the national level, as a federal institution Zayed University had been exempt from participating in the licensure and accreditation processes through the UAE’s Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA) until very recently. In spring 2015 Zayed University

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\(^1\) The CHEA Award can be found at: [http://www.chea.org/chea%20award/CHEA_Awards_All.html](http://www.chea.org/chea%20award/CHEA_Awards_All.html)
completed the CAA’s institutional licensure process and program accreditation processes are now underway. Though the terminology used by the CAA at times differs from the language used by MSCHE or some of the other disciplinary accreditors, when it comes to learning outcomes assessment, the processes and expectations surrounding learning outcomes assessment are quite similar and complement one another. One major difference is that the CAA focuses more on the course level through its Course Files process, but again this complements existing processes.

Accountability, Quality, and Continuous Improvement

Accountability is one of the essential components of accreditation. CHEA is very clear that the threefold role of accreditation is:

- to demonstrate accountability;
- to advance academic quality;
- to encourage, where appropriate, scrutiny and planning for change and for needed improvement. (CHEA, 2010)

At Zayed University issues of academic quality and continuous improvement closely align with matters of accountability. It is believed that by focusing on academic quality and continuous improvement, accountability will take care of itself and not be negatively construed. Zayed University is, after all, accountable to its mission, its students, and its stakeholders.

Learning Outcomes at Zayed University

Zayed University has a rich history of learning outcomes and learning outcomes assessment. The Zayed University Learning Outcomes (ZULOs) and the Major Learning Outcomes (MALOs), while under constant revision, were first published via the “Blue Book”2 in 2002. This initial publication detailed the Zayed University Academic Program Model which included the ZULO rubrics, the MALOs, and the accompanying assessment protocols. These assessment protocols centered on course-embedded assessments, a capstone experience, and evaluation of internships, much of this reliant upon the developmental ZULO rubrics. For its time, and even today, much of what was then established would be considered an international best practice in assessment. Since the “Blue Book” was first published, the language and understanding of learning outcomes and learning outcomes assessment have become embedded into higher education models the world over. Though modifications have been made to the learning outcomes and the assessment protocols at Zayed University, the spirit of the initial framework remains in place. Learning outcomes assessment is now recognized as the major component of academic quality assurance.

It is important to know the language and abbreviations of learning outcomes at Zayed University in order to navigate through the learning outcomes assessment process. There are

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2 Available at the ZU library and formally titled the Zayed University Academic Program Model 2002-2003
course learning outcomes (CLOs), Zayed University learning outcomes (ZULOs), major learning outcomes (MALOs), graduate program learning outcomes (GPLOs), and now Qualification Framework Emirates (QFE) learning outcomes are entering our sphere.

Course Learning Outcomes

At the course level there are CLOs. Each course as part of its design and approval should include a set of clearly-written, focused learning outcomes which describe what students should be able to do at the completion of the course. Experience has shown that 4-8 is usually a good number of CLOs as less than 4 may signify that not enough is being accomplished in a course and more than 8 is often indicative of learning outcomes that are too granular and do not focus on the essential learning in a course. Pragmatically, an overabundance of CLOs can make the process of aligning them to program learning outcomes far too complicated to be meaningful or effective. Good CLOs:

- begin with an introductory phrase indicating what students will be able to do at course completion;
- can be assessed by course assessment strategies;
- are understandable to students;
- use an appropriate action verb;
- contain the key course content which is the focus of the learning;
- are written to the appropriate level of accomplishment.

Examples of well-written CLOs:

- A course in a BSc Physical Education: Students will be able to identify critical issues pertaining to safe selection, structuring and planning for content of exercise instruction.
- A course in a Bachelor of Business Studies: At course completion students will be able to critically evaluate modern selling and sales management concepts, techniques, strategies and theories.
- A course in a Master of Finance: Students will be able to analyze and evaluate complex data sets to inform decision-making.
- A course in a BSc Information Technology: A successful student in this course will be able to code the interactive components of a mock customer service portal in Java.

These learning outcomes are expected to be aligned to the program learning outcomes (PLOs) which will take the form of either ZULOs, MALOs, or GPLOs depending on the level. Figure 1 shows the typical alignment between CLOs and PLOs. In all likelihood, the CLOs do not align to all of the PLOs, and some of the CLOs align with the same PLOs.
ZULOs, MALOs, and GPLOs

ZULOs, MALOs, and GPLOs are all program-level learning outcomes which rest a level up from CLOs. At Zayed University, six core learning outcomes have been identified as the foundation of the academic programs. These general education-type learning outcomes are known as the *Zayed University Learning Outcomes*[^3] (ZULOs). Models of well-written program-level learning outcomes, they include:

- **Language**: ZU graduates will be able to communicate effectively in English and Modern Standard Arabic, using the academic and professional conventions of these languages appropriately.
- **Critical Thinking and Quantitative Reasoning**: ZU graduates will be able to use both critical and quantitative processes to solve problems and to develop informed opinions.
- **Global Awareness**: ZU graduates will be able to understand and value their own culture and other cultures, perceiving and reacting to differences from an informed and socially responsible point of view.
- **Information Literacy**: ZU graduates will be able to find, evaluate, and use appropriate information from multiple sources to respond to a variety of needs.
- **Technological Literacy**: ZU graduates will be able to effectively understand, use, and evaluate technology both ethically and securely in an evolving global society.
- **Leadership**: ZU graduates will be able to undertake leadership roles and responsibilities, interacting effectively with others to accomplish shared goals.

The ZULOs serve as the learning outcomes for the Colloquy on Integrated Learning (COL) the highly-structured general education program delivered at the start of the baccalaureate program and delivered at the start of the baccalaureate program. Each ZULO is accompanied by a rubric or matrix[^4] that includes a set of indicators, criteria, and descriptors which articulate where students should be in terms of learning outcomes attainment at the end of the first year (Beginning), in the second and third years (Developing), and at graduation.

[^3]: ZULOs and their rubrics are online at [http://www.zu.ac.ae/main/en/_assessment_resource/learning_outcomes.aspx](http://www.zu.ac.ae/main/en/_assessment_resource/learning_outcomes.aspx)
[^4]: ZULO matrices are online at: [http://www.zu.ac.ae/main/en/_assessment_resource/learning_outcomes.aspx](http://www.zu.ac.ae/main/en/_assessment_resource/learning_outcomes.aspx)
(Accomplished). The ZULOs and the rubrics have been designed and revised by faculty to clearly describe the undergraduate experience at ZU.

Within the majors, the MALOs are the program learning outcomes (some programs are starting to refer to them specifically as PLOs). These learning outcomes are the discipline-specific learning outcomes which are often aligned or mapped to the ZULOs5. In some cases, the MALOs read very differently from the ZULOs— the College of Education for example, but in other cases, the MALOs are nearly identical to ZULOs— Humanities and Social Sciences for example. One area of consistency is that the MALOs are not accompanied by sophisticated developmental matrices or rubrics as are the ZULOs. Some majors have an additional set of descriptors that assist faculty when assessing the achievement of students.

Graduate programs house the GPLOs6. Each graduate program has a set of learning outcomes that describes the attributes and skill of their graduates. These GPLOs are independent of ZULOs and MALOs and are not accompanied by developmental rubrics. They do, however, serve the same purposes as the ZULOs and MALOs.

Qualifications Framework Emirates Learning Outcomes

In February 2012, the National Qualifications Authority released the approved Qualifications Framework Emirates (QFE) Handbook for staged implementation across the UAE. The QFE is the national qualifications framework for the UAE which defines academic qualifications according to student achievement of learning outcomes rather than by seat time— 15 hours of instruction being equal to 1 credit for example. As a federal institution, Zayed University is committed to the alignment of all its programs with the QFE by the end of 2015. To date, Zayed University has held or participated in a number of workshops and presentations about QFE alignment, developed an implementation schedule7 which shows which programs will be aligned in 2014 and which will be aligned in 2015, created a QFE Policy and Procedure (see Appendices B), and drafted a set of templates8 to guide the alignment process.

The QFE comprises ten hierarchical levels of sophistication from Level 1 (Certificate) to Level 10 (Doctoral). The focus for Zayed University is alignment to Level 7- Bachelors (see Appendix C) and Level 9- Masters (see Appendix D). Each level within the QFE is composed of five strands of learning outcomes:

- Knowledge;
- Skill;
- Autonomy and responsibility- Aspects of competence;

5 MALOs and their alignment to ZULOs are online at http://www.zu.ac.ae/main/en/_assessment_resource/learning_outcomes.aspx
6 GPLOs are all online at: http://www.zu.ac.ae/main/files/contents/assessment_resource/support_docs/GPLOs_4.8.2014.pdf
8 QFE alignment templates are available at: http://www.zu.ac.ae/main/en/_assessment_resource/QFE.aspx
• Role in context- Aspects of competence;
• Self-development- Aspects of competence

The complete set of learning outcomes across the five strands indicates the cumulative description of what students know, value, and can do upon graduation.

One of the major benefits of the QFE is that it serves as a guide for the writing of learning outcomes particularly at the program level. The language which is used clearly differentiates between the learning outcomes at the different levels. Take for example one set of learning outcomes across the QFE Knowledge strand at Level 4- High School, Level 7- Bachelors, and Level 9- Masters (see Table 1).

Table 1.
Knowledge Learning Outcomes

At completion of the program, students should be able to demonstrate…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 4</th>
<th>Level 7</th>
<th>Level 9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a broad range of specialized knowledge, including some theoretical and abstract concepts with limited depth in some areas in a field of work or discipline, including facts, principles, processes and general concepts</td>
<td>specialized factual and theoretical knowledge and an understanding of the boundaries in a field of work or discipline, encompassing a broad and coherent body of knowledge and concepts, with substantive depth in the underlying principles and theoretical concepts</td>
<td>comprehensive, highly specialized knowledge in a field of work, discipline and/or professional practice, and at the interface between different fields, including frontier concepts and recent developments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As part of the QFE alignment process, Zayed University will be re-examining existing programs and the corresponding program and course learning outcomes in order to facilitate effective alignment with the QFE. This alignment will be integrated into the current course approval, revision, or deletion process, and will be demonstrated in three ways:

• Program learning outcomes to QFE learning outcomes;
• Course learning outcomes to program learning outcomes;
• Assessment to course learning outcomes.

One of the major impacts of QFE alignment on our current practice is that, where we used to have MALOs aligned to ZULOs, this will no longer be mandated. The complete mapping is from course learning outcomes to program learning outcomes to QFE learning outcomes (see Figure 2). Nonetheless, for the purposes of learning outcomes assessment, units are still free to map MALOs to ZULOs, it is just no longer a requirement.
QFE and Program Learning Outcomes

What QFE alignment means for our program learning outcomes is that they not only need to be representative of our programs, but also must be pitched to the appropriate QFE level. Similar to course learning outcomes, good QFE aligned PLOs:

- begin with an introductory phrase indicating what students will be able to do at completion of the program;
- can be assessed;
- are understandable to students;
- use an appropriate action verb;
- are written to the appropriate QFE level.

Examples of QFE appropriate PLOs at the bachelors and masters level are:

- **Bachelor of Science in Cyber Security**: Graduates will be able to apply creative and technical skills towards the understanding of complex cyber security issues.
- **Bachelor of Fine Arts**: At the completion of the program students will be able to produce and present designs by communicating clearly and effectively in oral, written and graphical forms, as well as in advanced digital software and media.
- **Masters of Social Work**: Program graduates will be able to engage in critical inquiry and knowledge acquisition and development using advanced research skills, analysis, and evaluation.
- **MBA**: Graduates will be able to lead diverse professional teams towards the attainment of goals in unpredictable and highly complex environments.

The Assessment Model

Zayed University follows a best practice model of learning outcomes assessment. At the most basic level this was represented as Assess-Analyze-Act which was built around the mindset of continuous improvement and includes an annual planning and reporting mechanism. However, in the past year it became obvious that while the institution had
mastered the mechanism of assessment and had numerous assessment successes, the assessment model and processes were far more complex than had been presented graphically. Specifically, the implementation of meaningful changes or interventions remained a challenge, and the ability to then assess the impact of the change or intervention was rare. Because of this, the model has been altered to better represent the reality (see Figure 3).

This annual assessment model is aligned with the expectations of the major international accreditors. For example, at the institution level the MSCHE has articulated their learning outcomes assessment expectations as:

1. Developing clearly articulated written statements of expected learning outcomes;
2. Designing learning experiences that provide explicit opportunities for students to achieve those learning outcomes;
3. Implementing appropriate measures of student achievement of key learning outcomes…; and

Within the various disciplines, similar language and expectations exist. The professional accrediting organizations for the College of Technological Innovation, College of Business and College of Communication and Media Sciences respectively:

- The program must regularly use appropriate, documented processes for assessing and evaluating the extent to which … student outcomes are being attained. The results of these evaluations must be systematically utilized as input for the continuous improvement of the program…. (ABET, 2010, p. 3)
The school uses well-documented, systematic processes for determining and revising degree program learning goals; designing, delivering, and improving degree program curricula to achieve learning goals; and demonstrating that degree program learning goals have been met. (AACSB, 2013)

The unit regularly assesses student learning and uses results to improve curriculum and instruction…. Assessment is a focused and deliberate process to learn if students are learning what a unit expects them to learn and to improve the quality of the program overall. (ACEJMC, 2012, p. 2)

Closing the Loop

One of the overarching elements incorporated into all of these accreditor expectations is that learning outcomes assessment is conducted and the results are used to improve the program (increase student learning). This process of using assessment results to implement changes to improve student learning is referred to as closing the loop. While closing the loop is important in complying with accreditor expectations, it is, more importantly, the program-level process that drives improvement in student learning. Examples of closing the loop interventions include curricular changes such as changes in pedagogical practices, or course materials. Closing the loop interventions can also include changes in academic processes, e.g., increased faculty professional development, changes in technology, or changes to admissions criteria. Finally, closing the loop actions may include changes in the outcomes assessment process, e.g., data collection methods, analysis of additional data sources (University of Central Florida, 2008). The Office of Educational Effectiveness works with colleges and departments in designing closing the loop interventions, and consults with each unit as it develops its annual assessment plan. Closing the loop actions are the most critical element in the assessment cycle, and are documented in the annual assessment reports.

The Assessment Cycle

Though the assessment cycle itself is an ongoing loop of continuous improvement, one cycle does have defined boundaries in most cases. All cycles start early in a fall semester with the completion of an annual assessment plan. Assessments are then conducted in that fall semester or the following spring semester- often an assessment plan utilizes capstone-like projects or final exams in the spring semester as the assessment points. As assessments are completed, data is analyzed and put in tables or graphs to be easily digestible. This happens immediately, so at the latest, this is completed before faculty disperse for the summer- it may even be done long before the end of spring semester. After summer break, a faculty committee convenes to discuss the results of the previous year’s assessments. They determine actions to improve the program and enhance student learning. These decisions are then further discussed, or at least disseminated, to the entire faculty for feedback and implementation purposes. Depending on the actions taken, they will either be implemented in that fall semester or at the latest in the upcoming spring. It is in that upcoming spring semester where the assessment report is submitted. This usually signals the end of one complete cycle. Because one cycle spans nearly 2 full academic years, there is overlap with the next cycle (see Figure 4).
The Assessment Calendar

The assessment calendar, developed annually, is the main mechanism to guide the annual assessment process within general education, the majors, and graduate programs. A draft assessment calendar is put forth for approval at an initial meeting of the University Learning Outcomes Assessment Standing Committee (ULOASC). Once approved, the calendar is posted online and referenced on a regular basis at committee meetings. Though the calendar presents numerous assessment activities, the indisputably essential activities revolve around submission of the annual assessment plans and reports. The calendar on the following pages outlines the annual assessment cycle and serves as a guide to the steps in the learning outcomes assessment process.

Assessment Calendar Guide and Checklist

N.B. Burgundy refers to items in the annual assessment report. All other items refer to the assessment plan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When?</th>
<th>What?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August / September</td>
<td>◯ Analyze 2nd semester data from previous academic year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>◯ Communicate results to faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>◯ Submit findings and analysis from previous assessment cycle to OEE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>◯ Draft annual assessment plan in consultation with OEE:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Determine outcomes to be assessed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Determine appropriate types of outcome measures, i.e., direct,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9 Always available on this page: http://www.zu.ac.ae/main/en/_assessment_resource/Learning_Assessment/assessment_resources.aspx
| Indirect | Determine assessment points, i.e., the courses in which you will assess the selected outcomes for this AY  
- Determine targets, i.e. levels of student attainment indicating successful completion |
|----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| October / November | Determine closing the loop actions in consultation with OEE, based on previous year’s data  
- Create or modify outcome measures tools (rubrics, scales, tests, etc.)  
- Submit draft assessment plans to Educational Effectiveness  
- Peer Review of assessment plans  
  - Amend plans to incorporate feedback  
- Obtain Dean’s/Director’s signature  
- Assessment plan presentation  
- Submit finalized and approved assessment plan to OEE |
| December/January | Conduct assessments  
- Conduct data collection  
- Plan implementation of closing the loop actions |
### Spring Semester

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>February / March</th>
<th>☐</th>
<th>Analyze any 1st semester data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>Communicate results to faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>Submit first semester findings and analysis to OEE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>Implement Closing the loop actions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>April / May June</th>
<th>☐</th>
<th>Draft Annual Assessment report (see exemplar and template)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>Submit draft assessment report to OEE</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>Peer Review of Assessment Reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Amend reports to incorporate feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>Obtain Dean’s / Director’s signature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>Assessment Report presentations</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>Submit final assessment reports to OEE</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>Conduct assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>Conduct data collection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Assessment Plans

Contents of the annual assessment plans have been refined over the past few years and, through a template, present the university’s expectations for learning outcomes assessment. This includes details about the:

- curriculum map demonstrating alignment between courses and PLOs;
- schedule of learning outcomes assessed;
- academic year and semester when assessments will occur;
- assessment points (most often course-embedded);
- methods of assessment;
- sample plans and sizes;
- targets for attainment;
- ways data will be used.

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10 The updated plan templates for undergraduate and graduate are available here: [http://www.zu.ac.ae/main/en/_assessment_resource/Learning_Assessment/Assessment_Plans_Reports.aspx](http://www.zu.ac.ae/main/en/_assessment_resource/Learning_Assessment/Assessment_Plans_Reports.aspx)
To promote excellence, an exemplar assessment plan has been developed and is available as Appendix E and online.\(^{11}\) In addition, beginning in 2015-16, the OEE will consult with each college/department as they develop their annual assessment plan to ensure best practices.

The basic requirement for an academic program is that a minimum of two program learning outcomes be assessed annually, so that over a period of about 3 years all PLOs will have been assessed\(^{12}\). The main assessments that occur should be direct measures of student learning. These are most often course-embedded measures such as exam questions, presentations, capstones, essays, research papers, performance tasks, or creative works. It is expected that the OEE is consulted at this time to assist in the development or selection of appropriate measures and to plan their implementation. An assessment is developed or selected from a course where, through the alignment process, it is clear how the \textit{Assessment-Course Learning Outcome-Program Learning Outcome} align in order to present a valid and reliable measure of student learning at the program level. Unless it is some sort of standardized exam (either internally or externally developed) with known levels of reliability and validity, the use of a consistent and normed rubric is desired. Rubrics facilitate analysis based on performance indicators which will strengthen the reporting and improvement process, and norming ensures that faculty are rating work at a similar level. Targets for the attainment of the learning outcomes are set using the concept of \% of students \(\geq\) target. This practice is followed because it mitigates against outliers or skewed distributions which influence the results if reported as a simple mean score (i.e. student average score of 65\%). In addition to the direct measure of assessment, each unit is also required to triangulate the findings by including information from an indirect measure such as \textit{Course Files} reflections, Graduating Senior Survey, Internship survey, course grades, or the Teaching Evaluation by Student Survey (graduation programs).

As this is program level assessment, the assessments should occur at or near graduation, and the measure that is utilized must be clearly aligned with the appropriate program learning outcome. Though sampling methodology is not as rigorous as it might be for a formal research project, a representative sample that can provide trustworthy data from which faculty are willing to construct actions to improve student learning is a must. This might mean that a college samples a few sections of a course from each campus or, if they are working electronically, they might be able to use all of the available sections. Whatever the choices made for the assessment method and the sample, the processes must be efficient, sustainable, and lead to trustworthy data because faculty will use this data to inform their decision-making about student learning.

\textbf{Course Files}

Course Files are a requirement of the CAA and can serve as an important indirect measure of student learning. 2014-15 was the first year where all of Zayed University’s colleges and

\(^{11}\) Exemplars are online at: http://www.zu.ac.ae/main/en/_assessment_resource/Learning_Assessment/Assessment_Plans_Reports.aspx

\(^{12}\) In the general education program, processes and guidelines may be modified slightly because they have multiple streams, but the essential processes remain the same.
institutes began to collect and store Course Files, so a thorough understanding and effective processes and are still being developed. Contents of a Course File shall be:

1. syllabi for the current and previous offerings of the course;
2. copies of all instructor teaching materials;
3. copies of all assessment instruments;
4. instructor worked answers and marking schemes for all assessment instruments;
5. examples from across the range of student performance of graded responses to all assessment instruments;
6. a comprehensive instructor review of the presentation of the course, covering:
   a. appropriateness of the course learning outcomes;
   b. extent to which the syllabus was covered;
   c. extent to which learning outcomes were met (with evidence);
   d. appropriateness of textbooks and other learning resources;
   e. appropriateness of assessment instruments in relation to learning outcomes;
   f. appropriateness of the balance of assessment;
   g. appropriateness of prerequisites;
   h. general comments on any problems encountered with the course;
7. quantitative analysis of student performance during the course presentation (e.g., grade distributions);
8. summary of student feedback on the evaluation of the course.

It is item 6, the instructor reflection, which is the most meaningful component of a Course File for the purposes of learning outcomes assessment. Summaries of how faculty are experiencing the courses are useful indirect measures. Course Files are being stored either on Blackboard, SharePoint, or shared network drives.

Assessment Reports

The annual assessment reports report on the assessments conducted in the previous academic year. This is done because assessments are often conducted during final exams in the spring semester, and this gives faculty the time needed to analyze data, discuss the results, and develop actions for improvement. Through the assessment report template the expectations of reporting are provided. These include some information from the previous assessment plan such as the assessment point (often course/s), method of assessment, sample, target, and an explanation of any changes that may have occurred since plan was developed. The reports then describe and display the findings and analyses at the aggregate level (standardized for readability) before moving onto the critical sections of the report: Communication & Dissemination and Actions & Follow up. These sections are where the college or department describes the process of faculty engagement and deliberation over the

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13 The updated report templates for undergraduate and graduate are always available here:
http://www.zu.ac.ae/main/en/_assessment_resource/Learning_Assessment/Assessment_Plans_Reports.aspx
14 Examples of suitable actions are available here:
findings and, most importantly, states the actions that have been, or are being, implemented (closing the loop) if changes have been deemed necessary. It is expected that the OEE is consulted at this time to assist in the development and implementation of appropriate actions as this is a process that must be planned if it is to succeed. The fundamental consideration is continuous improvement, so actions should be underway by the time the report is submitted. At this time, because the assessment cycle has been underway for nearly 2 academic years, actions should be concrete and more than proposals for change. The actions section of a report should not use language like:

- Faculty should consider…
- It is proposed that…
- Discussions are underway to determine…

Appropriate language is:

- Faculty have altered the sequence of modules…
- The accepted proposal has led to modifications in the…
- Discussions determined that students need more reflective practice, so two more…

Any follow up information on previous actions should also be reported to complete the section.

To promote excellence, an exemplar assessment report has been developed and is available as Appendix F and online.

Administration of Learning Outcomes Assessment

The Office of Educational Effectiveness (OEE) is the organization charged with oversight of student learning at Zayed University. Reporting to senior leadership, the OEE enjoys critical support at the highest levels of the university, which is essential because the one overarching factor which will make or break an assessment program is campus leadership, “if campus leaders are truly and actively committed to assessment, assessment gets done, and done well” (Suskie, 2009, p. 70).

The Director of OEE manages learning outcomes assessment program through a committee. For a number of years the university had a committee known as the University Learning Assessment Committee (ULAC) which developed and managed the learning outcomes assessment process. ULAC was made up of a small steering group and two representatives from every college, department, or general education sequence. In fall 2013, ULAC was dissolved and a more formal university standing committee was launched, the University Learning Outcomes Assessment Standing Committee (ULOASC). The formal charge of the standing committee is to guide and supervise the assessment of learning

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15 Exemplars are online at: http://www.zu.ac.ae/main/en/_assessment_resource/Learning_Assessment/Assessment_Plan_Reports.aspx
16 OEE staff can be found at: http://www.zu.ac.ae/main/en/_assessment_resource/who_we_are.aspx
outcomes processes at the University, within the framework specified by the Zayed University Learning Outcomes (ZULOs). Specifically, the committee should:

1. Review and update all University learning outcomes;
2. Supervise all learning outcomes assessment practices, including University learning outcomes;
3. Implement and document assessment-related policies and procedures;
4. Make recommendations on the assessment of learning outcomes, mainly in connection with the following topics: policies and procedures, documentation, work schedules, development of faculty, and technology-based learning solutions;
5. Review and adopt plans and reports regarding the learning outcomes’ annual assessment, including University learning outcomes;
6. Promote and assess a learning outcomes-based culture and strengthen related intellectual works;
7. Submit recommendations to the Provost on the assessment of all learning outcomes' topics;
8. Any other task(s) to be assigned by the Provost.

The transition to a formal standing committee was done to signify the importance of learning outcomes assessment to the institution. ULOASC consists of a core team of administrators, faculty representatives from every college, and an additional representative for the Office of Graduate Studies\(^\text{17}\). The college representatives are to serve as the chairs of their college’s learning outcomes assessment committee, so there is a seamless channel of communication throughout the institution.

Within each of the colleges, there is expected to be a similar committee structure for learning outcomes assessment, and new in 2015-16 is the creation of college or institute level Quality Assurance Officer positions. These are faculty positions in each unit with release time dedicated to learning assessment. They are expected to chair the college-level committee and lead the assessment process for their respective units. It is their role to ensure the efficient flow of information between the standing committee and the college committee. To be effective, this means that the college committees should meet regularly and that the dean’s office is well-informed or is a participant in the college learning assessment activities.

**Professional Development**

Much of the learning that takes place surrounding learning outcomes assessment occurs within the ULOASC. However, in support of the assessment program, the OEE delivers an annual assessment retreat, regular workshops, brings in external experts, and partners with colleges and departments to provide tailor-made sessions both on assessment processes and best practices. The OEE creates an annual PD plan in consultation with key stakeholders and over the past year has dealt with topics such rubric development, QFE alignment, closing the loop, and effective assessment practices. With the recent allocation of

\(^{17}\) Current ULOASC Membership can be found at [http://www.zu.ac.ae/main/en/_assessment_resource/Learning_Assessment/ULAC_GLAC.aspx](http://www.zu.ac.ae/main/en/_assessment_resource/Learning_Assessment/ULAC_GLAC.aspx)
4 Student Engagement, Training and Service Learning (SETS) days this academic year, departments are encouraged to use these days for assessment-based discussions and activities.

**Technology**

Zayed University has always had software solutions available to support and enhance the effectiveness of the learning outcomes assessment program. Zayed University employs the multi-purpose, web-based assessment software Strategic Planning Online (SPOL)\(^\text{18}\). The main attraction to SPOL is its functionality as a tool for strategic planning; however, the efficacy of its assessment module made it clear that it should also serve as an assessment tool, and since the university is using SPOL for strategic planning, it is being used for learning outcomes assessment as well. SPOL currently houses learning outcomes assessment plans and reports as well as assessment findings, actions, and support documentation. Currently OEE is directly managing and administering SPOL for learning outcomes assessment purposes.\(^\text{19}\) Two additional data management platforms are scheduled for implementation in 2015-16: Curricunet, a curriculum management program, and Xplorance, a data management tool to be housed in the Office of Institutional Research.

Another technology that plays a role in learning assessment is the Blackboard rubric tool. The College of Education is moving towards full implementation of shared electronic rubrics for each and every course. While detailed data from these rubrics is available to students and faculty, summary level data across numerous sections is also available using a tool that has been developed by our computing department.

A technology which has endured since the very early years of the ZULO/MALO framework, is the ePortfolio tool. While not an ePortfolio in the truest sense of the word, it serves as a repository for student work where faculty review the work and assess it according to the Beginning, Developing, Accomplished, or Exemplary levels of attainment. Though this could still be considered a “best practice”, the system lacks the desired granularity, that is, the ability to identify areas of strength and weakness. Though the ePortfolio has become a dated technology limiting its usefulness program-wide, it is still used effectively by the College of Creative Arts & Enterprises.

\(^{18}\) Available at: [http://spol.zu.ac.ae/SPOLNET/Default.aspx](http://spol.zu.ac.ae/SPOLNET/Default.aspx)

\(^{19}\) Queries about SPOL assessment should be directed to Saidah Qunneis in OEE
References


POLICY
Learning Outcomes Assessment Policy

I. Policy
Learning Outcomes Assessment is a fundamental process which can demonstrate that students have achieved the knowledge, skills, and competencies appropriate for their degree, lead to an improvement in student learning, and is an emphasis of the major higher education accreditation bodies. Because of this, Zayed University will implement a systematic and sustainable learning outcomes assessment program which incorporates international “best practices” and meets the requirements of institutional accreditors. Such a program follows this common process:

- Establish a set of aligned learning outcomes at the course and program level;
- Assess student achievement of learning outcomes using appropriate methods;
- Evaluate the results of the learning outcomes assessment to implement solutions for improving student learning.

Detailed steps in the process will be maintained in a Learning Outcomes Assessment Handbook or integrated into a larger University Quality Assurance Manual.

The process and results of assessments should be communicated to stakeholders, and the assessment process itself should be periodically reviewed to monitor its effectiveness.

II. Application
This policy is applicable to degree-granting programs at Zayed University.

III. Related Policies
ACA-PRO-06 Assessment of Academic Programs

IV. Administration
This policy is administered by the Office of Educational Effectiveness, and questions should be directed to the Office of Educational Effectiveness.

Revision History

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POLICY

Qualifications Framework Emirates Alignment

V. Policy

As a federal institution it is imperative that Zayed University participate in the national qualifications framework, the Qualifications Framework Emirates, a document which defines academic qualifications according to the achievement of learning outcomes rather than time served within a program. As a learning outcomes institution, Zayed University will ensure that all degree-granting academic programs are appropriately aligned with the correct level within the Qualifications Framework Emirates and submit to any required external review of our alignment.

All existing programs will be aligned and all new programs will integrate the Qualifications Framework Emirates as part of their development.

Zayed University will establish procedures to guide the alignment process and embed these into the existing work conducted through the Curriculum Review Standing Committee.

VI. Application

This policy is applicable to degree-granting programs at Zayed University.

VII. Related Policies

ACA-PRO-02 New Degree Programs
ACA-PRO-03 Academic Program Change or Discontinuation
ACA-PRO-04 Authorizing New Courses and Changing or Discontinuing Existing Courses

VIII. Administration

This policy is administered by the Office of Educational Effectiveness, and questions should be directed to the Office of Educational Effectiveness.

IX. Revision History

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Appendix B
Integration of the QFE needs to demonstrate three levels of alignment:
- Program learning outcomes to QFE learning outcomes;
- Course learning outcomes to program learning outcomes;
- Assessments to course learning outcomes.
This process must be documented, completed using the standard set of QFE alignment templates, and be internally verified through the work of the Curriculum Revision Committee.
To achieve alignment each program should:
1. Document this entire process through the inclusion of meeting minutes or a narrative describing the process
2. Identify the appropriate level of the QFE and analyze each of the learning outcomes within the five strands
3. Interpret these learning outcomes in relation to the existing program learning outcomes or the learning outcomes under development
4. Edit or create the program learning outcomes cognizant of alignment to the QFE outcomes
   a. Ensure that the program learning outcomes clearly match the language (verbs and scope and quality of guidance) within the appropriate QFE level
5. Institute curricular modifications where there are deficiencies
6. Map program learning outcomes to QFE learning outcomes
7. Analyze course learning outcomes in relation to reviewed or edited program learning outcomes
8. Draft or edit course learning outcomes following accepted “best practices”:
   a. Begin with an introductory phrase indicating what students will be able to do
   b. Focus on what students can demonstrate at course completion
   c. Able to be assessed by course assessment strategies
   d. Understandable to students and other stakeholders
   e. Be written for the correct level of the QFE
9. Ensure assessments able to effectively evaluate course learning outcomes
10. Institute curricular or assessment modifications where there are deficiencies
11. Map individual course learning outcomes to program learning outcomes
12. Map courses to program learning outcomes
13. Submit all required documentation to the Curriculum Review Committee for approval.

X. **Alignment Templates**
The required alignment templates are located on the Form section of the Policies and Procedures website.
### Appendix C

QFE Level 7 - Bachelors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Aspects of competence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>specialised factual and theoretical knowledge and an understanding of the boundaries in a field of work or discipline, encompassing a broad and coherent body of knowledge and concepts, with substantive depth in the underlying principles and theoretical concepts</td>
<td>technical, creative and analytical skills appropriate to solving specialised problems using evidential and procedural based processes in predictable and new contexts that include devising and sustaining arguments associated with a field of work or discipline</td>
<td>can take responsibility for developing innovative and advanced approaches to evaluating and managing complex and unpredictable work procedures and processes, resources or learning</td>
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<td>an understanding of allied knowledge and theories in related fields of work or disciplines and in the case of professional disciplines including related regulations, standards, codes, conventions</td>
<td>evaluating, selecting and applying appropriate methods, procedures or techniques in processes of investigation towards identified solutions</td>
<td>can manage technical, supervisory or design processes in unpredictable, unfamiliar and varying contexts</td>
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<td>understanding of critical approach to the creation and compilation of a systematic and coherent body of knowledge and concepts gained from a range of sources</td>
<td>evaluating and implementing appropriate research tools and strategies associated with the field of work or discipline</td>
<td>can work creatively and/or effectively as an individual, in team leadership, managing contexts, across technical or professional activities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>a comprehensive understanding of critical analysis, research systems and methods and evaluative problem-solving techniques</td>
<td>highly developed advanced communication and information technology skills to present, explain and/or critique complex and unpredictable matters</td>
<td>can express an internalised, personal view, and accept responsibility to society at large and to socio-cultural norms and relationships</td>
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<td></td>
<td>familiarity with sources of current and new research and knowledge with integration of concepts from outside fields</td>
<td>can take responsibility for the setting and achievement of group or individual outcomes and for the management and supervision of the work of others or self in the case of a specialisation in field of work or discipline</td>
<td>can participate in peer relationships with qualified practitioners and lead multiple, complex groups</td>
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<td>can function with full autonomy in technical and supervisory contexts and adopt para-professional roles with little guidance</td>
<td>can take responsibility for contributing to professional practice, and undertake regular professional development and/or further learning</td>
<td>can take responsibility for managing the professional development and direct mentoring of individuals and groups</td>
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<td></td>
<td>can manage learning tasks independently and professionally, in complex and sometimes unfamiliar learning contexts</td>
<td>can self-evaluate and take responsibility for contributing to professional practice, and undertake regular professional development and/or further learning</td>
<td>can contribute to and observe ethical standards</td>
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## Appendix D

### QFE Level 9- Masters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Aspects of competence</th>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>comprehensive, highly specialised knowledge in a field of work, discipline and/or professional practice, and at the interface between different fields, including frontier concepts and recent developments</td>
<td>advanced skills required in research, analysis, evaluation and/or innovation of complex ideas, information, concepts and/or activities</td>
<td>can function autonomously and/or take responsibility for managing professional activities that may include a highly complex environment</td>
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<td>advanced knowledge of applicable research principles and methods</td>
<td>skills to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields using highly developed cognitive and creative skills and intellectual independence to the field of work or discipline</td>
<td>can initiate and manage professional activities that require new strategic approaches and/or intervention or conceptual abstract solutions</td>
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<td>critical awareness of knowledge issues, as the basis for original thinking; encompassing appropriate processes of enquiry and current processes of knowledge production</td>
<td>advanced problem-solving skills to analyse highly complex issues with incomplete data and develop innovative solutions and proposals relevant to an academic/professional field, field of work or discipline</td>
<td>can account for high level governance of processes and systems</td>
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<td>detailed body of knowledge of recent developments in a field of work, and/or discipline</td>
<td>planning skills to develop and execute a major project or comparable activities (that includes a significant range of variables and complexity) with appropriately selected research methodologies producing sound conclusions</td>
<td>can analyze and reflect on socio-cultural norms and relationships and act to build and transform them</td>
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<td>highly developed specialist communication and information technology skills to present, explain and/or critique highly complex matters</td>
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<td>can self-evaluate and take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice including unfamiliar learning contexts</td>
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<td>can develop and implement further learning consistently and sensitively</td>
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<td></td>
<td>can consistently and sensitively manage highly complex ethical issues leading to informed, fair and valid decisions</td>
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