

Plan for the Assessment of Student Learning at Beloit College

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Background

In August of 2021, the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) noted some areas of concern for Beloit College surrounding the assessment of student learning. In Fall 2021, COA reviewed these concerns, consulted those with assessment expertise, and devised this plan to address the issues raised. Beloit must provide an interim report to the HLC by February 28, 2023.

Purpose of the Assessment of Student Learning

The essential goal is for the assessment process to help instructors gain greater insight into their students' learning experiences, to be responsive to them, and to improve teaching. Moreover, as assessment takes place college-wide and faculty collaborate to share ideas, tools, and findings, we hope this can be an opportunity to further strengthen our community of educators. We have designed this process to be flexible so that it may be adapted for departmental, programmatic, and disciplinary norms. Ultimately, COA encourages each department and program to tailor assessment activities in ways that help them answer questions most relevant to their unique pedagogies and challenges.

While the primary goal of this assessment is to benefit students' learning experiences, collecting assessment data can be useful for several other purposes, such as the following:

- for teaching narratives for tenure and promotion
- for tenure-line proposals to ASP
- for department and program reviews
- for pedagogical research or grant proposals
- for data shared with COA informing curricular revisions and updates

What is the Assessment of Student Learning? How are We Approaching It?

The HLC requires "effective processes for assessment of student learning and for achievement of learning goals in academic and cocurricular offerings." While assessment could take on many forms and be multi-pronged, COA proposes that the College begin with a focus on departments and programs, as these are the core of our "academic offerings."

Before assessment can be done, departments and programs must first articulate what their learning goals are. What do you want students to be able to do or know? What does a successful student in your program look like? Since many of our courses serve both majors and non-majors, we imagine faculty will choose to design learning goals that address their teaching of the diverse groups in our classrooms. The assessment is then the systematic collection of evidence to measure whether students are achieving those goals. From this data, improvements to the learning experience can be made.

General Plan for the Assessment of Student Learning

Each department or program at Beloit should do the following:

- Articulate departmental/program learning goals.
- Identify the areas in the curriculum in which the goals are addressed (mapping).
- Implement at least one assessment activity each year.*
- Respond to the findings to better align student learning with learning goals.
- Share findings and plans with COA and the Provost's Office each semester.

*Each department or program may decide how to divide or carry out the work. We strongly encourage all full-time members of the faculty to participate in some way.

Timeline

In Spring 2022, we will set the stage for assessment activities in future years. After that, assessment activities will take place in the Fall semesters, while Spring semesters will be designated for reflection and responses to findings. We propose that this become an established college-wide pattern. The following steps should be taken by each department or program (with each submitting a single report at the end of each term).

Spring 2022—Preparation for Assessment

Each department or program should complete the “Curricular Mapping Worksheet” (below), which includes the following steps:

- Articulate three to five department/program-level student learning outcomes/goals.
- Map out where these goals are met within the departmental/program curriculum.
- Identify 1-2 assessment activities regarding **introductory courses** to carry out in Fall 2022.
- Upload the above to the shared folder “[Learning Goals and Mappings](#)” by **May 23, 2022**.

Fall 2022—Implementation of Assessment

- Conduct at least one assessment activity in relation to the chosen **introductory course(s)**, with a **focus on courses with domain designations**. Note that assessment may include data or student work from prior semesters.
- If offered, conduct on assessment activity in a **W-designated course** to support the 2022-23 Review of the Writing Program. See [goals and sample outcomes here](#) to guide your assessment.
- Refer to additional tools and guidance to be provided by COA and Teaching & Learning.
- Upload findings to the shared folder “[Fall 2022 Assessments](#)” by **December 16, 2022**. These reports to COA may be 1-2 pages long and should include summaries of the following:
 - Learning goal assessed.
 - Brief description of the assessment tool or method used.
 - A table, chart, graph, or summary of the evidence collected.
 - Preliminary plans for responses to findings, including improvements if necessary.

Spring 2023—Response to Assessment

Each department or program does the following:

- Implement any changes (or begin a plan for longer term changes) the department has determined based on findings from the assessment activity in the fall.
- Identify 1-2 assessment activities to carry out in Fall 2023 regarding **Mid-level courses, with a focus on courses with skills designations.**
- Share with COA any comments, questions, or concerns with the assessment process.

COA:

- Review assessment findings, look for patterns or trends that would require college-wide attention, and collect data that could be useful for future reviews.
- Compile findings and document the process for HLC reports.

Tentative Assessment Schedule

(This schedule may be adjusted by future COA committees to be responsive to college needs.)

Fall 2022	Introductory Courses (with a focus on courses with domains)
Fall 2023	Mid-level Courses (with a focus on courses with skills designations)
Fall 2024	Upper-level courses and Capstones
AY 2024-25	Review and Update Assessment Plan (COA)
Fall 2025	C-, E-, and Q-designated courses
Fall 2026	W, 1S, and 2A courses
Fall 2027	3B, 4U, and 5T courses
AY 2027-28	Review and Update Assessment Plan (COA)

CURRICULAR MAPPING WORKSHEET

Spring 2022

In Spring of 2022, each department/program is responsible for defining a set of learning goals. Following this, each department/program will conduct a curricular mapping exercise and preliminarily identify one or two learning goals to assess in the Fall of 2022.

In the pages that follow, you will find a simple and systematic method for developing and documenting the key learning goals that each department/program values. Here is a brief overview of the four-step process for Spring 2022:

- 1) Departments/programs collaboratively decide on a set of three to five student learning outcomes/goals central to their curriculum.
- 2) Map out where these learning goals occur in the curriculum.
- 3) Identify how learning outcomes are assessed in each course (e.g. paper, exam, presentation, collaborative project, etc.).
- 4) Tentatively plan on an assessment activity to implement in Fall 2022.

TIP: To use this worksheet, make a copy of this Google document (From the “File” menu, choose “Make a copy”). Delete the first three introductory pages.

This completed worksheet should be submitted to COA by May 23, 2022. Upload materials the shared folder “[Learning Goals and Mappings](#).”

Step 1. As a department or program, identify a set of three to five student learning goals.

What are students expected to be able to do or know? How do you define a successful student?

Tips

- The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) provides this [short guide](#) on writing learning outcomes.
- For specific examples of learning goals, we recommend browsing this [webpage](#) from UW Madison’s site, as each departmental page has clear learning objectives/goals.

Student Learning Outcomes/Goals

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Encouraged but not required: You may choose to add a goal or two that are related to domains and skills, especially if those are prominent features of your curriculum.

Step 2. Create Table 1: Map out where these learning goals/outcomes occur in the curriculum.

To set up Table 1, list the learning objectives/goals across the columns and list each course in your department/program in the rows. Note that a course is not expected to engage with all of your learning goals.

Example Table 1: Learning Goals Across Courses in MUSIC						
Course	Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3	Goal 4	Goal 5	Goal 6
	Apply disciplinary skills in new contexts.	Interrogate our positions within the changing conventions of music and sound studies.	Develop musicianship skills	Develop communication and research skills	Build communities	Foster collaborations
Ensembles			X		X	X
Lessons			X			
150 Histories of Music	X	X		X	X	
170 Music, Sound, and Theory	X	X	X	X	X	
200 Topics in Music	X	X		X	X	
255 Composition & Songwriting	X		X		X	X
260 Recording and Editing	X		X		X	X
270 Music Theory in Practice	X	X	X			
300 Capstone	X			X	X	

See this [NILOA](#) document or further discussion.

Step 3. Create Table 2: Identify how learning outcomes may be assessed in each course

Working collaboratively in your department/program, consider how each outcome/goal may be assessed in the courses. If the assessment of student learning is the systematic collection of evidence to show if a learning goal is being met, the goals could be assessed through essays, research papers, performances, simulations, lab reports, midterm exams, or research projects, for example. This assessment can be direct (e.g., an assignment or test that you design) or indirect (e.g., students’ self-assessment in a reflection). As before, this will vary greatly among courses and faculty as well as among departments and programs.

Example Table 2: Assessment Tools in (Selected) MUSIC Courses						
Course	Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3	Goal 4	Goal 5	Goal 6
	Apply disciplinary skills in new contexts.	Interrogate our positions within the changing conventions of music and sound studies.	Develop musicianship skills	Develop communication and research skills	Build communities	Foster collaborations
InterArts Ensemble					reflection	skills labs
Lessons			juries			
170 Music, Sound, and Theory	essay	forum discussion	quizzes		discussion	
255 Composition & Songwriting	creative project		creative project		discussion	group project
270 Music Theory in Practice	final project		individual quizzes			
300 Capstone	senior project			professional portfolio	group critique	

(similar to Table 4 here: [NILOA](#)).

Step 4. Plan for Fall 2022.

In this step, we will tentatively plan for assessment activities in Fall 2022:

1. Decide which one or two **introductory course(s)** from the curriculum will be assessed.
2. Choose one **assessment activity** to implement in each of the selected courses.

For example: “In MUSI 170 Music, Sound, and Theory, I will use a one-on-one quiz to assess competency in the performance of rhythms.”

These specific assessment tools do not yet need to be written or described in detail. Additional tools and resources will be shared in the Fall.

NILOA includes examples of assessments on [this page](#), including a filter at the bottom.

Resources

Cornell University: [Assessment of Student Learning](#) explains simply **what assessment is about**.

University of Wisconsin [webpage](#) with **departmental learning outcomes**

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) (Main [Page](#))

- [“A Brief Guide to Creating Learning Outcomes”](#)
- [“Mapping Learning: A Toolkit”](#) on curricular mapping
- [Assignment Library](#) includes a collection of assessment activities.

Vanderbilt University: [Student Assessment in Teaching and Learning](#) gives a useful overview on **types of assessment**.

[Concept Inventories by Subject - Center for Educational Innovation - University at Buffalo](#)