

## 1. Definition of Assessment of Student Learning

Assessment is the process of determining whether students have acquired the knowledge and skills described in the course, program, and college-wide learning outcomes. In other words, have they achieved the outcomes we have established for their learning? Put another way, how do we know they have actually learned what we assert that they will learn?

## 2. Grading and Assessment

Grading and assessment of student learning are not the same thing.

Grades represent the instructor's overall judgment regarding the quality of an individual student's work. Quality in this context is understood to include factors such as attendance, attitude, participation, effort, and growth. More specifically, grades are often affected by whether the student followed directions or met deadlines.

Grades can only be understood within the context of the course or assignment for which they are given. Therefore, they are the sole province of the instructor.

In contrast, assessment of student learning looks at student work and learning in the aggregate. Assessment is conducted against fixed learning outcomes using agreed upon objective criteria. Assessment may be performed by the instructor and/or third parties.

## 3. Quality Improvement versus Compliance

There are two equally important reasons for assessing student learning.

The first is to improve the quality of teaching and learning. At the course and program level, assessment helps instructors identify what isn't working for their students and determine whether attempted improvements have made a difference. At the institutional level, assessment identifies areas of weakness that represent opportunities to improve student learning.

The second reason for assessing student learning is to comply with the requirements of our accreditor. To retain our institutional accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), we must demonstrate a commitment to educational achievement and improvement through ongoing assessment of student learning. Specifically, HLC expects us to (a) have clearly stated student learning outcomes, (b) assess achievement of those outcomes, (c) use the information gained from assessment to improve student learning, and (d) use processes and methodologies for assessment that reflect good practice.

## 4. Faculty Driven Assessment

LSC has a long-standing commitment to faculty driven assessment. This commitment is a product of our shared understanding that assessing student learning is properly viewed as an inherent part of teaching. Moreover, the Higher Learning Commission expects "the substantial

participation of faculty and other instructional staff members” in assessment of student learning. It is for these reasons that LSC’s Academic Assessment Committee is comprised of faculty members. The Committee is chaired by the Director of Accreditation, Research, and Assessment, who functions as a facilitator.

## 5. Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes are goals for student learning. They may be thought of as statements of what we intend or claim to teach students.

We have multiple sets of learning outcomes: course outcomes, program outcomes, and college-wide outcomes.

Course outcomes are identified on the generic course outlines and should be listed on each instructor’s syllabus as well. All courses are designed to also meet one or more of LSC’s college wide outcomes.

Every program at LSC has program outcomes that students in that program are expected to achieve through one or more of the courses required by the program. The outcomes for the AA Degree program are embodied in the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum (MTC).

All learning outcomes at LSC are approved by the Academic Affairs and Standards Committee (AASC) as part of the curriculum design and approval process. Instructors do not have discretion to add, change, or delete course or program learning outcomes without AASC approval.

## 6. Alignment of Outcomes, Activities, and Assessment

For assessment to accurately measure student learning, there must be alignment of the outcomes, the assignments or activities designed to achieve the outcomes, and the assessment instrument or process. Alignment in this sense means that the outcomes, learning activities, and assessment are related to each other in a logical fashion. Alignment ensures that we actually teach what we intend to teach and that we assess what we actually taught! When students ask, “will this be on the test?” they are seeking assurance that our teaching and testing will be aligned. The same principle applies to assessment.

## 7. Direct versus Indirect Measures of Student Learning

Direct measures of student learning include exams, papers, projects, performances, etc. through which we can directly observe and form a judgment about a student’s knowledge or skills.

Indirect measures include self-reports, surveys, licensure exams, job placement, etc. through that indicate how much the student or an objective third party believes he or she learned.

Indirect measures are generally imperfect proxies for direct observation and therefore direct measures are preferred.

## 8. Power of Rubrics

Classroom assessment at the course level typically relies primarily on direct measures, and the best way to directly measure student learning is to judge it against rubrics. Rubrics are objective standards that can be used to judge knowledge (e.g. facts specific to a discipline) or skills (e.g. writing). The purpose of a rubric is to describe what “outstanding” or “satisfactory” or “inadequate” student performance looks like. In addition, good rubrics help instructors clarify both for themselves and others (including students) what their expectations are.

## 9. Closing the Assessment “Loop”

Closing the loop is a handy way of remembering that assessment of student learning is not an end in and of itself. The critical questions are, “What did we learn from the assessment, and what are we going to do about it?” Do the results indicate room to improve the curriculum, or a need to try different teaching methods? Did past curriculum changes or new teaching methods make a difference?

The process of closing the loop means that assessment of student learning is continuous, not in the sense that every outcome is assessed in every course or program every term, but in the sense that seeking and maintaining excellence in teaching and learning requires continuous attention.

## 10. Goal

Our goal is a faculty-driven (meaning faculty control the process at all levels - course, program/department and college-wide), standards-based (using faculty developed learning outcomes and rubrics), learning-centered (focused on course based activities) approach to assessment.

Outside assessments or standardized tests (e.g. National Occupational Competency Testing Institute assessments) will be used only when they are closely aligned with the LSC learning outcomes they are being used to measure.