

# Learning Outcomes and Assessment Advisory Committee Plan

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*Approved May 20, 2014*

## Background on TRU initiative

The Learning Outcomes and Assessment (LOA) initiative is included in TRU's Academic Plan (2011). Under the Academic Foundation of "Inquiry-based and Creative Learning" an item for further development is "clearly defined and measurable learning outcomes for all TRU courses across all delivery modes."

In the minutes of the Senate meeting of March 25, 2013, the Provost reported, "TRU will conduct a complete audit of all of our courses and curriculum in preparation for developing learning outcomes for all courses and programs as envisioned in the Academic Plan."

On April 3, 2013, the Provost announced the formation of the Learning Outcomes and Assessment Advisory Committee (LOAAC), which was to be "responsible for guiding the learning outcomes and assessment initiative." In that same announcement, the Centre for Student Engagement and Learning Innovation was tasked with keeping "the TRU community informed and engaged with the learning outcomes and assessment initiative" through their website, [www.tru.ca/ctl.html](http://www.tru.ca/ctl.html). Members of faculty, administration, staff, and TRUSU sit on the committee.

From April 16-18, 2013, Peter Wolf, the University of Guelph's Director, Teaching and Learning Initiatives, lead a town hall meeting and workshops for representatives of all parts of the TRU community, sharing both the research on, and his own experiences with, Learning Outcomes. Wolf's visit confirmed the LOAAC's belief that the LOA initiative should be faculty driven and student focused.

In the summer of 2013, TRU Co-op student Erin Kaulius surveyed and interviewed chairs to determine departmental readiness for the LOA initiative, including questions related to faculty members' engagement with both program- and course-level learning outcomes. Her full report is available on the CSELI website ([www.tru.ca/ctl.html](http://www.tru.ca/ctl.html)).

Throughout 2013-14, the LOAAC reviewed best practice LOA processes, and now presents this plan as the conclusion of its work; a working group will be formed to implement the LOA initiative as recommended by the LOAAC.

## Benefits and rationale of LOA

A learning outcomes-based approach to student learning is now the norm in determining whether students know and can do what educators intend. Learning outcomes are explicit and concise statements of what students will know, be able to do, and value at the end of an educational experience. Research shows that student learning is most effective when learning outcomes are clearly understood before a learning experience.

The LOA approach to teaching and learning specifies what students are expected to learn in a hierarchy of levels. At the course level, it effectively aligns the learning expectations with appropriate assessments and learning activities. At the program level, it organizes courses to form an integrated curriculum around intended learning outcomes. Program outcomes then contribute to institutional goals.

Program- and institutional-level outcomes are communicated broadly and serve to inform students, parents, employers and other stakeholders of the educational attributes that successful students will possess at the end of their studies. Learning outcomes inform curriculum decisions and form the basis of evaluating the quality and currency of programs.

The need for developing learning outcomes assessment has been recognized on several platforms. The Ministry emphasizes their importance in the Quality Assurance Framework of British Columbia Green Paper of March 2013, TRU's Academic Plan and Strategic Priorities indicate it as a priority, and it is a requirement of TRU's pursuit of accreditation with the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities. It is also part of a broader movement with well-established LOA in other provinces as well as in the US and several European countries.

The internal objective of TRU's LOA initiative is to develop and disseminate a process in which all educational programs can productively use a learning outcomes and assessment approach to inform and strengthen effective teaching and student learning. Externally, the initiative and its results will be communicated to accrediting bodies, policy makers and other stakeholders.

## Guiding principles

The LOAAC suggests several guiding principles for the implementation of LOA at TRU:

1. The implementation of learning outcomes should be faculty driven, with student input; that is, departments, with student consultation, decide on and implement the learning outcomes for their programs;
2. Learning outcomes should be student focused in their purpose and wording;
3. Implementation should begin with the development of program-level outcomes that are linked to institutional-level outcomes, followed by the development of course-level outcomes that are linked to program-level outcomes;
4. Programs should adopt a continuous, rather than an episodic or occasional approach, to the monitoring and updating of learning outcomes;
5. Whenever possible, existing workflows (accreditation, program review, various planning initiatives, articulation, new program development, etc.) should function as the reason for a program to review or revise its learning outcomes;
6. The LOA initiative should be closely aligned with the TRU Program Review process by:
  - a. Adding additional questions to the Program Self-Study template based on guidance from the LOA Working Group;
  - b. Including program-level learning outcomes and the program's assessment plan (containing a curriculum map) as an appendix to the final report;
  - c. Encouraging the External Review Team to review and comment on the program's learning outcomes and assessment plan;
  - d. As appropriate, including recommendations for improvements to the learning outcomes or assessment plan in the "Opportunities for Improvement" section of the Final Report and as a task(s) in the Program Review Action Plan;

7. CSELI should develop a clear resource and assistance pathway that programs can use to develop and refine LOA;
8. CSELI should be the University-wide monitor to assess the general health and currency of the University's learning outcomes initiative, at both the institution and program level;
9. TRU's practice of the continuous improvement of learning outcomes and curriculum should be used to promote the University to students and others.