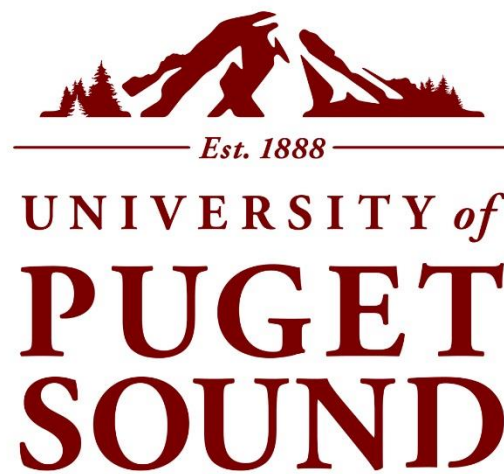


Ad Hoc Self-Evaluation Report
for the
Northwest Commission on
Colleges and Universities



March 2018

Introduction

This report is Puget Sound's response to a request made in President Sandra Elman's letter of July 27, 2017 notifying the university of the commission's actions on the university's Spring 2017 Demonstration Project Year Seven evaluation. The request was to "again address Recommendation 1 of the Spring 2013 Year Three Peer-Evaluation report".

As part of our Spring 2013 Year Three evaluation, the commission requested in its July 12, 2013 notification letter that Puget Sound address Recommendation #1 from the peer-evaluation report. That recommendation reads

The Evaluation Committee recommends that the University of Puget Sound take action to ensure that intended student learning outcomes are listed in all syllabi and in all program descriptions.

The recommendation was made in reference to Standard 2.C.2 which reads

The institution identifies and publishes expected course, program, and degree learning outcomes. Expected student learning outcomes for courses, wherever offered and however delivered, are provided in written form to enrolled students.

The relevant section from the full Spring 2013 peer-evaluation report reads

The University publishes expected program and degree learning outcomes, and in some cases, individual course outcomes. However, a review of over 25% of the course syllabi provided to the review team reveals that student learning outcomes are not consistently printed in syllabi. In almost every case, there are detailed course descriptions and assignment schedules, but not always identified student learning outcomes. Perhaps it should be an institutional practice to have a required section in all syllabi that begins: Upon the completion of this course, students will be able to . . .

A review of program websites showed the same inconsistent pattern of publishing intended student outcomes. In many cases, the desired student learning outcomes can be deduced by reading the course description, but they are not clearly or intentionally listed. Examples of department/program assessment found on the Web date back to 2006-07.

The university's Spring 2017 demonstration project report included an appendix responding to Recommendation #1. Due to the nature of the demonstration project, the Spring 2017 peer-evaluation report did not include feedback on that response.

Response to Recommendation #1

Program Student Learning Outcomes

At the time of the Spring 2017 evaluation report, most of the university's schools, departments and programs¹ had clearly identified expected learning outcomes published in the printed course catalog (known as the *Bulletin*) and on the university web site. Expected student learning outcomes are now published for the three exceptions noted in that report: Geology, German Studies, and Neuroscience.

¹ At Puget Sound, traditional disciplinary academic units are generally labeled "departments" while interdisciplinary academic units are generally labeled "programs". The graduate academic units are labeled "schools" as are, for historic reasons, two undergraduate units, namely Business & Leadership and Music. For this report, "department" will be used generically in reference to schools, departments, and programs.

Course Student Learning Outcomes

In response to the Spring 2013 recommendation, the university developed and implemented processes to help ensure all course syllabi include expected student learning outcomes. In particular, the Curriculum Committee has revised policies and practices for two processes:

- Course proposal forms—both for proposing new courses and for proposing changes to existing courses—were revised to include an explicit list of required items for the syllabus of any newly proposed course; the first item on this list is “clear enumeration of student learning outcomes”. In summer 2015, a group of faculty members who were serving or had recently served on the Curriculum Committee gathered to produce a set of guidelines for the committee’s regular review processes. The guidelines for review of course proposals by Curriculum Committee members include an explicit check for student learning outcomes on each proposed syllabus. A proposer who submits a syllabus that does not include student learning outcomes is asked to submit a revised syllabus as a necessary condition for approval of the proposal.
- As part of the departmental curriculum review process—completed on a seven-year cycle—each department submits a self-study report and a current set of syllabi. The summer 2015 group created guidelines for Curriculum Committee subcommittees carrying out a departmental curriculum review. Those guidelines specify that each subcommittee review the submitted syllabi for required elements, including expected student learning outcomes. If any syllabi lack student learning outcomes, the subcommittee communicates with the relevant department chair to solicit revisions.

These two processes ensure that any course syllabus that has undergone review by the Curriculum Committee, either as part of a course proposal review or a departmental curriculum review, will have been vetted for inclusion of expected student learning outcomes.

Since not all courses have yet gone through one of the two Curriculum Committee processes, the university asked all faculty to submit syllabi for courses offered in Spring 2018 (see the appendix for the text of that message) and has reviewed those syllabi for inclusion of expected student learning outcomes. In a few cases, this has necessitated working individually with some faculty members to clarify the need for or nature of student learning outcomes. Some revisions came too late to be incorporated into Spring 2018 syllabi but will be included on those syllabi for future offerings. The university will continue collecting and reviewing course syllabi each semester until all existing courses have been offered and each syllabus includes expected student learning outcomes.

Conclusion

Puget Sound has taken clear and effective “action to ensure that intended student learning outcomes are listed in all syllabi and in all program descriptions” and is in compliance with Standard 2.C.2. Degree learning outcomes for undergraduate degrees are articulated in the educational goals of the university’s Curriculum Statement. (Those goals were revised by the faculty in Fall 2017, culminating a process begun as part of the university’s work on the demonstration project.) Degree learning outcomes for each of the graduate degrees are articulated by the relevant graduate school. All schools, departments, and programs have published program learning outcomes. Going forward, syllabi for all scheduled courses will include expected student learning outcomes.

Appendix: Message to faculty requesting Spring 2018 course syllabi

Dear faculty colleagues,

As part of accreditation, we are required to provide “expected student learning outcomes” for each course in written form to all enrolled students. As part of responding to this accreditation requirement, I am writing to ask that you provide a version of your syllabus for each of your Spring 2018 classes that includes expected student learning outcomes for the class. **Please send an electronic version of a syllabus stating expected student learning outcomes for each of your Spring 2018 classes to your department or program administrative assistant by Wednesday, January 31.** Please do so for all of your Spring 2018 classes even if you have previously submitted a syllabus for the course that states learning outcomes. Additional details and background follow.

For the past few years, we have asked faculty to include expected learning outcomes on syllabi submitted as part of course proposals (new courses or revisions to existing ones) and as part of seven-year curriculum reviews. However, not all courses have gone through one of those processes so we will be collecting syllabi at the start of each semester for the new few semesters in order to have a complete collection to document our compliance with this accreditation requirement. **In order to facilitate our work in organizing the collection, it would be helpful if you could name each file with the following elements: subject code (e.g., HIST), course number, section letter, term, instructor last name (so, for example, HIST 281 A Spring 2018 Lear or BIOL 112 B Spring 2018 Elliott).**

For reference and guidance, here are a few notes on student learning outcomes:

- Outcomes should focus on ends rather than means. One approach to focusing on ends is to frame outcomes with language such as “Upon completion of this course, students will be able to...”
- For the purposes of the requirement, you can focus on the most essential learning outcomes for the course at a high or broad level. A small handful of outcomes will suffice.
- In developing outcomes, you might consider them as answers to a question such as “What are the essential things students should carry away from this course?”
- Outcomes are commonly expressed as a list but need not be.
- For some purposes, outcomes should be things that are observable or measurable. That approach is particularly useful if you are using outcomes as a framework for determining scores or course grades. However, requiring outcomes to be observable or measurable can feel limiting and reductionist. For the current purposes of satisfying the accreditation requirement, your outcomes need not all be observable or measurable.
- Outcomes can range across things such as skills, knowledge, understanding, and habits of mind. Outcomes statements often include an emphasis on action verbs such as explain, articulate, judge, evaluate, apply, design, create, or develop.
- Outcomes statement can include details on aspects or factors that are valued. For example “write effectively” might be expanded as something like “write accurately, precisely, clearly, and concisely”.
- Outcome statements can include details on mastery level or degree of progress.
- In developing course learning outcomes, you might consider relationships to your department or program learning outcomes and to the faculty’s educational goals as articulated in the Curriculum Statement (revised last fall).

If you have any questions or concerns about this request, please feel free to contact me.