ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT
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TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY

A Basic Guide to Using Curriculum Maps for Program Assessment

What is a curriculum map?

A program-level *curriculum map* is a visual tool for demonstrating the relationship between program learning outcomes and program courses and experiences. It is often organized in the format of a matrix where each row represents a program course or learning experience and each column represents a program-level learning outcome.

A basic curriculum map indicates which courses/experiences address which SLOs by simply placing an "X" in the appropriate cell.

	SLO #1	SLO #2	SLO #3
Course 5003	X	X	
Course 5133	X		
Course 5223	X	X	
Course 5403	X		X
Course 5523		X	X
Course 5653		X	X
Capstone	X	X	X

A more advanced curriculum map uses a coding scheme to indicate the extent or degree to which an SLO is covered in the course and/or in which course(s) the SLO is assessed. One commonly used coding scheme is I - Introduced, R - Reinforced, M - Mastered, and/or A – Assessed.

	SLO #1	SLO #2	SLO #3
Course 5003	I	I	
Course 5133	R		
Course 5223	R	R	
Course 5403	R, A		I
Course 5523		R	R
Course 5653		M, A	M, A
Capstone	M, A	M, A	M, A

You might also choose to include information about the type of assessment method used.

	SLO #3
Course 5653	M, A (Comprehensive exam)
Capstone	M, A (Capstone portfolio)

Note that TWU's Assessment Plans require completion of a curriculum map and include a template for the map within the plan form.

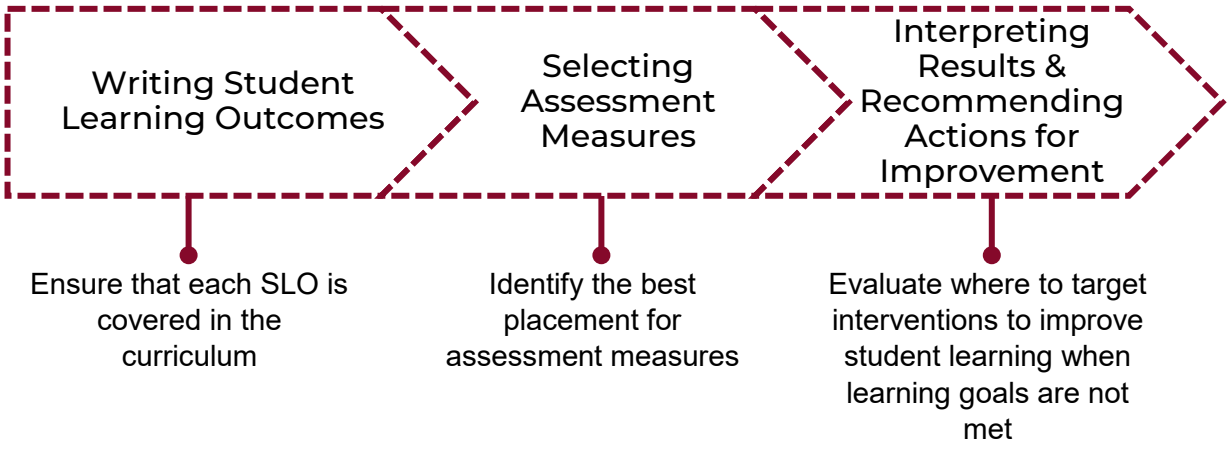
What is the purpose of a curriculum map?

A curriculum map is a useful tool for identifying and examining relationships between the different elements of a program's curriculum and the program's intended learning goals for students. Every student who completes the curriculum should have an opportunity to develop and demonstrate the identified program learning outcomes (Diamond, 2008). A curriculum map can serve as a confirmation that the curriculum provides these learning opportunities for all students.

A curriculum map can be useful for (National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment [NILOA], 2018):

- Reviewing the alignment between courses and SLOs
- Reviewing the extent to which SLOs are addressed and reinforced across the curriculum
- Reviewing the placement of assessment measures
- Identifying gaps in alignment where SLOs are not covered by courses or where courses are not covering SLOs
- Considering how students progress through the curriculum
- Ensuring that all students have adequate opportunities to develop the intended learning
- Understanding the impact of optional courses or experiences

A program-level curriculum map can be useful at multiple steps in the assessment cycle.



Tips for creating a curriculum map

Consider the following tips when creating a curriculum map for your program (Suskie, 2018):

- Include only required courses/experiences, or create a separate map for optional/elective courses/experiences
- For degree plans that allow students to select a specific number of courses from a pre-defined cluster or list, group these courses together as one row
- Only map a course to an SLO if demonstrating some degree of competency in the SLO is a significant part of the final course grade

Analyzing a curriculum map

After creating a curriculum map, use the map to analyze the program curriculum. It may be most beneficial to analyze the map in conversation with other program faculty.

Here are some questions* to guide your analysis:

- Is every SLO addressed in the curriculum?
- Which SLOs get more coverage? Which get less?
- Which courses/experiences offer more coverage for SLOs? Which offer less coverage or no coverage?
- Is every SLO addressed in multiple courses or experiences?
- Does the course sequence expose students to learning outcomes in a logical order?
- Are SLOs first introduced and then reinforced or mastered?
- Are students allowed adequate opportunities to develop and practice their learning before being assessed on an SLO?
- Is it possible to achieve the program learning outcomes given the current structure of the curriculum?
- How do electives or other optional learning experiences relate to students' development of program learning outcomes?

*Questions adapted from The Center for Assessment and Research Studies, n.d.; NILOA, 2018; Suskie, 2018

Example

Sample Curriculum Map

	SLO #1	SLO #2	SLO #3
Course 5033	I	I	
Course 5113	R		
Course 5223			
Course 5453	R, A	R	I
Course 5553	R	R	
Course 5603	M	M, A	M, A
Internship		M, A	M, A

Using the questions for analyzing a curriculum map, what are some observations that we can make about the sample curriculum map?

Every SLO is covered and mapped to multiple courses, but SLO #3 is addressed less than the other two program learning outcomes.

SLO #3 is introduced in Course 5453 and then mastered and assessed in Course 5603 and the Internship. Students are not provided with additional opportunities to reinforce the learning.

Course 5223 does not map to any learning outcomes.

SLO 1 is assessed in Course 5453 but later reinforced and mastered in subsequent courses. Students may have been assessed before they had an opportunity to fully master the learning.

In light of these observations, program faculty may want to consider the following questions and recommendations.

Is SLO #3 sufficiently addressed across the curriculum? The program may want to consider introducing SLO 3 earlier in the curriculum and/or adding reinforcement of SLO 3 to additional courses.

Program faculty may want to review the syllabus for Course 5223 and evaluate the course's placement within the curriculum. They might consider adding content to the course addressing one or more program learning outcomes. Alternatively, they could consider deactivating the course and replacing it in the curriculum with a new or different course that more closely aligns with the program learning outcomes.

Are students assessed on SLO #1 before they have had an opportunity to fully master the learning? The program may want to consider keeping the assessment in Course 5453 as a formative or developmental assessment while adding an additional summative assessment in Course 5603, where the SLO is mastered.

References

The Center for Assessment and Research Studies. (n.d.) *Assessment 101: Week 1* [PowerPoint slides]. James Madison University.

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Suskie, L. (2018). *Assessing student learning: A common sense guide* (3rd ed.). John Wiley & Sons.