

Learning Outcomes Questionnaire - Alberta Results

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Introduction

The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) is an intergovernmental body that was founded in 1967.

In Advanced Education's work through this council, a national questionnaire about learning outcomes was circulated to public post-secondary institutions in Alberta in July 2016. This document contains the aggregated data from the sixteen institutions who participated. Sharing raw data is important, not only to ensure transparency, but also to allow a fulsome conversation about learning outcomes.

The same questions were distributed across Canada by different jurisdictions. To date, CMEC has collected data from 79 institutions and the work is ongoing. Data presented in this document will be shared with CMEC to ensure Alberta is represented in their report. Once CMEC has completed this work, information will once again be shared, not only with our institutions, but also with the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer as well as the Campus Alberta Quality Council to better inform decision-making in our province.

In this report, direct responses from the institutions are included as bullet points, whereas responses that are in paragraph form are summations of the institutions' responses.

This work is important to pursue a data-based conversation about learning outcomes within the province in the context of post-secondary education in Canada.

Contact

Questions about the use and collection of this data can be directed to the International Education and Intergovernmental Coordination Branch of Advanced Education:

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Section A: Institutional characteristics

Number of survey responses:

University	College	Institute	Total
7	8	1	16

Number of FTE students:

University	College	Institute	Total
55414.67	35879	525	91818.67

Number of programs by level:

PhD	Masters	Bachelors	Certificate	Apprenticeship	Other	Total
60	103	257	169	31	301	921

Section B: Defining Learning Outcomes

1. To what extent are learning outcomes defined or currently being defined at your institution?

	Not at all				Very much
	1	2	3	4	5
Number of institutions	0	3	3	8	2

2. How does your institution define learning outcomes?

A learning outcome is a statement that outlines what learners are expected to know at the end of a program of study. Outcomes are classified as a set of skills, knowledge, competencies, attributes, abilities, attitudes, understandings, or values. Learning outcomes define what learners should be able to do at the end of instruction (Instructional Design, Smith & Ragan, 1999 p. 84) and how they should be able to show that they can do it.

3. Does your institution have an overall learning-outcomes plan?

	Yes	No
Number of institutions	7	9

4. Are learning outcomes identified at the course, program, discipline, department, faculty, institution, or other level?

Level	Yes	No
Institutional	8	8
Faculty	4	12
Department	3	13
Discipline	6	10
Program	15	1
Course	15	1

5. Are learning outcomes identified at the course/program level aligned with those at the institutional level?

	Yes	No
Number of institutions	9	7

Please explain how the learning outcomes identified at the course/program level aligned with those at the institutional level?

Learning outcomes are aligned differently across Alberta. According to responses, about 60 per cent of institutions have some kind of connection, or are working on making connections, between course level learning outcomes and institutional level outcomes.

6. Are employers, accreditation bodies, or other key stakeholders engaged/involved in identifying learning outcomes at your institution?

	Yes	No
Number of institutions	16	0

Please explain how employers, accreditation bodies, or other key stakeholders engaged or involved in identifying learning outcomes at your institution?

Industry/professional standards are intricately connected to the accreditation/success of students, teachers, programs, and institutions. Particularly, there are great relationships between employers, accreditation bodies, and other stakeholders in institutions with professional faculties/programs.

7. To what extent are students' learning experiences (e.g. curriculum, pedagogical approaches) explicitly aligned and designed to facilitate achievement of the identified learning outcomes?

	Not at all				Very much
	1	2	3	4	5
Number of institutions	0	1	8	5	2

Section C: Learning Outcomes Assessment

1. Are specific learning outcomes currently being assessed at your institution?

	Yes	No
Number of institutions	10	6

2. Which types of skills are currently assessed across your institution? Please indicate all that apply.

Skills	Yes	Not answered
Discipline-specific skills	10	6
Basic cognitive skills	9	7
Higher-order cognitive skills	7	9
Behavioural/transferable skills	6	10

3. Please indicate at what level (course, program, discipline, departmental, faculty, or institutional) specific learning outcomes currently being assessed at your institution?

Error in collection software created incompatible data for this answer.

Are specific assessment tools being used to assess learning outcomes at your institution?

Assessment tools	Yes	No	Not answered
Analytic rubric/score guide	8	2	6
Checklist	6	4	6
E-portfolio	9	1	6
Standardized test/assignment	7	3	6
Surveys	4	6	6
Other	4	6	6

Who/which area is responsible for leading the work on assessment?

It varies according to the institution, but the following is a list:

- Curriculum coordinator with department leads.
- Office of Program Development.
- Academic Innovation and Applied Research.
- Faculties, with support of the VP Academic.
- Program faculty and practicum supervisors.
- Teaching Learning department along with Deans and Coordinators.
- Program curriculum committees.
- Faculty members.
- Program areas.
- Centre for Instructional Technology and Development.

4. Are specific assessment tools being used to assess learning outcomes at your institution?

Assessment tools	Yes	No	Not answered
Analytic rubric/score guide	8	2	6
Checklist	6	4	6
E-portfolio	9	1	6
Standardized test/assignment	7	3	6
Surveys	4	6	6
Other	4	6	6

Please provide examples of which specific assessment tools are being used to assess learning outcomes at your institution?

Assessment tools	Examples
Analytic rubric/score guide	Score guides, rubrics, course design, varies by program
Checklist	Skill development checklist, workplace skills checklist, competency checklist
E-portfolio	Entrance portfolio, ELL (English Language Learning) portfolio
Standardized test/assignment	TOWES literacy assessment, provincial tests, created at the program level
Surveys	Institution-wide survey, course evaluations, student exit survey, employer survey
Other	Critiques, project reviews, capstone courses, practical labs

5. Are any unique or program-specific assessment tools being used to assess learning outcomes?

	Yes	No	Not answered
Number of institutions	8	2	6

Please describe any unique or program-specific assessment tools being used to assess learning outcomes?

There is considerable variation of assessment across programs. For some, outcomes assessment at the program level is ubiquitous.

- Professional programs with an external accrediting body assess outcomes systematically and regularly.
- Fine arts programs use student-lead or professional panel critiques, narrative explanations.
- Portfolio-based language assessment for ELL.
- Clinical Integration Assessment for practical nursing labs.

Section D: Key Drivers of Learning Outcomes Assessment

1. To what extent do the following factors drive learning outcomes assessment at your institution?

Factors driving learning-outcomes assessment	Not at all				Very much
	1	2	3	4	5
Improving teaching and learning	0	1	0	5	4
Professional accreditation	0	1	1	4	4
Helping students to articulate and market their skills	0	2	2	3	3
Recognition of graduates' skills by employers	0	1	4	3	2
Department or institutional leadership	0	0	5	1	4
Faculty interest	0	3	4	3	0
Participation in consortium or pilot projects	4	1	1	3	1
Enhancing accountability and transparency	0	0	4	4	2
Other (please specify)	7	0	2	0	1

Please specify to what extent "Other" factors drive learning-outcomes assessment at your institution?

Transfer credit and articulation agreements influence learning outcomes assessment at institutions.					
potential for learning outcomes assessment	1	2	3	4	5
Institutional leadership	0	1	0	6	3
Faculty buy-in	0	1	0	5	4
Time/cost	0	0	2	5	3
Awareness/interest in LOA	0	3	2	5	0
Student buy-in	1	2	3	3	1
Technology/learning management system	0	2	5	3	0
Assessment tools available	0	2	5	3	0
Professional training opportunities on LOA	1	5	1	1	2
Recognition for faculty participation in LOA	1	3	4	2	0
Research consortium/project funding accountability	2	4	2	1	1
Other (please specify, see open-ended questions)	6	0	2	2	0

2. Which of the following factors influence learning-outcomes assessment/the potential for learning-outcomes assessment within your institution?

Please specify which "Other" factors influence learning-outcomes assessment/the potential for learning-outcomes assessment within your institution?

- National or provincial interest in and support for learning outcomes could increase the potential for enhancing institutional approaches.
- Availability of funds or positions to support/manage instructional design and quality assurance will influence LOA assessment.
- Institutional and industry direction tend to be the key drivers for learning outcomes initiatives.
- Funding to support curriculum mapping, development of faculty professional learning communities, and software.
- Look back at the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (1999).

Section E: Use of assessment results/data

1. How does your institution use the results/data from learning-outcomes assessment?

Uses of results of learning-outcomes assessment	Not at all				Very much
	1	2	3	4	5
Institutional benchmarking	3	1	5	1	0
Program review	1	0	0	6	3
Professional accreditation	1	0	1	5	3
Reporting to government on results achieved	1	2	2	5	0
Curriculum modification	0	0	2	6	2
Resource allocation and budgeting	4	2	2	1	1
Professional development for faculty	2	4	3	0	1
Academic policy development	3	1	3	3	0
Informing students of their progress on skills acquisition	1	1	3	2	3
Marketing	5	2	3	0	0
Research/consortium models	4	5	1	0	0
Other (please specify)	7	0	2	1	0

Comments:

Transfer and articulation is another important use of LOAs. While specific learning outcomes are widely implemented, the assessment practices are decentralized and variable across programs. Course and program learning outcomes are often assessed and reported as part of a course grade rather than broken out for discrete learning outcomes.

Section F: Communicating Assessment Results

1. How does your institution share the results of learning-outcomes assessment?

Modes of sharing	Not at all				Very much
	1	2	3	4	5
Internally available	2	2	2	3	1
Publically available	7	3	0	0	0
With students	4	0	4	1	1
With employers	6	1	2	1	0
Other (please specify)	8	0	1	0	1

Please specify through what "Other" ways does your institution share the results of learning-outcomes assessment?

- When it is applicable to a program review,
- Results of LOAs are available and vetted through a subcommittee.

Section G: Desired Supports for Assessment

1. What supports are required to pursue learning-outcomes assessment at your institution?

Types of supports	Yes	Not answered
Training in learning-outcomes development	11	5
Training in the different types of assessment	12	4
Assistance in creating learning outcomes	12	4
Handbook on LOA approaches	12	4
LOA tools tested for reliability and validity	11	5
Common terminology	12	4
Student input	9	7
Collaboration with other institutions involved in LOA	9	7
Other (please specify)	6	10

Please specify what "Other" supports are required to pursue learning-outcomes assessment at your institution?

- A common platform could help with the development, alignment, and mapping of outcomes.
- This will help provide common ground for the conversations involving transfer and articulation.
- Promoting the value and applicability of learning outcomes and outcomes assessment from a policy point of view could allow for some collaboration between institutions.

Open-ended Questions

1. Does your institution consider it important to develop or expand learning-outcomes assessment within the next five years? Please explain why or why not?

- LOA is critical to our strategic growth going forward. Expanding LOA will allow institutions to focus on assessment and continuous improvement cycle.
- LOA are the basis of accreditation, transfer and internal curriculum development. Institutions are seeking to enhance the student learning experience.
- It is necessary to meet the requirements of funding stakeholders.
- Learning outcomes are a high priority at a program level. It is difficult to implement learning outcomes assessment.
- Learning outcomes which are properly mapped will be a key to quality assurance.
- Learning outcomes are integral to the strategic plan of the institution.

2. Are specific skills prioritized by your institution, i.e., discipline-specific, basic cognitive, higher-order cognitive, behavioural/transferable, etc.? If so, please explain why.

Discipline specific: curricular nature, career preparation to ensure learners have the theoretical knowledge, applied skills, and professional attitudes that meet employer and workforce needs.

Higher-order cognitive: communication, critical analysis, problem solving, research skills, higher order cognitive is core of arts, crafts, and design work.

3. Is there awareness of and interest in furthering learning-outcomes assessment at institutional and/or program levels? Please provide further details.

Yes, all surveyed institutions indicate a willingness to further learning-outcomes assessment. University administration seems committed to the process with various degrees of engagement from faculty, sometimes depending on what type of program.

4. Has your institution or program participated in any research or pilot projects on LO/LOA (either previously or currently)? Please provide details.

- Development of the Test of Workplace Occupational Essential Skills (TOWES).
- Another institution encouraged collaboration between teaching staff in the Faculty of Education and teaching staff outside of Education.

5. Is there any interest in participating in pilots or projects focused on learning-outcomes assessment?

Most institutions are interested in participating in pilots/projects, but it would depend on the focus or project. There is one institution that does not feel it is at the point where it can engage in the assessment of learning outcomes at the various levels of it's institution.