PL-ACADEMIC-0xx: Policy on Program Educational Objectives and Learning Outcomes

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Purpose

This policy aims to establish definitions, set standards, clarify procedures, and outline measures related to the processes of defining, assessing, and reviewing learning outcomes and educational objectives at the level of academic programs. It ensures continuous improvement of the quality of academic programs and enhances the quality of education and learning at Qatar University.

Source / Authority

This policy was developed by the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs in collaboration with other academic units at Qatar University (QU) to address Program Educational Objectives and Learning Outcomes. The Offices of the Vice President is responsible for overseeing and monitoring the implementation of this policy.

Who Should Know This Policy

■President

■Vice President

■ Legal Advisor

■ Dean

■ Director / Departmental Head

■ Faculty

☐ Accounting/ Finance Personnel

☐ Student

☐ All Employees

Policy Description

Learning outcomes at the program level encompass the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that students will achieve upon successful completion of their learning process. On the other hand, educational objectives refer to the identification of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that graduates will achieve a few years after graduation. Reviewing educational objectives and evaluating learning outcomes at the program level help facilitate continuous improvements based on the analysis of assessment results and consultation with stakeholders. Both serve as measures of the effectiveness and success of the academic program. Educational objectives are directly linked to learning outcomes, curriculum, and assessment strategies within the academic program. The achievement of learning outcomes by students at graduation highly ensures the attainment of the educational objectives of the academic program.

This policy and its procedures define the processes of reviewing and evaluating learning outcomes and educational objectives at the program level, with the aim of ensuring continuous improvement of the quality of academic programs and enhancing the quality of education and learning at Qatar University.

Definitions & Glossary

1. **AAR:** Annual Assessment Report

2. **APR:** Academic Program Review

3. **Assessment cycle:** The assessment cycle is the time period during which the assessment of all learning outcomes of the program must be completed.

4. **Assessment map:** Document that visually shows where Program Learning Outcomes are being assessed.

5. **Assessment plan:** Document that outlines what data will be collected, and by whom, for the assessment of each learning outcome (typically in a multi-year cycle).

6. **Assessment target:** A statement defining the standard for determining if the assessment results meet the expectations for the Program Learning Outcome being assessed. If the assessment target is not met, corrective measures should be adopted and implemented.

7. **Assessment rubric**: A type of scoring guide that assesses and articulates specific components and expectations for an assignment. A rubric can improve the consistency and accuracy of assessments conducted across multiple settings.

8. **CLOs:** Course Learning Outcomes

9. **Learning outcomes:** Statements in curriculum specifications to describe the knowledge, understanding, skills, and values students should be able to demonstrate after a period of learning.

10. **Mastery levels:** Targeted level of achievement relative to a learning outcome to be achieved in each course (Introduced, Developed, and Mastered).

11. **Mission:** The mission refers to the mission that guides the activities of the unit or program. Missions should be specific to units and capture the activities and purpose of the unit. Missions should be created and assessed periodically by faculty members.

12. **OAS:** Online Assessment System

13. **OE:** Outcome Element

14. **PEOs:** Program Educational Objectives

15. **PCI:** Program Continuous Improvement

16. **PI:** Performance Indicator

17. **PLOs:** Program Learning Outcomes. The PLOs are defined as specific measrable statements that describe what is expected of program graduates to achieve upon successful completion of the learning process in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

18. **PEOs:** Program Educational Objectives. The PEOs are defined as broad statements that describe what QU graduates are expected to attain within a few years after graduation

19. **QU:** Qatar University

20. **Reliability:** The extent to which an assessment tool produces stable and consistent results.

21. **RO:** Responsible Office. In this policy, the responsible office refers to the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs or the Office of the Vice President for Health Sciences and Medicine, or the Office of the Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies, depending on the program's affiliation.

22. **Program constituencies:** They are students, professors, society, government and private sector institutions, as well as the non-profit sector and all parties associated with the academic program, whether during or after the academic stage. They have an important role in enhancing the academic program.

23. **Summative assessment:** Assessments that are conducted at the end of some unit of time such as the semester or academic year to evaluate students' performance.

24. **Target:** Defined level of performance that helps to identify the degree, to which goals were not met, met, or exceed.

25. **VPAA:** Vice President for Academic Affairs

26. **VPHMS:** Vice President for Health and Medical Sciences

27. **VPRGS:** Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies

28. **Validity:** The accuracy of inferences drawn from assessment results and the appropriateness of the uses of assessment results.

Policy Statements

1. **Establishment of Program Educational Objectives (PEOs) and Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)**

    a. **Defining PEOs**

    • All the academic programs offered within QU should have defined PEOs consistent with the QU vision, mission, objectives, and graduate attributes, and the program's constituencies' needs.

    • All academic programs should define their PEOs as part of program initiation and review them as part of the Program's Continuous Improvement (PCI) in consultation with the main program constituencies (if applicable).

b. Defining PLOs

- Programs define their PLOs as part of their program initiation proposal, in line with the program's vision, mission, strategic objectives of the college, and the vision, mission, objectives, and attributes of Qatar University. PLOs should also meet the expected standards of stakeholders and accreditation requirements (if applicable).
- A mapping of the PLOs with the university graduate attributes and related competencies should be conducted and well documented.
- All academic programs review their learning PLOs as part of their continuous improvement processes, in consultation with stakeholders and accreditation bodies (if applicable).
- Academic programs should adopt appropriate teaching and learning methods to help students acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes described in the learning outcomes. These teaching and learning methods should align with the university's themes of excellence.

2. Review and Assessment Processes

a. PEOs Review

- There should be a periodic review cycle of the PEOs that ensures they remain consistent with QU's mission and objectives and the program's constituents' needs.
- PEOs' periodic review cycle should be decided by the program coordinator in consultation with the college dean, departmental head, faculty, and program constituencies.
- Periodic review activities involve conducting surveys, organizing meetings, and conducting documented interviews (such as meeting minutes and reports) to consult with stakeholders. These documented activities can serve as evidence during the academic program review (APR) or when submitting the program accreditation file.
- Assessment of the PEOs is not required by QU, but it can be conducted, if judged necessary, by the program or accreditation agencies (when applicable).

b. PLOs Assessment

- The assessment process adopted by academic programs (undergraduate and graduate programs) must comply with the institutional requirements specified by the Responsible Office (RO) and meet the standards required by accreditation bodies (if applicable).
- The implementation of PLOs assessment should assist students in achieving the expected academic standards set by the university and stakeholders.
- The PLOs assessment should be based on accurate and reliable measurements to evaluate students' performance and competencies.
- The process of PLOs assessment should lead to continuous improvements in students' performance and curriculum specifications.
- Assessment activities should be aligned with the learning outcomes and academic level to provide an accurate measurement of program performance.
- The results of the PLOs assessment should serve as evidence of students' achievement of these outcomes.
- Each academic program should designate a point of contact with all stakeholders involved in the PLOs assessment process to coordinate and ensure the effective implementation of all assessment procedures.

3. Review & Assessment Reports

- PEOs review and PLOs assessment reports should be available in the academic program shared folder and accessible to all program faculty members.

Procedures

1. Defining and Reviewing PEOs & PLOs

- Each newly established program determines its own list of PEOs/PLOs based on a benchmarking process that considers the expected academic standards set by the university, stakeholders' expectations, and accreditation requirements (if applicable).

- The RO reviews the PEOs/PLOs presented within a new program proposal and provides feedback to the academic program. The feedback provided by the RO may include requests for modification or approval of the PEOs/PLOs as presented. Additionally, there may be a request for an external review of the proposed PEOs/PLOs by an external reviewer.

- All PLOs should be mapped (linked) to the PEOs and the university graduate attributes and their related competencies.

- Through the program curriculum mapping, all the PLOs should be linked to different courses offering the different mastery levels (Introduced, Developed, Mastered) of the learning outcome. Each course syllabus should be consistent with the adopted curriculum map. The alignment between Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs) and PLOs should be provided in the master course syllabus as outlined in the syllabus template.

- The curriculum map should consider the proper sequencing of courses in terms of the proficiency level of each learning outcome. This ensures that the academic program ensures students' completion of courses that provide a "lower" level of proficiency in learning outcomes before taking courses that provide a "higher" level of proficiency.

- The program should ensure that the 'Mastered M' level of the learning outcomes is achieved at the end of the academic program through required courses.

- Any proposed PEOs/PLOs initiations/modifications should be submitted for approval to the RO with rationales and benchmarking evidence. The feedback provided by the RO may include a modification request or approval of the PEOs/PLOS as proposed. The ROr may request that the proposed PEOS/PLOs be reviewed by internal/external reviewers.

- The approved versions of the PEOs/PLOs must be accessible on the website, student handbook, curriculum map, course syllabi, Online Assessment System (OAS), and all official program documents. Additionally, all approved updates should be communicated to all stakeholders.

2. Assessing PLOs

- The assessment committee at the department/faculty level (or the designated body at the program level) is responsible for developing an assessment plan, mapping, rubrics, and assessment activities and sending them to faculty members one semester before the start of the assessment cycle.

- Each PLO must be assessed at least twice during the assessment cycle through the selection of two different assessment activities.

- The assessment committee should consider adopting an appropriate assessment process that reflects the aggregated assessment results, which accurately portray the program's actual performance. The committee ensures that the assessment activities align with the PLOs as defined in the assessment rubrics and their dimensions. The assessment activities should be based on courses related to the PLO at the "Mastering" level (i.e., close to students' program completion) to reflect their performance at the time of graduation.

- The program/assessment coordinator defines the assessment details in the OAS before

the start of the assessment cycle by one academic semester. The assessment details include the assessment map, assessment plan, achievement target, and any other relevant information regarding the process and faculty contributions.

- The faculty members affiliated with the program, under the supervision of the program/assessment coordinator, ensure the application of appropriate teaching and learning standards that align with the specific PLOs.

- Faculty members are required to actively participate in various stages of the assessment process, documenting their contribution to the implementation and analysis of assessment results, and endorsing improvement measures.

- Any modification to the assessment plan specified in the OAS requires notification to the RO, accompanied by a justification.

- Further details regarding the implementation of the assessment process can be found in the learning outcomes assessment guidebook.

3. PLOs Assessment Results

- Analyzing the results of the assessment is a crucial element in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the program. The analysis should encompass the overall results at the level of program learning outcomes and the results at the level of Performance Indicator (PI)/ Outcome Element (OE)/ Rubric dimension level.

- If the desired goal is not achieved according to the assessment results of a specific outcome or any deficiencies are observed during the results analysis stage, improvement measures should be proposed by the program to enhance student learning and/or improve the implementation of the assessment process.

- The program should adopt appropriate improvement measures to address any shortcomings related to program performance or the assessment process and ensure their effective implementation.

- The impact of the adopted improvement measures should be analyzed after their implementation to assess their expected influence on student learning and program performance. In case any negative impact is observed, corrective measures should be implemented accordingly.

- The assessment results should be documented, analyzed, and included in the annual assessment report (AAR) on PLOs assessment, which each program is required to submit to the RO at the end of each academic year.

- The RO reviews the AARs submitted by the academic programs according to a specific process and provides feedback to the programs for improvement purposes.

- The RO monitors the implementation of the adopted improvement measures and evaluates their effectiveness in enhancing student achievement and advancing the programs through the review process.

- The assessment results provided by the various academic programs are used to prepare reports on PLOs assessment at the university level and are considered part of the key performance indicators (KPIs).

Review of the Implemented Processes

The various ROs of the mentioned Vice Presidents of the University shall conduct regular reviews of all processes implemented through approved development methods and tools (such as Lean Management, Kaizen, and Six Sigma DMAIC).