

**University of Windsor  
Senate**

5.2.2: **Senate Working Group on Learning Outcomes - Report**

Item for: **Information**

Forwarded by: **Senate Working Group on Learning Outcomes**

*\*See report attached.*

*\*Please click here to link to the appendices.*

# **Report of the Senate Working Group on Learning Outcomes**

May 2016

The co-chairs would like to thank the Working Group members for their significant efforts and goodwill, which were critical to the completion of this review. The Working Group would like to thank all those who provided thoughtful feedback and comments.

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**Appendices** (Contained in a separate document:

[http://www.uwindsor.ca/secretariat/sites/uwindsor.ca.secretariat/files/sa160610-5.2.2\\_swgolo\\_appendices-final.pdf](http://www.uwindsor.ca/secretariat/sites/uwindsor.ca.secretariat/files/sa160610-5.2.2_swgolo_appendices-final.pdf))

Appendix A: Fact-Finding Protocols

Appendix B: Learning Outcomes: Brief History and International Context

Appendix C: Funded Learning Outcomes Initiatives in Ontario

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## Executive Summary

This report describes the findings of a working group tasked with identifying and describing what is being done at the University of Windsor related to the status and progress of learning outcomes. The Working Group included faculty, staff, and a student from a broad range of disciplines and services.

Learning outcomes are used to clarify student learning, encouraging the alignment of learning activities and assessments with intended learning. The environment in post-secondary education has changed such that currently in Ontario there is a strategic focus on the student experience and learning quality, institutional differentiation, and student mobility. The change in focus has placed a higher priority on learning outcomes and their assessment. The articulation by the Province of its strategic focus has funding implications for universities.

Members of the group contacted every Faculty on campus using a common survey protocol to gather input from central units and committees involved in supporting learning outcomes development. Additionally, Working Group members reviewed Senate records of learning outcomes completion and institutional and provincial policy documents related to learning outcomes development, ultimately gathering information to describe:

- the purposes of learning outcomes at the University of Windsor and provincially (Section 3-5);
- the state of program/course learning outcome development on campus (Section 6);
- procedures and policies (both centrally and within departments and Faculties), and their perceived efficiency and effectiveness (Section 7 and 8);
- identified strengths, challenges, opportunities, and threats (Section 9); and
- possible directions identified by the campus for further exploration, dialogue, and action (Section 10).

Learning outcomes are pressed into service to meet multiple goals at Ontario universities, and so some perceive requirements for their development as primarily bureaucratic gatekeeping for accountability, a purpose that has little to do with actual teaching and learning. However, at the University of Windsor many academic units indicate growing confidence in the value of learning outcomes-based approaches for improving teaching, learning, and the student experience. Many also indicated the value of learning outcomes would increase when integrated more fully and collaboratively into reflection, analysis, and decision making. This position is supported by extensive international scholarship.

The data collected by the committee indicated learning outcomes are usually developed at departmental and faculty levels for courses and programs and are reviewed by academic councils and central units. There is significant evidence at the University of Windsor of commitment, hard work, and good faith efforts to meet provincial requirements for learning outcomes development. There is also evidence of growth in capacity and engagement with learning outcomes as a way of collectively designing curricula and clarifying what students should know, value and be able to do by the end of a course or program. However, awareness, engagement and expertise across campus remains uneven.

**Presently, approximately 45% of the University of Windsor's undergraduate programs and 63% of graduate programs have centrally recorded learning outcomes of some kind.**

Very few programs have an integrated and systematic approach to evaluating the degree to which students are achieving their programs' learning outcomes, but a number of Faculties are developing strategies. In general, the development of learning outcomes without a strategy for systematic assessment and use of the findings of that assessment for course and program improvement significantly limits the impact of the investment we are making.

The procedures, requirements and approval processes surrounding learning outcomes development are at times a source of frustration for both academic and central support units, though many expressed appreciation for the support and efforts of others. The process, which involves multiple offices with diverse responsibilities, would benefit from greater cross-unit co-ordination, navigational support, and transparency. Feedback suggested the distributed nature of the work tends to mask the resource intensity of learning outcomes development on campus, and increase the chance of duplication and redundancy. **Campus input suggested clear consensus around some potential directions for next steps, focused on five main themes: capacity building, coordination, communications, collection, and enhanced culture and context.** There are numerous solid opportunities to enhance and streamline our processes, but coordination of multi-level dialogue, leadership, trust, and capacity building will facilitate the development and implementation of any action plan.

This document summarizes the evidence gathered from the campus community, including their concerns and recommendations. Determining an action plan was beyond the scope of the working group's mandate, but the working group hopes that this document will constructively inform further planning and action. Recommendations raised by faculty and staff during this review have been compiled, organized and listed in Section 10, *Campus Input into Next Steps and Future Considerations at the end of this report (p.27)*.

## 1. Mandate

In November 2015, the University Senate established a working group on learning outcomes with a mandate to identify “what is being done on campus related to learning outcomes.”

## 2. Process

The working group members, endorsed by Senate, included faculty, staff, and a student representing a broad range of disciplines and services: Dr. Alan Wright (co-chair), Dr. Erika Kustra (co-chair), Mr. Nick Baker, Ms. Joan Dalton, Dr. Stephen Pender, Mr. Michael Potter, Dr. Maureen Gowing, Dr. Julie Smit, Prof. Lionel Walsh, Ms. Erica Lyons and Mr. Ed King, with Ms. Beverley Hamilton in support.

In preparing this report, members of the group contacted and gathered input from every Faculty on campus, and all central units and committees involved in supporting learning outcomes development (Appendix A), reviewed Senate records of learning outcomes completion, and reviewed institutional and provincial policy documents related to learning outcomes development. This report summarizes their findings, including:

- the purposes of learning outcomes at the University of Windsor and provincially (Section 3-5);
- the state of program/course learning outcomes development on campus (Section 6);
- procedures and policies (both centrally and in the departments and Faculties), and their perceived efficiency and effectiveness (Section 7 and 8);
- strengths, challenges, opportunities, and threats identified (Section 9); and
- possible directions for further exploration, dialogue, and action identified by participants (Section 10).

## 3. Learning Outcomes: A Definition

Learning outcomes are assessable statements that indicate what students should know, value, or be able to do by the end of a course or program. To be assessable, learning outcomes must be observable (Goff et al., 2015; Potter & Kustra, 2012).

## 4. The Purpose of Learning Outcomes

A primary purpose for learning outcomes is to clarify the intended learning in a course and/or program, for the benefit of both students and instructors. Students’ active behaviours as learners, rather than teachers’ activities, have become the core focus of contemporary scholarly approaches to curriculum design (Biggs, 1999; Barr & Tagg, 1995; Tyler, 1949) (See Appendix B). Many scholars argue for an approach where learning and assessment activities align with intended course-level learning outcomes, and courses align with more general program-level learning outcomes to enhance student learning – a principle known as “constructive alignment” (Figure 1).

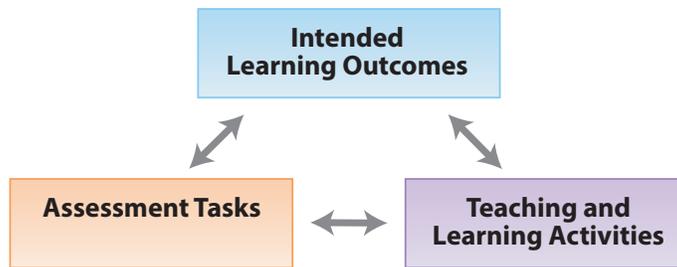


Figure 1. Constructive Alignment

Although this seems like a fairly straightforward idea, its full application integrates complex factors, extending into every area of pedagogical decision-making and improvement planning. Some of the complexity is summarized in Fig. 2.

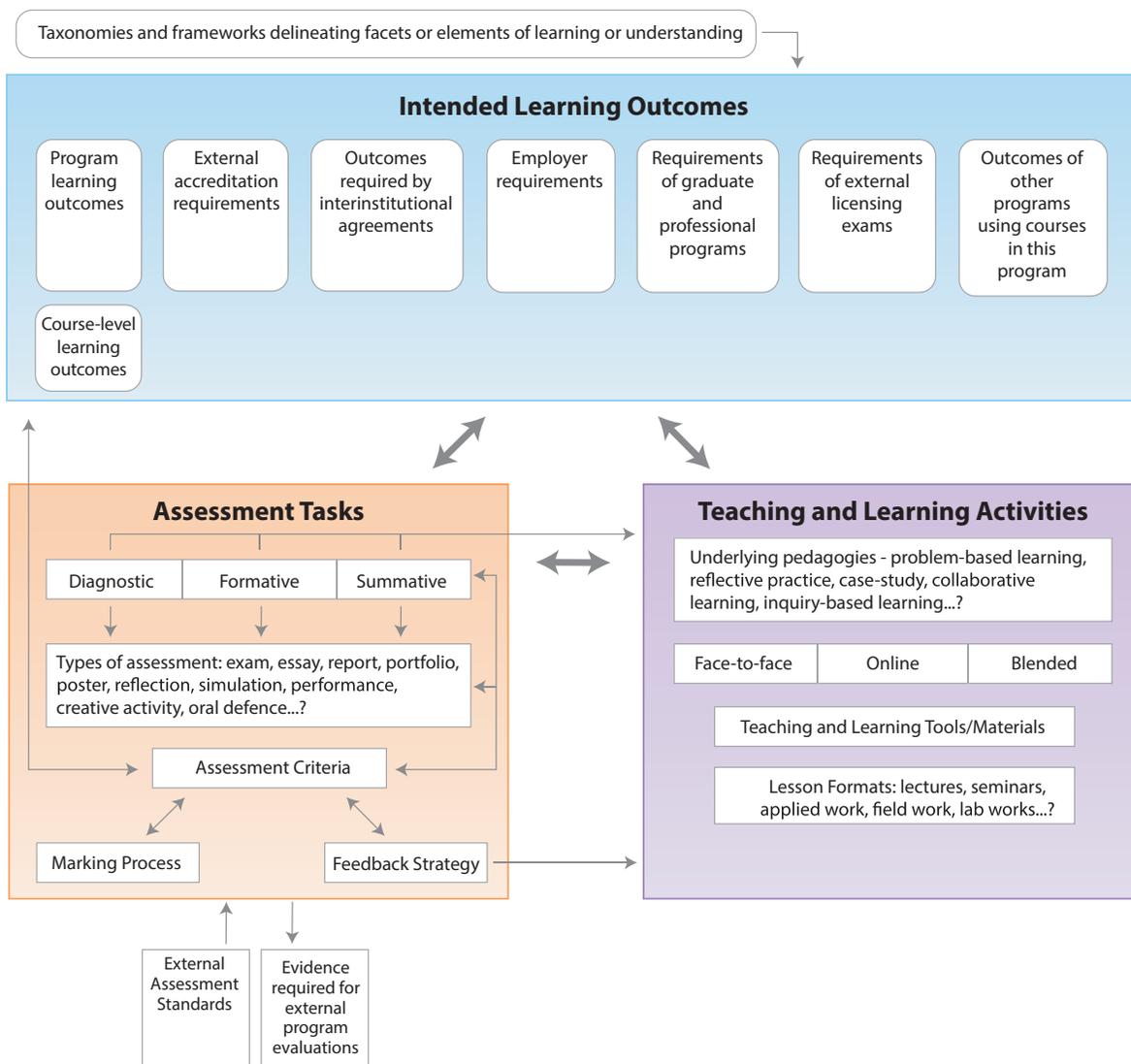


Figure 2. Factors impacting and impacted by learning outcomes decision-making. Adapted from Manchester Metropolitan University, 2016

Establishing systematic, institution-wide learning outcomes-based improvement processes is a difficult undertaking (Kuh et al, 2015); however, if done right, can yield many positive results. Implementing a constructively-aligned approach systematically shifts the pedagogical focus towards the learner and learning (Spronken-Smith et al., 2013), particularly if intentional and purposive assessment of student learning is a key cyclical driver in the process (Kuh et al., 2015). Using this approach can also encourage educational processes that systematically contribute to continual program and course improvement.

Internationally, learning outcomes are tied to a number of other purposes, systemic concerns, and policy priorities, and opportunities such as (See Figure 3):

- assessing and providing evidence as to whether students are learning what institutions claim they are;
- identifying and implementing more effective teaching practices;
- creating a common language so that all stakeholders can discuss post-secondary graduate expectations;
- providing evidence of program quality for accountability purposes;
- enabling student mobility through credential harmonization and the establishment of inter-institutional course equivalencies;
- facilitating inter-institutional comparisons of student achievement;
- assessing the degree to which institutions are meeting the terms of their Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMA), which are intended to drive differentiation among Ontario post-secondary institutions; and
- improving the global competitiveness of institutions or a post-secondary sector more generally (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009; Deller, Brumwell, & MacFarlane, 2015; Wihlborg & Teelken, 2014).

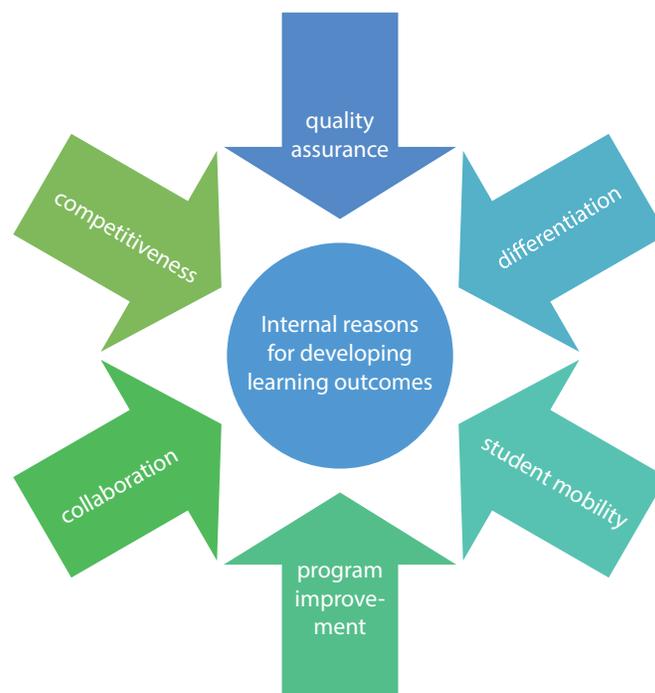


Figure 3. Purposes for learning outcomes development

In summary, constructive alignment can, and is intended to, enhance student learning experiences, pedagogical decision-making, and reflective practice. However, the motives that drive learning outcomes initiatives internationally and provincially are more broadly based, relating also to accountability, aspirations for greater sectoral integration, quality assurance, competitiveness, and so on. As Gosling and d’Andrea (2001) argue, teaching improvement, faculty engagement, quality assurance, and accountability practices are not always easily allied: trying to use the same process both for external accountability and to engage instructors with the ongoing enhancement of teaching and learning can be challenging. In some cases, it can lead to the prioritization of accountability requirements over educational needs (Biggs, 2001). The combined external pressures have, in many cases, produced what Kuh et al. (2015) refer to as a “compliance culture”, driven by the need to meet external requirements, rather than by a collective conviction that learning, as a guiding purpose, should drive thinking and decision making. Studies of successful initiatives suggest that deep and constructive engagement with learning-outcomes approaches requires sustained, multi-level leadership; coordinated cross-functional support; and respect for institutional and disciplinary cultures and contexts (Gosling and d’Andrea, 2001; Jones, 2009; Lennon & Frank, 2014; Spronken-Smith et al., 2013).

## 5. Learning Outcomes: Provincial Context

The University of Windsor’s ongoing commitment to learning outcomes development has occurred in a provincial post-secondary context that has increasingly emphasized learning outcomes and their assessment. The University of Windsor must respond to the provincial context, in part because the province remains a primary funding source. There are three priority areas where learning outcomes play particularly important roles: increased focus on the quality of student learning, demand for institutional differentiation, and enhancement of student mobility (See Figure 4). All of these have funding and sustainability implications, creating both opportunities and challenges for universities.

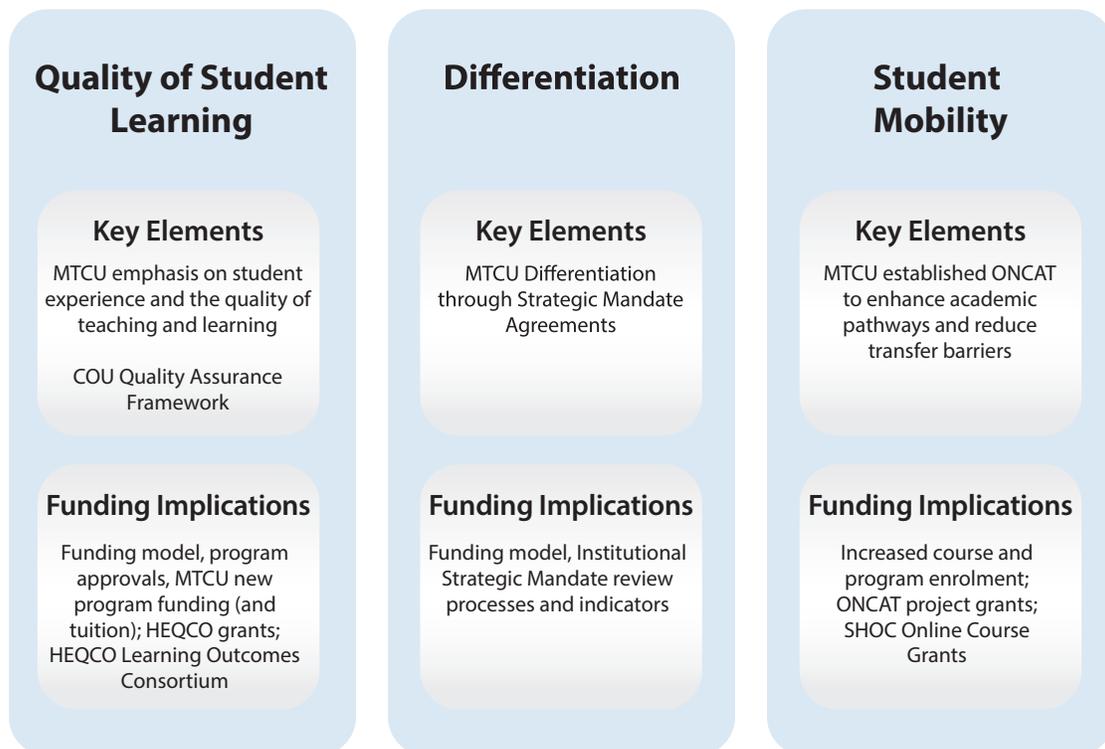


Figure 4. Key external drivers for learning outcomes, with associated funding levers in Ontario

## The Quality of Student Learning

The Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities (MTCU) has repeatedly reiterated its intention to focus on “enhancing learning, demonstrating its value, and ensuring that this value is understood by students, families and society as a whole” (MTCU 2015, p. 38). The discussion paper *Focus on Outcomes, Centre on Students: Perspectives on Evolving Ontario’s University Funding Model* (MTCU, 2015) specifically links the assessment of learning outcomes with possible changes to the university funding model: “Understanding what students know – and what they should know – as a result of their time at university is critical to addressing quality”(p. 44). The report suggests that “...assessing undergraduate learning outcomes has the potential to add considerable value to the sector, enabling students to understand what they have learned, governments to understand what skills are being generated, and universities to drive continuous improvement”(p. 44) The document further advocates the acceleration of current work on learning outcomes at Ontario universities, prioritizing learning outcomes assessment as a condition of funding. The Ministry’s prioritization of this approach has very serious policy and procedural implications for universities.

The numerous institutional and interinstitutional projects funded by organizations such as the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) and Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfers (ONCAT) are further evidence of the priority the Province is placing on the use of learning outcomes-based approaches, including constructive alignment. These projects explore learning outcomes development and assessment, from the use of standardized tests, to student self-reporting, to capstones and e-portfolios. Several organizations also offer annual conferences and symposia on the topic. A summary of these projects and initiatives can be found in Appendix C.

The Ontario Undergraduate Students Alliance (OUSA) is also a strong advocate of learning outcomes-based practice. Their 2015 submission on teaching and learning noted that while many aspects of the social and academic missions of universities are difficult or impossible to quantify or simplify, learning outcomes and evaluations can “improve the experience of education for all, and can strengthen outcomes for students, those that work at universities and the Province as a whole” (p. 26).

## The Quality Assurance Framework

The Council of Ontario Universities’ (COU) quality assurance framework (QAF) governs program approval and review processes at all Ontario universities. Established in 2010, the QAF is a key lever in the promotion of a consistent learning outcomes approach across the Province. The QAF presents a challenge to the University of Windsor first because it requires program-level learning outcomes for **all** for-credit programs in Ontario. Secondly, these learning outcomes must demonstrate that students graduating from programs will acquire institutionally-established degree-level expectations. Finally, the learning outcomes for programs and institutional degree-level expectations must map onto provincial degree-level expectations approved in 2005 by COU (<http://oucqa.ca/framework/appendix-1/>). In summary, the challenge is to assure that each program at the University of Windsor:

- identifies intended learning outcomes that describe what a student graduating from a specific program should know, value, and be able to do;
- identifies learning outcomes related to all of its institutional attributes;
- develops course-level learning outcomes that address some of the University graduate attributes;
- ensures that collectively the courses within a program enable students to acquire all of the University’s Graduate Attributes; and

- articulates practices for the assessment and monitoring of student learning outcome achievement.

Based on the data collected from the University of Windsor, the campus has made more significant progress on the first three points. The remaining two points were only recently incorporated into practice for cyclical program review.

Existing programs undergo cyclical review under the auspices of the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance (the Quality Council), including internal and external review of both learning outcomes and assessment of learning outcomes within programs. The Quality Council also undertakes regular audits of quality assurance processes at universities, through a site visit and desk audit of program reviews from the previous cycle.

All new programs must include program-level learning outcomes and a description of how outcomes will be assessed. As part of new program submissions, these learning outcomes are reviewed externally prior to approval by the Quality Council. The MTCU has a separate process, which determines whether new programs are eligible for funding and whether students in new programs are eligible for financial assistance. This process also involves review of program-level learning outcomes, which inform the evaluation of a proposed program’s distinctiveness and alignment with its institutional SMA. In addition to these processes, many professional programs must also demonstrate compliance with professional accreditation standards, which generally involve learning outcomes, competencies, or some other form of articulation and assessment of expected learning.

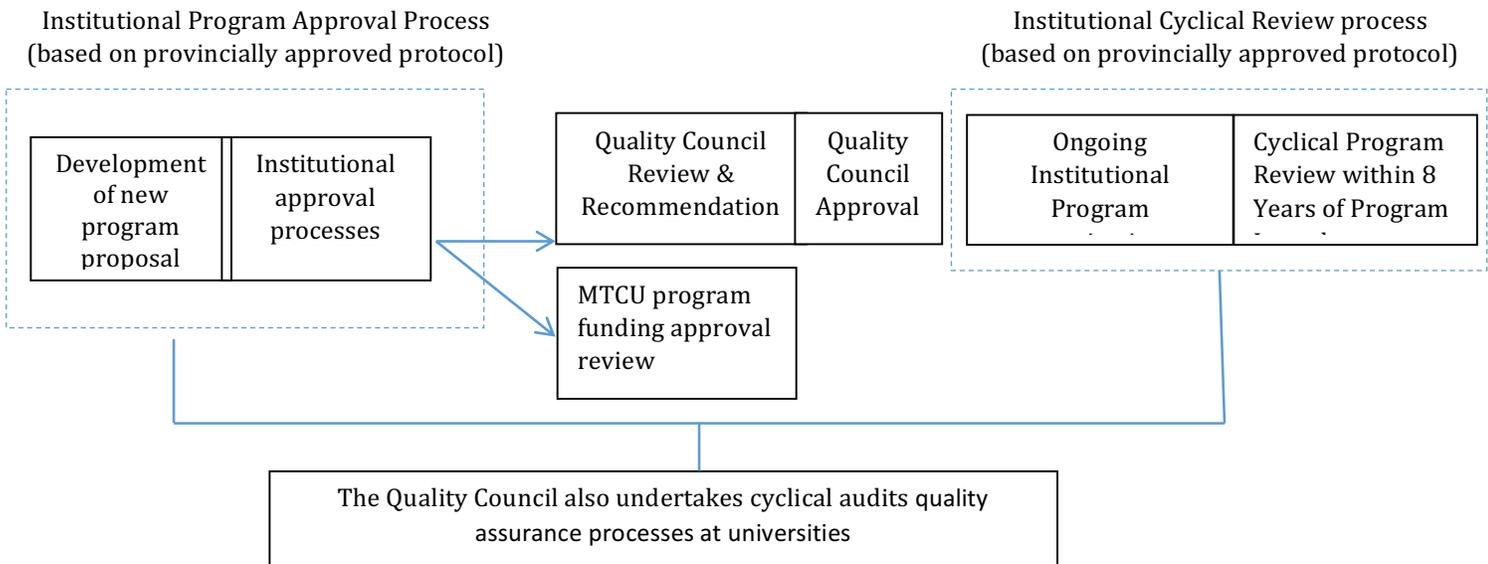


Figure 5. Mandated institutional and external program approval processes in Ontario

### Differentiation

In *Ontario’s Differentiation Policy Framework for Postsecondary Education* (MTCU, 2013), the Ministry identified differentiation as “a primary policy driver for the system” (p. 6). Differentiation is intended to limit institutional duplication in favour of greater emphasis on institutions’ individual strengths. In principle, institutions should then operate together as complementary parts of a whole, more efficiently offering a diverse range of programs and opportunities for students. Each Ontario post-secondary

institution has developed and signed an SMA with the MTCU, outlining its strengths and unique character across six facets, reporting annually on performance indicators related to those facets. SMAs are re-developed on a cyclical basis (<http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/pepg/publications/vision/universities.html>).

The *Policy Framework* indicates that over time, funding levers will align with differentiation. Student learning outcomes are identified as a potential area for metrics identifying unique strengths. The MTCU has indicated that implementation of a funding model incorporating the SMAs will take place over the first two SMA cycles (MTCU, 2015).

## **Student Mobility**

Learning outcomes are also viewed provincially as a critical tool for improving student mobility and shared course and program development. The determination of course and credit equivalencies (Fallon, 2015) requires the accurate comparison of curriculum content at the course, year, and program levels. In 2011, the MTCU established the Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT), with a mission to enhance academic pathways and reduce barriers for students looking to transfer among colleges or universities. ONCAT sees its role as assisting in the exchange of information and communication in order to enhance mutual understanding of each other's students and programs, using learning outcomes approaches as a central tool:

Learning outcome statement facilitate a clear comparison of credentials at the course, year, and program levels and, as such, can play a vital role in credit transfer, both improving existing pathways to maximize student success and by increasing the overall number of transfer opportunities. When discipline experts from various institutions, sectors, and jurisdictions come together to discuss their subject area through a learning outcomes lens, they gain greater understanding of what is expected of students in each program. The clarity and trust that results from such work enables partners to more confidently build partnerships and pathways among programs and institutions, which ultimately expedites the often lengthy and complex articulation process (Fallon, 2015, p. 4).

The Province has consistently communicated its intention to expand the use of learning outcomes approaches and the assessment of student achievement of learning outcomes at Ontario's post-secondary institutions. Institutions exhibiting efficient and effective engagement with these approaches create the opportunity to benefit from both greater success in new program development, and significant project-based funding to extend learning outcomes and learning outcomes assessment practices within their own institutions and beyond. Current indications from the post-secondary sector suggest that the mechanisms for learning outcomes assessment, as well as evidence of student achievement of learning outcomes, may begin to impact institutional funding within the next several cycles of SMAs. Although the intention is clear, the specific mechanisms or metrics that the Province may adopt for the measurement of learning outcomes are not.

Given this evolving emphasis, institutional expertise, efficiency, and clarity regarding the development and assessment of learning outcomes are likely to become increasingly important to programmatic and institutional sustainability. Further, expertise in this area may be a critical factor in influencing the ultimate form performance indicators might take.

## Tension Points

Learning outcomes-based approaches continue to be controversial, here and elsewhere. Many connect the approach with increased managerialism, arguing that there has been a gradual shift in the mission of universities from an “aim of developing analytical and creative human capacities [as] a worthwhile social purpose” to “the equivalent of [a] barren utilitarianism” (Collini, 2016). From this perspective, learning outcomes approaches tend to emphasize those aspects of student experience that can be easily defined, measured, and predictably produced, a definition of learning that appears to be at odds with the principles, values, and experiences of many scholars and students.

A memorandum distributed by the Canadian Association of University Teachers (Robinson, CAUT, September 17, 2014), outlines arguments put forward by various faculty members and faculty associations from across Canada:

- Learning outcomes undervalue the learning process by focusing on outputs rather than process, emphasizing short-term rather than long-term benefits of university education.
- The pre-determined nature of learning outcomes runs counter to the educational mission of universities, in that it does not allow for the intellectual ambiguity, uncertainty, and experimentation that advance knowledge.
- The development of standardized learning outcomes impinges on faculty academic autonomy and freedom.
- Learning outcomes increase faculty workload and impose a bureaucratic burden of limited pedagogical value.
- Approaches to ‘measuring’ learning outcomes privilege quantitative over qualitative assessments of learning.
- Learning outcomes may be used punitively against institutions and faculty members, much like the high-stakes, standardized testing more common in the United States, e.g., faculty associations argue that such results might be used inappropriately in faculty evaluation or promotion decisions, or to reallocate funds within institutions.
- The implementation of learning outcomes is an externally imposed bureaucratic assessment of educational quality that implies that individual and collective faculty expertise – the knowledge upon which universities have relied for centuries — is somehow inadequate, and that the approach favours standardized externally imposed regulation over pragmatic, informed responsiveness to intellectual needs, questions, and inquiry.

For a significant number of instructors, for a diversity of reasons, the case for the value of learning outcomes has yet to be made. For many the question is not whether there are bottlenecks or challenges that impede the development of learning outcomes and their assessment, but whether a learning outcomes approach is beneficial at all. Some faculty at the University of Windsor raised similar concerns, including:

- The framing of the enterprise appears to imply, often without evidence, that something has been wrong with how universities have educated students at Ontario universities, something that requires remediation.
- The approach has more to do with the kinds of efficiencies required for increasingly depersonalized, industrial models of education.
- The level of analysis might be misplaced by using metrics collected for programmatic or institutional level analysis punitively at the individual level.
- The implementation of learning outcomes and assessment of learning outcomes may not have enough of an impact to support change for teaching and learning improvement.

- The emphasis on a learning outcomes approach misrepresents the core challenges facing the post-secondary sector as well as the ideals and fundamental mission of scholarly inquiry and scholarly teaching.

Certainly, adopting the approach is not an automatic pathway (or barrier) to intentionality, reflective inquiry, or effectiveness in teaching and curriculum planning. Vigilance, critical reflection on practice, and collective engagement, are critical factors, regardless of approach.

### **Provincial Context: Conclusion**

While there is evidence of the potential value of well-enacted, well-supported adoption of learning outcomes approaches, there is also evidence of a number of potential threats. The resources and time spent creating learning outcomes or gathering evidence of learning for reporting purposes, may not efficiently translate into actually improving student learning or the student experience. To date, there has also been limited exploration of the opportunity costs involved in this approach – what universities are not doing because they are pursuing a learning outcomes development agenda. This is in part because the distributed resource allocations involved are difficult to tally. All of these factors contribute to the threat of disengagement and the potential for a “compliance culture”, rather than critical reflection on how to improve the intellectual development of graduates (Kuh et al., 2016). The opportunities and threats created by the external drivers for learning outcomes in the Ontario context bear further investigation, and substantially impact the context for learning outcomes initiatives at the University of Windsor. Even in a climate where learning outcomes-based approaches are required, it would be of benefit to have greater clarity about strategies that offer the greatest potential value for student learning and teaching improvement, while meeting provincial requirements and optimizing institutional opportunities.

The following section summarizes the evidence the working group gathered, describing our specific University of Windsor context. The findings suggest numerous avenues for improved efficiency and factors that could effectively enhance student learning and teaching – including capacity building, coordination, communication, collection of data and enhancing culture and context. Enabling faculty to engage through a diversity of approaches that reflect their own disciplinary understandings of learning is critical.

## **7. University of Windsor: Current Status**

The University adopted institutional Graduate Attributes in 2003 by Senate approval. These were approved by Ontario Council of Graduate Studies and COU respectively, and then integrated into University program review and audit guidelines. In 2008, these were linked to COU’s Undergraduate and Graduate Degree-Level Expectations (<http://www.uwindsor.ca/secretariat/72/undergraduate-and-graduate-degree-level-expectations>). Since then, programs and instructors have been engaged in developing or revising learning outcomes that are intended to map onto the university-level attributes and the degree-level expectations.

### **Learning Outcomes Development Progress**

The University Secretariat maintains a record of all program-level outcomes reviewed and approved by PDC and Senate, and tracks program-level learning outcomes included in cyclical review documents but which have not actually been through formal PDC review. However, the decentralized nature of

curriculum and course design at the University of Windsor makes it impossible to report on what has actually been completed with total accuracy. Course-level learning outcomes are intended to be included in cyclical program review, but are not centrally tracked unless they are courses that have been approved since 2007. Programs in which enrolment has been suspended are still in the calendar, and therefore require learning outcomes unless deleted, but are often not considered for learning outcome development. Departments are also sometimes unaware of the need for learning outcomes for combined or joint programs. Currently, for example, approximately 85% of undergraduate combined degree programs lack learning outcomes. Finally, there are numerous programs that do have learning outcomes, but where the outcomes need revision to conform to the University’s graduate-level attributes or to distinguish among numerous programs that now have common learning outcomes. Some programs also have learning outcomes that have not been sent through the normal review and approval process. Departments may benefit from greater clarity regarding missing outcomes and which programs require outcomes.

Table 1 summarizes the University’s progress towards full achievement of program-level learning outcomes development. Column 3, “Has centrally recorded program learning outcomes of some kind”, indicates the existence of program-level learning outcomes of any kind that have been documented by the University Secretariat. Columns 4-7 are subcategories of column 3: in other words, they are a more detailed breakdown of the status of the learning outcomes included in column 3.

	Number of programs or certificates	Has centrally recorded program learning outcomes of some kind	Fully approved learning outcomes	Need diversification among programs	Need revision for consistency with UWindsor graduate attributes	In program review – need formal approval
<b>Undergraduate Programs</b>	191	45%	22%	14%	3%	6%
<b>Undergraduate Certificates</b>	16	62%	38%	13%	6%	6%
<b>Graduate Programs</b>	74	63%	53%	4%	0%	7%
<b>Graduate Diplomas</b>	2	50%	50%	0%	0%	0%

\*Please note limitations to reporting accuracy identified (e.g., some programs have been suspended, some are joint programs, and some learning outcomes have not been reported). Numbers are based on March 2016 data, new LO have been reviewed as of that time.

**Table 1.** Progress towards program-level learning outcomes in all UWindsor programs\*

### 2015 Quality Assurance Audit Findings

As noted above, the Quality Council undertakes regular audits to determine whether institutions are in compliance with their Council-approved institutional quality assurance protocols. The University of Windsor underwent its audit in 2015. The audit process involves the examination of past program reviews, major modifications to existing programs, new programs, and new field proposals. Given that the University’s current quality assurance process has only been in place for one audit cycle, many of the concerns identified had already been rectified through the efforts of the Office of Quality Assurance, the

University Secretariat, and departments undertaking their cyclical reviews. Findings of the audit relevant to learning outcomes are summarized below:

- University of Windsor administration, faculty, and staff are committed to the quality-assurance process, but to varying degrees.
- Concerns were raised by Faculties regarding the complexity of the quality assurance process, its unclear correlation with other forms of accreditation, and the availability of additional resources to ensure a successful and thorough process. However, they also expressed interest in practices and aspects process that might enhance the provision, quality and delivery of their programs.

The recommendations from the Quality Assurance Auditors are summarized below:

- Ensure that all existing programs develop and assess learning outcomes at the program level as part of the cyclical program review.
- Ensure that all new program proposals include explicit program-level learning outcomes.
- Ensure accuracy and transparency in listing all programs on its cyclical review schedule, including programs that are on hiatus as well as all collaborative, concurrent, and consecutive programs offered on campus or at other locations.

Several of the recommendations have been implemented, but as with any new process of this level of complexity, there remain a number of challenges and opportunities.

## 8. Our Current Practices: Faculties and Departments

Working Group members reviewed the current state of learning outcomes processes and practices in each Faculty, using a common protocol to survey or interview representatives who are heavily involved in learning outcomes efforts for that area. In Science, most Heads of Departments or their delegates were interviewed. In FAHSS, due to the large number of departments, an online FluidSurvey was circulated, completed by representatives from ten departments. A comparative summary of the information collected for all Faculties can be found in Appendix D.

The information gathered reflected the significant effort and resources that have been put into the development of learning outcomes over the last ten years, and in many areas (or among many instructors) improved reception of the principles involved. There is considerable variation in procedure, engagement, and degree of coordination and efficiency among Faculties, in part owing to different Faculty structures and external requirements such as accreditation. There was also a high degree of variation in people's knowledge of, and experience with, learning outcomes development and approval procedures, as well as in their overall perception of the benefits or potential benefits of using a learning outcomes approach.

### Academic Unit Process and Oversight

The management of the learning outcome development process varies. Most commonly, it involves the following steps:

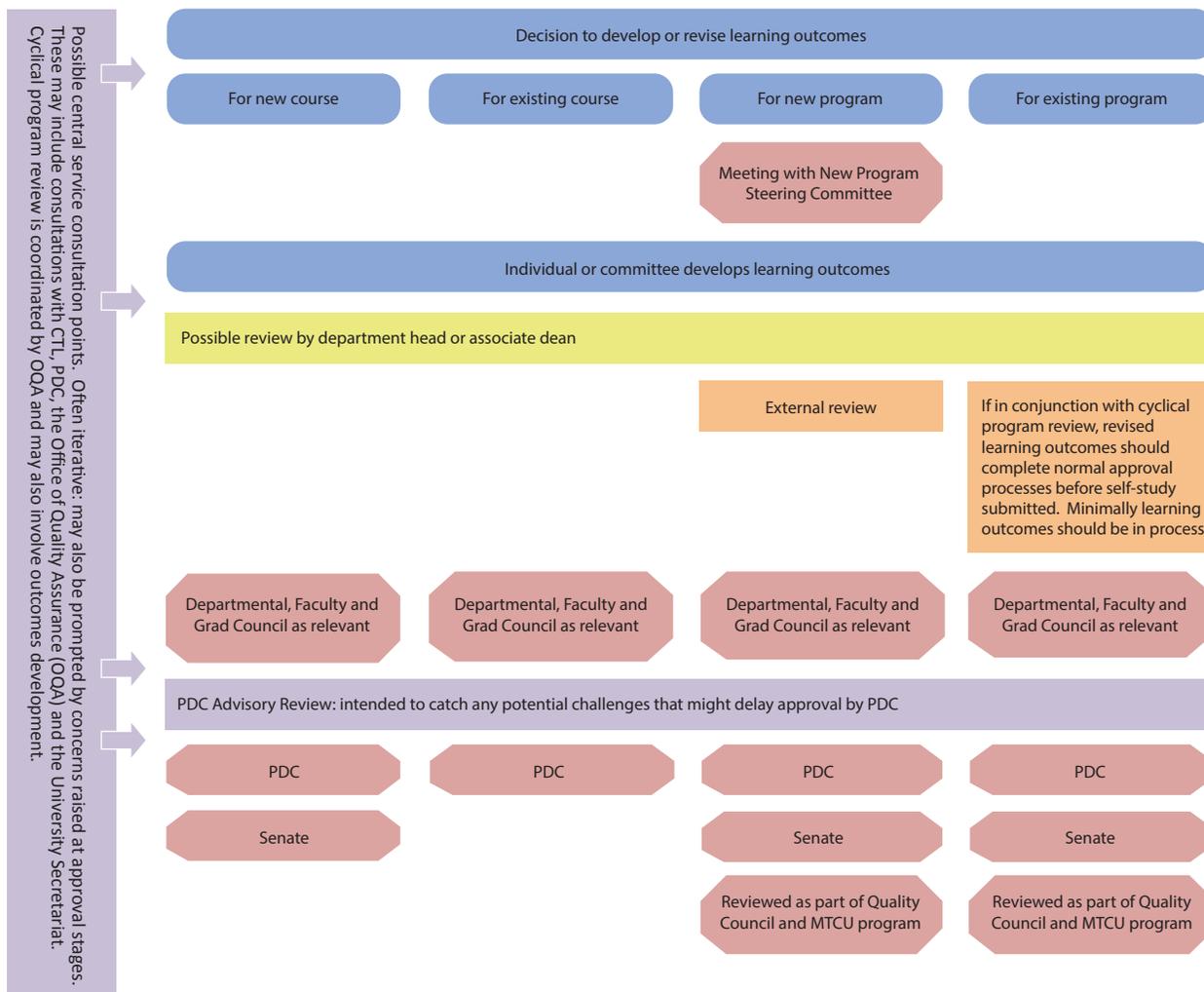
1. An individual faculty member, team, or curriculum committee develops or re-designs a program or course(s) and associated learning outcomes.
2. Learning outcomes may then be reviewed by a Department Head or Associate Dean.
3. Designated departmental or program-level committees approve course/program and associated learning outcomes.
4. Departmental and/or Faculty council and Faculty co-ordinating councils (as appropriate for different Faculty configurations) review and approve the learning outcomes.
5. Learning outcomes are then submitted to the PDC for approval.

6. Prior to formal review, courses and programs are referred to a PDC advisory committee to identify any potential barriers to approval in order to limit delays.
7. Should any problems with the learning outcomes be identified, academic units are referred to the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) for assistance. Academic units are invited to meet with CTL at any point in the process. This assistance is advisory only: proponents ultimately determine what is formally reviewed by PDC.

Some departments and Faculties designate an individual responsible for learning outcomes or curriculum development. Business, for example, has an Assurance of Learning Coordinator, and Engineering an Undergraduate Programs Coordinator, who have designated responsibility for supporting learning outcomes and assessment of learning outcomes for accreditation. Most commonly, a person with another role is designated to oversee the process, such as the Associate Dean, Head, or Undergraduate Chair. The presence of a coordinating figure appears to be of benefit, as this provides an opportunity for expertise development and dissemination: one risk factor with this approach is that, without succession planning, when the person vacates the role, the expertise can be lost.

As the diagram below indicates, departments and individuals may consult central units, or be referred to central units, at multiple points during this process. The multi-unit support and approval system is intended to provide flexible, as-needed support, and is not centrally co-ordinated. This means that what recommendations have been made previously and by whom, how those were understood or implemented, and the context in which the learning outcomes are intended to operate are often not clear to the individuals providing support. There is considerable potential for mixed messages and misunderstandings despite best efforts to help. Gaps in information about requirements or procedures can result in missed opportunities for support and also create frustration as people come up against unexpected time constraints in the process.

These processes are outlined in Figure 6, below.



There are many variations of approval processes: new degree programs, new certificates, new minors, major modifications to existing programs, etc. Many of these involve the development and approval of learning outcomes. These processes are outlined in more detail in the University's Quality Assurance Protocol (See Appendix E). Decisions to develop or revise course- or program-level learning outcomes may be driven by the requirements of cyclical program review as well as external accreditation requirements. Faculties report that the latter can often make the process even more complex.

Figure 6. Learning outcomes development and review at the University of Windsor

### Learning Outcomes Policies

There are not many specific Faculty-level policy requirements related to learning outcomes. The most common require the inclusion of course learning outcomes in course outlines or syllabi (FAHSS, Business, Engineering, HK, and the Collaborative Nursing program). In some Faculties, course-level learning outcomes included in the syllabi must also show alignment with the program-level learning outcomes (FAHSS, Business). While it does not have a policy, Education reports the development of a course syllabus template with alignment of learning outcomes and assessment. A standardized syllabus is under discussion in Science.

Accreditation processes have contributed to the development of Faculty-level policies in some areas. Business has a standardized set of program-level rubrics. Designated courses are used to assess progress on program-level outcomes and this information is included, connected with the rubric, on course outlines. Nursing is mandated to demonstrate 120 competencies. Engineering creates a course information sheet for each course for accreditation, and every instructor is required to maintain a binder of information with syllabi, lecture notes, sample student work, and marking schemes for this purpose. Accreditation processes appear to have contributed to more systematic approaches to learning outcomes and aligned assessment development; however, synchronizing accreditation and institutional quality assurance processes has proven both challenging and time-consuming for many Faculties.

### **Alignment of Learning Outcomes with Assessment of Student Learning**

Learning outcomes development is not yet formally or consistently aligned with assessment of student learning in most University of Windsor programs. In most Faculties, work continues to focus on developing course and program-level learning outcomes to conform to the graduate-level attributes, without including assessments. However, Engineering and Business have undertaken alignment of assessment of student learning with their learning outcomes. Both Faculties are currently extending and embedding this practice in relation to external accreditation requirements. Education teaches the concept of alignment of learning outcomes, methods, and assessment. Additionally, some programs have begun curriculum mapping with initial identification of assessment methods. An essential component of assessment of learning outcomes is 'closing the loop', to reflect on the data gathered from the assessment and consider how to continuously improve the programs.

### **Effective Practices Identified by Academic Units**

A variety of effective practices were identified by academic units, including:

- having a specific point person coordinate processes and provide support across the Faculty;
- using a standard course outline/syllabus;
- collecting and storing learning outcomes on a common drive or public website;
- developing resources for sessional instructors (e.g., sessional handbook);
- Faculty-led retreats to jointly determine learning outcomes;
- providing department specific assurance of learning workshops with the CTL;
- developing and using common curriculum maps;
- tracking indicators of graduate attributes through a Faculty curriculum committee in order to share best practices;
- regularly discussing the results of learning outcomes assessment, including identifying areas for change; and
- systematically evaluating Faculty processes for learning outcomes development to examine actual practices, led by the faculty members (in this case supported by an internal grant).

Overall, Faculties identified their most effective practices as those determined and engaged in collaboratively by the academic units with the majority of faculty members involved. Areas with the collaborative processes reported significant increase in buy-in and greater identification of benefits for both students and instructors. These practices may be facilitated by the CTL or disciplinary colleagues. Collaboration and dialogue at the level of the academic unit appears to be the pivotal factor.

## 8. Our Current Practices: Central Units

Five different central offices play significant roles in assisting departments and Faculties with the development, review, and use of learning outcomes on campus. Some offer consultation and support, while others coordinate processes that involve learning outcomes, or employ learning outcomes as an element of other institutional procedures. In collaboration with a working group member, each of these units undertook a self-study, describing its role in learning outcomes development; the resources involved; the boundaries of its responsibilities; and perceptions of progress and challenges. This information was then synthesized and compared with the reports of departmental experiences to find common ground and divergence of perspective.

### Roles and Responsibilities

The chart below summarizes these units' roles and responsibilities.

Office	Role
<b>Office of Quality Assurance (OQA)</b>	<p>Consultative and regulatory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensures that new program and program cyclical review documents are complete and ready to be reviewed by external quality assurance bodies, including the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance (academic quality) and the MTCU (program funding). Emphasis is primarily on ensuring that program-level learning outcomes have been completed, and whether course outlines have learning outcomes. OQA does not formally assess the quality of learning outcomes.</li> <li>• Coordinates the New Program Steering Committee, a preliminary program development checkpoint intended to assist in the development of a work plan for those at the earliest stages of program development.</li> </ul> <p>Contact Person: Erica Lyons</p>
<b>University Secretariat (Usec)</b>	<p>Regulatory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinates the Program Development Committee (PDC) and Senate approval processes as well as bylaw and policy development and approval, which may impact when and how learning outcomes are required. Receives and undertakes preliminary review of all documents including learning outcomes where relevant. Coordinates multi-stage review and revision processes and tracks learning outcomes approvals at the program level. Proponents, AAU Heads, and Associate Deans contact the University Secretariat for clarifications regarding proposals, including learning outcomes.</li> <li>• Learning outcomes are reviewed by PDC as one element of the program and course review process.</li> <li>• A PDC Advisory group involving PDC, CTL, OQA, the Registrar, and the Provost's Office previews course and program proposals prior to formal review by PDC to expedite approval processes by helping departments to resolve challenges that might impede approval and create delays.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A University Program Review subcommittee of PDC reviews cyclical program reviews including learning outcomes, and proposes program recommendations for the next cycle.</li> </ul> <p>Contact Person: Renee Wintermute</p>
<b>Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL)</b>	<p>Consultative and educational</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides consultation, support, and educational opportunities for individuals, departments, Faculties, PDC, and OQA regarding learning outcomes, curricular alignment, and course and program design.</li> <li>• Works with departments either throughout the process or at the point of course and program review, usually iteratively. Its support role focuses on consultation, review, feedback, and recommendations.</li> <li>• Offers workshops, courses, and retreats focusing both on curricular alignment and learning outcomes generally, and specifically focused on supporting units developing and mapping learning outcomes and curricula.</li> <li>• Supports external accreditations processes involving discipline-specific learning outcomes, competencies, or objectives upon request.</li> <li>• Offers a peer-reviewed granting scheme intended to support instructor-led research and initiatives within their own disciplines, including projects involving learning outcomes.</li> <li>• Involved in the implementation of Blackboard-related learning analytics tools that will support learning outcomes assessment.</li> <li>• CTL staff and faculty also play significant leadership and scholarly roles in learning outcomes related research and practice provincially.</li> </ul> <p>Contact Person: Erika Kustra</p>
<b>Office of Open Learning (OOL)</b>	<p>Consultative and educational</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contributes to learning outcomes development for online, hybrid, and technology-enabled courses and programs.</li> <li>• Involved in the implementation of Blackboard-related learning analytics tools that will support learning outcomes assessment.</li> <li>• In internally and externally funded pedagogical projects, the OOL course-development team assists in the cooperative refinement of proposed course learning outcomes</li> </ul> <p>Contact Person: Nick Baker</p>
<b>Registrar’s Office (RO)</b>	<p>Regulatory and consultative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In co-operation with AAUs and Faculties, reviews learning outcomes equivalencies that impact articulation agreements, course-to-course equivalencies, and international agreements to determine whether the equivalencies are accurate.</li> </ul> <p>Contact person: Karoline Fox</p>

**Table 2.** Central offices’ roles in learning outcomes

## Policies

The frameworks governing learning outcomes development here and at other Ontario universities originate outside of the University. The practices and processes outlined in our institutional quality assurance protocol, for example, must conform to a generic provincial framework for quality assurance. The principle themes required in programmatic learning are similarly a response to COU-approved graduate attributes. The University has accordingly developed a number of policies and forms in conformity with such provincial standards. Links to these documents can be found in Appendix F.

## Processes

Central support units each have a different role, related to specific internal or external responsibilities that touch on learning outcomes. Because these roles have evolved independently, albeit with a degree of interdependence, coordination among units has to date been informal and somewhat idiosyncratic. One consequence of this history is that central units' processes and procedures are often not mutually visible: tracking is unique to each unit, and when a new request for support or set of documents arrives in an office, the context is sometimes not clear. Units often refer proponents to another unit at various stages, but whether those meetings occur, or the results of those meetings, are often not clear to the referring unit. Units who provide support or coordination of learning outcomes are also committed to providing support responsively, and so have adopted a degree of flexibility. While flexibility was felt to be a strength, a need for better coordination and systematic communication was identified by all units. A plan to explore and improve coordination is underway: and all central units supported establishing co-ordinated document management as well.

## Services and Resources

Central units play many roles in supporting Faculty-based activities, offering educational opportunities, and developing resources for Faculty-based efforts. They are also involved in oversight and regulatory activities related either to internal academic governance or ensuring that proposed and implemented programs (and their related documentation) meet externally established standards.

Central units have developed numerous documents, templates, and web resources over the last decade, in addition to the provision of over 130 workshops, courses, and other events related to the learning outcomes, constructive alignment, and learning outcomes assessment. Institutional funding has also enabled teams in various units to undertake projects to develop, revise, or assess learning outcomes, through both the Centred on Learning Innovation Fund (CLIF) and the Strategic Priority Fund. A listing of relevant resources and weblinks developed at the University can be found in Appendix F.

Reporting emphasized the overall resource intensity of learning outcomes development across the entire institution. Instructors, support staff, and administrators in individual AAUs; staff, faculty, and administrators in central units put in many hours on these tasks. Faculty contribute hundreds of service hours contributed across multiple levels of academic governance, through departmental and Faculty councils, committees, external review contributions, and Senate. The CTL, for example, reviews and provides feedback on approximately 120 sets of learning outcomes per year, based on their internal tracking, all of which are developed by Faculty, reviewed by departmental and Faculty councils and Senate committees, and often then forming part of external review as well. Each of these sets of learning outcomes can involve multiple rounds of feedback and revision in collaboration with faculty members, and sometimes using multiple forms of communication (face-to-face, telephone, and email). This time is difficult for everyone to predict and schedule, as most of this work is done on an as-needed/just-in-time basis, often with little advance notice and an immediate deadline. Even in central units, there is no individual for whom learning outcomes development, review, or support is their sole

or primary responsibility: for everyone involved, this is work that has to be fit in around many other responsibilities and priorities.

### Effective Practices Identified by Central Units

A number of effective practices were reported by the central units, including:

- establishing strong working relationships with other centralized units and with departments and proponents;
- responsiveness to departmental needs and timelines wherever possible;
- team-based approaches to resolving challenges and bottlenecks;
- ongoing expertise and capacity building which takes role transition into account;
- inter-institutional collaboration and knowledge exchange;
- ongoing efforts to improve technology use in order to streamline processes and enhance assessment tracking; and
- emphasis on supporting Faculty-driven collaborative program and curriculum development which employs learning outcomes as an element of constructive alignment, effective program and course design, and ongoing assessment of program effectiveness.

## 9. Discussion of Internal Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

Based on information gathered from Faculties, departments, and centralized support units, the committee undertook an analysis of strengths, challenges, opportunities, and threats in our current practices and context. Reports from each Faculty and central unit were analyzed, and comments were categorized. While both central and academic units identified challenges and frustrations with the University's current process, there was also extensive agreement in the ideas generated suggesting common ground for potential next steps.

### Strengths

- Both Faculty and central units report **progress in the quality of learning outcomes expertise** and **perception of potential value** of learning outcomes approaches for program improvement, instructors, and students. There is considerable variability across campus.
- There is an **ongoing, good faith effort to offer support**, provide learning opportunities, resolve bottlenecks, and improve efficiency for those developing learning outcomes; and willingness to engage in practices that will significantly improve programs and student learning opportunities.
- Many identified the **support provided to them by central units** as helpful.
- Numerous instructors on campus value learning outcomes approaches, have engaged in **collaborative curriculum mapping**, or are otherwise seriously engaged with the use of learning outcomes and with explorations of how to link learning outcomes to assessment: these **faculty members' experiences offer important "on the ground" knowledge and insights to others**.
- Faculties and central units report **strong success and engagement with collaborative approaches** that emphasize support for Faculty involvement and **leadership in program development**. These included:
  - **curriculum retreats**, whether facilitated internally or by a central unit;
  - constructive alignment approaches that employ tools such as **curriculum mapping** and **evidence of learning** to foster dialogue and analysis in order to streamline and enrich curriculum for student learning;
  - **establishing designated positions or roles** in departments and Faculties to support learning outcomes development in connection with curriculum design, often acting also as liaisons with the CTL and other units; and

- developing a **central repository** of learning outcomes both as a resource for others and as a tool for collective curriculum mapping and discussion.
- **Process efficiency and coordination** are improving: the current project has been a useful opportunity to further these efforts.
- Some areas and units have developed strong levels of expertise, including **significant evidence of provincial and interinstitutional leadership** in learning outcomes development and assessment.

## Challenges/Frustrations

- Between one half and one third of **programs do not have program-level learning outcomes**.
- It remains very difficult to **accurately track** learning outcomes progress across the institution.
- People often experience learning outcomes primarily as a **bureaucratic or regulatory barrier**, rather than an integrated part of the activities that make up a teaching and learning environment. For many, the learning outcomes process is something entirely separate from their efforts as teachers or curriculum designers. Many – whether trying to get their forms approved, or trying to engage others with a more holistic, integrated approach to constructive alignment – object to what they perceive as the **constrained vocabulary and “sentence-completion exercise”** nature of how we currently approach learning outcomes. More detailed discussion across the University community and exploration of approaches at other universities would be of benefit in identifying next steps.
- Although units involved in supporting learning outcomes have worked hard to streamline the process, a number of areas continue to require greater clarity, including:
  - **what requires learning outcomes** – this holds up processes when departments believe they are ready to move forward, but then discover they are not;
  - **factors that impede approval** of learning outcomes, and belief that advice regarding these factors is accurate and consistent (multiple iterations and sources of advice, and time constraints, exacerbate this challenge); and
  - **consistency** (or at times perceived consistency) **of feedback** from different advisors.
- There is a need for **greater co-ordination, role clarity, and transparency** among units providing support for learning outcomes development and review. Common tracking, shared document management, automated workflows, and increased dialogue could significantly improve both efficiency and effectiveness of our processes.
- There is a need for **greater support and dialogue in the early stages** of program development to facilitate more integrated approaches to program design, streamline processes and reduce bottlenecks, and improve program development success rates and efficiency. This requires programs to work with central units earlier in the process than they do now: further exploration of why this is often not the case would be of benefit.
- The **approval process**, with its multiple, hierarchical approval stages, often **appears unduly long, unclear, and even arbitrary**, particularly for those undertaking it for the first time. For the most part proponents have limited experience and few undertake the process often enough to become experienced navigators. Also, despite multiple approval layers, documents arriving at final approval stages still require considerable revision, suggesting that the process is not entirely addressing potential problem areas.
- Progress on **systematic assessment of program-level learning outcomes** has been limited, also impacting the use of such information for program improvement.
- Programs with complex **external accreditation** standards find it difficult to map those standards on to institutional learning outcomes, resulting in extra work and shorter regulatory cycles.

Similarly, processes for interinstitutional programs, and in particular college-university partnerships, can be complex.

The factors described above sometimes contribute to frustration and confusion for proponents, and for those seeking to support them. Proponents feel that the CTL, PDC, or other departments are keeping them from getting their new course or program approved. Concomitantly, central units express a sense that repeated efforts to provide support and suggestions are sometimes ignored, misunderstood, or rejected resulting in further delays and problems in the approval process, particularly when time is a factor, or when requirements are discovered late in the process. Possibly further dialogue and perspective taking would assist in establishing a greater degree of mutual trust and more constructive dynamics.

## Opportunities

- The implementation of learning **outcomes and analytics tools** can provide the campus with new ways to explicitly align learning outcomes with learning activities at course and program levels, and gather information about assessment of those learning outcomes. These tools are intended to enable programs to generate evidence of achievement of learning outcomes at the course, program, and Faculty level. How do we develop third party tools effectively to support expanding engagement with assessment of learning, as well as enhancing other emerging initiatives aimed at learning outcomes assessment?
- The **recent re-organization of the CTL and OQA** under a common reporting structure offers an opportunity to enhance service and tracking integration, while the University Secretariat's current project to develop **online interfaces** for program development may offer infrastructure for enhancing a coordinated approach. The New Program Steering Committee may also be an opportunity to explore **more integrated service and support models**. How do we make the greatest impact with these new organizational structures?
- **External accreditation requirements appear to provide external leverage** for the development and assessment of learning outcomes, and often provide discipline-specific resources for that process. How do we make the most of this opportunity while alleviating the pressures created by the multiple quality assurance standards these programs face?
- We are part of **strong interinstitutional networks related to learning outcomes and learning outcomes assessment**. How can we identify and adapt approaches at other institutions that appear to be internalizing and integrating learning outcomes thinking more deeply and constructively?
- **Learning outcomes articulation is typically limited to academic coursework**: there is some sense that more holistic analysis of student learning across their whole range of experience at the University – service learning, co-curricular experiences, research experiences, and so on – would be to their benefit and ours. How might learning outcomes help departments articulate the promise of their program for recruiting?

## Threats

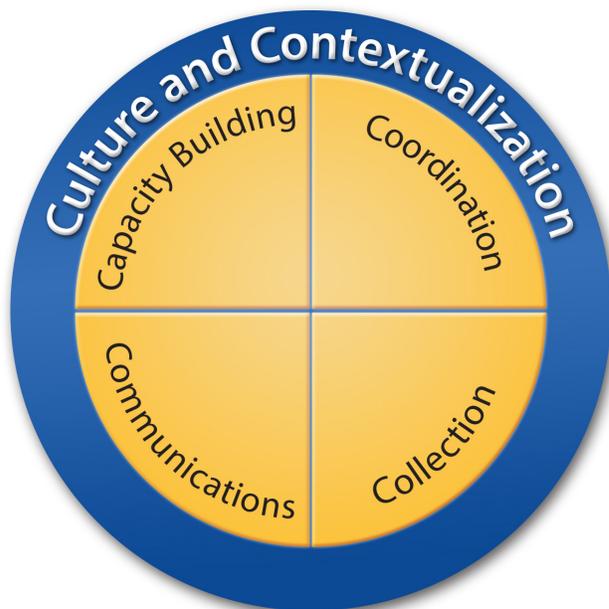
- A key threat to engagement is **time** - a very important resource for faculty and staff.
  - The **timelines involved in these processes limit nimbleness and innovation** in collaborating with external agencies, institutions, and industrial partners, impacting our competitiveness.
  - Units who must also respond to **external accreditation requirements** frequently find the **dual regulatory demands onerous, problematic, and time consuming**, resulting in frustration and disengagement with quality assurance processes.

- Given the time and resource intensity of these processes, it is important to consider how best to construct these processes to **maximize their positive impact and limit their potential to foster cynicism and “minimal compliance”** (Gosling & d’Angela, 2001).
- Resources appear to be insufficient to support the breadth and depth of culture and process change involved.
- As an institution, the University of Windsor has not systematically connected learning outcomes, assessment, and program improvement: this integration appears to be of increasing concern to the MTCU. We need to **develop the capacity to assess student achievement of learning outcomes** in ways that are intellectually rigorous and consistent with disciplinary norms. If these processes are to become integral to instructors’ work, they must be **efficient, and their value must be evident** to instructors, students, and programs.
- Disciplines’ epistemological differences appear to affect **perceptions and uptake of the learning outcomes approach**: further discussion and exploration of these divisions might enable new approaches to articulating students’ intended learning experiences.

## 10: Campus Input into Next Steps and Future Considerations

The University – faculty, staff, and administration – has made serious efforts to establish learning outcomes at both the course and program level, beginning from an essentially decentralized, but centrally regulated, model. To date, results have been mixed: some units and individuals have integrated learning outcomes and learning outcomes assessment into their ongoing practices in ways that they perceive to effectively inform their pedagogy and curricula, while for others the requirement to create them remains a bureaucratic and potentially counter-productive burden. There is evidence that this approach can enhance instructor and program efforts to optimize student learning, provide markers for program improvement. However, collective instructor engagement is ultimately fundamental to its efficacy.

Many of the individuals and units consulted offered suggestions for improvements to our current processes and practices. The Working Group reviewed these collectively, identifying four key themes or



areas: capacity building, coordination, communications, and collection of data and resources. All of these contribute to, and are informed by a fifth key theme - the broader cultural and contextual factors. These themes are summarized below, and are submitted with the suggestion that the University should establish a cross-functional Working Group that includes staff, faculty, and administrators currently involved in learning outcomes efforts on campus to implement a feasible working strategy for improvement. As always, time and resources will be important to the consideration of this challenge.

**Figure 7.** Key themes in participant recommendations

### Capacity building

Many identified strategies that might systematically support the development of the expertise, resources, and infrastructure required to create systematic processes for the development and assessment of learning outcomes in all academic units.

- Value and build capacity for **distributed leadership** on curriculum development and learning outcomes development in order to extend and sustain the knowledge base across campus and in AAUs.
  - Create processes and resources to **develop the expertise of new members** on program committees, departmental committees, Faculty councils, PDC, IQAP and Senate; and develop strategies for ensuring that knowledge is passed on as roles change.
  - Continue to provide **ongoing and systematic training** for instructors on how to develop learning outcomes within the context of course and curriculum development that clarify the value of the process, and the unique strengths of the programs.
  - Develop **curriculum maps** with different Faculties.
  - Develop **expertise within academic committees and councils**. This may assist councils to more effectively and properly vet the documents they are approving, as course and program forms would benefit from more careful review before submission to PDC.
  - Consider more fully the very significant **resource implications** of this distributed responsibility, and how systematic, proactive support might improve efficiencies for everyone.
  - Explore potential ways in which the significant time commitments involved in fostering this approach can be recognized in **faculty and staff workloads**.
  - Reward service.

- **Streamline course and program design** by establishing mechanisms through which departments and teams can work with individuals who are regularly involved in course and program design and who can assist with navigating the complex system involved, while respecting the disciplinary expertise and vision of those developing the programs.

## Coordination

All areas identified a need for improved coordination. Centralized units are exploring better integration, transparency, and co-ordination of services. Greater coordination within Faculties, and between Faculties and central units would also be of benefit.

- Establish a **cross-functional advisory team** to streamline and enhance processes, procedures, support, communications, and education. This advisory unit can also function as a useful sounding board for the identification of bottlenecks, problems, and ambiguities, which require addressing. The advisory might also include faculty representatives who meet on a routine basis.
- **Streamline** and formalize processes for learning outcomes development and assessment in ways that support these efforts within AAUs and centrally.
  - Continue to ensure that advice from CTL is provided through one point person throughout the process in order to streamline process and avoid the potential for variability in advice and consultation.
  - Explore how to offer effective early support and navigational assistance to those seeking to develop new programs.
  - Help Faculties find more feasible ways to address and synchronize external accreditation processes and internal IQAP processes.
  - Implement technology that can facilitate the routine distribution and approval of routine changes, to improve the responsiveness and agility.
- Consider the allocation of a **position for a curriculum specialist** to support curriculum committees as well as individuals and Faculties. Having **at least one liaison** person in each AAU trained in learning outcomes development and assessment, who reviews, in consultation with the CTL, proposals prior to their submission to councils might also be of assistance. These individuals could also provide invaluable feedback about faculty perceptions and experience with the learning outcomes development process, and function as an important information exchange network on campus. They could also implement orientation and faculty development relevant to learning outcomes and the assessment of learning outcomes, depending on how the workload implications of these responsibilities were taken into account.

## Communications

All academic and central units identified improved communications – clarity, quantity, and impact – as a critical need. They identified recommendations from improved resource materials, to administrative communications, to transparency of process and expectations.

General communications issues:

- Work towards **consistent and accurate messaging** regarding the creation and implementation of learning outcomes from all levels of administration, the CTL, OOL, Senate, and the Quality Assurance Office.
- Explore mechanisms for improving communications of **updates and changes** within Faculties and across the institution.
- Define and communicate **roles** of each unit/person involved in supporting or coordinating the processes of learning outcomes development, and making that information widely available.

- Determine ways to **encourage early consultation** with CTL and the OQA.
- Work towards greater departmental awareness regarding **PDC/IQAP/external processes** to clarify for Faculty and departments the reasons for internal processes.

Specific documents, forms, and resources:

- Establish **accessible, well-informed, official University of Windsor guidelines resources** for creating and implementing learning outcomes, including examples and well-articulated, defensible standards against which submitted learning outcomes can be assessed.
- Continue to **explore potential improvements to PDC forms**, including the integration of assessment, and the use of technology to streamline the processes.
- Establish **regular communications channels at the university-level** among department heads, associate deans, and curriculum committee chairs.
- Establish **clear policies that identify what requires separate learning outcomes**, what does not.

### Collection – Data, Resources, Repositories

Related to communications and coordination was the clearly identified need to explore infrastructures that would facilitate the collection of data, resources, and exemplars from campus and beyond – structures that would be searchable and open to the campus community. This would save people time and decrease the learning curve by sharing examples of good learning outcomes from a variety of disciplines and levels.

- Create a **searchable online archive of approved course and program-level learning outcomes** sorted by departments and programs to which they belong, so that new sets of learning outcomes can be reviewed in the overall context of their programs, and good models can be more easily shared.
- Establish a **joint document management infrastructure**, which support and coordinate learning outcomes processes.
- Implement learning outcomes packages with an emphasis on potential for **tracking and assessing learning outcomes at the course and program level**, and engage Faculties in considering the potential of a tool for learning outcomes assessment.
- Develop technological methods to **decrease the manual labour involved in collecting and analyzing** learning outcomes and learning outcomes assessment (such as a well-supported roll-out of learning outcomes analytics software, and use of freeware).
- Create **electronic forms and e-approval processes** with access for everyone involved in the process, which would also enable proponents to see where their proposals were in the process.
- Develop an **online electronic course outline system** that would support the collection of consistent information on all courses. These are common internationally, and can contribute to the development of aligned curriculum by providing frameworks for thinking through these issues.

### Culture and Contextualization

For most institutions, departments, programs, and instructors, effective, deep engagement with learning outcomes-based approaches involves cultural change, which may be made more complicated by the levers and resistance created by external regulatory pressures, and attendant anxieties regarding managerialism. While it might seem as though increased regulatory pressure is the key to compliance, an institutional culture that values teaching, and invests in the resources to support intentional development of curriculum may provide more scope for departments to engage with the principles of learning outcomes in ways that meet their own objectives as well as those of the institution. Efforts to

implement the suggestions identified above are likely to have significantly more impact if culture and context are taken into account.

- Engage in **open dialogue**.
  - Discuss the purpose, value and implications of learning outcomes.
  - Explore barriers, listen to, recognize, and work with the **legitimate philosophical, pedagogical, and political concerns** that faculty members raise about the mandated quality assurance processes of the province.
  - Seek legitimate and serious ways for instructors to identify, document, and assess student learning in ways and using language that reflects an awareness of their disciplinary and academic practices and concerns.
  - **Share evidence** of the impact of learning outcomes.
  - **Share methods** to collect and analyze data, and to use the information gathered from assessing learning outcomes to enhance programs.
- Establish expectations that information gained from assessment will be used.
  - Establish **processes to discuss and use the information** from program-level learning outcomes assessment.
- Collaborate at program and departmental levels.
  - Wherever possible, **focus on determining the aims of programs and instructors**, using learning outcomes and learning outcomes assessment as tools for furthering those aims.
  - Include **curriculum mapping** as a core practice in program review with an aim of enriching dialogue over curricular alignment.
- Engage in action at the institutional level.
  - Explore the generation of **an institutional vision for teaching and learning**, including a teaching and learning strategic plan with achievable and operational outcomes.
  - Provide **appropriate resources and rewards to support** AAU development of curriculum and learning outcome expertise and to allow appropriate support from CTL, OOI, IT, and OQA.

Overall, if engagement with learning outcomes approaches is institutionally valuable, we need to explore **approaches that recognize, value, and prioritize the work of developing them and developing a culture that values them**.

## 11: Conclusion

This scan was a preliminary overview of a very complex practice, summarizing what is being done on the University of Windsor campus related to learning outcomes. Input from our academic and central units identified progress, strengths, weaknesses, and potential directions for future work around five major themes: coordination, communications, capacity building, collection, and culture and context.

We recommend these themes form the basis for discussion and planning of next steps, both through Senate and through units involved in the development or support of learning outcomes practices. Given the obvious limitations of resources, and the many priorities of the University, the identification of a limited number of feasible and high impact initiatives is an important next step.

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