



ST. THOMAS UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW

Programmatic Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan 2018-2025

Approved by the Strategic Planning/SACS Committee
Members

April 19, 2018

Adopted by the Faculty

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Strategic Planning 2017-18

Assessment Planning Process



Introduction

This Programmatic Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan (“Assessment Plan”) is the final step of the design phase of our assessment process. It articulates a process for the ongoing

“implementation phase” of assessment at St. Thomas University School of Law that will commence in the Fall of 2018.

Overview of Assessment

Briefly stated, “assessment” refers to a process of (1) defining student learning outcomes (“SLOs”) and performance criteria for a course, course cluster, department, or degree program; (2) measuring whether students are achieving the identified SLOs; (3) analyzing the results; and (4) using the results to “close the loop” by making changes in teaching or curricular design. It is an ongoing process designed to improve student learning and demonstrate the added value of a legal education. At the program level, the law school should use assessment information to improve the curriculum and overall student competency. At the course level, faculty should use assessment information to improve how they teach. After SLOs for a degree program are identified, assessment usually proceeds in year-long cycles. At the beginning of a cycle, a group (typically Strategic Planning or another committee)¹ identifies one or two SLOs to be studied in the cycle. Then evidence of student learning for those outcomes is collected from at least three sources. The findings are reported and the data is used to recommend changes to improve outcomes further. After a few years of assessment, the institution will have conducted assessment activities on all of the SLOs and the process can begin again.

Regulatory Background

In 2014, the ABA Council on Legal Education—the Department of Education-recognized, national accrediting body for the J.D.—adopted sweeping changes to the Standards and Rules of Procedure for Approval of Law Schools. The changes were the result of a 7-year process led by a special committee charged with “determining whether and how output measures, other than bar passage and job placement” (ABA Managing Director’s Guidance Memo)² might be used for accreditation. The committee recommended adoption of an outcomes-based philosophy after review of relevant research on higher education and study of regional and professional accrediting body practices. With the adoption of this approach, the ABA’s new Standards and Rules use outcomes and assessment as the driving forces behind the accreditation process.

Standard 315. EVALUATION OF PROGRAM OF LEGAL EDUCATION, LEARNING OUTCOMES, AND ASSESSMENT METHODS

¹ The Strategic Planning Committee performed the work during the “development” phase of the law school’s assessment plan. The work of Strategic Planning and any ad hoc Assessment Team Committees may overlap with the Curriculum Committee. Ad hoc Assessment “teams” are made up of two or three faculty members who have expertise in the area subject to assessment. The process is described within this Assessment Plan.

² ABA Managing Director’s Guidance Memo: Standards 301, 302, 314 and 315, June 2015, available at http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/legal_education_and_admissions_to_the_bar/governancedocuments/2015_learning_outcomes_guidance.authcheckdam.pdf.

The dean and the faculty of a law school shall conduct ongoing evaluation of the law school's program of legal education, learning outcomes, and assessment methods; and shall use the results of this evaluation to determine the degree of student attainment of competency in the learning outcomes and to make appropriate changes to improve the curriculum.

Interpretation 315-1

Examples of methods that may be used to measure the degree to which students have attained competency in the school's student learning outcomes include review of the records the law school maintains to measure individual student achievement pursuant to Standard 314; evaluation of student learning portfolios; student evaluation of the sufficiency of their education; student performance in capstone courses or other courses that appropriately assess a variety of skills and knowledge; bar exam passage rates; placement rates; surveys of attorneys, judges, and alumni; and assessment of student performance by judges, attorneys, or law professors from other schools. The methods used to measure the degree of student achievement of learning outcomes are likely to differ from school to school and law schools are not required by this standard to use any particular methods.³

We are also mindful that, as part of a University accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges ("SACSCOC"), we must have an assessment program to improve student learning.

3.3 Institutional Effectiveness

3.3.1 The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results in each of the following areas: (Institutional Effectiveness)

3.3.1.1 educational programs, to include student learning outcomes⁴

Goals of the Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) Assessment Plan

This Assessment Plan has the following purposes:

1. To strengthen this law school's academic programs by gathering data about student

³ ABA Standards, available at https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/publications/misc/legal_education/Standards/2017-2018ABAStandardsforApprovalofLawSchools/2017_2018_standards_chapter3.authcheckdam.pdf.

⁴ SACSCOC, *The Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement* (available at <http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/2010principlesofaccreditation.pdf>).

learning in relation to a set of pre-identified Student Learning Outcomes, analyzing the data to determine whether students are achieving the identified learning outcomes, preparing a report with the results and recommendations, and adopting changes where necessary to respond to identified problem areas and improve the overall quality of the programs.

2. To articulate an effective, workable, faculty-driven, and efficient process to assess student learning outcomes at an institutional level over a ten-year period (the ABA's sabbatical site visit schedule).

3. To identify the roles of faculty and relevant administrators in implementing this Assessment Plan.

4. To demonstrate compliance with the ABA's requirement that, by the 2017-2018 academic year, every accredited Law School has a publicly available assessment plan.

5. To ensure that the students acquire the requisite knowledge, skills, and values expressed in the law school's Mission Statement, which our institution deems important for the legal profession and the practice of law.

6. To demonstrate compliance with SACSCOC (the university accrediting body).

Learning Outcomes for the J.D. degree

On August 29, 2017, the Law School Faculty adopted a set of seven learning outcomes for the J.D. degree. The Law School Faculty adopted performance criteria for each outcome on October 31, 2017:

<p style="text-align: center;">LEARNING OUTCOMES</p> <p>Upon conferral of the Juris Doctor degree:</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">PERFORMANCE CRITERIA</p> <p>Students will demonstrate achievement of this learning outcome by:</p>
<p>Learning Outcome 1:</p> <p>Students will demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the law and the American legal system.</p>	<p>Criterion 1: Identifying, describing, and interpreting terms, rules, and principles of foundational and core areas of law, including significant alternative formulations, such as minority rules.</p> <p>Criterion 2: Describing the American legal system’s structures, processes, and procedures.</p> <p>Criterion 3: Demonstrating the knowledge of substantive and procedural law tested on a bar examination.</p>
<p>Learning Outcome 2:</p> <p>Students will demonstrate competency in issue spotting, analytical and problem-solving skills.</p>	<p>Criterion 1: Identifying each potentially applicable legal issue as it relates to the facts.</p> <p>Criterion 2: Identifying each legal term, rule and principle of law relevant to each potentially applicable legal issue, including evaluation of conflicting terms, rules and principles, and synthesizing the rules into a logical framework for analysis.</p> <p>Criterion 3: Identifying the legally significant facts relating to each applicable rule and applying the identified rules to the facts, including evaluating potential counterarguments, to determine the likely outcome of the case.</p>
<p>Learning Outcome 3:</p> <p>Students will demonstrate competency in research.</p>	<p>Criterion 1: Selecting and employing legal research tools, strategies, and methods (including technology) to identify relevant legal authority, taking into account time limitations and the financial constraints of the client.</p>

	<p>Criterion 2: Identifying the governing law with relevant secondary sources, and accurately assessing the weight of authority.</p>
<p>Learning Outcome 4: Students will communicate effectively and with civility.</p>	<p>Criterion 1: Writing documents that are clear, concise, well reasoned, and organized; follow accepted rules of grammar, punctuation, spelling, and citation; are professional in tone and appearance; and are appropriate to the audience and the circumstances.</p> <p>Criterion 2: Speaking in a clear, concise, well-reasoned, organized, and professional manner, appropriate to the audience and the circumstances.</p> <p>Criterion 3: Actively listening, being respectful in interactions with others, and when appropriate, collaborating effectively with others.</p>
<p>Learning Outcome 5: Students will demonstrate competency in legal practice skills.</p>	<p>Criterion 1: Managing a legal project (e.g., legal case, memorandum, mediation) from its inception to its conclusion.</p> <p>Criterion 2: Proposing solutions to problems that take into account applicable law, client interests, changes in circumstances, alternative options and practical constraints.</p> <p>Criterion 3: Managing time to meet deadlines.</p> <p>Criterion 4: Employing current technologies in the practice of the law.</p>
<p>Learning Outcome 6: Students will exercise proper professional and ethical responsibility to clients and the legal system.</p>	<p>Criterion 1: Listing the sources of the law governing lawyers.</p> <p>Criterion 2: Identifying and explaining the applicable law governing lawyers.</p> <p>Criterion 3: Using the law governing lawyers to recognize ethical and other professional</p>

	<p>dilemmas.</p> <p>Criterion 4: Applying the law governing lawyers in an attempt to resolve ethical and other professional dilemmas.</p>
<p>Learning Outcome 7:</p> <p>Students will demonstrate awareness of their moral and ethical responsibility to society.</p>	<p>Criterion 1: Identifying the nature and sources of moral and ethical standards.</p> <p>Criterion 2: Appraising existing laws in light of a good order reflecting a considered moral stance and developing solutions to social problems in light of a public order of human dignity.</p> <p>Criterion 3: Demonstrating intercultural literacy across cultures, races, ethnicities, political opinions, etc.</p> <p>Criterion 4: Exhibiting an ethic of public service by dedicating time, energy and resources to serve communities at risk, including the poor and the marginalized.</p>

Curriculum Map

From January–March 2018, curriculum mapping surveys were distributed to all faculty who have taught courses at the Law School in the past academic year, asking them to identify which of the learning outcomes they covered in their courses and whether they employed any assessment tools to measure student competency as to those outcomes. The results are made available on our website.⁵ The Curriculum Map identifies where each of our learning outcomes is being covered in our first year, required, seminar, clinic and externship, and elective curricula.

⁵ STU Curriculum Mapping Survey (last updated March 2018), available at <https://www.stu.edu/law/about/mission-and-learning-outcomes/curriculum-map>.

Implementation Phase: Overview and Roles

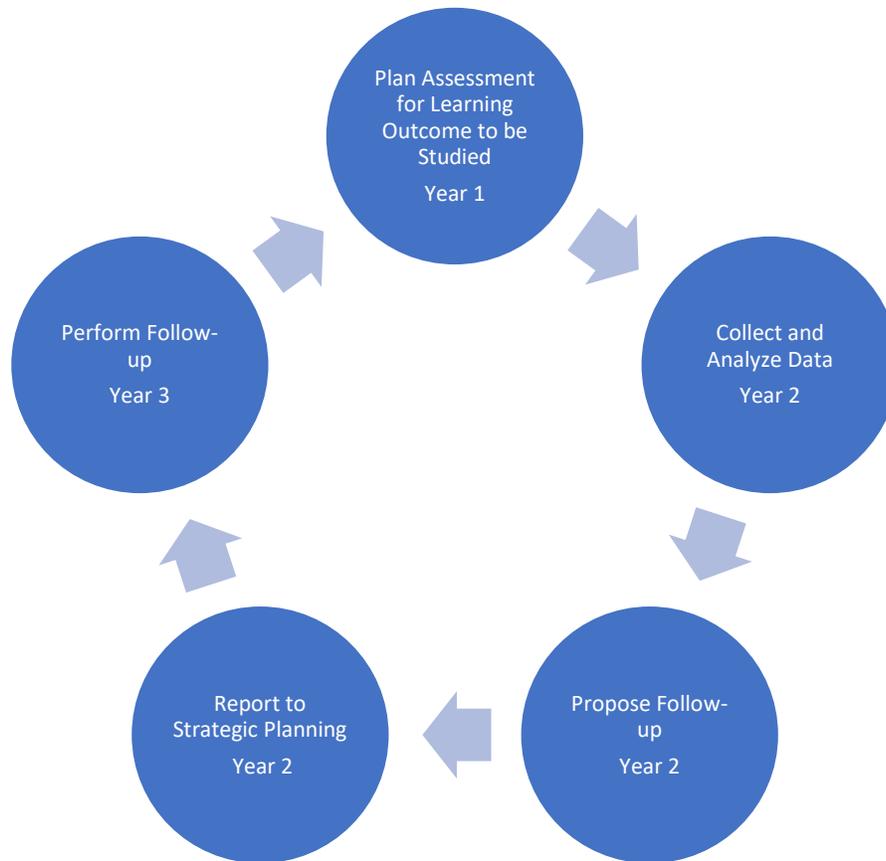


During the year, an ad hoc Assessment Team appointed by the Dean, will assess a learning outcome, reporting its results to the Strategic Planning Committee by the end of the spring semester. The Dean will select the Assessment Team with consideration towards expertise and interest by its prospective members, and may appoint faculty who are not members of the Strategic Planning Committee. Throughout the seven-year assessment cycle, it is anticipated that every full time faculty member will serve at least once on an Assessment Team. Faculty members may serve more than once on an Assessment Team.

The Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, who also chairs the Curriculum Committee, will also participate in the process.

Annual Cycle

Implementation of Assessment of Learning Outcomes



April: The Dean appoints and charges an ad hoc Assessment Team to adopt/implement a plan for studying the SLOs during the following academic year in accordance this Assessment Plan.

May-August: The Assessment Team begins work preparing the Annual Assessment Plan using at least three tools. A sample of an Annual Assessment Plan form is attached as **Appendix A**.

August/September: The Assessment Team makes final decisions regarding the direct and indirect measures it will use to collect data and develop rubrics, surveys, focus groups, or other instruments as necessary. A sample Hot Rubric form is attached as **Appendix B**. Progress reports are submitted to the Strategic Planning Committee and to the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs.

October/November: Data collection by the Assessment Team. It reports progress to the Strategic Planning Committee. The Strategic Planning Committee meets to monitor and document follow-up “close the loop” actions recommended the prior year.

December/January/February: The Assessment Team makes an initial evaluation of the data. The AT prepares a Triangulated Analysis Plan. A sample Triangulated Analysis Plan form is attached as **Appendix C**. Progress reports are submitted to the Strategic Planning Committee and to the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs.

February: In the spring semester, the Strategic Planning Committee identifies the learning outcome(s) to be assessed in the following year.

March: The Assessment Team reports its data, initial evaluations and recommendations to the Strategic Planning Committee, including, where appropriate, a Specific Action Plan. The Strategic Planning Committee reviews and approves and makes recommendations to “close the loop.” Recommendations may be directed to administrative departments, faculty committees, the whole faculty, or the Dean. A sample Specific Action Plan form is attached as **Appendix D**.

April. The Strategic Planning Committee delivers the annual report on assessments to the full faculty. The Strategic Planning Committee with the faculty, reviews the assessment process and proposes modifications if necessary.

Assessment Timeline: 2018-2025

LEARNING OUTCOMES	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
1: Students will demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the law and the American legal system.					Plan	Collect & analyze data, propose follow-up	Follow-up
2: Students will demonstrate competency in issue spotting, analytical and problem-solving skills.						Plan	Collect & analyze data, propose follow-up
3: Students will demonstrate competency in research.	Plan, collect & analyze data, propose follow-up	Follow-up					
4: Students will communicate effectively and with civility.	Plan	Collect & analyze data, propose follow-up	Follow-up				
5: Students will demonstrate competency in legal practice skills.		Plan	Collect & analyze data, propose	Follow-up			

			follow-up				
6: Students will exercise proper professional and ethical responsibility to clients and the legal system.			Plan	Collect & analyze data, propose follow-up	Follow-up		
7: Students will demonstrate awareness of their moral and ethical responsibility to society.				Plan	Collect & analyze data, propose follow-up	Follow-up	

Conducting Assessment

Before each annual cycle, the Assessment Team (in consultation with the Strategic Planning Committee) will create a working plan for assessment of the learning outcome identified for the following year. The purpose is to create a rough draft of a plan that the assessment team can use to gather and analyze the data. This mini-plan should identify potential data and how it may be collected and analyzed. The assessment team is free to change the “mini-plan” as necessary.

For each learning outcome that is assessed, the assessment team must use at least three measures, at least two of which are “direct” ones, and triangulate the results. A direct assessment measure is based on students’ actual work; typically, a sample of student work is evaluated against a rubric. The advantage of direct measures is that they involve examples of what students have actually produced, which tend to be the strongest evidence of learning. In contrast, indirect measurements are based on reports of *perceived* learning.

It is preferable to examine work product that is already being created as part of course-level assessment, rather than creating a new exam or project to be administered solely for the purpose of programmatic assessment.

Examples of Measures of Student Learning

Direct Measures
Review of samples of exam answers against a common rubric
Review of samples of papers against a common rubric
Entry/exit tests
Course projects/experiences coupled with ratings/evaluations
Embedded questions in exams
Videos of skills exercises, such as oral arguments, client interviews, or negotiations
Bar Exam Preparation course results
Bar Exam results
Seminar papers
Indirect Measures
Surveys of students
Surveys of faculty, alumni employers
Student evaluations of teaching
Placement rates
Grades earned in applicable courses
Focus groups
Retention and graduation rates

Assessment data will be analyzed and reported in an aggregated fashion. Identifiable student information will be redacted. Since the purpose of assessment is not to evaluate individual faculty members, assessment data should also, to the extent feasible, not identify the faculty members who taught the students whose data is being analyzed.

Results and Reports

The Strategic Planning Committee and assessment teams will document findings and report to the Law Faculty. To the extent practicable, reports will be made public on the Law School’s assessment webpage. The Strategic Planning Committee is responsible for following up on “close the loop” recommendations made year-to-year, in consultation with other relevant committees, including Curriculum.

Evaluating the Assessment Process

In accordance with ABA Standard 315, the Strategic Planning Committee is charged with conducting an ongoing evaluation of the assessment process at this Law School, including whether to accelerate the timetable such that two learning outcomes are assessed per year. It will report, on at least an annual basis, progress under this plan, recommending changes to the learning outcomes or assessment process. Moreover, the process of evaluating the Assessment Process will be ongoing:

Cycle of Implementation

IMPLEMENTATION & EVALUATION ACTIVITY	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Review learning outcomes and performance criteria that define each outcome	•				•		
Map (or review map of) where the law school addresses and assesses these criteria	•				•		
Use map to identify where data will be collected	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Develop a measurement strategy and the needed assessment tools for the performance criterion or criteria under review.	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Collect data		•	•	•	•	•	•
Evaluate assessment data, including process		•	•	•	•	•	•
Report findings		•	•	•	•	•	•
Take action where necessary			•	•	•	•	•

Amendments to this Assessment Plan

The Law Faculty looks to the Strategic Planning Committee to propose amendments to this plan as necessary.

Appendix A⁶

**St. Thomas University School of Law
Annual Assessment Plan Form
Strategic Planning Committee
March 28, 2018 (draft)**

Learning Outcome: Performance Criterion: Assessment Cycle: 20__-20__ Assessment Team Members:					
Column A	Column B	Column C	Column D	Column E	Column F
Tools/ Measures	Tool Type (Direct or Indirect; Objective or Subjective; Quantitative or Qualitative)	Where and when will data be collected (i.e., in what class or other setting)?	What is the performance threshold?	Who will score/tabulate the data?	Who will evaluate the data?
Tool 1					
Tool 2					
Tool 3					

⁶ See LORI E. SHAW & VICTORIA L. VANZANDT, STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES AND LAW SCHOOL ASSESSMENT 191 (2015).

Appendix B⁷

**St. Thomas University School of Law
Hot Rubric Form
Strategic Planning Committee
March 28, 2018 (draft)**

Task Description:

What task is the student expected to complete?

Dimensions	Scale Level 1	Scale Level 2	Scale Level 3
What components are needed to successfully complete the task	What is the quality level of the work? sophisticated	What is the quality level of the work? competent	What is the quality level of the work? Not yet competent
i.e. draws analogies and distinctions when appropriate	Description with observable evidence that would establish this quality level for this dimension	Description with observable evidence that would establish this quality level for this dimension	Description with observable evidence that would establish this quality level for this dimension

⁷ See LORI E. SHAW & VICTORIA L. VANZANDT, STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES AND LAW SCHOOL ASSESSMENT 141-44 (2015).

Appendix C⁸

**St. Thomas University School of Law
Triangulated Analysis Plan Form
Strategic Planning Committee
March 28, 2018 (draft)**

Learning Outcome: Performance Criterion: Assessment Cycle: 20__-20__ Assessment Team ("AT") Members:					
Link to Annual Assessment Plan Form	Column G	Column H	Column I	Column J	Column K
Tools/ Measures	Record your findings and indicate if there is a trigger for change or further analysis	Analysis of data collected for relevant criterion. What does your triangulated analysis indicate?	Hypothesis? What are the possible causes of the findings (favorable or unfavorable)? List as many as may apply	Report to appropriate stakeholders	Link with Specific Action Plan, if necessary
Tool 1	i.e. __ of __ (__%) of students demonstrated competency.	i.e. all measures support the conclusion that the criterion is being achieved. Thus, the AT			

⁸ See LORI E. SHAW & VICTORIA L. VANZANDT, STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES AND LAW SCHOOL ASSESSMENT 138-41, 151-52, 192 (2015).

	Action is/is not triggered.	<p>recommends no further action be taken.</p> <p>Or</p> <p>All measures support the conclusion that the criterion is NOT being achieved. Thus, the AT recommends action be taken to address the problem.</p> <p>Or</p> <p>___ of ___ measures support the conclusion that the criterion is NOT being achieved. The AT recommends further (analysis or action).</p>			
Tool 2					
Tool 3					

Appendix D⁹

**St. Thomas University School of Law
Specific Action Plan Form
Required for Unfavorable Findings
Strategic Planning Committee
March 28, 2018 (draft)**

Learning Outcome: Performance Criterion: Assessment Cycle: 20__-20__ Assessment Team Members:					
Column K	Column L	Column M	Column N	Column O	Column P
Specific Action(s) that constitutes the change (can be multiple)	Who are the change agents?	What is the time frame for implementation and assessment?	How will effectiveness be measured?	What does the analysis indicate?	How are results shared? What was final result?

⁹ See LORI E. SHAW & VICTORIA L. VANZANDT, STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES AND LAW SCHOOL ASSESSMENT 166-68 (2015).