

Handbook Insert – Learning Objectives and Assessment

Rationale: Graduate students, faculty, staff, and administrators benefit from common language to describe the expectations of a graduate program. As TGS strives to build a more diverse academy, we cannot assume that all stakeholders have the same knowledge about the program’s learning objectives, expected skill sets, and assessment criteria.

The purpose of this template is four-fold:

- 1) To promote transparency in academic learning objectives and assessment criteria.
- 2) To empower students by providing language with which they can describe the skills/capacities they have developed through their graduate studies.
- 3) To support faculty as they articulate clear learning objectives. This could be a starting point for programs to develop more tailored learning objectives and assessment strategies and provide it to students.
- 4) To position TGS as a leader across Northwestern and in graduate education broadly in creating a culture of transparent learning objectives and assessment criteria, that will also comply with the Higher Learning Commission’s accreditation requests.

Each program will begin to create its own learning objectives, align those objectives to program-specific milestones/requirements, and consider assessment criteria and strategies to be inserted into the program’s handbook for fall 2018.

TGS views this assessment initiative as a process, so please bring a draft of this template before your program’s Progress Review meeting or attach it with any curriculum proposals.

Instructions: According to the Council of Graduate School’s 2011 report on Assessment and Review of Graduate programs, assessment strategies and learning objectives can improve graduate programs by identifying “what students are expected to learn as a result of their educational experience,” evaluating the extent to which students have learned those objectives, and applying the findings of the assessment to improve the program.¹

Consider all the requirements for students in your program and think critically about what you aim for students to learn. How does your program’s courses and milestones prepare students to achieve those learning objectives? Grades tell part of the story, but do not give a holistic view of the learning objectives students achieve. (More information can be found on [Northwestern’s Assessment Webpage](#).) *Please be as comprehensive as possible; the examples attached provide a few starting points, but your document may have many more learning objectives. You may borrow the format and content of the templates if they fit the learning objectives of your program.*

One way to begin is to ask yourself and other faculty the following questions:

- What knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and behaviors do you expect students to be able to demonstrate (potentially in the core capacities listed below: research, communication, literacies, teaching, leadership/collaboration, career development, personal effectiveness, and organization/management)?
- How will you know if the program has effectively taught these skills, values, attitudes, and behaviors?
- Do the current program requirements and milestones achieve these objectives?

¹ Baker et al., “Assessment and Review of Graduate Programs | Council of Graduate Schools.”