



Queen's University Quality Assurance Processes Guidelines for the Development of Program-Level Learning Outcomes (PLOs) in the Cyclical Review Process

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to explain how units should determine which programs selected for cyclical program review must have unique sets of PLOs. For any questions, contact quqap@queensu.ca.

Summary

In the development of the self-study as part of the cyclical review process, authors are expected to articulate clear program-level learning outcomes for each plan within a program. A plan refers to a distinct academic path or qualification within a broader program structure, such as a degree or certificate.

- **Program-Level Learning Outcomes:** Each academic plan, as described in examples A-C, must have defined learning outcomes that are tailored to its specific educational context.
- **Overlap in Learning Outcomes:** Within program blocks, which consist of different levels of the same program (e.g., General vs. Honours in a Bachelor of Arts), there is an expected overlap in learning outcomes. This overlap supports a continuity in learning experiences across the related programs.
- **Differentiation in Learning Outcomes:** Although some learning outcomes may overlap between program blocks, there should be a clear distinction in the complexity and depth of these outcomes to reflect the differing levels of student achievement expected between plans, such as between General and Honours levels (example E). This differentiation ensures that the learning outcomes appropriately match the academic rigor and depth required at each level.

The questions and answers provided below offer further insight and elaborate on the guidance outlined above, addressing specific scenarios and questions that may arise in the application of these principles during the cyclical review process.

Q1: What programs require the development of learning outcomes?

A: For the purposes of QUQAP, each plan in a program will have program-level learning outcomes.

Example A (Arts, Social Science)

Citizenship Studies: 7 plans

1. Citizenship Studies – General – Bachelor of Arts [also Citizenship Studies – Minor (Arts)]
2. Citizenship Studies – Joint Honours – Bachelor of Arts (Honours)
3. Citizenship Studies – Major – Bachelor of Arts (Honours)
4. Citizenship Studies Undergraduate Certificate
5. Graduate Diploma in Building Citizenry
6. Citizenship Studies – Master of Arts
7. Citizenship Studies – Doctor of Philosophy

Example B (Science)

Botany: 5 plans

1. Botany – General– Bachelor of Science [also Botany – Minor (Science)]
2. Botany – Major – Bachelor of Science (Honours)
3. Botany – Specialization – Bachelor of Science (Honours)
4. Botany – Master of Science
5. Botany – Doctor of Philosophy

Example C (Professional)

Pharmacy: 5 plans

1. Pharmacy – Major – Bachelor of Science (Honours)
2. Pharmacy – Major – Bachelor of Science with Professional Internship (Honours)
3. Pharmacy – Master of Science in Pharmacy
4. Pharmaceutical Sciences – Master of Science
5. Pharmaceutical Sciences – Master of Science

In Example A, the Citizenship Studies program has seven plans that would require program-level learning outcomes. In Example B, the Botany program has five plans that would require program-level learning outcomes. Finally in Example C, the Pharmacy program would have five plans that would require program-level learning outcomes.

Q2: Will there be overlap between Program-Level Learning Outcomes?

A: Yes, it is expected that there will be some overlap between program-level learning outcomes in closely related academic plans. For instance, In Example A, the General BA, Joint Honours BA, and Honours BA in Citizenship Studies would be three plans that are strongly connected and could be considered a program “block.”

Because Honours degrees represent the most sophisticated depth of knowledge in an undergraduate program, the Honours would be expected to have more program-level learning outcomes, and/or more sophisticated (in expected student achievement) program-level learning outcomes. Honours and General degrees in the same program block would be expected to share some of the same program-level learning outcomes (see example D, below).

Example D

Citizenship Studies — Learning Outcomes

BA Major in Citizenship Studies	BA General in Citizenship Studies
Learning Outcome A	Learning Outcome A
Learning Outcome B	Learning Outcome B
Learning Outcome C	No equivalent
Learning Outcome D	Learning Outcome D
Learning Outcome E	Learning Outcome E
Learning Outcome F	No equivalent
Learning Outcome G	No equivalent

In the example above, the two plans share common program-level learning outcomes (e.g. PLLOs A, B, D & E). Further differentiating these plans is the level of sophistication expected for similar Learning Outcomes. In example E, seen below, the achievement of Program-level Learning Outcome A at the BA Major level is more sophisticated (requiring student to apply principles through a capstone project) than at the BA General level.

Example E

Learning Outcome A, Citizenship Studies – General – Bachelor of Arts

Students will be able to describe the principles of ethical leadership and collaborative engagement to identify and explain how others have used these principles to advance and sustain local and global communities.

Learning Outcome A, Citizenship Studies – Major – Bachelor of Arts (Honours)

Students will be able to apply the principles of ethical leadership and collaborative engagement to advance and sustain local and global communities through the completion of a capstone project.

This principle of sharing common program-level learning outcomes in program blocks, with a) changes in sophistication of learning between plans or b) no equivalent program-level learning outcome applies across all programs (e.g., Examples A-C, above).

Q3: How many sets of program-level learning outcomes do I need to submit for a cyclical review?

A: As defined in the QUQAP, a program is “is the complete set and sequence of courses, combinations of courses and/or other units of study, research and practice described by Queen’s University for the fulfillment of the requirements of a degree, diploma, or certificate.”

Put another way, for the purposes of QUQAP, if a student can successfully graduate from the Queen’s after completing a discrete plan of study offered by an academic unit, it is considered a program. To this end, it is not just bachelor’s or master’s degrees that are considered programs.

At the undergraduate level, general bachelors, joint-honours bachelors, honours bachelors, and specializations are all considered distinct programs, though it is expected that there would be overlap between the four programs. It is also likely that there would be a degree of similarity if, for example, a unit offered both a BA and a BSc in the same discipline.

At the graduate level, each type of master’s program and PhD program would have its own set of program-level learning outcomes, though it is expected that the programs would have some shared program-level learning outcomes. For instance, in the case of two masters’ program, once which is course-based and one which is thesis-based, it would be expected that the programs would have some shared program-level learning outcomes, but that the experience of engaging in novel research, writing, and then defending a thesis (unique to the thesis-based degree) would differentiate the two programs and thus be reflected in the program-level learning outcomes.