

**HAMLIN UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW  
LEARNING OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT  
THREE-YEAR PLAN  
2009-2012**

**[As approved by Faculty on May 12, 2009]**

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I. Introduction and Background

During Hamline University's 2006-2007 strategic planning process, the faculty and staff members of the "Distinctive Teaching and Learning Framework Group" became aware of the lack of both consistent data about student learning and articulated learning outcomes across the university, and made their first order of business the alignment of units' goals for student learning with the demands of the communities in which Hamline graduates serve and lead. The result was a set of university-level learning outcomes and a call for the articulation and assessment of learning outcomes within and across the academic and student affairs units of the university as follows:

Strategic Direction 2: Connect teaching, scholarship, and university-wide learning outcomes with the mission and core values to advance a distinctively Hamline experience that is valued and realized by all learners.

Objective 2.2: Hamline University will adopt and assess university-wide student learning outcomes across schools, programs, departments and other units to advance a distinctively Hamline experience that will:

- reinforce Hamline's identity as a university
- coordinate curricular goals
- operationalize and measure learning outcomes
- assess current and new programs.

Initiative 2.2.A: Implement learning outcomes that ensure a Hamline graduate will be able to:

- serve, collaborate, and lead in a community

solve problems in innovative, integrative, analytical, and ethical ways  
work and create understanding across cultural differences locally, nationally, and internationally  
use information and technology competently and responsibly  
communicate effectively in writing and in speaking  
apply the theories and methods of a field of expertise  
engage independently and reflectively in lifelong learning.

Initiative 2.2.B: Develop criteria and systematically assess existing and new academic programs and academic support services that:  
deliver learning outcomes  
keep pace with changing demographic, market, and resource realities  
use assessment tools for evaluation.

Objective 2.3: Hamline University will support faculty, staff, and students in their teaching, learning, and research to continually improve as a learning-centered university.

As it turned out, HU's embrace of learning outcomes assessment was very timely as it is a principal concern and focus of the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), HU's accrediting body. In November 2007, the HLC Site Visit Team observed that Hamline University's assessment processes were "in need of severe and immediate attention." The Site Visit Team noted that although assessment structures are well-developed within some academic and co-curricular units at Hamline, such efforts have remained largely isolated, leaving assessment uneven and uncoordinated across the institution as a whole. To address these concerns and accomplish its strategic objectives related to learning outcomes assessment, HU applied for and was accepted into the HLC Assessment Academy and in 2007-2008 initiated a series of coordinated efforts to improve its assessment processes. Among other things, each program (unit) within the University is required to take affirmative and consistent steps to develop a system of program-level assessment and otherwise improve its assessment processes.

## II. The Stages of Learning Outcomes Assessment

Learning Outcomes Assessment (LOA) seeks to answer whether students are learning what they are taught and, if not, how their learning can be improved. Generally, there are three stages (or parts) to the LOA process: (1) the development/articulation of learning objectives; (2) the gathering of information to determine (i.e., "assess") whether students are meeting identified learning objectives (meaning program-level assessment); and (3) the use of assessment information to improve programs (e.g., the law school).

In LOA there are different levels of inquiry. First, is the inquiry that occurs in courses, referred to as "course-level assessment." Second, is the inquiry that occurs at the program-level, for instance with respect to the overall objectives of a J.D. program ("program-level assessment"). Third, is the inquiry that occurs at the institutional level (e.g., Hamline University)

(“institutional-level assessment”).

### III. Where Are We and Where Are We Going?

With the adoption of its “Learning Outcomes for Lawyer Achievement” (LOLA) objectives in May of 2008 (see attached), the law school successfully completed stage one of the LOA process. In 2008-2009, the law school continued to engage in LOA processes by: (1) working to map its curriculum (focusing first on required courses); (2) developing a Three-year Plan (“the Plan”); (3) engaging in faculty development sessions centered on LOA; and (4) considering a proposal for reform of its curriculum.

This Plan is designed to build on the foregoing accomplishments by laying the foundation for the law school to engage in program-level assessment (stage 2) in the future. In other words, the Plan focuses on building the foundational know-how and processes that can be used to implement program-level assessment processes.

The focus of the Plan is on communication, education, and training in three basic parts: (1) it provides education for faculty and staff to learn more about learning assessment theory and practice so that discussions concerning learning objectives and methods of assessment can be more focused; (2) it provides for the law school to communicate learning objectives to students; and (3) it supports the law school’s historic commitment to teaching excellence. Within each part of the Plan (see “Action Items” below), specific projects or tasks are detailed, most of which are sequenced to account for the LOA learning curve (i.e., the tasks in years two and three will build on the work that was done in previous years).

### IV. Overview of the Five Components of the Plan.

#### A. Communicating Our Learning Objectives to Our Students.

An underlying principle of LOA theory is that students learn better when they are told what is expected of them. Thus, a key component of the Plan requires the law school to articulate program-level (i.e., the Law School’s) and course-level (i.e., each Professor’s) learning objectives.<sup>1</sup> For the latter, this Plan calls for faculty to obtain additional training in course design and the articulation of learning objectives.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A statement of learning objectives is not intended to be, and need not be, all encompassing; i.e., you can teach more than you state.

<sup>2</sup> Ultimately, we will need to consider whether it makes sense to specifically identify the courses where our program-level (HUSL) learning objectives are taught.

## B. Faculty and Staff Development Regarding Teaching and Learning

Experts in the field of education have engaged in numerous studies of how to design courses, how to teach students with different backgrounds and learning styles, and how to provide relevant and effective assessment. The aim of this component of the Plan is to provide faculty and staff with helpful information regarding teaching theory and methods that will enable them to improve their teaching methods, as necessary, to meet the needs of today's students<sup>3</sup> and utilize summative and formative assessment tools designed to ensure that law students are meeting the law school's learning objectives (LOLA). More generally, it supports HUSL's historic commitment to teaching excellence.

## C. Dialogue Regarding Course-level Objectives and Assessment.

Because there is a lot that can be learned from one another, this component of the Plan provides structure for members of the law school community to collectively discuss our learning objectives and methods of assessment, particularly with respect to required courses. This will allow the identification and articulation of core learning objectives to improve the law school's course descriptions and syllabi; it will also identify any gaps in the law school curriculum. Part of this process also includes discussions regarding the standards that the law school should apply when assessing its students.<sup>4</sup>

## D. Program-Level Assessment Activities

The proposed program-level assessment activities focus on preparing for future assessment exercises after we learn more about LOA processes.<sup>5</sup> Specifically, the Plan will set the ground work for the law school to institute one program-level assessment process in 2011-2012 and another in 2012-2013 (described in the Action Items below). These activities will pilot program-level assessment that may become part of future LOA plans.

## E. Curriculum Development, Refinement & Reform

Curriculum development, refinement, and reform are, and will remain, the principal responsibility of the Academic and Library Affairs Committee. However, consideration of the law school's learning objectives (LOLA) will be integrated into the law school's approach to curriculum and program development.

## V. Action Items

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<sup>3</sup> There is a lot of emerging literature on "millennials" and the different ways they think and communicate. See e.g., Cathy Sandeen, *Boomers, Xers, and Millennials: Who are They and What Do They Really Want from Continuing Higher Education?*, 72 *Continuing Higher Education Review* 11 (2008).

<sup>4</sup> For instance, what do we mean when we say that we want our students to be able to "effectively communicate in writing;" i.e., what are the features of effective written communication that we want our students to learn?

<sup>5</sup> The HLC stated that it does not expect HU to institute a full-blown process of institutional-level assessment in one or even a few years. However, the HLC does expect progress toward that goal and has indicated that at least one means of institutional-level assessment per year (beginning in 2009-2010) will provide evidence of progress.

- A. Communicating Learning Objectives to Law Students.
  - 1. Provide law students with information about the LOLA objectives during Orientation (2009 and beyond).
  - 2. Obtain input from students and alumni regarding their educational experiences at HUSL and the LOLA objectives (e.g., in a focus group setting) (2009-2011).
  - 3. Work to ensure that our syllabi convey course-level learning objectives (2010 and beyond).
  
- B. Faculty and Staff Development Regarding Teaching and Learning<sup>6</sup>
  - 1. Focus at least two regular colloquia on teaching excellence with the theme of “Course Design for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Student” (2009-2010).
  - 2. Focus at least two regular colloquia on teaching excellence with the theme of “Formative and Summative Assessment” (2010-2011).
  - 3. Focus at least two regular colloquia on teaching excellence with the theme of “Effective Use of Program-level Assessment” (2011-2012).
  - 4. Expand training of adjuncts to address syllabi design and learning objectives (2010-2011).
  
- C. Dialogue Regarding Course-level Objectives and Assessment.
  - 1. Focus at least three regular colloquia on discussion of course objectives for Contracts, Torts, and Property (2009-2010).
  - 2. Focus at least two regular colloquia on discussion of grading policies and other assessment standards (2010-2011).
  - 3. Focus at least two regular colloquia on discussion of course objectives for two skills courses (2011-2012).
  
- D. Program-Level Assessment Activities
  - 1. Conduct inventory of existing assessment tools and data points and prepare report to faculty (2009-2010).
  - 2. Plan for and design a means of assessing the objectives related to writing (2010-2011).
  - 3. Consider modifying course evaluation forms to include a question related to the achievement of specified course-level learning objectives (for use in 2010-2011 and beyond).
  - 4. Explore other program-level assessment tools for assessing LOLA objectives other than the writing objectives (2011-2012).
  - 5. Implement program-level assessment of the writing objectives (2011-2012).
  - 6. Conduct exit interviews of a select number of graduating law students regarding their educational experiences at HUSL and the LOLA objectives (2011-2012).
  - 7. Reevaluate our LOLA objectives and make changes and improvements as

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<sup>6</sup> It is recommended that outside experts be brought in for these faculty and staff development sessions.

deemed necessary (2009 and beyond).

- E. Curriculum Development, Refinement & Reform
  - 1. Document efforts to improve teaching and learning, including the ongoing curriculum reform efforts.
  - 2. Modify course proposal procedures and analysis to include information about anticipated learning objectives. (2009-2010).
  - 3. Based upon information that is gleaned through LOA processes, consider possible improvements to course descriptions and delineation of focus areas (2010-2011).
  - 4. Continue to map curriculum until complete (2009-2012).

#### VI. Suggested Institutional Structures to Support LOA Efforts

For LOA work to continue in an effective manner, the law school should consider how it is organized. The following are some general observations and suggestions for changes/improvements in institutional structures to support the law school's LOA efforts:

- 1. Reorganize the current Faculty Teaching & Scholarship Committee (and reorganize other faculty committees as necessary) and create a new Teaching and Learning standing committee to coordinate the implementation of LOA objectives. (The LOLA Task Force would cease.)
- 2. Budget for the foregoing activities.
- 3. Apply for available grants (internal and external) to support the foregoing activities.
- 4. Include LOA information in faculty recruitment efforts.
- 5. Encourage faculty and staff to report their LOA-related activities as part of their annual reviews.
- 6. Reconfigure the law school schedule for faculty colloquia focused on: (1) LOA-related discussions; (2) teaching and learning; and (3) scholarship.
- 7. Adopt principles for faculty and staff evaluations to ensure the appropriate use of assessment data.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The HU Standing Committee on Learning Outcomes Assessment is in the process of developing proposed principles to govern institution-level and program-level assessment. For LOA to work both HU and the law school must create an environment in which faculty and staff feel free to admit weaknesses in their courses and programs.

## ATTACHMENT

**HAMLIN UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW  
LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR LAWYER ACHIEVEMENT (LOLA)  
As adopted by the law faculty on May 8, 2008.**

**GOAL #1 (KNOWLEDGE): Acquire the conceptual frameworks and substantive knowledge needed for competent professional service as a new attorney and as a basis for lifelong learning.**

**HUSL graduates should be able to . . .**

1. Demonstrate competence in key foundational areas of U.S. law, including areas of substantive law tested on bar examinations. (University Outcome #6, see below)
2. Demonstrate competence in other student-elected areas of substantive law. (University Outcome #6)
3. Demonstrate knowledge of the structure, components, and functioning of the U.S. legal system, including the markets for legal services. (University Outcome #6).
4. Demonstrate an understanding of the operation of law in a global context. (University Outcome #3)
5. Demonstrate an understanding of the ethical rules that govern the legal profession. (University Outcome #2)

**GOAL #2 (SKILLS): Learn, practice, and apply the skills and methods that are essential for effective lawyering.**

**HUSL graduates should be able to . . .**

1. Identify and apply strategies to discover and achieve client objectives. (University Outcome #6)
2. Master appropriate strategies and technologies to retrieve, use, and manage research materials and information effectively and efficiently. (University Outcome #4)
3. Comprehend and synthesize the reasoning and rules contained in legal authorities and apply them to a variety of client situations. (University Outcome #6)
4. Communicate effectively in writing and in speaking with diverse audiences in a variety of formal and informal settings. (University Outcome #5)
5. Demonstrate the capacity to understand and appreciate the diverse backgrounds and perspectives of clients, colleagues, adversaries, and others while dealing sensitively and effectively with the issues presented. (University Outcome #3)
6. Advocate, collaborate, and problem-solve effectively in formal and informal dispute resolution processes. (University Outcome #2)

**GOAL #3 (PROFESSIONALISM): Develop the personal attributes, attitudes, and practices befitting an honorable and respected profession.**

**HUSL graduates should be able to . . .**

1. Acquire the knowledge and skills required to competently represent one's clients (see the lists above).
2. Articulate the roles lawyers play in promoting justice, improving the legal profession, and serving the community. (University Outcome #1)
3. Exercise professional decorum consistent with a lawyer's professional responsibilities and leadership roles. (University Outcome #2)
4. Reflect on one's own work and professional development. (University Outcome #7)
5. Engage in effective time management. (University Outcome #4)