

1.4.3 CORE COMPETENCE AND LEARNING OUTCOME SPECIFICATION POLICY

1. Purpose

ADA University has defined essential learning outcomes that serve to guide all teaching and learning activities at the University. Since they are intended to apply to all degree programs, they are by necessity generic in nature. These institutional learning outcomes thus need to be specified on the level of programs and courses, and their gradual achievement will allow students to acquire crucial competencies. The level of student achievement of these program and course learning outcomes must be evaluated according to clearly defined criteria. The purpose of this document is to outline procedures for the specification of learning outcomes, assessment criteria and grade descriptions on the program and course level.

2. Scope and Recommendations

This policy applies to all degree programs and to all courses offered at ADA University.

This document should be read in conjunction with ADA University's *Curriculum and Course Development Policy* and with its *Statement of Core Competencies and Learning Outcomes*.

3. Definitions

Competence is defined as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitude. *Core Competencies* are general statements of qualities that a student is expected to demonstrate upon graduation and in future workplaces, and this regardless of a specific degree program.

Each core competence is specified by a number of learning outcomes. *Learning Outcomes* are more detailed statements of what a student is expected to know, understand and be able to demonstrate upon the completion of a course or degree program. They form the basis of teaching, learning and assessment.

Program Objectives are general statements of the competencies students are expected to have acquired upon graduation. They are based on essential outcome images and core competencies (for details, see ADA University's *Statement of Student Outcome Images* and its *Statement of Core Competencies and Learning Outcomes*).

Curriculum Mapping is a process in which program learning outcomes are specified and sequentially and coherently distributed across the courses of a specific degree program. This process also defines assessment criteria for the evaluation of a student's performance as well as grade descriptions which indicate his/her achievement of specific learning outcomes.

A *Curriculum Map* indicates in which of its courses the program's learning outcomes are taught and assessed.

Assessment Criteria delineate precise requirements for the achievement of learning outcomes. These requirements are clearly defined statements of what a student is expected to demonstrate during or at the end of a process of learning in order to have partly or fully achieved a specific learning outcome. They thus provide detailed guidelines for the evaluation of assessment tasks.

Grade Descriptors are terms that serve to express a student's level of performance in a specific assessment task, course or unit of study (for details, see ADA University's *Student Assessment Regulations*).

Grade Descriptions provide definitions of grade descriptors. Grade descriptions are based on the level on which learning outcomes are achieved. This level of achievement is indicated by the extent to which assessment criteria are fulfilled. The latter presupposes that learning outcomes and assessment methods are aligned (for details, see ADA University's *Student Assessment Regulations*).

A *Grading Rubric* is a scoring guide that allows for the precise evaluation of student performance in a specific assignment. It further specifies (subdivides) grade descriptors and thus explicates the achievement of grade scale percentages and the allocation of grade points.

4. General Procedures

- 4.1 The procedures delineated in this policy tie in with chapters 4.2.d and 4.3.d of the University's *Curriculum and Course Development Policy*.
- 4.2 Responsibility for the specification of core competencies and learning outcomes on the level of programs and courses rests with the faculty of the Schools involved in the delivery of the respective degree program (for further details, see chapter 4.1.b of the University's *Curriculum and Course Development Policy*).
- 4.3 It is the responsibility of Program Directors to ensure that the procedures delineated in this policy are fully implemented and that program objectives, learning outcomes, assessment criteria and grade descriptions are phrased adequately and based on the requirements set forth in this document. This also includes the appropriate distribution of learning outcomes throughout programs.
- 4.4 As established in ADA University's *Statement of Core Competencies and Learning Outcomes*, not all core competencies and learning outcomes need to be represented in each individual course. Yet, each course must reflect them substantially and ensure that the entire process of teaching, learning and assessment is fully aligned with these competencies and outcomes. Courses form part of degree programs, and it is through each program and its coherent structure of courses that the Schools must ensure that competencies and outcomes are comprehensively covered.

5. Curriculum Mapping: The Program Level

- 5.1 When developing a program, the program's objectives must be defined. Program objectives must be geared to and adequately reflect the respective degree program. They must be phrased coherently and be based on the essential outcome images and core competencies set forth in the University's *Statement of Student Outcome Images* and its *Statement of Core Competencies and Learning Outcomes*.
- 5.2 What follows is an example of program objectives for the *Bachelor of Arts in International Studies* that may illustrate the requirements outlined in 5.1.

Program Objectives

The *Bachelor of Arts in International Studies* is a four-year multidisciplinary program that aims to provide students with a broad base of knowledge and skills required to meet the needs of societies, governments and businesses in an ever-changing international context. Students will become thoroughly familiar with diverse world cultures, with major issues of global significance, and with various disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches to the study of international affairs. Graduates of this program will have developed a critical as well as an ethical perspective on international issues and challenges; they will be able to cooperate closely with others in diverse and transcultural contexts; and they will be able to generate innovative solutions to international problems. Graduates will thus be prepared for a successful career in diplomacy, the government, in multinational corporations, as well as in the banking and the educational sectors.

- 5.3 Learning outcomes must be specified for the program. Program learning outcomes must be aligned with and informed by the program's objectives. They must be based on and cover the institutional learning outcomes set forth in the University's *Statement of Core Competencies and Learning Outcomes*.
- 5.4 Program learning outcomes must be phrased so that they are adapted to the program and its subject matter. Each learning outcome must consist of a complete sentence with an active and measurable verb, which is followed by one or several objects (nouns).
- 5.5 When phrasing program learning outcomes, the basic structure of each institutional learning outcome must be preserved. Most particularly, program learning outcomes may not deviate from the verb (or verbs) chosen for institutional learning outcomes. They should, however, adapt the noun (or nouns) to suit the context of the program and to reflect its subject matter.
- 5.6 Learning outcomes are to be distributed sequentially and coherently across the courses of a degree program. The resulting learning outcome distribution should thus allow for a gradual student learning progress and experience. This requires that learning outcomes are phrased on 3 different levels, namely *Introductory (I)*, *Developed (D)*, and *Proficient (P)*. For each institutional learning outcome, this results in one general program learning outcome and its specification on 3 levels.
- 5.7 What follows is an example that may illustrate the procedures and requirements outlined in 5.3 to 5.6. The example applies the institutional learning outcome 3.b that is defined in the University's *Statement of Core Competencies and Learning Outcomes* to the program *Bachelor of Arts in International Studies*.

Institutional Learning Outcome (ILO)	Identify and assess problems and challenges within a multidisciplinary and/or transcultural context.
Program Learning Outcome (PLO)	Identify and assess current political, social and economic problems and challenges within a global context.
Introductory (I)	Identify basic political, social and economic problems and challenges of today's globalized world. Assess these problems while being guided by the teacher.

Developed (D)	Identify essential political, social and economic problems and challenges of today's globalized world more comprehensively. Assess these problems more independently.
Proficient (P)	Comprehensively identify essential political, social and economic problems and challenges of today's globalized world. Assess these problems independently.

- 5.8 The proficient level should reflect the achievement of a learning outcome during or at the end of a program. Schools will thus ensure that the gradual fulfillment of learning outcomes throughout a degree program allows students to achieve all of the program's learning outcomes and acquire all of the University's core competencies upon graduation.
- 5.9 Assessment criteria must be defined for each program learning outcome and its 3 different levels. They must precisely reflect the respective learning outcome and be tailored towards its different levels.
- 5.10 Grade descriptions must be defined for each assessment criterion and for different grade descriptors. They must clearly address the respective assessment criterion and specify the level of student achievement.
- 5.11 What follows is an example that may illustrate the procedures and requirements outlined in 5.9 and 5.10. It proposes (shortened) assessment criteria and grade descriptions for the introductory level of the first part of the program learning outcome used in 5.7.

Assessment Criteria	Grade Description (Excellent)	Grade Description (Good)	Grade Description (Satisfactory)	Grade Description (Poor)	Grade Description (Acad. Fail)
The student names basic problems that were introduced during the course.	All or nearly all of the relevant problems are named.	Most of the relevant problems are named.	Some (more than 50%) of the relevant problems are named.	Some (less than 50%) of the relevant problems are named.	Hardly any or none of the relevant problems are named.
The student describes basic problems that were introduced during the course.	All or nearly all of the relevant problems are described.	Most of the relevant problems are described.	Some (more than 50%) of the relevant problems are described.	Some (less than 50%) of the relevant problems are described.	Hardly any or none of the relevant problems are described.

- 5.12 The program objectives and all the program learning outcomes, assessment criteria and grade descriptions resulting from the procedures delineated in 5.1 to 5.11 must be included in the *Program Description Form* which can be found in Appendix II of ADA University's *Academic Quality Assurance Standards and Guidelines* (also see chapter 4.4. of the University's *Curriculum and Course Development Policy*).

5.13 The procedures and requirements delineated in 5.1 to 5.12 apply both to the development and the modification of degree programs.

6. Development of a Curriculum Map

- 6.1 Once all the components mentioned in 5.12 have been finalized, the program’s curriculum map must be set up. This map will indicate in which of the program’s courses specific learning outcomes are taught and assessed, and on which level: *Introductory (I)*, *Developed (D)*, or *Proficient (P)*. The curriculum map will also indicate the emphasis that each course places on a specific learning outcome: *No Emphasis (-)*, *Some Emphasis (1)*, or *Strong Emphasis (2)*.
- 6.2 The curriculum map must cover all the program’s courses and learning outcomes. It must ensure that the program’s learning outcomes are distributed sequentially and coherently across the courses of the program. Students should thus be able to experience a gradual learning progress across all courses and learning outcomes.
- 6.3 The shortened version of a curriculum map resulting from the procedures and requirements outlined in 6.1 and 6.2 may be illustrated as follows:

Course / PLO	PLO 1	PLO 2	PLO 3	PLO 4	PLO 5
Course 1	I (2)	-	I (1)	I (2)	-
Course 2	-	I (2)	-	D (1)	-
Course 3	I (1)	-	I (2)	-	I (2)
Course 4	D (1)	-	D (1)	D (2)	-
Course 5	-	D (2)	-	P (1)	D (1)

6.4 The curriculum map must be included in the *Program Description Form* referred to above in 5.12.

7. Specification of Learning Outcomes: The Course Level

- 7.1 Program learning outcomes are more specific than institutional learning outcomes, but they are by necessity more general than course learning outcomes since they must cover the entire degree program. Once the curriculum map has been finalized, learning outcomes must thus be further specified for each of the program’s courses.
- 7.2 Course learning outcomes must be based on those defined for the program.
- 7.3 Each course learning outcome must precisely address the context and subject matter of the respective course.
- 7.4 Each course learning outcome must preserve the basic structure of the corresponding program learning outcome. Most particularly, course learning outcomes may not deviate from the verb (or verbs) given in the program learning outcomes. The adjustment of the latter on the level of courses thus requires that the noun (or nouns) is (are) adapted to suit the context of the course and to reflect its subject matter.
- 7.5 Course learning outcomes must precisely reflect the level envisaged in the program’s curriculum map.

- 7.6 The assessment criteria defined on the level of the program must be specified for all course learning outcomes. They must precisely reflect the respective learning outcome and its level.
- 7.7 The grade descriptions defined on the level of the program must be specified for each relevant assessment criterion and for different grade descriptors. They must clearly address the respective assessment criterion and specify the level of student achievement.
- 7.8 The specification of course learning outcomes, assessment criteria and grade descriptions generally follows the pattern described above in chapter 5.
- 7.9 All the course learning outcomes, assessment criteria and grade descriptions resulting from the procedures delineated in 7.1 to 7.8 must be included in the *Course Description Form* which can be found in Appendix II of ADA University's *Academic Quality Assurance Standards and Guidelines* (also see chapter 4.4. of the University's *Curriculum and Course Development Policy*).
- 7.10 Each time a course is being taught, grading rubrics must be developed for each graded assignment by the teacher of the course. The teacher may include grading rubrics in the Course Description prior to the beginning of a course. He/she may alternatively decide to make grading rubrics available to students shortly before assignments. The latter would allow for an adjustment of the assessment process to the learning progress of students.
- 7.11 The procedures and requirements delineated in 7.1 to 7.9 apply both to the development and the modification of courses.

8. Addendum: The School Level

- 8.1 Each School of ADA University must have a clear mission. This mission is a broad and general statement of the School's objectives and thus of the most significant professional and civic competencies that its graduates are expected to have acquired during their studies at that School.
- 8.2 Since School missions are to cover all of the degree programs taught at a School, they are by necessity still more general in nature than program objectives.
- 8.3 School missions are to be aligned with the University's mission, and they are to be based on the essential outcome images and core competencies set forth in the University's *Statement of Student Outcome Images* and its *Statement of Core Competencies and Learning Outcomes*.
- 8.4 What follows is an example of a School mission for the School of Public and International Affairs that may illustrate the requirements outlined in 8.1 to 8.3.

School Mission

Graduates of the School of Public and International Affairs will be highly competent solution providers who possess a global perspective and who will excel on various levels of governance. They will have a thorough understanding of the significance of close cooperation and effective communication in a complex global landscape in which regional, national and international affairs are increasingly interrelated. Graduates of the School will be able to apply their acquired knowledge and skills in an ethical and socially responsible manner to develop innovative solutions to complex national and international problems that serve the public interest.

- 8.5 Responsibility for the development of a School's mission rests with all of that School's (academic and administrative) members. Proposals for the modification of a School's mission may be submitted to the Vice Rector of Academic Affairs by any group of that School's members or by any

member of the senior management of ADA University. Proposals need the approval of (1) the Committee of Faculty Affairs, (2) the Deans' Council, and (3) the University Senate in order to become effective. If accepted by the Senate and approved by the Rector, the proposed modification comes into effect in the academic year following the Senate's approval.