



Why principles for the assessment of student learning?

An important commitment for developing future-focussed academic programming at UCalgary is to advance innovative, authentic, and research-informed approaches to the assessment of student learning (University of Calgary, 2023). Assessment practices greatly impact what, when, and how students learn in higher education (Gibbs & Simpson, 2005). Increased attention has focussed on assessing student learning, especially following what we learned through our teaching and learning experiences during the pandemic (Devlin & Samarawickrema, 2022). Assessment practices are influenced by individual educators, and a myriad of policies, procedures, networks, and supports across the academic community.

Principles for the assessment of student learning provide a framework and foundation to help guide assessment practices, policies, guidelines, procedures, discussions, and decision-making across multiple organization levels. In higher education, these levels are often contextualized at the micro (individual educators), meso (faculties, departments, working groups), macro (institutional) and mega (disciplinary, provincial, national, international) levels (Simmons, 2016; Kenny et al., 2015; Williams et al., 2013). Assessment principles build upon scholarly literature, research-informed practices, and dialogue with faculty, staff, and students across the academic community.

Lindstrom et al. (2017) describe,

...principles are the “big ideas” that transcend specific assessment practices across disciplines and fields of study. They do not prescribe assessment practices in a particular context. Across diverse discipline contexts, guiding principles help us reflect on, critically assess, and have confidence in the effectiveness of a critical dimension of our students’ learning experiences - how we assess their learning. Specific assessment strategies are determined by individual teachers, based on their discipline and teaching expertise” (p.5).

Building upon the work of Stowell (2004), Lindstrom et al. (2017) further summarize that principles can be used: a) to guide the development of assessment procedures and decision-making, b) clarify what meaningful assessment practices look like across multiple contexts, and c) provide inspiration for further reflection and discussion about how assessment can best support student learning, growth and development. The development of principles for the assessment of student learning will provide a guiding foundation for further reflection, dialogue, and decision-making across the University of Calgary. Articulating principles for the assessment of student learning will be a key step in moving forward with the University’s priority in creating future-focussed academic programming and advancing innovative, authentic and research-informed approaches to the assessment of student learning across disciplines.

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