

Student Learning Outcomes and Law School Assessment: A Practical Guide to Measuring Institutional Effectiveness

By Lori E. Shaw & Victoria L. VanZandt. Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press (2015), 215 pages, ISBN: 9781611632668.

Academic institutions have accepted a new role in the educational process. In addition to faculty assessing student work for a course grade, institutions have begun to assess their programs to determine the efficacy of instruction. This new measurement, known as institutional student learning outcome assessment, uses the quality of student outputs as a measure of institutional effectiveness. All accredited law schools are required to have an assessment plan in place under ABA Standards 314 and 315.

This work describes the process beginning with developing institutionally-established learning outcomes, that is, the knowledge, skills, and values that students should be able to demonstrate by the time they graduate. The process continues with devising a means of measuring student achievement with regard to these learning outcomes, then analyzing the data that is being measured. Those results are later applied to improve future student learning. This cycle, the authors suggest, is an approach to tweaking and improving our educational practices to better ensure that we are meeting our institutional goals.

It is a daunting task to be faced with the establishment and carry-through of such a process. This text is a step-by-step guide providing an approach to each phase. From mapping the curriculum, getting buy-in from the parties and establishing support from the administration, to developing assessment projects and analyzing the data, the book is filled with tables, charts, lists, sample language, ideas for assessment projects, and real-life examples. While it is impossible to eliminate the time commitment that developing assessment projects will have on a law school and its faculty, this text provides a model for schools to follow in order to streamline the process and yet ensure that the coverage is comprehensive and in line with accreditation principles.

Reviewed by Debora Person, Associate Director, George William Hopper Law Library, University of Wyoming College of Law, in 2016.