St. John's School of Law

Programmatic Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan

2025-2030

Introduction

This assessment plan is a revised plan following the completion of our previous assessment plan as laid out in the Programmatic Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan 2016-2023. This plan continues a process we previously designed for the ongoing assessment at St. John's School of Law. This plan will commence in the Fall of 2025.

Overview of Assessment

As used in this assessment plan, "assessment" refers to a process of (1) defining student learning outcomes ("SLOs") for a course, course cluster, department, or degree program; (2) measuring whether students are achieving the identified SLOs; (3) analyzing the results; and (4) using the results to "close the loop" by making changes in teaching or curricular design. It is an ongoing process designed to improve student learning and demonstrate the "value add" of an education. At the course level, faculty should use assessment information to improve how they teach.

The SLOs identified in this assessment plan are for the juris doctor degree program. Assessment will proceed in year-long cycles. At the beginning of a cycle, the Teaching Learning and Assessment Committee will identify one or two SLOs to be studied in the cycle. Then evidence of student learning for those outcomes will be collected from at least three sources. The findings will be reported, and the data will be used to recommend changes to improve outcomes further. After a few years of assessment, all SLOs will have been assessed, and the process can begin again.

Regulatory Background

In 2014, the ABA Council on Legal Education—the national accrediting body for the J.D. recognized by the Department of Education—adopted sweeping changes to the Standards and Rules of Procedure for Approval of Law Schools. The changes were the result of a 7-year process led by a special committee. The committee recommended adoption of an outcomes-based philosophy after review of relevant research on higher education and study of regional and professional accrediting body practices. With the adoption of this approach, the ABA's Standards and Rules use outcomes and assessment as the driving forces behind the accreditation process. The standards were designed to ensure that the outcome measures and assessment methodologies that schools develop will improve their legal education programs and better serve the needs of their students.[1]

ABA Standard 315 requires the dean and faculty of a law school to "conduct ongoing evaluation of the law school's program of legal education, learning outcomes, and assessment methods." The law school is to "use the results of this evaluation to determine the degree of student attainment of competency in the learning outcomes and to make appropriate changes to improve the curriculum."[2]

While the ABA process was being deployed, in late 2015, the New York Court of Appeals proposed adoption of a new skills requirement for admission to the bar that was adopted after a brief notice and comment period. The rule provides for several pathways in which an applicant can show that he or she has the requisite skills to practice law. Most relevant is the first such pathway, which provides that applicants show a certification from the law school that (1) the school has an assessment plan in place, which is publicly available and that identifies and incorporates into the curriculum the skills and values that the law school believes are required for competent and ethical participation in the profession, as required by ABA Standard 302(b), (c), and (d), and (2) the applicant has acquired sufficient competency in those skills and sufficient familiarity with those values.[3]

Additionally, as part of a University accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, Middle States' Standard V requires that we have clearly stated learning outcomes and organized and systematic assessments.[4]

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[1] Managing Director's Guidance Memo, June 2015
[2] ABA Standards and Rules of Procedure 2024-2025
[3] 22 N.Y.C.R.R. § 520.18.
[4] Middle States Standards for Accreditation 14th ed.

Additional Considerations

Beyond the regulatory requirements, this assessment plan aims to reflect the goals and values of the law school as stated in our mission statement. The Law School's Mission Statement indicates that St. John's Law seeks to:

a) Provide access to an excellent legal education for all people, especially those lacking economic, physical, or social advantages
b) Maintain and strengthen our commitment to rigorous teaching, scholarly research, and innovative application of knowledge
c) Sustain and foster an equitable, inclusive, and anti-racist community of diverse experiences and perspectives, emphasizing respect for the rights and dignity of every person
d) Inspire civic engagement, including inquiry into the causes of injustice and the search for adaptable, effective, and concrete solutions to these problems
e) Enhance student learning to empower graduates with the knowledge, skills, and values required for successful leadership in the local, national, and global legal profession.

In revising the 2016 Assessment Plan, we were also informed by our experiences implementing that plan over the past nine years. We considered the following:

- The need to update learning objectives to reflect recent developments in the legal profession, particularly technological advancements
- The need to include recommended assessment methods to streamline the assessment process
- The need to rework some learning objectives to avoid confusion and repetition
- The need to include recommendations for the makeup and function of the Teaching, Learning, and Assessment Committee

Goals of the Institutional Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan

This assessment plan has the following purposes:

1. To strengthen this Law School's program of legal education by gathering data about student learning, analyzing the data to determine whether students are achieving the identified learning outcomes, and adopting changes to respond to identified problem areas.
2. To articulate an effective, workable, faculty-driven, and efficient process to assess student learning outcomes at an institutional level over a 5-year

period (a revised timeline based on a recent ABA proposal[5] and our experience implementing the 2016 assessment plan).

3. To identify the roles of faculty and relevant administrators in conducting institutional assessment.
4. To demonstrate compliance with the ABA's requirement that every accredited Law School has a publicly available assessment plan.
5. To provide students with a certification that they have the requisite skills and values under 22 N.Y.C.R.R. § 520.18 that the Law School has identified as important to the practice of law.
6. To demonstrate compliance with Standard V of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

Learning Outcomes for the Juris Doctor Degree

The learning outcomes in this Assessment Plan reflect the requirements in ABA Standard 302 (Learning Outcomes) and the Law School's Mission Statement. We have additionally considered the goals of the NextGen Bar exam and the curriculum requirements in ABA Standard 303.

ABA Standard 302 requires that the law school's learning outcomes include, at a minimum, the following:

a) Knowledge and understanding of substantive and procedural law;
b) Legal analysis and reasoning, legal research, problem-solving, and written and oral communication in the legal context;
c) Exercise of proper professional and ethical responsibilities to clients and the legal system; and
d) Other professional skills needed for competent and ethical participation as a member of the legal profession.

In drafting this assessment plan, we are aware that New York has adopted the NextGen Bar exam, which will be administered beginning in 2028. The NextGen Bar Exam is designed to test "a broad range of foundational lawyering skills, utilizing a focused set of clearly identified fundamental legal concepts and principles needed in today's practice of law."[6] These skills include "legal research, legal writing, issue spotting and analysis, investigation and evaluation, client

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[5] The ABA Recommended Revisions to Standard 315 published in July 2024. The proposed revision would require a law school to "review, and if appropriate, revise its programmatic learning outcomes at least every five years, based on information about developments in practice, such as insights obtained from its graduates and their employers." (Standards Committee Memo, July 31, 2024).
[6] NCBE January 8, 2025 Press Release

counseling and advising, negotiation and dispute resolution, client relationship and management."[7]

The learning outcomes were also developed to include assessment of the recent additions to the law school curriculum indicated in ABA Standards 303(b) and 303(c). Standard 303(b) requires a law school to provide opportunities for, among other things, "the development of a professional identity." Standard 303(c) requires a law school to "provide education to law students on bias, cross-cultural competency, and racism."

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[7] *Id.*

Learning Outcomes and Performance Indicators for the Juris Doctor Degree

Learning Outcomes	Performance Indicators	Possible measures
Upon conferral of the Juris Doctor degree, students will be able to:	Students demonstrate they have achieved this outcome by:	
1. Demonstrate understanding of substantive and procedural law.	Identifying and applying concepts of law in foundational courses, core areas, and other areas as reflected by our curricular offerings. Identifying and understanding how the law evolves. Identifying legal issues and applying relevant law to a novel set of facts.	• Exam performance in representative first-year and core classes • Formative assessment performance • Bar passage (as a limited value data point) • Exam performance in statutory rule-based courses (e.g. Evidence and Civil Procedure)
2. Demonstrate competency in legal practice skills.	Developing an effective and appropriate legal research strategy. Demonstrating the ability to develop a case planning strategy. Demonstrating the ability to conduct a factual investigation. Demonstrating proficiency in interviewing, counseling, and alternative dispute resolution. Locating, analyzing, and synthesizing primary and secondary sources relevant to the legal issue at hand.	• Fact investigation can include students' ability to identify relevant facts, sources of information, or methods of obtaining information. Courses that could provide assessment data include Clinics, Externship Seminar, ADR • Interviewing, counseling, and negotiating could include students' ability to develop rapport, be guided by client's interests, and weigh advantages

	Applying the relevant legal rules to the legally significant facts and drawing appropriate conclusions based on clients' interests and goals.	and disadvantages and convey that to clients • Legal research can include assessment of information literacy. Formative and summative assessment performance in courses that require legal research skills (Basic Research, Clinic, Scholarly Research & Writing, Adv. Legal Research)
3. Communicate effectively in both written and oral form.	Drafting and editing documents that objectively analyze a legal problem. Drafting and editing documents designed to persuade a reader. Drafting and editing documents that create legal rights and obligations. In oral and written communications, communicating in a clear, concise, and effective manner. In all documents, employing rules of grammar, spelling, and citation. Making persuasive oral arguments or presentations.	• Review samples of the final brief by 1L students in Legal Writing II against a common rubric • Entry and exit tests in Core Grammar • Review of communication skills by students in upper-level practical writing course against a common rubric • Relevant LSSSE evaluations • Review of communication skills in transactional documents

4. Engage with legal concepts at a scholarly level.	Communicating an argument on an issue of law or legal policy. Researching, locating, analyzing, and engaging with scholarship on the topic. Citing and attributing the words and ideas of others properly.	• ASWR course assessments
5. Fulfill professional and ethical responsibilities to clients and the legal system.	Demonstrating awareness of cultural differences that may impact representation of one's clients, the legal profession, and the legal system. Identifying the history, goals, structures, values, and responsibilities of the legal profession. Identifying and applying rules of professional conduct for attorneys. Understanding the importance of assisting the underserved with their unmet legal needs and providing at least 50 hours of pro bono service during Law School. Demonstrating awareness of the role of structural inequities, including structural racism, in the legal system.	• Identify faculty methods for introducing anti-racism, etc. (See ABA interpretation 303-6) • Identify curricular opportunities for professional identity formation, anti-racism, and cultural awareness • Review student reflections from courses focused on professional identity formation (like Professionalism)

Curriculum Map

The last curriculum mapping survey was distributed to faculty in April 2016. The survey asked faculty to identify which learning outcomes they cover in their courses and whether they employed any assessment tools to measure student competency in those outcomes. A similar survey will be distributed in April 2025, and the results will be available for use in future assessments following the guidance and requirements of this assessment plan.

Additionally, in the Spring 2024 semester, a survey was distributed to faculty to determine the extent to which they covered professional identity formation, bias, cross-cultural competency, and anti-racism in their courses and whether they assessed student competency in any of these areas. This survey was designed to determine the extent to which we comply with ABA Standards 303(b) and (c) but will be helpful in implementing assessment of the learning outcomes in this plan.

Implementation Phase: Overview and Roles

Assessment is not the function of one committee, office, or person. Instead, it is a responsibility of the entire faculty. This plan envisions that the Teaching, Learning, and Assessment Committee will play a leading role in coordinating our institutional assessment activities. However, the entire faculty is responsible for providing rubrics, data, and information to the Committee upon request for assessment of the stated learning objectives.

During each year of this plan, the Teaching, Learning, and Assessment Committee will (1) assess a learning outcome based on a plan developed in the previous year, (2) monitor progress with implementing a prior year's "closing the loop" recommendations, (3) report on assessment activities and results to the Faculty Council, and (4) develop a plan for the following year's assessment activities.

At the beginning of each academic year, the appointed Teaching, Learning, and Assessment Committee should be divided into teams, with different teams assigned to (1) assess a learning outcome, (2) close the loop on prior recommendations, and (3) plan the following year's assessment. The Associate Dean for Assessment and Accreditation, who serves as chair of the committee, will assign committee members to teams considering member expertise, interest, and input.

To function effectively in carrying out this plan, the Teaching, Learning, and Assessment Committee should have at least 9 members, not including the Associate Dean for Assessment and Accreditation. Committee members will serve three-year

staggered terms. It is anticipated that every faculty member will serve at least once on the Committee during two five-year cycles.

Annual Cycle

August: The Dean appoints members to the TLA Committee, and the Associate Dean for Assessment and Accreditation assigns Committee members to teams.

September: The teams begin work according to their assigned tasks: (1) refining the assessment plan developed by the TLA Committee the year before; (2) developing follow-up criteria to close-the-loop on a prior assessment; and (3) considering what assessment methodologies to use for the next year's assessment and what information we may need to gather.

September/October: The team assessing the learning outcome for this academic year finalizes the direct and indirect measures it will use to collect data and develop rubrics, surveys, or other instruments as necessary.

October/November: The learning outcome assessment team collects data. The "close the loop" team monitors what actions and recommendations were implemented from the prior assessment, documents them, and considers any follow-up assessment of their effectiveness.

December/January/February: The learning outcome assessment team analyzes the results and delivers a brief, written report to the full TLA Committee.

February/March: The team assigned to design an assessment plan for the learning outcome to be assessed in the following year identifies recommended assessment tools, courses, and methodologies.

March: TLA Committee reviews reports from the learning outcome assessment team and makes recommendations to "close the loop." Recommendations may be directed to administrative departments, faculty committees, the Faculty Council, or the Dean. TLA Committee also reviews the report from the "close the loop" team and the recommendations from the team designing the assessment plan for the following year.

April: Associate Dean for Assessment and Accreditation delivers annual report on assessment to the Faculty Council. TLA Committee reviews assessment process and proposes modifications if necessary.

Assessment Timeline

Learning Outcome/Year	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30
1. Demonstrate understanding of substantive and procedural law.	Collect & analyze data, propose recommend-ations	Follow-up			Plan
2. Demonstrate competency in legal practice skills.	Plan	Collect & analyze data, propose recommend-ations	Follow-up		
3. Communicate effectively in both written and oral form.		Plan	Collect & analyze data, propose recommend-ations	Follow-up	
4. Engage with legal concepts at a scholarly level.			Plan	Collect & analyze data, propose recommend-ations	Follow-up
5. Fulfill professional and ethical responsibilities to clients and the legal system.	Follow-up			Plan	Collect & analyze data, propose recommend-ations

Conducting Assessment

Before each annual cycle, the TLA Committee will create a working plan for assessment of the learning outcome identified for the following year. The purpose is to create a rough draft of plans that the assessment team can use to gather and analyze the data. This draft plan should identify potential data and how it may be collected and analyzed. The assessment team is free to change the plan as necessary.

For each learning outcome assessed, the assessment team must use at least three measures, at least two of which are "direct" ones, and triangulate the results. A direct assessment measure is based on students' actual work; typically, a sample of student work is evaluated against a rubric. The advantage of direct measures is

that they involve examples of what students have actually produced, which tend to be the strongest evidence of learning. In contrast, indirect measurements are based on reports of perceived learning. It is preferable to examine work product that is already being created as part of course-level assessment, rather than creating a new exam or project to be administered solely for the purpose of programmatic assessment.

Examples of Measures of Student Learning	
Direct Measures	**Indirect Measures**
Review of samples of exam answers against a common rubric	Surveys of students
Review of samples of papers against a common rubric	Surveys of faculty, alumni, employers
Entry/exit tests	Student evaluations of teaching
Capstone projects/experiences coupled with ratings/evaluations	Law School Survey of Student Engagement results
Embedded questions in exams	Placement rates
Videos of skills exercises, such as oral arguments, client interviews, or negotiations	Grades earned in appliable courses
Bar exam results	Focus groups
Portfolios	Retention and graduation rates

Assessment data will be analyzed and reported in an aggregated fashion. Identifiable student information will be redacted. Since the purpose of assessment is not to evaluate individual faculty members, assessment data should also, to the extent feasible, not identify the faculty members who taught the students whose data is being analyzed.

Results and Reports

The TLA Committee and assessment teams will keep minutes and document findings. The TLA Committee will submit a report of findings and recommendations for the assessment and "close the loop" follow-up to the full faculty. The report should be saved in a shared drive for accessibility and documentation.

Evaluating the Assessment Process

In accordance with ABA Standard 315, the TLA Committee is charged with conducting an ongoing evaluation of the assessment process at this Law School. It will report, on at least an annual basis, progress under this plan, recommending changes to the learning outcomes or assessment process.

Amendments to this Assessment Plan

The Faculty Council defers to the TLA Committee to amend this plan as necessary.