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## UNSW Integrated Curriculum Framework

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### Issue

How can UNSW enhance current approaches to program and course design and quality assurance to support the realisation of its 2025 vision for learning and teaching?

### Background

UNSW 2025 articulates the need to design a distinctive education model that will position UNSW as a leader in educational innovation to support academic excellence. Central to the model is to design and develop an integrated blended, face-to-face and digital learning environment.

UNSW's current *Learning and Teaching Strategy 2014-2018*, informed by AQF<sup>1</sup>, states that all programs and courses aspire to be outcomes-focussed (commonly referred to as 'outcomes-based'). Outcomes-based learning is premised on demonstrable learning outcomes that can be systematically assessed. Articulated links between various components of the program and its courses underpins the outcomes-based approach. The learning environment in courses includes resources, activities, support and evaluation mechanisms that facilitate students moving towards achieving the learning outcomes, with ongoing feedback and assessment to determine how well student performance meets the standards in relation to the learning outcomes (Biggs, 2014).

The outcomes-based approach is the basis behind various curriculum reform initiatives across UNSW over the years, such as curriculum mapping, embedding graduate capabilities, standards-based assessment, etc. This approach has been broadly adopted at UNSW but now needs to be systematically embedded in UNSW learning and teaching policies, academics guidelines and business processes and procedures.

Learning is most effective when it is guided by clear expectations, academic standards and an integrated curriculum, where the various components of the program and courses are identified and linked (Biggs, 2014). Consistency of alignment between programs and courses has implications for UNSW student' experiences. For instance, students interviewed as part of the UNSW Student Voice project indicated that in less vocationally oriented programs students had difficulty conceptualising the program they were undertaking (Vigentini & Zhao, 2013).

There is, at present, a lack of consistency in curriculum terminology used across UNSW. For example, terms such as "graduate outcomes", "graduate attributes", "graduate capabilities" are used interchangeably in a range of documents. Similarly, "student learning outcomes", "course learning outcomes", "learning objectives", "course objectives" are also often used interchangeably.

### Discussion

Any solution to these issues need to address two **key needs**:

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Australian Qualifications Framework - <http://www.aqf.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/AQF-2nd-Edition-January-2013.pdf>

1. a baseline Integrated Curriculum Framework to guide clear alignment of teaching, learning and assessment activities with the learning outcomes and graduate capabilities at the program and course levels, to be used in relevant policies, academic management systems, curriculum and review documents
2. a set of standard terms to describe the curriculum structure

## 1. Integrated Curriculum Framework

The purpose of the Integrated Curriculum Framework is to draw attention to the importance of the standardized connections between key components of the curriculum and how these connections assist in the development of effective programs and courses that can be quality assured. The Integrated Curriculum Framework (Figure 1) identifies core components and the interrelationships between these components.

 UNSW Integrated Curriculum Framework

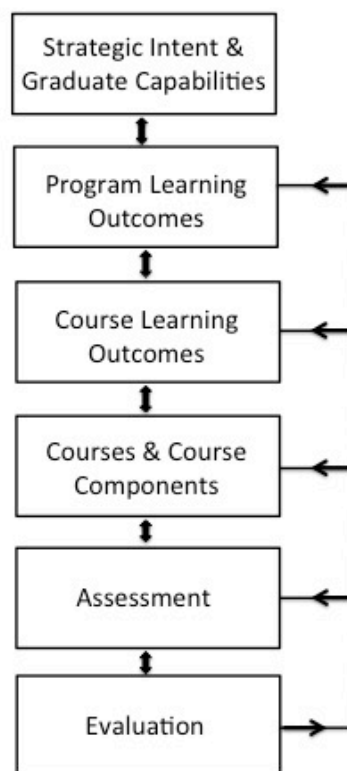


Figure 1: UNSW Integrated Curriculum Framework

In developing the curriculum, a common starting point is to identify an overall rationale for the degree, followed by writing Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) and examining how these incorporate the university's strategic intent and graduate capabilities. The PLOs prescribe the knowledge, skills, attributes and practices of a program. The PLOs incorporate the graduate capabilities, which identify the university's expectations that all UNSW students should achieve a set of generic abilities and skills on graduation. Once PLOs are defined, Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs) are developed, with each CLO articulating clear links to one or more PLO. At the course level, each course may well have links to some but not all Graduate Capabilities as these are associated with the totality of student learning experiences across the years of their study at UNSW. Once the CLOs are defined, the course components and assessments are developed, again articulating clear links between each component and aligned with the CLOs. Once courses are taught and students have been assessed, an evaluation process can be

undertaken, providing data on the degrees of success students have in achieving the CLOs and PLOs set. The evaluation data can also be used to support the assessment of the effectiveness of the courses and the program with students evidencing achievement of the generic graduate capabilities.

## 2. Standard terms to describe the curriculum structure

Standard terms to describe the curriculum structure are used to describe the components within the Integrated Curriculum Framework:

- **UNSW Strategic Intent** establishes the institution's aspirations, and broadly defines what students may expect to experience when undertaking an UNSW program or one of its courses.
- **Graduate Capabilities (GCs)** are the *generic* knowledge, skills, attributes and practices that students are required to develop and evidence during and on completion of their studies. They are common for all programs and are integrated into Program Learning Outcomes.
- **Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)** prescribe the specific knowledge, skills, attributes and practices, including GCs that students need to demonstrate in completing a program.
- **Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)** prescribe the knowledge, skills, attributes and practices that students need to demonstrate to complete a specific course or courses within a designated program. CLOs articulate with PLOs.
- **Courses & Course Components** comprise a combination of resources, student activities, support, feedback and evaluation required for the full achievement of the CLOs, the PLOs and the GCs.
- **Assessments** evidence actual learning outcomes and capabilities achieved by the student. Assessment methods can be both formative and summative and are designed to ensure progress in all learning outcomes can be demonstrated and verified.
- **Evaluation** reviews: the effectiveness of courses/programs in developing the graduate capabilities and PLOs; the level of coherence between the courses/program's educational design and the principles inherent in the outcomes-based Integrated Curriculum Framework; the quality of teaching in the courses/program; and students' learning outcomes and experiences.

## Recommendations

In light of the needs outlined above, **it is recommended that** UNSW's solution to the problem: "How can UNSW enhance current approaches to program and course design and quality assurance to support the realisation of its 2025 vision for learning and teaching?"

1. UNSW adopt the Integrated Curriculum Framework, outlined in Figure 1.
2. UNSW Integrated Curriculum Framework is used to support academic program reviews to analyse the curriculum, and to rationalise the alignment between programs and courses.
3. UNSW Integrated Curriculum Framework is embedded in AIMS and other relevant academic and student administration systems as well as in program and course outline

templates and other relevant curriculum documents that communicate academic expectations to students.

4. UNSW adopts standard terms used to describe key curriculum components, outlined in this paper.

## References

Biggs, J. (2014). Constructive alignment in university teaching. *HERDSA Review of Higher Education*, Vol 1, 5-22.

Vigentini, L. & Zhao, C. (2013). *CATIE Aims and specifications*. University of New South Wales, Learning and Teaching Unit.

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