

UH Mānoa Institutional Learning Objectives FAQs

1. UH Mānoa Faculty Senate has now approved the Institutional Learning Objectives (ILOs) proposed last academic year. Now what?

A working group has been tasked with identifying how we meet these objectives and how we will assess whether students are meeting the performance standards set out in the ILOs.

All universities accredited by WASC must develop institutional learning objectives for undergraduate education and develop a plan for implementation and assessment. These learning objectives encompass the whole student experience and include those things we believe students should know, value and be able to do upon completion of a bachelor's degree from UH Mānoa. Importantly, they are meant to be achieved by the whole of a student's experience at UH Mānoa, not merely by completing coursework.

This is an opportunity for the campus to understand student learning at the institutional level—the comprehensive view of what students learn and what we think they should know upon leaving UHM.

2. How does UHM currently meet the objectives?

The ILO implementation committee is mapping how UHM already provides students with educational experiences that meet our institutional learning objectives. We believe that we provide students with the opportunities necessary to acquire these skills and to be exposed to the things we value as an institution. However, we have not yet developed a process where we can identify and assess how we meet our learning objectives. The goal is to make our learning objectives more visible to students, faculty, and those involved in the accreditation process.

3. There are a thousand different classes, a thousand different paths through the University—how do we assure that a student is able to meet the ILOs?

We of course don't have to look at 100% of the students, but instead demonstrate there is the possibility that all students have access to developing the skills, values, and knowledge that UHM as a whole find to be important. While each student may choose a different path, it should be possible to map how through a combination of general education, extracurricular activities, the major, living on campus, and working with advisers, in other words, through the entire educational experience as a whole, students can achieve the learning outcomes defined in the ILOs.

For example, critical thinking is widely understood as a valuable skill for our students. How we understand and measure critical thinking is more difficult, but can be done by looking at courses taught in departments involving critical thinking skills, as well as asking students for examples of such work.

4. Does our department have to address every ILO?

No. Because the ILOs encompass the UH Mānoa experience as a whole—academic and co-curricular—it is understood that any specific department may not address all the ILOs. It is through the combined efforts of general education, the major, electives, and co-curricular programs that students are afforded opportunities to meet ILOs.

However, departments should use the ILOs as a guide in conjunction with departmental SLOs to better understand what students are learning and which of the ILOs would require a higher level of mastery beyond general education for the department.

5. How do we show that the University is meeting the ILOs?

This is the big question and the reason why the ILO Implementation Committee exists. Now that we have ILOs in place, we need to develop ways to determine if we are meeting them. We need the help of all UH Mānoa community members to create qualitative and valuable methods of determining if our undergraduate students are learning what we think they ought to be learning.

6. What is the difference between an ILO, PLO, SLO?

Institutional Learning Objectives (ILOs) are those skills, values, ideas, and qualities that the University as a whole believes are important for future graduates of UH Mānoa. Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) are those things each specific program finds important for their graduates to have mastered while in the program. Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) are those course-related objectives that a specific course is designed to teach. There is clearly an overlap between these types of objectives as well the course-based objectives that build to create the larger institutional objectives.

7. Who came up with these ILOs?

A faculty working group constituted by the Mānoa Faculty Senate produced a set of draft ILOs in 2011/2012. These were approved by the Faculty Senate on May 2, 2012.

8. At the Faculty Senate meeting it was clear that the faculty endorse learning objectives but are not in favor of learning outcomes. What is the difference between an outcome and an objective?

For WASC, this language is used interchangeably. However, it is important to note that while we as a faculty are very interested in providing a quality learning environment for students and ensuring that what we teach matches our stated objectives, not all students will achieve these objectives to the same degree. Thus, any measure of outcomes must recognize that students have a responsibility to participate in their education. Faculty can only present a quality learning environment but only students participating in their own learning can achieve a given outcome.

It is important to note that faculty groups, and not external organizations, retain control for assessing the extent to which students have achieved the ILOs. Faculty will use assessment results to improve the undergraduate experience.

9. I think ILOs are meaningless; why should we care?

Outcomes-based learning cannot be the be-all and end-all of a university education, especially given that at the end of the day it is up to students to participate in their own learning. However, ILOs can provide a space within which we can think collectively about what we believe ought to be learned while at college and it can help frame the future directions in which we would like to see education move. Faculty can now use the ILOs as a guide to inform student learning activities and make the learning outcomes for our students more visible and clear.

10. The general education requirements cover all the ILOs, so why do majors have to do this too?

The Committee has indeed found that the vast majority of ILOs can be found in the general education requirements. However, these ILOs should be important enough that more than a freshman level of mastery is accomplished by students. These decisions can and should be made in conversations with departments. Thus, not all departments require senior-level mastery of math. However, many departments wish to ensure that their students have sufficient quantitative reasoning so that they can read a basic chart or understand the way data is communicated.