



West Texas A&M University (WTAMU) is a proud institution that seeks to produce college graduates that are capable of finding gainful employment and living civic minded lives in the Texas Panhandle and further into a globally connected society. These are the outcomes that institutions of higher learning seek to convey on an annual basis. The way that said outcomes are reached, however, are not uniform and in fact are constantly in flux.

Understanding what learning improvement looks like in higher education is a process in which educators attempt to integrate new components of learning each year in an effort to enhance these student outcomes. A Student Learning Outcome (SLO) is an expectation, as opposed to a goal which pertains to something hoped for. Such a distinction is important to understand and incorporate into the learning environment of students with future aspirations in a work-minded society.

During the 2022-23 Academic Year, the Provost commissioned the Assessment and Assurance of Learning Award presented at the annual WTAMU Academic Affairs Faculty and Staff Awards. It is a way to reward top performers for their efforts to improve student learning at the program level. The award for 2021-22 was given to the Department of Life, Earth, & Environmental Sciences (LEES). The department includes the following programs:

- Environmental Science BS
- Environmental Science MS
- Biology BA/BS
- Biology MS
- Wildlife Biology BA

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While maintaining 5 to 8 outcomes in each program, the department has designed a three-year schedule for analysis of outcomes. These are analyzed, two outcomes at a time for that three-year period in the following ways to:

- 1) Observe and analyze,
- 2) Build action plans to motivate change,
- 3) Seek measurable improvement based on said changes.

Measures assessed in each program included a variety of methods including exams, written papers, case studies, scientific collections, and other projects.

100% of the department’s programs achieved assessment requirements including:

- Completion of **ALL** assessment reporting and Improvement Narratives. (All Programs-Base Expectation).
- Clearly written Student Learning Outcomes that are properly structured to detail what a student WILL be able to do upon graduation. (Minimum two outcomes, see [Assessment workbook](#)).
- Multiple measures of learning outcomes that include a description, a stated methodology, an acceptable benchmark (70% or above of student participants at minimum), findings that offer an analysis for understanding, and indicate improvement is taking place and/or being sought in coming cycles. (Minimum two measures per outcome).
- Stated plan for assessment of outcomes during the 2021-22 Cycle.
- Positives and challenges with stated outcomes are discussed in the narrative.
- An action plan for the 2022-23 Cycle was written with discussion of specific courses and/or assignments detailed for assessment.
- Sufficient findings were recorded in all measures. In total for the entire department, there were 39 measures analyzed for the 2021-22 assessment cycle, an average of 8 per program, and 4 per outcome.

As with all programs and departments on the WT campus, there is and always will be changes that can be made to foster improvement on an annual basis. However, the efforts of this department exceed all others on campus for the 2021-22 assessment cycle.

There will be a new recipient of this award for the 2022-23 academic year. No program can win this award in successive years, but the LEES program has set an impressive bar for all other departments moving forward. Ultimately, and most importantly, WTAMU improved a little more in the past year and it will be exciting to see that improvement grow in the years ahead!