

## Editorial

### “Learning outcomes: to be or not to be”

Why spend time on developing learning outcomes? Will learning outcomes make me a better instructor? Do learning outcomes truly impact the curriculum in a course or program? These and other questions have been raised globally by faculty during the process of developing and assessing learning outcomes in higher education. The skepticism stems from the wide belief that the learning outcomes initiatives are more about accountability and accreditation than about improvement of student learning. True, learning outcomes do have their conspicuous place in accreditation and self-study endeavors; nevertheless, they also have their value in the curriculum reform movement in many colleges and universities. The argument of some skeptics addresses assessment of student performance as being done with or without learning outcomes, a system they refer to as grading. Right, yet the assessment of learning outcomes does not disparage the instructors' grading or underestimate its role in improving student learning; rather the instructor can employ his/her grading procedures to verify the extent to which students have attained his/her set expectations, i.e. set learning outcomes; hence, different grading procedures and assessment of learning outcomes provide data on student learning and performance. The skeptics further question the merits of the complicated method of analyzing complex academic data generated from assessing learning outcomes. Understandably, assessment of learning outcomes can get complicated and messy; with time and experience, it could shift into a sophisticated way for presenting evidence on how to improve student learning and reflect on existing curricula for the purpose of quality teaching and learning. In a student centered approach, learning outcomes give students the role of being active players in their learning process; they are clear about what to expect in terms of learning and assessment. In conclusion, learning outcomes will continue to create a collegial dialogue among faculty in higher education raising the dilemma of: to be or not to be, to stay or to stray, to do or to boo?

*By Dr. Amal BouZeineddine, CTL Associate Director*

## Why does teaching matter to me?

I had a professor who inspired me. She taught me: “out of nothing comes nothing” and that there is value in searching for the origins of opinions. This idea was both humbling and inspirational and it really captures why teaching matters to me. Teaching is about learning about roots, being keen to contemplate the new and old, being open to learning from all people, and opening possibilities to the once unfathomable. We each have a place in this ongoing chain of “somethingness” – but we have to decide what role we will play. Teaching matters because we are all infinitely linked.

*Charlotte M. Karam, PhD; Winner of the AUB Teaching Excellence Award, 2011-2012*

I always thought that my passion for teaching is because of the great role models I had: my teachers. Today, some of my previous and current students attending the Middle East Medical Assembly were presenting, discussing, and commenting on the subject of Social Medicine and Global Health, advocating for the poor, the de-marginalized, and the disadvantaged. Listening to their concerns, seeing the great work they are involved in, and feeling their enthusiasm, passion, empathy and devotion, made me realize that it is because of such wonderful human beings that teaching matters to me: my students!

*Mona Nabulsi, MD, MS, Professor of Clinical Pediatrics; Winner of the AUB Teaching Excellence Award, 2011-2012*

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## Teaching Excellence Award

The purpose of the Teaching Excellence Award is to honor and recognize individuals who have exhibited excellence in teaching at the American University of Beirut. By recognizing such individuals, the University demonstrates its commitment to teaching as a scholarly endeavor, emphasizes the importance of outstanding teaching, and provides incentives for faculty members to pursue activities which could enhance their abilities as teachers. The award is based on evidence of teaching effectiveness and contributions to advancement of AUB's educational programs as implied by the teaching mission of AUB. The Award was established in academic year 2002-2003 and since then two faculty members receive the award annually. This Year's award winners are **Dr. Miran Jaffa**, Assistant Professor of Biostatistics, Department of Epidemiology and Population Health, Faculty of Health Sciences, and **Dr. Arafat Tfyli**, Associate Professor of Clinical Medicine, Department of Internal Medicine, Faculty of Medicine.

## Program and Course Learning Outcomes Assessment Process in General Education

In order to ensure that students are achieving the ultimate goals of the general education program, a three-year General Education (GE) program assessment plan was prepared and implemented starting Fall 2010-2011. Direct and indirect assessment methods were used to measure the level of achievement of learning outcomes. As direct assessment tools, rubrics were used since they constitute a clear, objective and transparent measurement tools by which student performance can be assessed. They allow the measurement of student performance by assessing whether a student is able to meet

or exceed the expectations of each rubric item. Some GE rubrics were adapted from VALUE rubrics developed by the Association of American Colleges and Universities while others were developed by faculty experts. These rubrics were used to assess responses to embedded questions and essays in a number of selected GE courses in different areas. Results of rubrics were collected by the GE assessment officer at the end of the grading period where they were formatted, summarized, and analyzed.

Some learning outcomes were difficult to assess directly in a specific GE course. For example, the ethics learning outcome was difficult to assess in one course taken by most AUB students. Therefore, an Ethics Exam was developed and reviewed by faculty experts, distributed and answered anonymously by two cohorts of junior and senior students. The average results were low and no improvement was noticed in the results between junior and senior students. It was apparent that ethics education needs to be improved in the curriculum.

Other direct measures used in assessing GE learning outcomes included the results of the standardized exam CAAP which is administered by OIRA while indirect assessment measures included selected questions from the College Outcomes Survey and Exit Survey also administered annually by OIRA. Strengths and weaknesses were identified in GE learning outcomes and an action plan was prepared and will be used for improvement. Data analysis and recommendations were shared with the General Education Committee.

*By Dania Salem, General Education Assessment Officer*

## Teaching Portfolio: A Requirement for Promotion at AUB

According to AUB's mission statement, AUB is committed to provide excellence in education. In line with the mission, the promotion criteria are based on three central pillars: Research, Teaching, and Service. In keeping the bar high to achieve excellence, the promotion portfolio serves as the foundation document for evidence-based assessment of a faculty member's merit toward promotion to the next rank or renewal of contract. For research, a triangulation of documents is considered, i.e. the candidate's research statement, publications and external reviews are considered to assure assessment of the faculty member's performance. For teaching, however, recent changes in the promotion criteria rendered the submission of a teaching portfolio optional and only a teaching statement and ICE scores are used to assess the faculty member's teaching effectiveness. It is my strong conviction that if we want to live up to the standards set by the mission, a faculty member has an obligation to offer evidence that s/he is an efficient teacher, is attempting to improve his/her teaching effectiveness, is staying abreast with current approaches and new technologies in teaching and learning, and is reflecting on his/her teaching in an effort to improve student learning. Compiling evidence regarding the quality of teaching would surely improve teaching/learning effectiveness. A Teaching Portfolio provides an ensemble of documents that would evidence the faculty member's endeavor to reflect on his/her teaching and student learning with the aim of improving both. Unfortunately, teaching effectiveness has been marginalized when faculty members are considered for promotion. This may lead to a disincentive for faculty members to put the time and effort to improve. Moreover, the fact that faculty members are not required to provide evidence to support their statement on teaching will encourage those who review promotion files to disregard the teaching contributions of faculty members and focus on their research output. In the long run, this would dramatically affect the learning experiences of our students.

**By Dr. Bilal Kaafarani, Department of Chemistry,  
FAS**

## Faculty Learning Communities at AUB: A Pilot Initiative

"Everybody who is incapable of learning has taken to teaching." Presenting a counter model to Oscar Wilde's caricature of teachers, a Faculty Learning Community (FLC) is a community of practice (1), "a group of trans-disciplinary faculty of size 6-15 or more... [where a] participant ... may select a focus course or project to try out innovations, assess resulting student learning, and prepare a course or project mini-portfolio to show the results..." (2)

At the beginning of the academic year 2012-2013, and for the first time at AUB, four topic-based FLCs, initiated by CTL, kicked off. When asked to reflect on their experience, FLC members opined that it was better than expected the first time round. The interdisciplinary nature of FLCs was praised. In the words of Nidal Najjar from Psychology "FLCs offer a great and unique opportunity to collaborate and share ideas with faculty members outside one's discipline." The fact that there was no pressure helped in some ways, and created obstacles at times because the level of commitment on the part of faculty participants varied. In the opinion of Nathalie Zgheib, Facilitator for FLC on Team Based Learning, the most important requirement for an FLC to work is "faculty commitment and prior, real understanding of the objectives of that FLC." Could compensation and reward for faculty participants be the key to their serious commitment?

**By Mrs Malakeh Khoury, Department of English,  
FAS**

(1). Cox, Milton. *Website for Developing Faculty and Professional Learning Communities (FLCs): Communities of Practice in Higher Education*. Retrieved from <http://www.units.muohio.edu/flc/index.php>

(2). Cox, Milton. *Website for Developing Faculty and Professional Learning Communities (FLCs): Communities of Practice in Higher Education*. Retrieved from <http://www.units.muohio.edu/flc/index.php>. For an extended definition of FLCs, see this website and Center for teaching and Learning at AUB webpage.

### CTL Staff

Director: Dr. Saouma Boujaoude  
Associate Director: Dr. Amal BouZeineddine  
GE Assessment Officer: Mrs. Dania Salem  
Administrative Officer: Miss Lamia Hussein

## CTL Activities 2012-2013

**Workshops.** CTL organized a workshop on “New ways of Thinking about Plagiarism” on October 3, 2012 facilitated by Dr. Amy Zenger and Dr. Lisa Arnold followed by another workshop by the same presenters entitled “How does writing fit into the learning goals for your program?” on November 7, 2012. In the same area of writing, a 3-day workshop entitled “What is Reflective Writing: Definition, Implementation and Practical Issue” was held on October 10, 11, and 12, 2012 and was facilitated by Dr. Jenny Moon. This workshop was organized in collaboration with FHS and the Center for Civic Engagement and Community Service. Another workshop entitled “Workshop on Lime Survey for Faculty” was held in collaboration with the IT-ACPS on October 16, 2012. Other workshops included “Developing a Teaching Portfolio” on February 12, 2013, Assessing Learning Outcomes in collaboration with IT ACPS on February 15, 2013, “Inquiry Based Learning” on March 28, a seminar titled “Communicating Effectively using Power Point and Multimedia” on March 20, 2013. Additionally, CTL organized its “Annual Faculty Seminar on Teaching and Learning Excellence”. The seminar included six sessions and was held every Thursday between 5:00 and 7:00 pm from March 14th to April 23rd 2013. Each session discussed a different topic. Fourteen faculty members attended regularly; in addition, other faculty guests attended a number of sessions because of their interest in the session topic. CTL participated in the fall and spring New Faculty Orientation Program by presenting workshops on program learning outcomes.

**FLCs.** CTL launched four Faculty Learning Communities during the week of October 2, 2012. These learning communities are: Enhancing the Quantity and Quality of Academic Reading of Graduate Students, Team-Based Learning in Higher Education, Blended Learning: Design, Implementation and Assessment, and Community Based Learning in Writing.

**Assessment of PLOs.** CTL continued its efforts in assessment of Program Learning Outcomes by organizing two workshops on the topic. The first workshop entitled “Assessment of Program Learning Outcome with a focus on developing indirect assessment instruments” was held on October 16, 2012 for FHS faculty members. The second was entitled “Presentation of the PLO 3-Year Plan with Emphasis on the 3rd Year tasks” on December 18, 2012. Additionally, the assessment reports submitted by departments were reviewed and summarized to show progress for the second year cycle 2011-2012. Departments who did not submit their program assessment reports were identified and contacted. CTL has been working closely with these departments to prepare assessment plans, collect data, and write the three-year assessment report using a template prepared by CTL. Activities related to assessment have included holding follow-up activities on the implementation of assessing program learning outcomes. Several meetings were held with the newly-appointed faculty assessment/accreditation officers mainly in FAS and FEA during which the program assessment process was explained. An assessment site was created on CTL homepage (<http://www.aub.edu.lb/ctl/assessment/Pages/default.aspx>) that includes simplified program assessment guidelines and online resources. Finally, a workshop was held with representatives from all faculties to follow up on issues related to the 3-year assessment reports and postings of PLOs and assessment plans and results on the CTL website.



## CTL Activities 2012-2013 Raison d'être Conference Presentations.

Dr. BouJaoude and Dr. BouZeineddine presented a paper entitled "Assessing Learning Outcomes: Changing Habits of Mind and Transforming Universities into Learning Communities" at the 2012 Assessment Institute in Indianapolis, Indiana, USA. Furthermore, they presented a paper entitled "Promoting and Supporting High Quality Teaching and Learning at AUB" at the Leadership Workshop organized by the Command and Staff College of the Lebanese army.

**Outside Consultations:** CTL also extended its services to other institutions. A workshop on program learning outcomes assessment was held at Rafic Hariri University. Additionally, a workshop was held at Fahd Bin Sultan University in Tabouk, KSA and a review of current status for a comparable center at Princess Noura Bint Abdel Raman University in Riyadh, KSA was completed. The last two activities were implemented in collaboration with the Office of Regional External Programs.

**Individual consultations** were held based on faculty requests. Discussions ranged from course syllabus design, to compiling a teaching portfolio and writing a proposal for scholarship of teaching and learning.

**SOTL:** The year two of the scholarship of teaching grants program was launched with a deadline of April 30, 2013 for submitting proposals. CTL received nine (9) proposals. The proposals submitted were as follows: Four from FAS, Two from FEA, One from FM, one from OSB, and one from SON.

It is healthy for any organization to always maintain focus on the reason for its existence, *raison d'être*, and use that as its guiding principle. For AUB, we only have to look as far as the first part of the first sentence of the mission statement: "...an institution of higher learning founded to provide excellence in education...", and more eloquently put by President Daniel Bliss, on December 7, 1871 in his guiding principle: "This college is for all conditions and classes of men ... may enter and enjoy all the advantages of this institution... knowing what we believe to be the truth and our reasons for that belief." Therefore, the truth in values, morals, ethics, arts, business, design, engineering, health, medicine, sciences, etc... and nothing but the truth should be our guiding principle, not only in what we lecture, but more importantly in what we practice as individuals and as an institution. This places responsibilities throughout the institutional hierarchy and not only at the forefront with the teachers and instructors. Being in the business of truth, we must focus our investments and efforts on the generation, delivery, practice and more importantly the protection of truth, "so that they may have life (truth) and have it more abundantly."

*By Dr. Imad El Hajj, FEA  
Chair of CTL Advisory Committee*



## Featured Article

### TEAM-BASED LEARNING by Dr. Nathalie K. Zgheib, MD.

Team based learning (TBL) is a student-centered, problem-based teaching approach that stimulates teamwork and active learning while maintaining individual accountability. The learning method consists of repeating sequences of 3 phases: phase 1 is the individual pre-class preparation of the contents to be later discussed in class; phase 2 is the individual readiness assurance testing that assesses the knowledge that has been supposedly acquired by students in phase 1; phase 2 also includes group readiness tests, discussion with the instructor and appeals; phase 3, the last phase, involves a higher level of learning: it aims at applying higher course concepts using small-group assignments. Effective learning in TBL is based on key instructional principles that stress the importance of accountability and interactive discussions. These can be created and fostered by creating assignments based on the four S's: significant problem, same choice, specific choice and simultaneous reporting. In contrast to classical lectures that focus on "covering content", the TBL instructional method aims at "applying knowledge" in a highly interactive setting. It has also the advantage of "ensuring the effectiveness of small groups with high student faculty ratios (e.g. up to 200:1) without losing the benefit of faculty-led small group discussions with lower ratios (e.g. 7:1)". One can visit the [www.teambasedlearning.org](http://www.teambasedlearning.org) web site for more information.

The department of Pharmacology and Toxicology at the Faculty of Medicine (FM) has had a very encouraging experience with TBL. This innovative teaching and learning technique was first introduced, in 2007, into 2 case-based sessions in the pharmacology course provided to second year medical students, and showed improved student performance. After that, and since 2008, bi-weekly clinical pharmacology TBL sessions were introduced into the third year medical curriculum. Two articles describing the course and its outcome were recently published. We have shown that medical students were highly satisfied with the course and the teaching approach, and that their performance on prescription writing and formulary development had improved.

TBL is also gradually growing at AUB. For example, TBL will be a staple of the new curriculum that is being developed within the FM. Furthermore, several TBL training workshops were held in collaboration with CTL, and a TBL Faculty Learning Community (FLC) will be launched in early fall 2012-2013. Please call CTL if interested in joining the FLC.

## Conference on Effective Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

One of the major activities related to teaching and learning is the Annual Conference on *Effective Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*. The 3rd annual Conference was held in collaboration with IT-ACPS on December 7 and 8, 2013. The Conference included four preconference workshops that were conducted by CTL and IT-ACPS staff and 12 concurrent sessions with topics ranging from assessment to methodology of teaching and technology in education. The conference was attended by around 100 participants from Universities in Lebanon and other Arab countries.

Furthermore, CTL has been working on preparations for the 2014 annual conference which will be held on February 7 and 8, 2014 in cooperation with IT-ACPS and the Communication Skills Program (Department of English). The call for proposals was announced on April, 2013.

The 2014 Conference includes five strands: 1. Assessment of Program and Course Learning Outcomes in Higher Education; 2. Community-Based Learning; 3. E-learning and Pedagogy; 4. Teaching, Learning and Assessment Procedures in Higher Education; 5. Writing Instruction and Research in Higher Education.

In addition, the Conference has seven pre-conference workshops entitled: Assessment of Program Learning Outcomes: Capstone Courses and Rubrics; Cooperative Learning in Higher Education; Assessing General Education to Improve Students' Learning Experience; Developing Writing Assignments for the College Classroom; From the Writing Classroom to Writing in the Disciplines – Bridging the Gap; Learning on the GO! The Cloud: Time to Lighten Up the Bag.

For more information about the conference please visit the conference website at

<http://www.aub.edu.lb/conferences/etlhe/Pages/index.aspx>