

Introduction

Because we believe that students must ultimately activate their own inherent capacities for gaining knowledge and understanding, we entrust students with much of the responsibility for their own learning. Small, seminar-style classes provide ample opportunities for every student to participate in discussion and give professors many opportunities to observe and interact with students. Professors also have regular meetings and many other occasions for informal discussions with other professors about instruction matters and student progress. Professors use this feedback to inform their teaching and to modify instruction as needed throughout the year.

In addition, each student's professors get together with the student once a semester for a student conference, at which each professor discusses with the student his or her progress in learning. The professor highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the student's intellectual skills, and invites the student to reflect and respond. A summary report of each student conference is kept with the student's academic file.

Finally, each year, at least one monthly faculty meeting is devoted to a discussion of proposals for revising and improving the academic programs. This discussion is based on experience gained and evidence gathered throughout the year, including professors' close knowledge of student progress, examples of student work, reports from student conferences, and ideas from numerous informal and formal discussions held throughout the year.

Therefore, assessment is an ongoing process at DRBU and embedded in many of DRBU's core instructional activities as described above. This document describes the assessment processes at DRBU.

Student Learning Outcomes

Tracing the Learning Outcomes to the Mission

The University's Mission states that:

Dharma Realm Buddhist University is a community dedicated to liberal education in the broad Buddhist tradition—a tradition characterized by knowledge in the arts and sciences, self-cultivation, and the pursuit of wisdom. Its pedagogical aim is thus twofold: to convey knowledge and to activate an intrinsic wisdom possessed by all individuals. Developing this inherent capacity requires an orientation toward learning that is dialogical, interactive, probing, and deeply self-reflective. Such education makes one free in the deepest sense and opens the opportunity to pursue the highest goals of human existence.

Accordingly, conveying knowledge and activating an intrinsic capacity are the primary educational aims of the University. "Inherent capacity" includes various skills for lifelong learning and the ability to communicate candidly and skillfully, and "knowledge" refers to methods for and insights into addressing abiding questions in the areas of human nature, the

workings of causality, and the complex interconnections between the personal, the social, and the natural world. Therefore, DRBU's three institutional learning outcomes (ILOs) are:

- ILO 1: A liberally educated person will develop and practice skills for lifelong learning, which encompass sound judgment; the flexibility to constantly assess evolving internal and external conditions; and accordingly, the ability to reconsider, adjust, alter, or even abandon his or her course or stance.
- ILO 2: A liberally educated person will appreciate the methods of inquiry and insights suggested by the primary texts, particularly in the study of human nature, the workings of causality, and the complex interconnections between the personal, the social, and the natural world.
- ILO 3: A liberally educated person will communicate in a clear, nuanced, candid, and skillful manner.

Each of DRBU's programs has developed program-level student learning outcomes appropriate for its respective degree level. These program learning outcomes (PLOs) and their associated rubrics provide markers for DRBU's assessment activities. They are listed in Table 1, below. Professors are responsible for setting the "standards of performance" required for graduation from both the MA and the BA programs. For the MA program, a student's work from the time period close to graduation should provide sufficient evidence to score mostly "threes" across all dimensions of the program's four PLOs' rubrics.

For the BA program, all outcomes are assessed as degree outcomes (summative assessment)—students should meet similar "standards of performance" as those stated for the MA program for the nine PLOs—and some of the outcomes are also assessed at an intermediate point in the student's time in the program (formative assessment).

Curriculum Map

The programs' curricular strands should be seen not as stand-alone modules each advancing a compartmentalized area of outcomes, but as intertwined threads (or "strands") of a tightly woven fabric that results in a well-rounded and requisite set of intellectual skills. Therefore, each of DRBU's programs has a mandatory curriculum.

The exercise of plotting a curriculum map for each of DRBU's programs, then, is not about dividing up the outcomes and assigning ownership to specialized academic domains, but rather a best attempt by professors to identify areas suitable for sampling student work to reveal progress and potential issues in learning and instruction. The distribution of outcomes across the curricular strands is also designed so that, as the assessment process rotates through all the outcomes, during any given five-year cycle we will have the opportunity to review all of the

curricular strands. As a whole, the curriculum map promotes a collaborative effort that is aligned with the integrated nature of the programs.

Professors and staff from the Office of Academic Affairs review the curriculum map yearly to make adjustments as necessary to improve the assessment process. The Updated Procedure section of this document shows the adjustments that professors have made to the outcome assessment framework. DRBU's curriculum maps for its BA and MA programs are shown below in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 1: DRBU Student Learning Outcomes

DRBU Institutional Goal	BA in Liberal Arts Program Learning Outcomes	MA in Buddhist Classics Program Learning Outcomes
<p>A liberally educated person will develop and practice skills for lifelong learning, which encompass sound judgment; the flexibility to constantly assess evolving internal and external conditions; and, accordingly, the ability to reconsider, adjust, alter, or even abandon his or her course or stance.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Demonstrate ethical awareness. (D) ● Cultivate a flexibility of mind to adapt to evolving conditions. (D) ● Demonstrate critical thinking skills. (I, D) ● Exercise quantitative reasoning skills. (I, D) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Exercise ethical sensibility
<p>A liberally educated person will appreciate the methods of inquiry and insights suggested by the primary texts, particularly in the study of human nature, the workings of causality, and the complex interconnections between the personal, the social, and the natural world.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Appreciate and defend different systems of thought as conveyed within the primary texts in the curriculum (D) ● Demonstrate fluency in the use of tools and methods of inquiry from different traditions and disciplines presented in the curriculum. (D) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assess and articulate major Buddhist methods and practices. ● Explain insights gained from close reading of texts and their implications for the personal, the social, and the natural worlds.
<p>A liberally educated person will communicate in a clear, nuanced, candid, and skillful manner.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Practice thoughtful and probing dialogue combined with close listening, to assess the context and the character of the audience. (I, D) ● Compose coherent arguments and narrative. (I, D) ● Evaluate and responsibly use and share information resources. (I, D) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Create sustained, coherent expositions and reflections for both general and specialized audiences.
<p>(I): Outcome assessed also at intermediate point of program; (D): Degree learning outcome.</p>		

Table 2: Curriculum Map for BA in Liberal Arts

Strand	Semester/ Year	PLO 1	PLO2	PLO3	PLO4	PLO5	PLO6	PLO7	PLO8	PLO9
Buddhist	Fall Freshman	I				I	I		I	
	Fall Sophomore	I/D				I/D	I/D		I/D	
	Fall Junior	D				D	D		D	
	Fall Senior	M				M	M		M	
Indian	Fall Sophomore	I/D	I			I				
	Spring Sophomore	D	I/D			D				
	Fall Senior	D/M	D			M				
Chinese	Fall Freshman	I				I		I/D		
	Spring Freshman	I/D				I/D		D		
	Spring Junior	D				D/M		M		
Western	Spring Freshman	I				I			I	
	Spring Sophomore	D				D			I/D	
	Spring Junior	D				D			D	
	Spring Senior	M				M			M	
Rhetoric	Fall Freshman			I					I	I
	Spring Freshman			I/D					I/D	I/D
	Fall Senior			D/M					D	D/M
	Spring Senior			M					M	M
Language	Fall Freshman						I	I		I
	Spring Freshman						I/D	I/D		I/D
	Fall Sophomore						D	D		D

	Spring Sophomore						D/M	D/M		D/M
	Fall Junior						M	M		M
Math	Fall Sophomore			I	I			I/D		
	Spring Sophomore			I/D	D			D		
	Fall Junior			D/M	M			M		
Science	Fall Junior		D				D			I/D
	Spring Junior		D/M				D/M			D/M
	Fall Senior		M				M			M
Music	Spring Junior		D	D			D			
Music	Spring Senior		D/M	D/M			D/M			
Capstone	Fall Senior			D/M		D/M	D/M	D/M	D/M	D
	Spring Senior			M		M	M	M	M	M

Table 3: Curriculum Map for MA in Buddhist Classics

Course	Semester	PLO 1	PLO 2	PLO 3	PLO 4
Buddhist Classics 1	Year One Fall	I	I		I
Buddhist Classics 2	Year One Spr	I	I	I	
Buddhist Classics 3	Year Two Fall		I	I/D	D
Buddhist Classics 4	Year Two Fall	D	I/D	D	
Buddhist Classics 5	Year Two Spring	D/M	M		D/M
Buddhist Classics 6	Year Two Spring		M	M	
Buddhist Hermeneutics 1	Year One Spring	I/D	I/D		I/D
Buddhist Hermeneutics 2	Year Two Fall	D	D		D
Buddhist Hermeneutics 3	Year Two Spring	M	M		M
Comparative Hermeneutics 1	Year One Fall			I	I/D
Comparative Hermeneutics 2	Year One Spring			D	D
Language 1	Year One Fall		I	I	
Language 2	Year One Spring		D	D	
Language 3	Year Two Fall		D/M	D/M	
Language 4	Year Two Spring		M	M	
Language 5 (optional)	Year One Fall		M	M	

Outcome Assessment Cycle

Assessment is inextricably linked to academic program review at DRBU, and therefore it shares the same five-year cycle as the program review. The Dean of Academics and the Instruction Committee delegate the responsibility of coordinating the academic program review and outcome assessment to the Program Review Committee. The aim is that all student learning outcomes are assessed and all curricular strands reviewed over the five-year cycle. Table 4 below shows sample assessment cycle for reviewing outcomes and curricular strands within the five-year assessment and program review cycle:

Table 4: Sample Assessment Cycle

Year	1	2	3	4	5
BA Outcomes	3I, 8I, 9I	6I, 7I, 1D	2D, 4D, 5D	3D, 8D, 9D	6D, 7D
BA Strands	Rhetoric/Writing, Mathematics	Indian Classics, Buddhist Classics	Western Classics, Natural Science	Language, Music, Rhetoric/Writing	Chinese Classics, Capstone
MA Outcomes	4, 1	2, 3	4, 1	2, 3	4, 1
MA Strands	Language	Comparative Hermeneutics	Buddhist Classics (year 1)	Buddhist Hermeneutics	Buddhist Classics (year 2)

Assessment Process and Methodology

DRBU's assessment process is designed to dovetail with and provide additional support to ongoing instructional activities that already emphasize student engagement, providing regular feedback to students and opportunities for collaboration among professors to make adjustments in our programs. The Program Review Committee is delegated the oversight of the outcome assessment process by the Dean of Academics and the Instruction committee. All professors are required to participate in regular assessment activities.

DRBU's assessment activities include 1) planning and preparation, 2) gathering and compiling evidence of learning, 3) analyzing and evaluating progress in advancing student learning

outcomes based on evidence gathered, 4) proposing and implementing adjustments to programs based on results of analyses and evaluation, and 5) closing the loop.

1. **Planning and preparation** takes place at various times during the school year and includes activities such as reviewing changes to the program, if any, from the previous school year; preparing professors for assessment activities for the year; developing and revising rubrics for learning outcomes; and scheduling assessment-related meetings or retreats, including assessment-related discussions during monthly faculty meetings.
2. **Gathering and compiling evidence of learning** starts with identifying the type of evidence to be gathered for the year. DRBU employs both direct and indirect methods of assessment. Types of evidence include:

- a. **Student conference (indirect):** The student conference is a comprehensive assessment that takes place every semester in both the MA and the BA programs. The student and all of his or her professors for the year have a dialogue to discuss the student's progress and the strengths and weaknesses of his or her intellectual skills as they relate to the program learning outcomes. Organized as a conversation, in the first conferences it is inevitable that assessment will be more driven by the professors. Over time, however, students will be expected to take more initiative in presenting assessment of their own progress in learning.

Notes from each student conference are compiled and organized into a summary report to become part of the student's file. The Office of Academic Affairs aggregates these summary reports for assessment purposes.

This form of evidence has been found to be most useful to students and professors. A form of qualitative data, conference session reports provide strong evidence of student achievement of program learning outcomes, primarily verbal testimonies from students and professors. Records of such testimonies of accomplishments are documents in the student conference reports.

- b. **Student work (direct):** In addition to exploring classical primary texts through close reading and in-depth discussions in class, students further engage with the texts through completing assignments and exams in written and oral forms. The Associate Dean and the Office of Academic Affairs coordinate the collection of student work from all strands of both programs for assessment purposes. Student work can include papers, exams, and laboratory reports. While this document does not enumerate and describe all possible types of student work at DRBU, it will highlight several significant works that DRBU's assessment process draws heavily upon:

- i. **Focus strand essays:** Both MA and BA students tackle four focus strand essays during their study at DRBU. A focus strand essay is intended to be a serious and thoughtful examination of a particular question and its significance to the study of classical primary texts. Based on class readings, each student chooses a topic, reflects upon its wider implications, and explores its deeper meaning in relationship to the text. The essay is not intended to be a work of specialized research, but rather an exercise in critical thinking and careful observation based on a close reading of the texts. The four focus strands that students write these essays for are Western Classics, Indian Classics, Chinese Classics, and Buddhist Classics for the BA program; and Buddhist Classics (two), Comparative Hermeneutics, and Buddhist Hermeneutics for the MA program.

<i>Sample Strand Paper Assignments Across Classic Strands.</i>	
Year	BA Strand
Fall 1 st Year	Chinese/Buddhist
Spring 1 st Year	Western
Fall 2 nd Year	Indian
Spring 2 nd Year	Indian/ Western
Fall 3 rd Year	Buddhist
Spring 3 rd Year	Chinese
Senior	Capstone

Year	MA Strand
Fall 1 st Year	Buddhist Classics
Spring 1 st Year	Comparative Hermeneutics
Fall 2 nd Year	Buddhist Hermeneutics
Spring 2 nd Year	Buddhist Classics

- ii. **Senior essays and oral examinations:** Seniors in the BA program are required to present a final essay in the spring semester of their fourth year. This essay is a substantial and sustained intellectual endeavor that epitomizes the culmination of a student's education at DRBU. The process of writing the senior essay begins in the fall of senior year, when a student submits a senior essay proposal describing the topic and the organization of the essay, as well as the primary text(s) to be used. Students are then assigned a senior essay advisor with whom they are encouraged to meet frequently to review their progress. Students must also prepare for an oral examination focusing on their senior essay. Both the senior essay and the oral examination must be successfully completed before graduation. The

essay as well as professors' written remarks on students' oral examinations will be collected for assessment purposes.

- c. **Student self-assessment (indirect):** For major assignments in both MA and BA programs, professors may ask students to perform self-assessments on their work. In preparing students to perform a self-assessment, professors explain the outcomes and the associated rubrics that students will use in analyzing their assignments. Similar to the practice of asking students to present their own progress in learning during the later student conferences, student self-assessment aims to develop a student's ability to understand his or her own strengths and weaknesses and make adjustments in how to approach learning. The result of this self-assessment may also provide valuable information as evidence in DRBU's assessment process.
3. **Analyzing evidence** of student learning and evaluating the effectiveness of instruction is an integral part of DRBU's core instructional activities. It takes place during regular faculty meetings as well as during informal conversations among professors. In addition, professors systematically analyze each student's body of work over the course of that semester, during the individual student conferences.

Near the end of each semester, a rotating group of professors gathers for an assessment-specific meeting to analyze the evidence aggregated by the Office of Academic Affairs. Tasks carried out during these assessment meetings may include calibration of professors' expectations in analyzing student work samples, scoring student work samples against learning outcome rubrics, compiling results of analyses, and discussing these results in order to evaluate the effectiveness of programs in advancing student learning outcomes.

During these meetings, the participants also compare results of their analyses and findings with those from previous assessment meetings. This comparison may help to point to persistent issues and to gauge the effectiveness of implemented measures aimed at addressing areas needing improvement, as discovered in previous meetings. The small group of professors presents its findings to the teaching faculty for discussion.

Finally, a report summarizing the proceedings of the assessment meetings, including key findings and evaluation, is drafted by the professors with coordination by the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs. This report is circulated throughout the University and is a key document for formal aspects of the final type of assessment activities—**proposing and implementing adjustments to programs**.

4. Informally, professors make minor adjustments to their teaching throughout the school year, in response to student needs observed in their dynamic interactions with students.

Formally, the semesterly assessment retreats provide a forum for professors to deliberate on issues discovered through the assessment process and to propose changes and initiatives so as to address these issues. Professors are solely responsible for revision of the programs, and particularly those of the curriculum. DRBU's Faculty Governance Manual outlines the process by which professors work together to revise the curriculum.

During the assessment retreats, professors discuss the findings from the report and adopt proposals on actions items. The Program Review Committee documents these action items and works with the Dean of Academics and the Instruction Committee to determine priorities and resource planning and allocation. A key criterion for prioritizing action items is whether a proposal can improve the effectiveness of instruction in an area highlighted by the assessment process. The findings, recommendations, and action plans are also documented for the purpose of academic program review.

- 5. Closing the loop.** The Dean of Academics, through the Office of Academic Affairs, is in charge of implementing program changes and initiatives. The Program Review Committee documents findings, recommendations, and action items and monitors the progress of implementation and study of the actions' effects. The committee reports progress on implementation at assessment retreats and during program review self-study.

Current Assessment Practices (2017-2018)

DRBU has implemented various parts of its outcome assessment framework since the two programs' launch in 2013 and 2014. This section describes current practices centered around the biannual assessment workshops. The Program Review Committee will keep this section updated as DRBU implements new practices or makes adjustments to current practices.

Sampling

During the first two years of the MA program, because of the small number of students, all written work from all students was collected and collectively read and analyzed by the professors. Starting in 2015-2016, the professors began to read samples of student works.

For the January 2017 assessment on MA PLOs, the Program Review Committee selected a sampling of student work from the two graduated MA cohorts (classes of 2015 and 2016). Three students were chosen from each cohort. For each student, three pieces of writing from different courses were chosen from both their first and their final (fourth) semesters. This way, progress could be tracked from the time students entered the program to their completion of it. In addition to studying students' progress in the MA program, the committee was interested to see whether this sampling method would, after several years of evidence collection and analyses, surface variations of progress in PLOs across different cohorts and courses. See January 2017 Assessment Report for assessment results using this sampling technique for the first time.

Readers and Calibration

For the first three years since DRBU began practicing outcome assessment, all professors read and scored rubrics on some student works. In fact, in the first year of the MA program, every professor read all the works from every student (there were five students and each had four pieces of written work in the first semester).

In 2014, the teaching faculty adopted the practice of calibration so that the collection of student work could be distributed across the teaching faculty for reading and rubrics scoring. During calibration, all professors read three different student work samples of varying quality, then score the rubrics for different outcomes on the samples and report their results. The ensuing discussions focus on any noticeable discrepancies in the scores of the same piece of student work across different readers and aim at reaching a common rubrics-scoring set of standards and expectations. Calibration has been a part of every assessment exercise since it was first practiced in 2014.

Involving the whole teaching faculty in reading and rubric-scoring of student works had strong benefits, as DRBU has only begun to implement and practice the assessment framework. All professors were able to gain familiarity with the process by going through the exercise. However, having the entire faculty reading sample student work soon became an inefficient use of time.

Therefore, in 2017, the Program Review Committee instituted a practice wherein a group of professors read and score rubrics on student work instead of the whole teaching faculty. A calibration exercise will precede the group's reading and rubrics scoring. The group will gather to analyze the evidence, then lead a discussion with the teaching faculty at the assessment retreat on their analyses, findings, and suggested action items. After the teaching faculty adopt the findings and action items, the group composes an assessment retreat report.

Different professors will serve as readers on a rotating basis. Coupled with the sampling practice described earlier, this small-group approach has helped to save time during the January 2017 retreat. An added important benefit of this practice is that more time can be devoted to substantive discussions on the findings.

Rubrics for Program Learning Outcomes

In part to respond to the WSCUC Eligibility Review Committee's recommendation, the teaching faculty began to develop rubrics for program learning outcomes for both the MA and the BA programs (see [MA PLO rubrics](#) and [BA PLO rubrics](#)). In spring 2017, the Program Review Committee began revising the MA rubrics to improve their clarity, as an action item from the January 2017 assessment retreat.

[Revisions for PLO 2 and PLO 3](#) have been completed. The Program Review Committee will complete the revision for the remaining MA and BA PLO rubrics in 2017 and 2018.

Indirect Assessment Methods

The main indirect assessment method that DRBU has used thus far is the student conference, which has provided invaluable feedback with regard to student learning. Over the course of 2016 and 2017, DRBU also began to systematically use student and teaching faculty surveys as indirect assessment methods. [This table](#) shows the list of surveys conducted from 2016 to 2017. DRBU will work to improve its ability to incorporate both direct and indirect assessment methods in informing decisions on changes related to instruction and learning.