Assurance of Learning: Handbook for Teaching Faculty

The background to Assurance of Learning

Assurance of Learning (AoL) is a quality management tool which evaluates study programs as a whole based on the performance of its students. It allows to monitor whether students acquire the full set of competences and skills which the program is designed to offer. Thus, AoL complements the other quality management tools such as teaching evaluations, which focus on individual courses and teachers, and the student-teacher-exchange in Quality Circles. In comparison, AoL allows to reflect on and implement measures for continuous improvement of the programs and study experience.

Program Learning Competencies[1]

The key to the Assurance of Learning system are the Program Learning Competencies. In the first phase of introducing AoL to the Faculty of Business and Economics, AoL is based on four overarching Learning Competencies which are the same for all study programs and which substantiate the main lines of FB&E's mission:

1. Disciplinary strengths for interdisciplinary thinking: Students critically reflect on and apply academic knowledge in interdisciplinary contexts.
2. Entrepreneurial perspective: Students develop and evaluate solution-oriented propositions.
3. Responsible management: Students act responsibly in their decision-making.
4. Scientific research competences: Students demonstrate high standards of scientific research.

The Learning Competencies define a framework of educational expectation for all degree programs and set a range of competences that our students should acquire in their time at the FB&E. In a next step, program directors, program coordinators and Team AACSB together will re-define the Learning Competencies to challenges or questions of the respective programs. This step is repeated whenever deemed necessary and should be reflected on at the latest every 5 years.

The Learning Competencies are operationalized and fitted to the graduation levels Bachelor, Master and Doctoral studies. For this, different Learning Objectives have been developed. Using the Learning Objectives, we can measure how the students perform regarding the Competence Goals. These are evaluated on a regular basis to demonstrate the viability of our study programs and to collect feedback for potential improvements.

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[1] Learning Competencies were previously called Learning Goals; the terminology was changed.

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Assessment

The Assessment of Learning allows those responsible for study programs to continuously monitor whether overarching learning goals are being achieved. Program directors, coordinators and other faculty develop the learning objectives relevant for their specific program and decide in which way these can be measured. The Team AACSB of the Dean's Office supports with regard to the different operational steps.
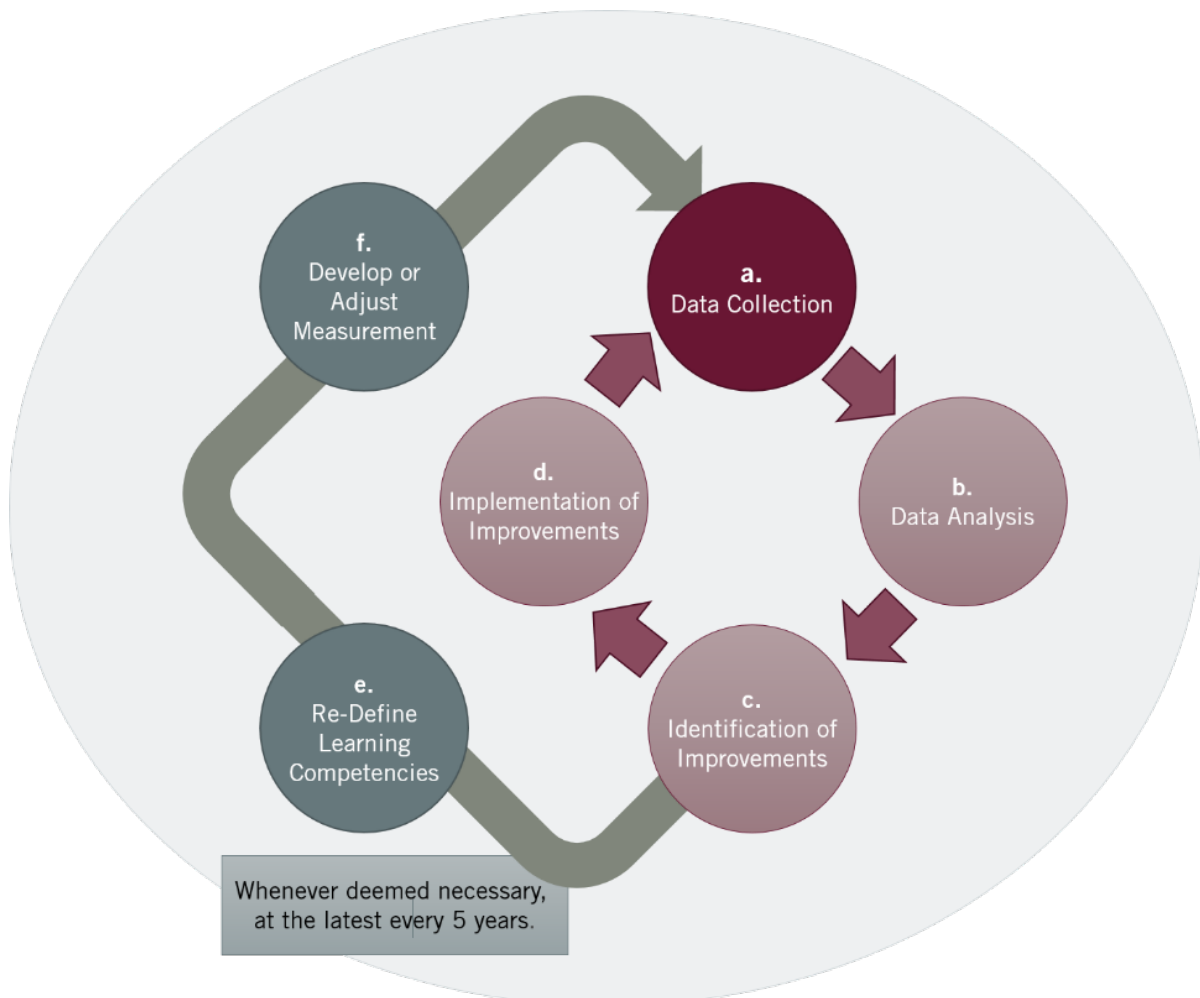

Figure 1: **The Assurance of Learning control loop**
The Assurance of Learning is a systematic process based on a. data collection, b. data analysis, c. identification and d. implementation of improvements. You as teacher or lecturer usually contribute to step a. The regular AoL is shown with purple arrows. The Learning Competencies are re-defined to current challenges or questions of the respective programs at the latest every 5 years (blue arrow).

The Assurance of Learning process describes systematic a. data collection, b. data analysis c. evaluation of results and identification of possible, and d. the development and implementation of improvement measures and strategic decisions within a closed and continuous control loop (see fig. 1). Most likely, you are reading this handbook because you are contributing to step a. data collection. This process goes hand in hand with the existing quality management at Leuphana and at the FB&E. The results are not associated with you, the teachers and lecturers who collect the data; nor can individual students be identified. Rather, the datasets can offer valuable insight on program-level, strategic topics.

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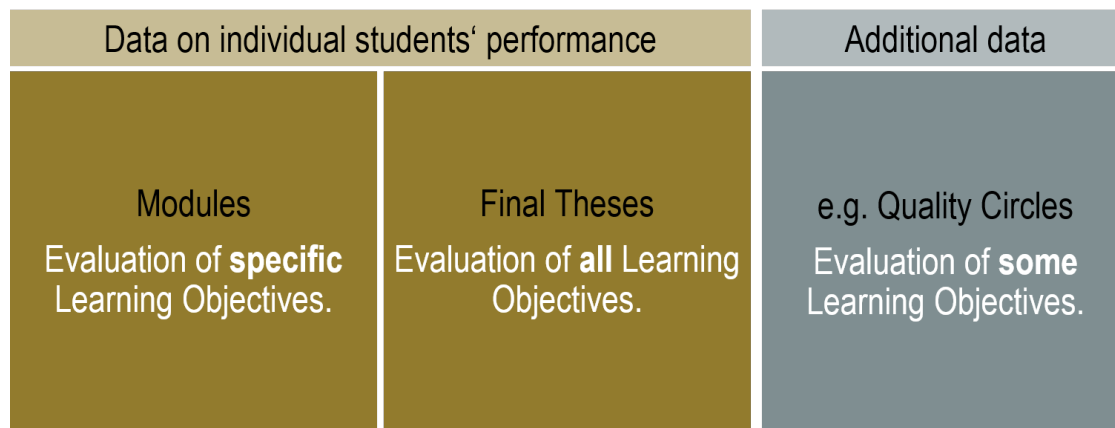| Data on individual students' performance		Additional data
Modules Evaluation of **specific** Learning Objectives.	**Final Theses** Evaluation of **all** Learning Objectives.	**e.g. Quality Circles** Evaluation of **some** Learning Objectives.

Figure 2: **Three data sources.**
Data is collected in direct measures, i.e. evaluation in modules and via final theses, and in indirect measures. The latter can include surveys or institutionalized teacher-student-discussions such as the Quality Circles.

AoL is based on three data sources (see fig. 2). The first way of data collection builds on **specific modules** that are suitable for evaluation on one or more Learning Competencies. In this case, Lotte Lutz from Team AACSB contacts you as teachers and lecturers responsible for those modules and seminars and provides you with an Excel evaluation sheet that is fitted to your seminar or module. Here, the evaluation is based on the examinations and assignments that you are going to grade anyway. Your grading criteria differ most likely from the Learning Objectives, because your grading relates to the specific goals of the module you are teaching. The evaluation is therefore independent from your students' grades, but the process of grading is, from a practical point of view, a good moment to fill in the evaluation sheet. When you have finished the evaluation of the Learning Competencies, please send the sheet to aol@leuphana.de.

The second way of data collection is based on the **final bachelor's-, master's- and PhD- theses**. This evaluation is based on the grading of the thesis and its defense. Similar to the evaluation in modules, your grading criteria differ most likely from the Learning Objectives, because your grading relates to the specifics of the study program and the individual thesis. The evaluation is therefore independent from your students' grades, but the process of grading is, from a practical point of view, a good moment to fill in the evaluation sheet. You as the first supervisor fill in a PDF sheet that is provided by the Leuphana Examination Service together with the regular examination documents. These sheets can also be downloaded from our website (see footer) or we send it to you via email, if you want. Please send the sheet to aol@leuphana.de or, if you use a paper copy, you can send it via house mail to Lotte Lutz.

The third way of data collection are indirect measures; these can be other information sources on the performance of our students and on the programs, such as surveys, self-assessments or LVE. The third way is therefore based on the **integration with Quality Management tools such as Quality Circles**. For this, we from Team AACSB contact program coordinators or program directors and ask to join a Quality Circle, or whether we could provide one or two topics to the meeting. This also allows us to collect data on the achievement of Learning Competencies.

Improvement Process

After initial data analysis, program coordinators and directors of a study program meet with us from Team AACSB in a strategic Assurance of Learning meeting once in the academic year. In this meeting, data is evaluated, measures and improvements are being developed and documented. In a next step, the evaluation results and the developed measures are discussed in the working group AACSB. This is a group of faculty with members from all study programs that are part of the AoL process. Please feel free to contact us if you are interested in joining the working group!

Improvements usually concern the curriculum design, the evaluation process itself, or the teaching coordination. In the former case, the measures are introduced to the curriculum management processes of our university. Additionally, we will include the information derived from the assessments into the quality management processes of Quality Circles and Internal Assessment Procedures (see: QE-Richtlinie or contact Leuphana's Quality Development team).

Contact and Feedback

The Team AACSB is part of the Dean's Office. Your contact for any question regarding the AoL is Dr. Lotte Lutz, phone 677-1995.

We are available via email at aol@leuphana.de. Information and some downloads (e.g. the theses sheets) can be found on the AoL website (see footer).

We are happy to receive your feedback!

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Assurance of Learning in a nutshell:

What is the aim of Assurance of Learning?

The AoL allows to evaluate study programs as a whole. We can use AoL to monitor whether our students acquire the full set of skills and knowledge that they are supposed to learn in their study program. In a first step, the Learning Competencies define a generic framework of educational expectation based on the faculty's mission. We can therefore currently monitor whether our students acquire comprehensive skills and competences such as disciplinary excellence, interdisciplinary thinking, or responsible management. In a next step, the Learning Competencies can be adapted to the study programs.

What is not the aim of Assurance of Learning?

The assessment of the Learning Competencies is not related to a student's grades, although the process of grading is, from a practical point of view, a good moment to fill in the evaluation sheet. Grading criteria may or may not contain elements close to the Learning Competencies, but grading criteria most likely contain more aspects that specifically relate to the given module or thesis. Importantly, the AoL is not about evaluating any module or individual teacher/lecturer. The AoL outcomes are not and will neither be connected to individuals nor to the grades given.

Comprehensive Guide for the evaluation in specific modules (first way of data collection):

1. If you are teaching a module that is suitable for the AoL and if the evaluation is to take place in the current semester, we from Team AACSB will get in touch with you.
2. You carry out the teaching in your seminar as planned. The AoL evaluation does not influence the design of your seminar, assignments, nor the grades.
3. We will ask you to assess how far the students in your course perform with regard to the Learning Competencies. For this, we give you a sheet that you fill in alongside the regular grading. The evaluation will be based on the final assignments or examinations in your course, e.g. essays, presentations, or tests. We from Team AACSB are available to answer any question you may have concerning the evaluation.
4. After evaluation, you send the results back to aol@leuphana.de.
5. If you like, become part of the working group AACSB.

Comprehensive Guide for the evaluation of final theses (second way of data collection):

1. If you are the first supervisor of a bachelor's or master's thesis or of a PhD dissertation, we ask you to evaluate your student's performance – this is a standing call, we cannot contact every supervisor for each thesis they are supervising.
2. Together with the regular documents, you will receive the AoL sheet from Leuphana's Examination Service.
3. You carry out your grading as usual, and additionally you assess your graduate's performance using the AoL sheet. The defense is probably a good moment to do so. We from Team AACSB are available to answer any question you may have concerning the assessment.
4. After evaluation, you send the results back to aol@leuphana.de.
5. If you like, become part of the working group AACSB.

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