

ICP Approach to PLOs

The PLOs in the Integral Counseling Psychology program are the “spine” of the curriculum. Over a decade ago, they were forged out of a collaborative effort to define who we are and what we do. They have been tempered by hours of debate and analysis over the ensuing years. They have significantly changed over time, yet the central spine has remained and expanded (for example, Diversity Awareness was added to the three original groupings, Clinical Skills, Understanding the Field, and Personal Growth). This addition was based on our Program Review, and the input of outside evaluators. Our time-tested, yet always evolving PLOs, have provided the standard for other Masters in Counseling Psychology programs at CIIS.

Fourteen out of thirty nine outcomes were selected as the most essential to use for manageable data collection as part of our Capstone Evaluation Process. It is by these dimensions that all ICP and ICPW students are measured in Integrative Seminar class, typically the last class students take prior to graduation (both final integrative papers and final oral presentations are measured with regard to these 14 variables). The results of these assessments, when aggregated, give us both a sense of our program's strengths, as well as its limitations, and provide as a basis for comparing the weekday and weekend versions of the program. Additionally, we have recently started having students directly rate themselves during the Integrative Seminar on a 10-point scale on each of the 14 essential outcomes. These results also are reported back to the entire ICP faculty with student reps present.

The following is an example of how our PLO's evolve: External reviewers recommended that we improve our diversity efforts. Therefore, instead of having diversity outcomes spread throughout the existing three major areas, we decided to highlight the power and centrality of diversity to our curriculum by adding this element as a separate stand-alone dimension. These spelled out dimensions have helped us target our multicultural efforts in various classes, in program-wide trainings for students and faculty, and for curriculum revision (it should be noted that diversity elements are part of all aspects of the curriculum, but as was stated, we chose to group them together).

Along with the reviews of our PLOs during faculty meetings (resulting in additions and modifications to them), PLOS offer a dynamic

basis by which to guide and account for changes in our curriculum, whether these are initiated by analysis of data from Capstone Reviews, through student feedback, or from outside reviewers. For instance, in realizing that we needed to attend to academic rigor as a result of our last Program Review, rather than add a fifth element, we highlighted our academic expectations regarding clear writing and expression, and critical thinking in the introduction to the document. Also, during faculty meetings we discussed where the outcomes should be implemented (which classes), along with looking at where they are already being taught. Having this curricular map is useful when we need to modify our curriculum to meet changing requirements from the regulatory agencies for our school.

Another outcome of faculty PLO analysis has been increased dialogue between the teaching faculty and counseling center directors to clarify what variables are consistently taught by supervisors and trainers.

To conclude, the Integral Counseling Psychology Learning Outcomes provide:

*A basis for a regular, lively student faculty discussion about who we are and what we are actually doing. We foreground our PLOs by distributing them to students during their initial orientation, telling them that this is what they can expect from their education, and that these are the outcomes that they can hold us responsible for. We later encourage them to gauge their progress vis-à-vis this document during their pre-practicum faculty advisor meeting.

*A living, dynamic basis by which to guide us and account for changes in our curriculum.

*A reliable structure that the students can count on.

One impact of going over various documents with graduating students was to contextualize these outcomes properly. Students were expressing undue feelings of inadequacy when they looked at their level of accomplishment of these PLOs. Therefore we noted that although these expectations are appropriate goals for senior practitioners, we highlighted the proviso that our expectations of accomplishments were at the Masters level.