

Institution-Wide Assessment of Graduate Education at CSU Stanislaus

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Approaches to institution-wide assessment

Institutions regularly assess outcomes for students who complete a program of study (program learning outcomes, or PLOs), but increasingly there is a desire – or requirement – to assess learning outcomes for the institution as a whole (ILOs). ILOs embody the outcomes that are expected for students who complete *any* program at the institution, although graduate-level ILOs typically differ from undergraduate ILOs. PLOs and ILOs may be assessed separately. However, if PLOs are mapped onto ILOs, assessment of one set of outcomes also provides data about the other set of outcomes. This approach, which is highly efficient, is used to assess graduate education at California State University, Stanislaus. Figure 1 provides an example, illustrating how the PLOs for a doctoral program in Education and a master’s program in Nursing map onto the institution’s six graduate ILOs. Note that PLOs typically use different language than the ILOs to which they are related. Note also that some PLOs are specific to a program and so do not have corresponding ILOs.

Processing of assessment data

The mechanism for processing assessment data is illustrated in Figure 2. Programs assess a subset of their PLOs each year, forwarding the data to the Office of Assessment. These data are accompanied by “contextual” information (provided by the graduate program coordinators) describing factors that may have impacted student learning and program completion rates. The Office of Assessment uses the PLO-ILO map to summarize the ILO data, and forwards this summary to Graduate Council, the governing body for all graduate programs. Graduate Council uses the ILO data to make policy decisions and strategic recommendations. Resource needs can also be identified by considering the “contextual” information that accompanies the ILO data. Graduate Council includes representatives from each discipline that offers a graduate program, ensuring communication between the governing body and the individual programs.

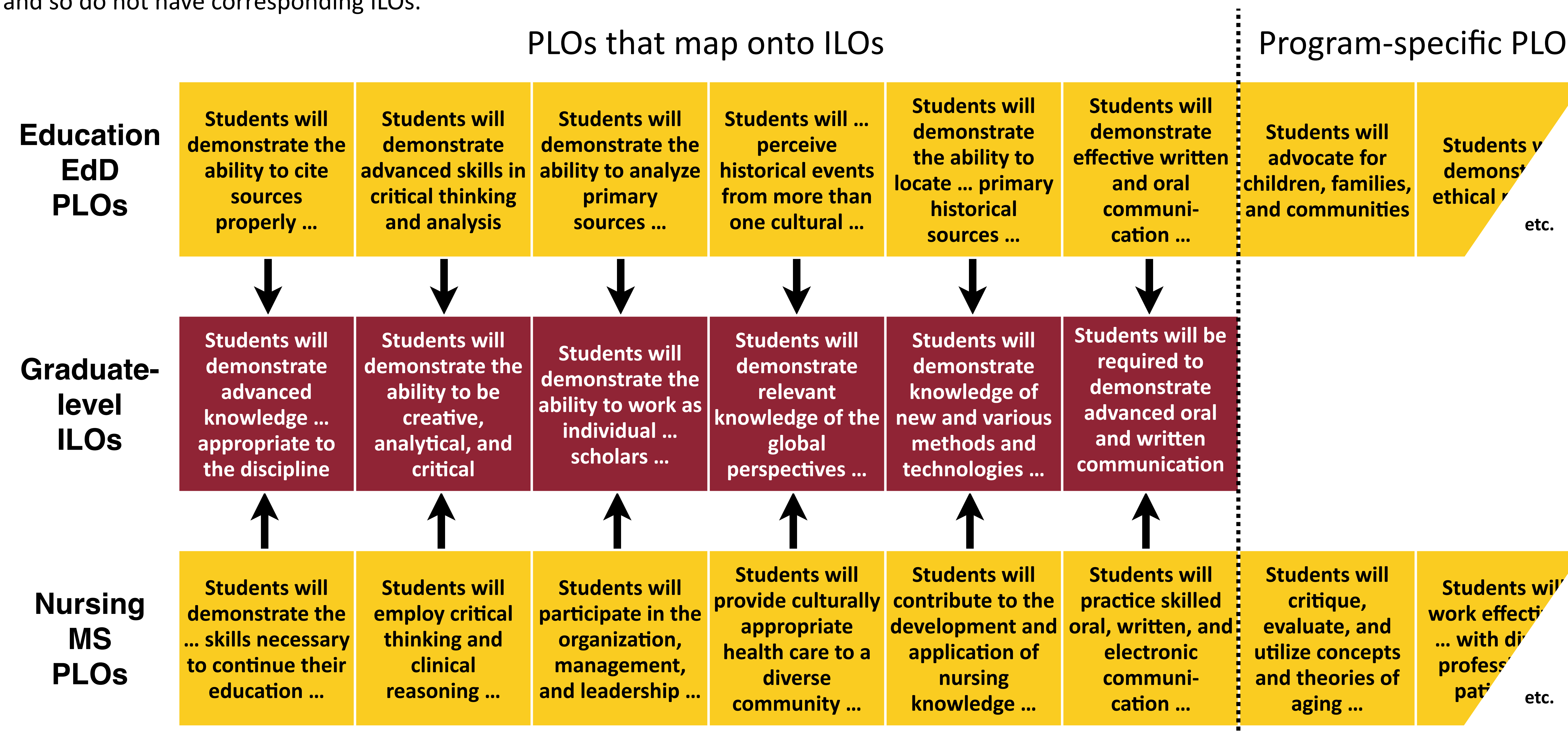


Figure 1. Mapping of PLOs from two graduate programs onto graduate-level ILOs. Learning outcomes are edited for brevity.

Challenges

As often occurs in assessment, progress can be slow; the graduate ILOs were adopted in 2002, but the initial mapping of PLOs onto ILOs did not occur until 2014. Two issues continue to be of particular concern. One is pragmatic: How should institutional needs be balanced with priorities mandated by the professional bodies to which many graduate programs answer? A second issue is more philosophical in nature: Since a given ILO may be central to one graduate program but peripheral to another, should ILO benchmarks be the same for every graduate program, or should they differ? The former approach may lead to the adoption of lowest common denominator standards. By contrast, the latter approach opens the possibility of viewing graduate-level ILO assessment as aiming to ensure that the desired set of outcomes – while perhaps not embodied fully in any given student – will be realized by the institution collectively across the various graduate programs that it offers.

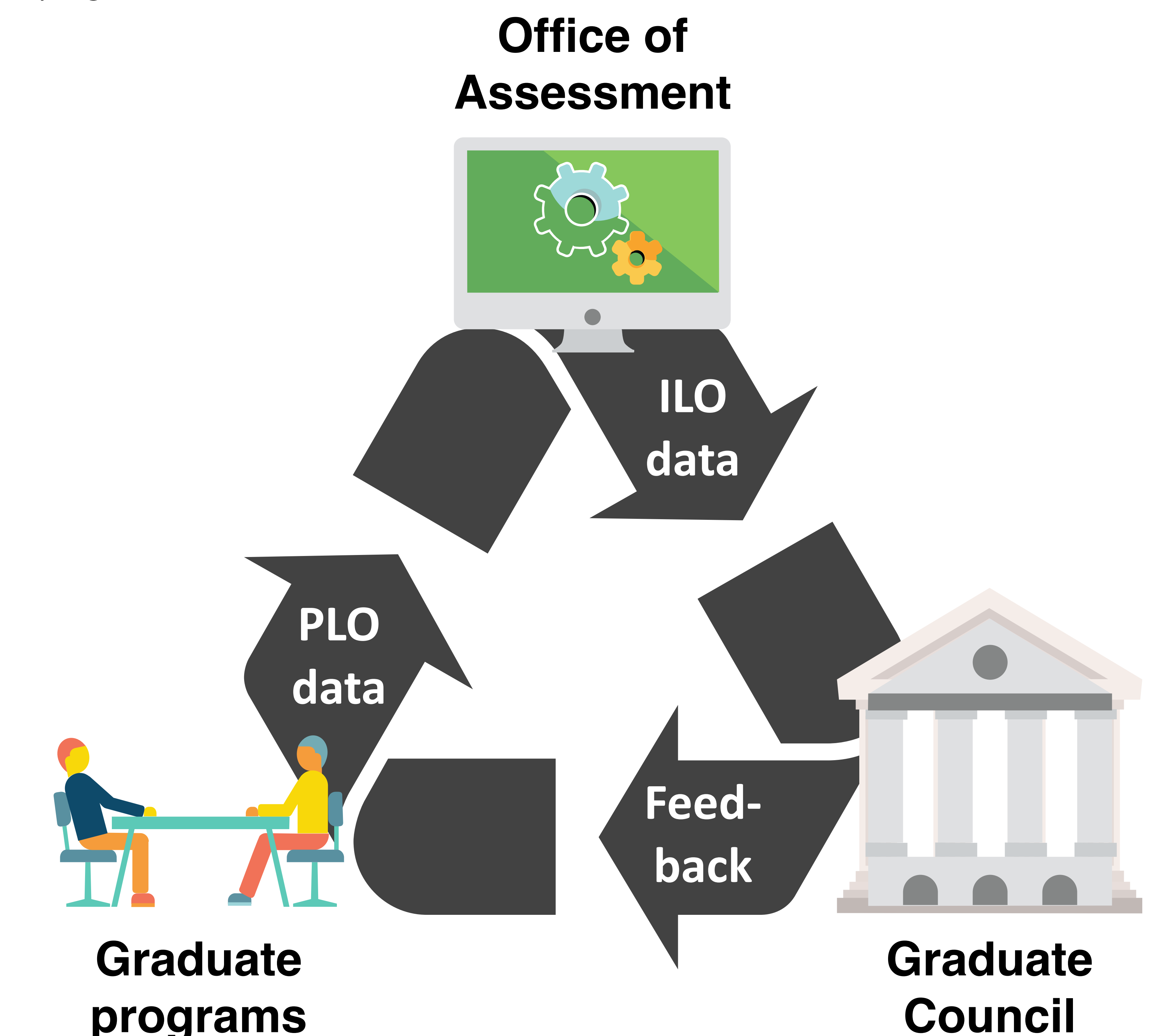


Figure 2. Sequence of processing assessment data.