

# Identifying Key Questions For The Next Review Cycle

In Year 1, your department will identify a series of Key Questions as it looks to the future. These will determine your program review work for the next five years.

Simply put, key questions are the most important questions that your department wants answered during the next several years. They may be:

- Questions that emerge out of the Seven-Year Program Review Report, the external review, or the program review team's response to your report.
- Questions that relate to aspects of your work that you have not assessed before.
- Questions that address areas where you know instinctively that your students could do better.
- Questions that address apparent obstacles to your department fulfilling its potential.
- Questions that address your student performance in relation to the institutional level outcomes.

The goal is that your program review will be driven by what your department cares about most and needs to know about most. At the beginning of the process, therefore, you should discuss together what those things are. Some may be old, some new. But the core of your program review work will be finding answers to these questions.

Remember that these Key Questions may overlap with your program learning outcomes. Key Questions may also be carried over from cycle to cycle. You might have a Key Question about how to help your students use digital resources well, for example. If so, craft a new learning outcome to be assessed in the next program review cycle that frames your question. At least one of your Key Questions will likely focus on an existing learning outcome relative to how your students gain knowledge in your field as measured by national norms. The hope is that these Key Questions will encourage departments to think strategically about ways to improve their work.

To give an example: a department may decide that its Key Questions for the next several years are:

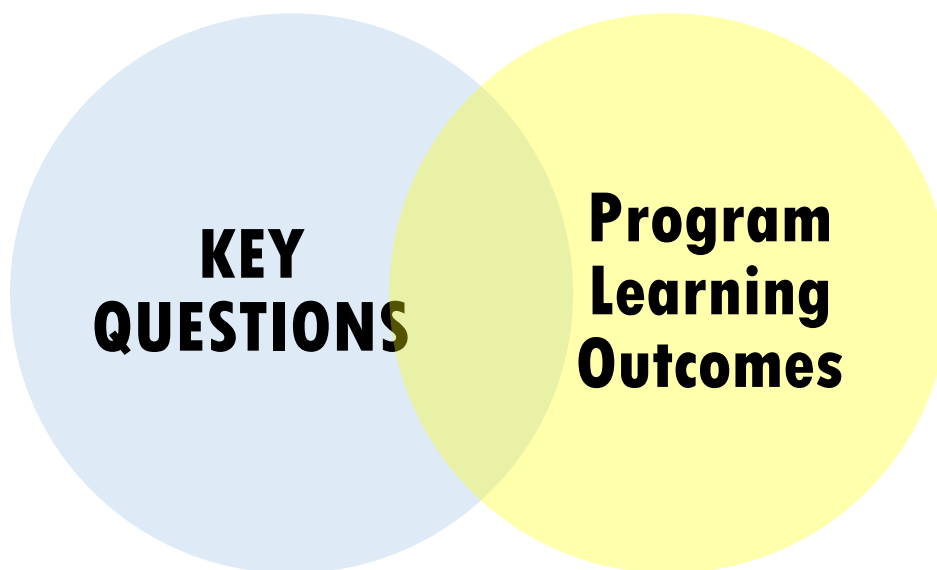
- a) How can we help students conduct better research?
- b) How can we help students to integrate their Christian faith with their study in the major?
- c) How might we adjust our curriculum in line with the changing demands of employers who hire our graduates?

Questions a) and b) would require program-learning outcomes, which you might need to craft. Question c) would not require crafting a program-learning outcome, unless your department has an experiential learning or internship requirement or component. Ideally, your review cycle would have no more than five learning outcomes (unless an external accrediting agency

requires additional outcomes). Thus, the department in our example would work on the learning outcomes for a) and b), on answering and implementing c), *and* would select two additional questions, likely stemming from existing learning outcomes, to continue assessing. Thus, Key Questions may overlap with program learning outcomes, but are not synonymous with them.

A good number of Key Questions is two to four. Most of these will likely align with old or new learning outcomes (your Key Questions may require you to conceive of one or more new learning outcomes for your next review cycle). In addition, Key Questions may relate to any number of areas, including but not limited to:

- The shape of your curriculum
- Your General Education work
- Your students' preparation for life after Westmont
- Teaching load distribution
- Student workload compared to other majors
- The financial basis of your program
- Diversity in your department
- Integration of faith and learning in your program
- Your students' performance against the ILOs
- PLOs alignment with your curriculum. Are your current program learning outcomes the right outcomes for your program? Are they aligned with course learning outcomes and integrated into the curriculum map?



As you come up with your Key Questions, remember that your program's learning outcomes do not need to capture everything that your department believes to be important. They are simply

an articulation of the direction in which your department wishes to grow and serve as tools to identify what students will be able to demonstrate, produce or represent as a result of what and how they have learned in your program. Also, remember to check in with the Dean of Curriculum and Educational Effectiveness to see what the plan is for institutional assessment in the coming years: if you want to study your students' writing, for example, it may be advantageous to coordinate your work with college-wide assessment efforts.