

## Identifying Key Questions for the Next Review Cycle

**In Year 1, your department will identify a series of Key Questions that will guide your program review work over the next five years.**

These Key Questions represent the most important issues your department wants to explore as it plans for the future. They may include:

- Questions emerging from the Seven-Year Program Review Report, the external review, or the program review team's response.
- Questions related to aspects of your program that have not previously been assessed.
- Questions prompted by a sense that students could perform better in certain areas.
- Questions addressing obstacles that may hinder your department from reaching its full potential.
- Questions about student performance in relation to institutional-level outcomes.

The goal is to ensure that your program review is driven by what matters most to your department. At the beginning of the review cycle, take time to discuss and identify these priorities. Some questions may be carried over from past reviews, while others will be newly developed.

Keep in mind that Key Questions may overlap with your Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs). For example, if your department is concerned about students' use of digital resources, you might create a new learning outcome around that theme to assess during the next cycle. At least one Key Question will likely focus on how students gain knowledge in your discipline, especially as measured against national benchmarks.

Ultimately, these Key Questions should help your department think strategically and work toward meaningful improvements in student learning and program quality.

To illustrate, consider the following example of Key Questions a department might adopt for the next several years:

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

Questions (a) and (b) would require corresponding program learning outcomes, which the department may need to develop. Question (c), by contrast, may not require a new learning outcome—unless the department has a specific experiential learning or internship component.

Ideally, a review cycle will focus on no more than five learning outcomes, unless an external accrediting body requires more. In the example above, the department would:

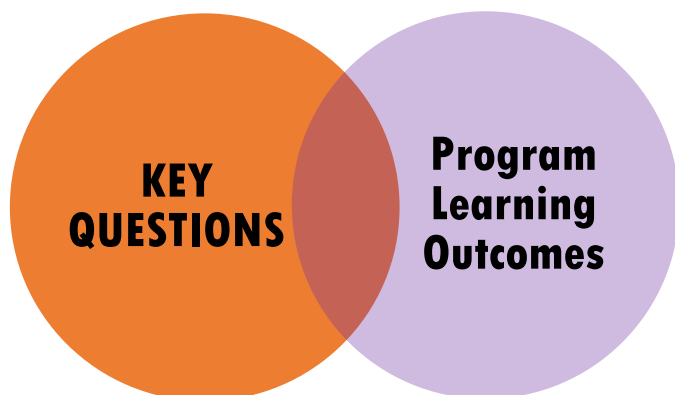
- Develop and assess learning outcomes related to questions (a) and (b),
- Investigate and implement changes related to question (c),
- Select two additional Key Questions, likely tied to existing learning outcomes, for continued assessment.

This example illustrates that while Key Questions may overlap with program learning outcomes, they are not the same.

A good number of Key Questions is typically two to four. Most will align with existing or newly created learning outcomes. However, Key Questions can address a wide range of topics beyond student learning outcomes, such as:

- The structure and content of your curriculum
- Contributions to General Education
- Students' preparation for life after Westmont
- Faculty teaching load distribution
- Student workload compared to other majors
- Financial sustainability of your program
- Diversity, equity, and inclusion in your department
- Integration of faith and learning within the major
- Student performance on Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs)
- Alignment of Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) with your curriculum—Are the right outcomes in place? Are they mapped appropriately to course-level outcomes and curricular content?

Key Questions should reflect your department's strategic priorities and guide meaningful, actionable assessment and improvement efforts.



As you develop your Key Questions, keep in mind that your program's learning outcomes do not need to encompass everything your department values. Instead, they should reflect areas where the department intends to grow and serve as practical tools for assessing what students can demonstrate, produce, or represent as a result of their learning experiences in your program.

Additionally, be sure to consult with the Dean of Curriculum and Educational Effectiveness to learn about upcoming institutional assessment plans. For instance, if you are interested in evaluating student writing, coordinating your efforts with college-wide assessment initiatives may provide valuable alignment and support.