Assessment Council on Learning Outcomes (ACLO) responses to the 2020-2021 assessment report submitted by:

School: New Brunswick Core Curriculum

1. Did the New Brunswick Core Curriculum report adequately address the changes and disruptions to the learning outcome assessment processes for its departments and programs, due to the adjustments made to cope with the pandemic and its consequences? Were two examples provided showing of how processes were adapted?

   The New Brunswick Core Curriculum report adequately addresses the adjustments made in the Core assessment process in the period under discussion. The major changes discussed were not related to the pandemic disruptions, but were part of the larger strategic vision of the Core Requirements Committee (CRC). For example, the CRC revised its summative assessment narrative requirement in an effort to integrate assessment results into decision-making. A new reporting method was introduced to give departments assistance in developing reports, and to give the more time for reflection on their assessment results.

   Other changes to the process of assessment were made to deal with the pandemic and its disruptions. The standing requirement that every online course must be assessed by the CRC was relaxed, mainly to keep the assessment cycle already in place functioning well. Reporting for Summer 2020 courses was made voluntary. Assessment strategies in the core courses were adjusted to help students cope with the enormous stress they experienced. The opportunity for change presented by the pandemic was taken to introduce new teaching and learning models. In some courses, assessments moved away from high-stakes and objective assessments and towards project and research based activities.

   It is important to note, though, that through all this adjustment, the assessment structure established to support the Core Curriculum was resilient and kept operating effectively in the face of the pandemic disruptions.
2. Did the New Brunswick Core Curriculum report discuss any change in learning goals or adjusted expectations for the learning outcomes of its departments and programs because of the response to the pandemic? Were two examples given?

The report indicates that there were no significant changes to learning goals in the pandemic period. The assessment process for the Core Curriculum functioned effectively and any changes in learning goals were driven by the pandemic but were instead part of the well-functioning assessment structure. There were changes in expectations due primarily to the many adjustments students and faculty faced as courses were moved into a remote or online format. Faculty teaching in the Core Curriculum responded to this in many ways, such as changing course assessments, or the weight of a final exam in the course, or adjustments to exam formats, or moving to more frequent ‘low stakes’ assignments’ rather than one or two ‘high stakes’ exams or assignments. In many cases, the report notes that these changes lead to improvements in student learning outcomes. This is important to note because many of the changes put into place in the face of the pandemic are the kinds of teaching and learning ‘best practice’ innovations that faculty have been reluctant to use in the past. The CRC and SASOUE are well aware of this and have encouraged this kind of creative response to circumstances.

3. Did the New Brunswick Core Curriculum report discuss any changes in students’ learning outcomes during this period of remote and online instruction? Does the report describe how these changes will be addressed, either to work to improve any declines that have been detected, or to build upon an improvements noticed?

The report has considerable discussion of changes in student performance of one kind or another, usually in league with the changes in learning expectations and the responses faculty implemented to deal with these changes, as described above. The most important information in this report is the evidence of the many ways faculty used teaching and learning innovation guided by ‘best practices’ to keep students engaged and involved, and to adjust creatively to the needs of our students. Again and again, faculty teaching in the Core Curriculum used the pandemic disruptions as an opportunity to redevelop, redesign and improve their courses to support student learning.

Conclusion: The assessment structure established for the NB Core Curriculum, managed by the Core Requirements Committee, has been and is now exemplary. It is resilient, well structured, responsive to the needs of instructors in the Core Courses and to the students enrolled in those courses. Even when the reporting requirements were relaxed a bit, e.g,
Summer 2020 courses were not required to be assessed, faculty and departments submitted reports anyway. As noted in the report: Core assessment results were also filed voluntarily for an additional 262 courses, which includes 48 courses for Summer 2020, 93 courses for Fall 2020, 15 courses for Winter 2021, and 106 courses for Spring 2021. This is very significant, because it shows the faculty and departmental engagement and commitment to assessment and improvement of learning represented by all those involved in the Core Curriculum.

The Core Curriculum assessment process is not only resilient, it is a sustainable institutional structure and operates at a high level even in very difficult times. This is a very laudable and important achievement.

The faculty who taught in the Core Curriculum in the period under discussion were innovative and creative in their response to the many issues brought on by the pandemic and the move to online and remote instruction. The assessment structure for the Core Curriculum provides a mechanism to insure that what we learn from all of these efforts can be readily disseminated. This is a result of robust assessment structure that is often undervalued, but is really the most important of all.