Exploring the Degree Level Standard

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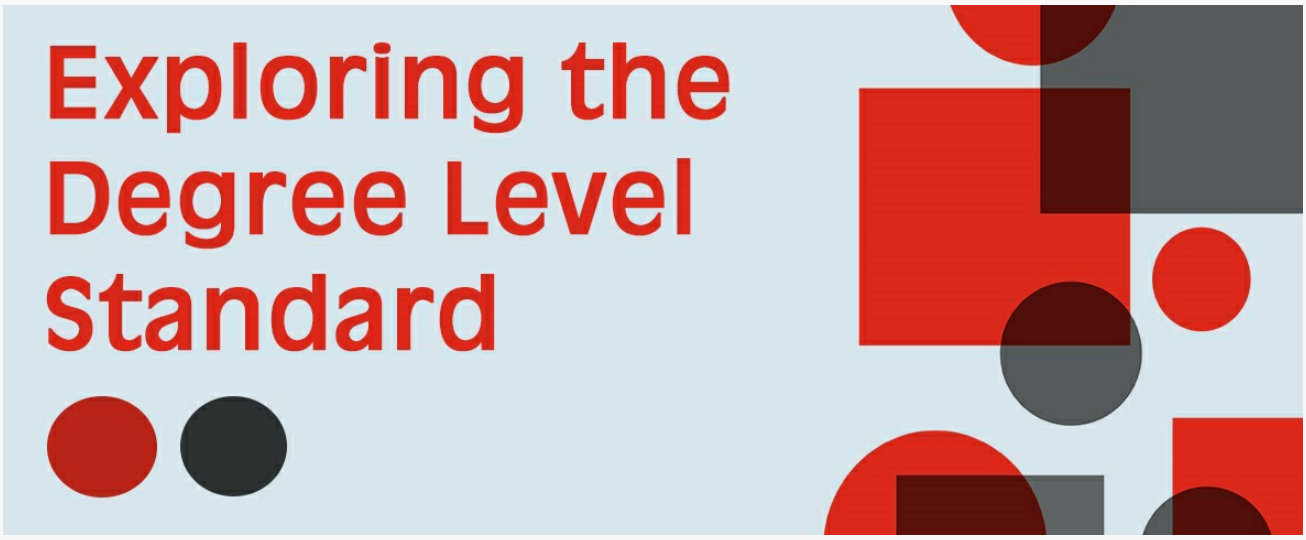

Overview and Outcomes

The Degree Level Standard identifies the level of knowledge and skills expected of graduates of Honours Bachelor degree programs in Ontario. It is the starting point for developing and delivering courses at a baccalaureate level. A good understanding of the Degree Level Standard and strategies for achievement of its elements is fundamental to degree level teaching.

In this first module we highlight the distinctions between diploma and degree teaching, and introduce the six elements of the Degree Level Standard and their relationship to specific program and course outcomes. Participants explore various strategies for building towards the level of learning required to meet the Standard.

> **By the end of this module participants will be able to:**
>
> - Describe the six elements of the Degree Level Standard
> - Develop a strategy for progression of learning to achieve a particular element of the Degree Level Standard

Degree versus Diploma

Seneca offers a variety of credentials including Certificate, Diploma, Advanced Diploma, Graduate Certificate and Honours Bachelor Degree programs. Each credential is associated with a set of expectations that specify the breadth, depth and complexity of learning a student must demonstrate upon graduation, as outlined in the Ontario Qualifications Framework (PDF). As a result, faculty need to incorporate unique elements of teaching and learning into their practice to meet the requirements of each credential.

> **Degree level learning differs from diploma level learning in several key ways:**
>
> - Degree programs support learning at a greater breadth, depth and complexity
> - Degree programs focus on theory to a greater extent and how the theory explains the practical application of knowledge
> - Degree programs provide opportunities to review, analyze and conduct research and/or develop creative solutions
> - Degree programs emphasize to a greater extent the interpretation, comparison, and critique of ideas and methods

Comparison of Credentials Offered at Seneca

Credential	Certificate	Diploma	Advanced Diploma	Graduate Certificate	Honours Degree
Program Length in Semesters	2	4	6	2	8
Breadth, depth and complexity of knowledge	Knowledge required to complete a list of tasks with clear instructions	Knowledge required to complete a variety of tasks and specialize in a few tasks. Be able to plan and choose between tasks.	Knowledge required to complete a wide variety of specialized tasks, with an emphasis on depth. Be able to plan, coordinate, design and troubleshoot tasks and provide guidance to others	Knowledge required to complete a specialized set of complex tasks. Be able to evaluate, analyze and develop practices and provide leadership in problem solving and planning	In-depth knowledge of an entire field and a specialized area of the field, including: theories, methods, current advances and research. Be able to critically evaluate and compare theories and concepts in order to apply the most appropriate methods; develop solutions to a problem or create new work

Source: MTCU, 2009a; MTCU, 2009b; PEQAB, 2017

Setting the Benchmarks

Three types of benchmarks describe the level, extent and composition of learning in Honours Baccalaureate degree programs: the Degree Level Standard, the Program Content, and Course Learning Outcomes. Together, these benchmarks ensure graduates possess the knowledge and skills required for employment in their field or further study.

Degree Level Standard

Within the Ontario education system, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) must grant Ministerial consent for each college degree program. Therefore, all Bachelor degree programs at Ontario colleges must meet the Honours Baccalaureate credential standards and benchmarks outlined in the Postsecondary Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB) Manual for Ontario Colleges (2018). PEQAB conducts the quality assurance processes that assess program proposals and renewal applications through an arms-length advisory board, and makes recommendations to the Minister regarding degree consent. There are eleven credential standards, each with multiple benchmarks, which a College must meet. Of particular importance to teaching and learning is the Degree Level Standard. One key component of this quality assurance process is an assessment of student work in the final years of the program to verify that the Degree Level Standard and the Course Learning Outcomes are being achieved.

Program Content

The Program Content outlines the knowledge and skills required for graduation from a specific program. For Honours Baccalaureate degrees, the program content includes the Program Learning Outcomes and associated breadth requirements (non-core course offerings). Program Learning Outcomes are expressed as broadly written statements that encompass learning in multiple courses throughout the entire program. Program Learning Outcomes are available on the Seneca Degree Programs webpage.

Program content is developed by the corresponding Seneca School in consultation with a Program Advisory Committee comprised of external industry experts and community representatives. Program content must adhere to PEQAB's Program Content Standard and include a balance of current theories and practices.

Course Learning Outcomes

Course Learning Outcomes specify what students can expect to achieve upon successful completion of a course. Course Learning Outcomes are described by focused and measurable statements indicating the knowledge and skills that can be attained by students within a specified time frame. Each Course Learning Outcome must be mapped onto the broader Program Learning Outcomes to ensure all criteria defined by the Program Content are met by the program as a whole. Learning Outcomes for all courses may be found on the

Seneca Subject Outline System.

Faculty together with program Chairs develop Course Learning Outcomes for Honours Bachelor Degree programs during the proposal phase. Once approved, Course Learning Outcomes should not be altered without consultation with the program Chair. A more detailed review of Course Learning Outcomes, and Program Learning Outcomes, occurs during the program renewal application process.

To learn more about Seneca's degree program development process, consult the website.

Video: Degree Level Standards (unavailable)

Explore the Degree Level Standard

Standard

When teaching in degree programs, it is important to keep in mind the Degree Level Standard, Program Learning Outcomes and Course Learning Outcomes. Awareness of the Degree Level Standard during course and lesson planning enables the implementation of the Course Learning Outcomes in a way that is appropriate to the Honours Bachelor credential level. Examination of the program description and Program Learning Outcomes ensures individual course content fits appropriately into the broader program. Together, these types of benchmarks enable students to develop the critical thinking, analytical and research skills that form the foundation of an Honours Baccalaureate.

Progression of Learning

The Degree Level Standard reflects the expected level of student achievement upon graduation. Accordingly, the accumulation of skills and knowledge should progress systematically throughout the program. The complexity of learning likewise should increase. This increase may occur over the length of the program, over the duration of a single course, or both.

Within such a laddering approach, first- and second-year courses typically lay a critical foundation for the achievement of the Degree Level Standard in the third and fourth years of the program. This foundation may include the following:

Foundation for Learning in First- and Second-year Degree Courses

A comprehensive overview of the subject, including an introduction to major concepts over a wide variety of topics

The demonstration to students of analytical or creative methods used in the field

The development by students of self-directed study habits and information literacy skills (i.e., the ability to independently find and retrieve relevant information).

Laddering strategies may be applied to the development of knowledge, the perfection of a skill or the cultivation of an attitude. A number of models describing progression through different levels of learning, such as the revised Bloom's taxonomy (Anderson, Krathwohl & Bloom, 2001), SOLO taxonomy (Biggs & Collis, 1982) and Webb's Depth of Knowledge levels (Webb, 1997), can provide guidance on developing your own laddering strategy. The following figures illustrate possible examples of progression of learning strategies within degree programs.

Download the Accessible PDF of Progression of Learning (PDF)

Progression of learning may also be adapted within a single course to introduce advanced topics and challenging skills. Building from simple to complex examples, modelling cognitive or academic behaviour and performing guided practice exercises provide suitable starting points from which students can progress to achieve higher level Course Learning Outcomes. For instance, reviewing a sample case study together with students and modelling the relevant analytical methods may set the stage for a major assignment in which students must analyse and evaluate a more complex study on their own.

> It is important to recognize that although several different levels of learning will be accessed throughout a course, the majority of teaching activities and assessments must be at a level appropriate to the relevant elements of the Degree Level Standard and the position of the course within the program.

For example, a fourth-year course may introduce a new concept and require students to recall, comprehend and apply this new information; however, the main focus of activities and assessments would involve critical evaluation of this new information and reconciliation with existing knowledge in order to evolve new ideas, methods or products. Likewise, a first-year course may include activities that require students to compare, assess and evaluate information at an introductory level, with the emphasis on building a strong, foundational knowledge base.

Activity – Developing a Laddering Strategy

This activity is designed to guide you through the steps of developing a progression of learning strategy relevant to your course, program or subject area. A template and example are provided to assist you with the development of your strategy.

Step 1: Choose one element of the Degree Level Standard that you would like to explore. A list of the six elements and their descriptions can be found in the Teaching & Learning Centre space.

Step 2: Read the description and interpretation for your chosen element. (Click on the corresponding icon to view).

Step 3: State a goal for the achievement of a particular aspect of this element within your

course or program. What do you want the students to be able to know or do with respect to this element?

Step 4: Outline how students will be guided towards the achievement of this goal. What are the start and end points of their learning? What steps will be involved in the progression of their knowledge and skills?

Step 5:For each step, identify a possible teaching activity, exercise or assessment.

Activity Template and Example

Developing a Laddering Strategy template (PDF)

Developing a Laddering Strategy example (PDF)

Complete this Module and Apply for Your Badge

To receive micro-credential recognition for completion of this module, apply for the Exploring the Degree Level Standard digital badge.

To demonstrate completion of the module, you will be asked to:

- Review all learning materials
- Design and submit a laddering strategy to guide students towards the achievement of one element of the Degree Level Standard in a degree course or program of your choice

Apply for a Badge

Badge Application Form

References

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tags : degree-learning-module, degree-level, degree-level-learning-module, degree-level-standard, degree-level-teaching, degree-level-teaching-learning-module, exploring-the-degree-level-standard-learning-module, learning-module, teach, teaching-and-learning, teaching-and-learning-centre