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Course Design and Implementation of "Strategic Management" Based on Assurance of Learning System

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Abstract: Based on the International Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) accreditation assessment system, this paper designs a teaching and evaluation scheme for the "Strategic Management" course grounded in the Assurance of Learning (AoL) system and proposes relevant course improvement measures based on implementation outcomes. The implementation of AoL facilitates mutual enhancement between teaching and learning, ensuring the continuous improvement of teaching methods and student learning outcomes.

Keywords: Assurance of Learning; Strategic Management; Learning Goals; Course improvement measures.

1. Introduction

With the deepening of economic globalization, an increasing number of local enterprises have responded to the national "Belt and Road" Initiative and expanded their international business sectors. This means that society's demand for business talents has begun to shift toward internationalization. The international development of enterprises has led to a growing need for business talents with an international perspective. Therefore, cultivating a group of international business talents who meet the requirements of China's economic and social opening-up, possess an international vision, understand international rules, and can participate in international affairs and competition has become a new mission and responsibility of higher education in China. In the process of cultivating international talents, universities should focus on exchanges and cooperation with foreign universities. Aligning with internationally recognized higher education quality standards is an effective way to fulfill this mission. Objectively, this requires that the teaching quality of Chinese universities not only be guaranteed and improved domestically but also gain authoritative international recognition and praise. Therefore, conducting professional accreditation and evaluation is not only very important but also an irresistible trend. Specifically for business schools, AACSB accreditation—one of the three major authoritative international accreditation systems for business schools worldwide—is widely recognized by business schools in various countries. Obtaining this accreditation is generally regarded as an important symbol of a business school moving toward a world-class business institution.

AACSB is a leading non-governmental accreditation body for business schools and accounting programs globally, representing a benchmark for world-class business education. Its core philosophy lies in "innovation, impact, and engagement," which is consistent with the spirit of the Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, which states: "We must give priority to education, self-reliance in science and technology, and talent-led development, comprehensively improve the quality of independent talent training, strive to cultivate top-notch innovative talents, and gather talents from around the world for our use." Both emphasize the importance of talents and innovation for development. Talents play a crucial role in promoting social development and are an indispensable resource for the progress of society and even a country. How to improve the quality of talents and cultivate a new generation of international talents suitable for the current process of globalization is a new challenge facing Chinese universities. AACSB accreditation first focuses on education quality, and most of its business accreditation standards are closely related to education quality. AACSB believes that teaching quality is created through interactive teaching practices between teachers and students. Therefore, AACSB accreditation is highly aligned with the current social demand for improving talent quality and cultivating business talents with an international perspective.

In the process of AACSB accreditation, the outcome-oriented AoL system plays a supportive role in improving course quality, optimizing teaching methods, and enhancing teacher-student interaction. It is a key core standard of AACSB accreditation. Guided by the institution's mission, the AoL system assesses students' learning outcomes, featuring assessability and continuous improvement. It helps evaluate course teaching quality and update teaching methods in subsequent courses. The AoL system provides a comprehensive evaluation framework for both teaching and learning, with specific implementation steps including: establishing course goals, aligning course goals, designing assessment methods, conducting course evaluations, formulating improvement plans, and applying these plans to the next round of teaching. This forms a closed-loop system that promotes the continuous improvement of course teaching, contributing to the steady enhancement of teaching quality.

From the perspective of AACSB accreditation, research on the AoL system has covered multiple core areas. These include how knowledge management enables competitive advantage for business school accreditation (Kehal, 2019 [1]), curriculum mapping pathways in AoL implementation (Xu, 2025 [2]), the design of digital-capability-oriented AoL scales and innovations in accreditation quality assurance (Vesty et al., 2022 [3]), the influence of strategic leadership and change management on AoL implementation (Prastiwi et al., 2024 [4]), the logic of AoL-driven accreditation management processes (Michael, 2019 [5]), empirical studies on course

learning assurance using business simulation tools (Alstete et al., 2019 [6]), the application of a unique AoL model in a comprehensive university finance course (Kohli et al., 2018 [7]), accreditation-oriented ethical assessment schemes and pathways for optimizing learning evaluation (Chiu, 2018 [8]), and frameworks supporting the competitive advantage of MBA programs (Dey, 2024 [9]). Regarding specific course applications, while practical AoL cases exist for courses such as "Introductory Financial Accounting" (Eng et al., 2014 [10]), significant research gaps remain for other important courses—for example, in the field of Strategic Management. "Strategic Management" is significant for cultivating students' international perspective and strategic and competitive thinking. Yet, the improvement of its course quality currently lacks guidance from a comprehensive global standard system. In the process of internationalizing talent cultivation, the School of Management at Tianjin University of Technology actively engages in exchanges and discussions with foreign universities, organizes various academic salons, fully mobilizes students' international thinking, and successfully obtained AACSB accreditation in 2023. In light of this, based on the AoL concept under AACSB international accreditation, this paper takes the Strategic Management course at the School of Management, Tianjin University of Technology as a case study to explore a development model for enhancing the learning quality of the Strategic Management course and to conduct course development in terms of learning assurance.

2. AoL Implementation Steps

AoL is an educational quality assurance system for assessing and improving student learning outcomes. Its core components are mission-driven outcome assessment and continuous improvement. The goal of AoL is to evaluate whether course offerings and teaching practice results meet the requirements of talent development objectives. Accredited institutions are first required to formulate degree program talent objectives based on their defined mission. These talent training objectives are then broken down into quantifiable goals. Subsequently, based on the characteristics of these goals, a curriculum map is drawn. Following accreditation standards, various methods are employed to professionally assess and analyze the achievement of data-oriented student professional training objectives. Improvement measures are proposed, an assessment report is formed, and a closed loop of continuous improvement is completed. The purpose of AoL is embodied in two aspects: performance evaluation and continuous improvement. Performance evaluation refers to assessing student learning outcomes and using actual data to demonstrate whether the institution's talent cultivation quality ultimately meets its set goals. Continuous improvement involves using assessment data to develop improvement plans for teaching and learning. AoL is a closed-loop, spiraling enhancement system. Figure 1 presents the roadmap for its implementation, and the process mainly comprises the following steps:

(1) Develop Learning Goals (LG) and Learning Objectives (LO) based on the school's vision and mission;

(2) For each course offered within a program, identify which learning goals it can achieve. Ensure that all learning goals are fully covered by all courses, thereby forming a complete Curriculum Map for the program. Simultaneously, develop assessment methods corresponding to the learning goals for each course;

(3) Based on the curriculum assessment methods and student assessment scores, develop a rubric or standard for each curriculum as the basis for course assessment;

(4) Conduct curriculum assessment, collect and analyze relevant assessment data, and generate assessment reports;

(5) Based on the curriculum assessment analysis reports, make appropriate adjustments and improvements to course teaching plans and assessment standards;

(6) Finally, based on the process of course teaching and teaching management, adjust and refine the program's learning goals; and, where appropriate, further optimize the school's mission.

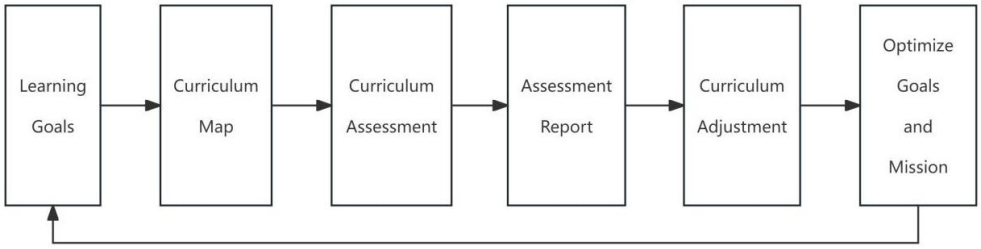


Figure 1. AoL Roadmap

3. AoL Design and Implementation for Strategic Management Course

The AoL system is "mission-driven" and evaluates student learning outcomes based on "outcome assessment." Following the AoL implementation steps, the first step is to scientifically formulate Learning Goals (LG) based on the school's mission and vision, and then break them down into measurable Learning Objectives (LO). Based on its vision of "becoming an excellent school of management in China with balanced development in engineering and management emphasizing both teaching and research" and its mission of "contributing to new knowledge in economics and management, cultivating professional talents, committing to regional development, and practicing social responsibility," the School of Management at Tianjin University of Technology meticulously formulated talent cultivation learning goals from three dimensions—knowledge, character, and skill. These learning goals were further detailed into learning objectives, and staged learning outcomes were set. Each program designs its curriculum based on the school's formulated learning goals, ensuring coverage of all learning goals and alignment of each course with corresponding learning goals.

Table 1. Assessment Methods for Strategic Management Course Goals

Learning Goal	Learning Objective	Assessment Method
LG1. Master fundamental professional knowledge	LO1.1 Students should master the basic theoretical knowledge of management disciplines	Final exam (fill-in-the-blank, short answer questions)
LG5. Possess an international perspective	LO5.1 Students should have a global vision and be able to analyze issues from a cross-cultural perspective	Case study and essay

The learning goals corresponding to the Strategic Management course selected for this paper are: LG1. Master fundamental professional knowledge - LO1.1 Students should master the basic theoretical knowledge of management disciplines, and LG5: Possess an international perspective - LO5.1 Students should have a global vision and be able to analyze issues from a cross-cultural perspective. At the end of this course, corresponding assessment methods are selected to evaluate the achievement of learning goals. Based on the established evaluation criteria, it is determined whether the learning goals have been met. Analysis and optimization are conducted based on the final goal achievement, improvement measures are proposed for the course teaching, and learning goals are refined. This forms an effective cycle of teaching refinement and learning outcome assessment. Table 1 shows the learning goals and assessment methods for the Strategic Management course in the Logistics Management program.

The essence of these two assessment methods is to collect scores from all students on questions related to each learning objective through the final examination, and then convert these scores into LO scores. Taking learning objective LO1.1 as an example, among all exam questions, fill-in-the-blank and short answer questions target the learning objective "students should master the basic theoretical knowledge of management disciplines," accounting for 30 points of the total exam score. Using a set conversion ratio, the score is converted into a percentage, resulting in the LO score. The evaluation standard is set as follows: an LO score of 0-59 is classified as "Does Not Meet Standard" (Unqualified), 60-84 is "Meets Standard" (Qualified), and 85-100 is "Exceeds Standard" (Excellent). The grades of all students in this course are compiled, and the LO score for each student is calculated. LO scores are then tallied according to the evaluation standards to determine the achievement status of the learning goals for all students in the Strategic Management course within the program, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Learning Goal Achievement Status for a Program

	Exceeds Standard (85-100)		Meets Standard (60-84)		Does Not Meet Standard (0-59)		Total Students Assessed
	Number (Excellent)	Percentage	Number (Qualified)	Percentage	Number (Unqualified)	Percentage	
Assessment1	94	75.8%	25	20.2%	5	4.0%	124
Assessment2	32	25.8%	71	57.3%	21	16.9%	124

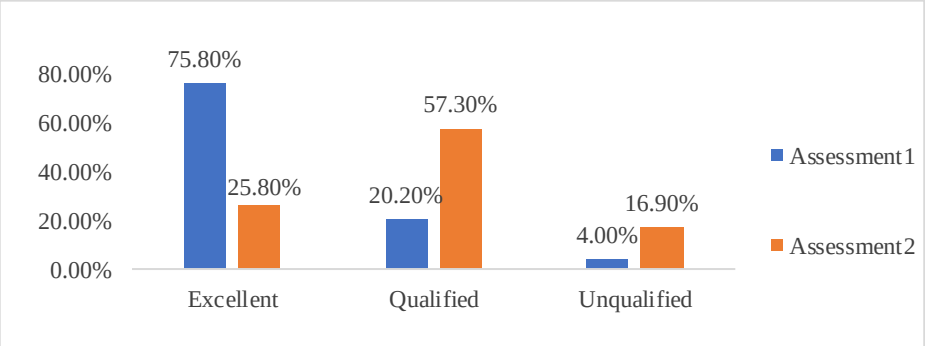


Figure 2. Learning Goal Achievement Status

Figure 2 shows that students in this program have achieved relatively good mastery of foundational professional knowledge for learning objective LO1.1: 96% of students met the requirements in mastering foundational professional knowledge, with 75.8% exceeding the average expectation. This indicates that current teaching methods can help the vast majority of students master foundational professional knowledge effectively. However, 4% of students still did not meet the standard, suggesting that current teaching methods have certain deficiencies. Instructors need to analyze the reasons for students who failed to meet standards, summarize experiences, propose improvement measures, and subsequently optimize goals and mission.

There remains considerable room for improvement in cultivating global vision and cross-cultural analytical skills. Although 25.8% of students demonstrated communication skills exceeding the expected standard, 16.9% of students simultaneously failed to meet expectations. This reflects that the cultivation of global vision and cross-cultural problem analysis abilities still requires improvement of existing teaching methods to improve effectiveness.

With the help of course assessment reports, the school and teachers can further examine the selection of course goals and whether teaching and assessment methods are scientific and reasonable, thereby promoting continuous teaching improvement. Based on the achievement status of learning goals in the Strategic Management course, improvement measures can be proposed from the following aspects:

Strengthen existing teaching methods for foundational professional knowledge and introduce more diverse testing to identify students who have not yet mastered the material, implementing targeted remedial measures.

Enhance the cultivation of global vision and cross-cultural problem analysis abilities incorporating various forms such as

case analysis and writing on global operations of multinational enterprises, group discussions, and presentations. Hold course teaching meetings to discuss assessment results and improvement measures.

Discussion content may include whether to revise rubrics or teaching methods during the next learning outcome assessment to obtain better evaluation results. Simultaneously, compile assessment result reports for reference by the curriculum committee, department heads, and relevant instructors. Finally, implement improvement recommendations and establish timelines, discuss and develop improvement measures in this course's teaching meeting (composed of instructors teaching common courses), and implement improvements in the next academic year.

4. Conclusion

With deepening international exchanges and the interaction and collision of diverse cultures, students are required to have a sense of national identity while also developing further attention to the current state and evolving developments of the world. They should understand the basic characteristics of major international cultures and ways of thinking, possess an attitude of respect, understanding, and mutual benefit, and hold the ideal and awareness of pursuing harmonious coexistence and common progress for humanity. Therefore, business schools should respond to societal needs by cultivating a group of applied international business talents with broad international perspectives and global awareness. How to measure whether student learning outcomes meet societal needs and how to continuously improve and refine talent education have become important components of talent cultivation evaluation. Within the AoL system framework, course teaching should follow rigorous steps, be guided by learning goals, and conduct teaching and evaluation according to various assessment and testing standards. Based on the results analysis from assessment reports, continuous improvement in course teaching should be gradually achieved, enhancing teaching and education quality, and ultimately fulfilling the school's mission and vision.

This paper takes the Strategic Management course at the School of Management, Tianjin University of Technology as a case study to explore problems existing in the course implementation process and proposes optimization based on the AoL system. Corresponding to the learning goals and objectives of Strategic Management, course assessment methods were set to evaluate student achievement of learning goals. A course evaluation plan and standards were established as the basis for course evaluation. Based on the course evaluation standards, an achievement evaluation report for the Strategic Management course learning goals was obtained. It was found that for learning objective LO1.1, 4% of students still did not meet the standard; for LO5.1, there remains significant room for improvement in cultivating global vision and cross-cultural analytical skills. Although 25.8% of students demonstrated communication skills exceeding the expected standard, 16.9% of students did not meet expectations. Based on the AoL system, optimized goals and improvement measures for the Strategic Management course under these learning objectives are proposed.

Higher education in business and management schools should be grounded in the strategic goals of various programs, integrating theory, education, and practice. Starting from the holistic nature of talent cultivation, it should enhance the integration and openness of professional courses and reasonably arrange the stages of students' professional learning. Simultaneously, following the reform path guided by the spirit of accountability and continuous improvement, with the improvement of student learning outcomes at its core, it should integrate professional practical courses into theoretical teaching, fully utilize professional practice activities, achieve the integration of teaching and simulation, teaching and research, truly place students at the center, benefit the cultivation of students' participation, innovation, and cooperation abilities, and support curriculum reform.

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