



What is Tuning?

Tuning is a faculty-driven process to articulate what a student knows and is able to do in a given discipline at the point of degree. Participants from four-year and two-year colleges and universities identify the essential learning in the discipline. Tuning invites stakeholders (faculty, students, recent graduates, and employers) to have input into the process and yields a framework that establishes clear learning expectations for students.

The objective is to better establish the quality and relevance of degrees in various academic disciplines. [Lumina Foundation](#) enumerates the following benefits arising from the Tuning process:

- Aligning the roles of higher education institutions;
- Facilitating retention, especially among students from underserved groups, by creating clear expectations for and pathways to degree completion;
- Simplifying the process for students transferring credits between institutions;
- Increasing higher education's responsiveness to changes in knowledge and its application;
- Emphasizing lifelong learning and important-but-often-undervalued transferable skills;
- Ensuring that the applied skills associated with coursework align with societal needs and workforce demands.

In the state and national projects, what has made Tuning unique is its intentional collaboration among faculty from different institutions and institutional types, professional organizations, and/or groups of states. It breaks down silos and brings faculty together to talk about their discipline across many lines. Tuning, however, does not attempt to standardize curricula. As has been noted already, Tuning is a faculty-driven process that identifies an explicit core of competencies and learning outcomes. The core outcomes are not an attempt to standardize curricula or to create some sort of statewide or national curriculum.

The Components of Tuning

Tuning consists of five elements by which participants identify what students earning a given degree in a discipline know and are able to do. The process grows from the assumption that faculty, those who know a discipline best, should be the party



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responsible for determining the discipline's essential learning. Because other stakeholders have an interest in the discipline, participants solicit feedback from them and incorporate it into their thinking about that learning. Tuning projects involve participants in:

- identifying essential learning;
- mapping career pathways;
- consulting stakeholders;
- honing core competencies and learning outcomes;
- implementing locally.

These elements are not a rigid process of steps and might be understood as activities motivated by four fundamental principles. First, Definitions of learning assist faculty in being more intentional in facilitating student learning and provide students with descriptions of what they will be challenged to learn. Second, we can strive to produce students concerned with core educational values, but we can do so while helping students understand that their learning can be deployed in multiple contexts. Third, faculty work as part of larger communities from whom we can learn and whom we can help to understand what our students know. Finally, the context in which essential learning occurs will shape the particular expressions of that essential learning.

As a process, Tuning encourages participants to develop explicit statements of a discipline's core areas of learning by engaging in a recursive sequence of definition and revision based on increased awareness of the needs of other stakeholders. It should be noted that Tuning endeavors to define the core of a discipline. That word, core, is important, because it does not suggest that Tuning aims at defining the totality of what will be taught in a given discipline. The process tries to define what various faculty and curricula have in common as they undertake to educate students in their own distinctive ways.

The initial results of this process is a body of explicit statements that make clear to students beginning or in the midst of their studies exactly what they are expected to learn and that articulate for graduates what their degrees have given them in terms of knowledge and skills, as well as career pathways opened to them by the degree. Fundamentally this process is about students gaining greater understanding of what it is they are learning, and the importance of that learning in terms of their discipline of interest.