Learning Outcomes are the standards by which most of our accredited programs (especially in Engineering, Pharmacy, Nursing, and Education) are judged. The entire university is also held to them by our regional accreditor, the Higher Learning Commission. I am inserting part of the criteria on Teaching and Learning. As Bill Martin noted in the open forum, the focus is not on the “inputs” (what we teach), but on “outputs” (what can students demonstrate that they know and can do.)

Criterion Three. Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources, and Support
The institution provides high quality education, wherever and however its offerings are delivered.

Core Components
3.A. The institution’s degree programs are appropriate to higher education.

1. Courses and programs are current and require levels of performance by students appropriate to the degree or certificate awarded.

2. The institution articulates and differentiates learning goals for its undergraduate, graduate, post-baccalaureate, post-graduate, and certificate programs.

3. The institution’s program quality and learning goals are consistent across all modes of delivery and all locations (on the main campus, at additional locations, by distance delivery, as dual credit, through contractual or consortial arrangements, or any other modality).

3.B. The institution demonstrates that the exercise of intellectual inquiry and the acquisition, application, and integration of broad learning and skills are integral to its educational programs.

1. The general education program is appropriate to the mission, educational offerings, and degree levels of the institution.

2. The institution articulates the purposes, content, and intended learning outcomes of its undergraduate general education requirements. The program of general education is grounded in a philosophy or framework developed by the institution or adopted from an established framework. It imparts broad knowledge and intellectual concepts to students and develops skills and attitudes that the institution believes every college-educated person should possess.
3. Every degree program offered by the institution engages students in collecting, analyzing, and communicating information; in mastering modes of inquiry or creative work; and in developing skills adaptable to changing environments.

4. The education offered by the institution recognizes the human and cultural diversity of the world in which students live and work.

5. The faculty and students contribute to scholarship, creative work, and the discovery of knowledge to the extent appropriate to their programs and the institution’s mission.

Some people prefer to call these proficiency-based, rather than competency-based (for similar reasons as you gave), but the latter is the most common term.

There are at least two completed national initiatives that have drafted competency-based frameworks for general education learning outcomes. In both cases they are progressive and establish a series of benchmarks for students to attain. One of their main goals is to build a common framework or understanding for what do we expect all college graduates to know and be able to do. Both of these were built with a great deal of input from faculty all over the country.

One is the Degree Qualifications Profile, which you may remember the campus worked with about two years ago with regards to the capstone course. It establishes benchmarks for the associate’s degree, the bachelor’s degree, and the master’s degree. It is at: http://www.luminafoundation.org/resources/dqp

The second is the VALUE Rubric project from the Association of American Colleges and Universities. http://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics. These rubrics are not prescriptive and the AAC&U notes they are too general for individual programs. Usually faculty will say that the “capstone” level is what we should expect in the major of our quality bachelor’s graduates and that the milestones at 2 & 3 are the targets for students after their sophomore years.

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