

## **Creating Student Learning Outcomes for a Department or Program**

Demonstrating student learning has become increasingly important for faculty and administrators at all levels of higher education. Now more than ever, we are being asked to show the value of the college experience and describe the tangible benefits and competencies associated with degree completion. Developing measurable learning outcomes is the first step in the assessment process, and when done well, it not only guides our methodology but also dramatically improves our work with students in and beyond the classroom. This process provides a foundation to justify educational practice and the larger impact of higher education on students.

This guide provides a starting place for creating and measuring meaningful learning outcomes. Regardless of your expertise or where you are currently in the process of developing clearly stated student learning outcomes (SLOs), this process can be most helpful as you take time to examine your own practice and through meaningful reflection, make changes to improve student learning and engagement.

### **Questions for Reflection:**

What is our program (major or minor) supposed to accomplish? What kinds of outcomes do we desire for our students? What kind of knowledge and skills do we want our students to gain from our program? What level of cognitive processes do we want students to reach within our knowledge domain?

How can we state these outcomes clearly for the benefit of students, faculty and administrators?

How are we currently measuring progress toward our desired outcomes?

How might our current methods need to be changes to give us a more complete picture of how students move toward these desired outcomes?

### **What are Learning Outcomes?**

Developing measurable learning outcomes is a first step in assessing student learning. Creating outcomes that are specific to the skills and/or knowledge we would like our student to obtain is crucial in achieving the larger goals of our departments and programs.

Learning outcomes are specific, measurable objectives that describe what an individual (major or minor) will learn and be able to do as a result of completing the program in our department or program.

### **Characteristics of Learning Outcomes:**

- Express what the student will be able to know or do
- Focus on the product rather than the process
- Are measurable (i.e., identifiable or observable)
- Are detailed and specific
- Include action verbs such as define, compare, create, design or develop

### **Format of the Student Learning Outcome Statement:**

Each learning outcomes is described by a sentence that consists of an action verb related to a cognitive process and clearly defined content related to a specific knowledge type as well as a means of measuring students' achievement of the outcome.

All learning outcomes have a common format:

#### **Subject – Verb – Object – Measurement Process**

Another common format is an “ABC” format:

#### **Audience – Behavior – Conditions**

#### Subject/ Audience of the Outcome Statement:

The Subject/Audience is the student or the learner:

- The student will be able to
- The major will be able to
- The minor will be able to

#### Verb/Behavior of the Outcome Statement:

The Verb/active Behavior is what you want the student to be able to know or do stated in an active form at various cognitive levels, depending on your objectives and goals:

- Define; duplicate; list; memorize; recall; repeat; reproduce; state
- Classify; describe; discuss; explain; identify; locate; recognize; report; select; translate; paraphrase
- Choose; dramatize; demonstrate; employ; illustrate; interpret; operate; schedule; sketch; solve; use; write
- Appraise; argue; compare; criticize; differentiate; discriminate; distinguish; examine; experiment; question; test
- Judge; defend; select; support value; evaluate
- Assemble construct; create; design; develop; formulate; compose

#### Object/ Behavior of the Outcome Statement

The Object/ content Behavior is the skill or content knowledge the educator is addressing as part of the program. Object statements are specific to the content of the particular major or minor being described.

- Factual knowledge
- Conceptual knowledge
- Procedural knowledge
- Metacognitive knowledge

### Measurement Process/ Conditions of the Outcome Statement

Learning outcomes are only useful if they are assessed or measured to see if the students have achieved them. It is important to state how the outcomes will be assessed in specific and realistic terms.

- Exams
- Standardized tests
- Papers
- Course assignments
- Presentations
- Performances
- Portfolios
- Capstone projects/ theses
- Exit assessments
- Reflection papers

#### **Examples:**

- The art major will be able to recognize historical periods and styles in the history of art through acceptable performance on a senior project.
- The psychology major will be able to demonstrate familiarity with concepts, theoretical perspectives and empirical findings within the field on a standardized exam in psychology.
- The Spanish major will be able to demonstrate oral proficiency at the high intermediate level or above according to the ACTFL guidelines.
- The theater major will be proficient in using research and analysis for theatrical practice as demonstrate in an on campus production.
- The religion major will be able to demonstrate an understanding of the basic beliefs, practices, and communities of several different religious traditions, both historically and as part of the dynamic flow of our contemporary global society – in written and oral presentations.

#### **Your Department/Programs' Outcomes Statements:**

Sections adapted from: *A Faculty and Staff Guide to Creating Learning Outcomes* by Jimmie Gahagan, John Dingfelder & Katharine Fei, University of South Carolina, 2010.