

How to Write Student Learning Outcomes

Instructions for Writing Student Learning Outcomes

Creating student learning outcomes for your degree or service program is a process. Some programs have found the following steps to be helpful:

Step 1

Start by having a faculty/staff meeting (including students and alumni, ideally) and brainstorm about what an ideal graduate would know, understand, and be able to do...and/or

Consult the web site for your professional/disciplinary organization – many of them are developing student learning outcomes for degree or service programs at various levels.

Step 2

Agree on a first draft of a list of outcomes, understanding that they will be revised several times before becoming firm (or definitive) and that they will change over time for currency in the discipline or service area and changing needs and characteristics of students.

Step 3

List the student learning outcomes on every syllabus for the required courses in your degree program (or programs within your student service area), indicating which of them will be covered in each particular course (or service program).

Step 4

Gather feedback from students in each course or service program about how well they perceive that student learning outcomes were addressed.

Step 5

Assess student learning by designing assignments specifically geared to measure achievement of each of the outcomes that are designated for each course, degree program, or service area.

Step 6

In light of this data, meet (with faculty, staff, and students) at the end of each semester or academic year and revise the list of outcomes, teaching methods, curriculum, and/or program.

Step 7

Repeat the above steps regularly and as needed to improve student learning.

Source/Reference: These steps were derived from information collected at various conferences by Dr. Cia Verschelden. She tailored the information to fit the approach that was implemented at Kansas State University in the fall of 2002.

Additional Resources on How to Write Learning Outcomes

1. From Ball State University

Getting Started (<http://web.bsu.edu/IRAA/AA/WB/chapter2.htm>)

Before writing or revising departmental goals/objectives, you might try a few of the following.

- Have some open discussion sessions on one of the following topics or something similar.
 - Describe the ideal student in your program at various phases throughout your program. Be concrete and focus on those strengths, skills, and values that you feel are the result of, or at least supported and nurtured by, the program experience. Then ask:
 - What does this student know?
 - What can this student do?
 - What does this student care about?
 - List and briefly describe the program experiences that contribute most to the development of the ideal student.
 - List the achievements you implicitly expect of graduates in each major field?
 - Describe your alumni in terms of such achievements as career accomplishments, lifestyles, citizenship activities, and aesthetic and intellectual involvement?
- Collect and review instructional materials. Try sorting materials into 3 broad categories: recognition/recall, comprehension/simple application, critical thinking/problem-solving. Use any of the following:
 - syllabi and course outlines
 - course assignments and tests
 - textbooks (especially the tables of contents, introductions, and summaries)
- Collect and review documents that describe your department and its programs:
 - brochures and catalogue descriptions
 - accreditation reports
 - curriculum committee reports
 - mission statements
- Review and react to goals and objectives from another unit that is similar but external (ex. another department or college in the Mid-American Conference). Try grouping the statements into broad categories of student outcomes (i.e., knowledge, attitudinal, behavioral).
- Use the 25 percent problem to refine or reduce a set of goal statements. Imagine that you want to reduce program or course material by 25 percent. What goals would you keep and which would you discard?

- Administer a goals inventory or conduct an interview study. Involve a variety of groups (or "stakeholders") when possible.
- Use a Delphi technique or a modification. This involves administering a series of related questionnaires in which information from the initial form is provided so that respondents can use it to revise their responses on subsequent forms. The objective is to develop consensus before writing goals or objectives.
- Shaping Department Goals and Objectives for Assessment – Definitions, Q&A, Getting Started with writing learning outcomes.

Source : The information above was derived from information presented on the Ball State University's web site (<http://web.bsu.edu/IRAA/AA/WB/chapter2.htm>), which was accessed in the summer of 2003.

2. Writing learning outcomes

(<http://www.ncgia.ucsb.edu/education/curricula/giscc/units/format/outcomes.html>)

- This site provides additional suggestions on how to create student learning outcomes. The site also provides its own list of verbs to use when writing your own learning outcomes.

3. Some Web Resources and How to Find Out More

(<http://www.cabrillo.edu/%7Etsmalley/learneroutcomes.html>)

- This site provides a list of sources related to student learning outcomes. Most of the resources are directed at community colleges, however the material is relevant for any academic unit that is developing its student learning outcomes for a course or degree program.

Kansas State University, Office of Assessment, Accessed: September 2005
<http://www.k-state.edu/assessment/Learning/resources.htm>