

Developing Useful Student Learning Outcomes

Student learning outcome definitions:

OUTCOMES: Skills, knowledge, and abilities acquired as a result of participating in a wide range of college experiences. “What” we expect students to achieve.

E.g.: Students will demonstrate basic fishing rod construction concepts. COMPETENCIES: “How” the student demonstrates that they have achieved the outcome.

E.g.: Students will construct fishing rods using bamboo and fiberglass.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES/ASSESSMENTS: “Method” of measuring whether the student has achieved the competency.

E.g.: Students’ construction of two fishing rods will be assessed by a rubric. 80% of students will score a 3 or 4 on a 4-point assessment rubric for each of two fishing poles.

Characteristics of learning outcomes:

Student-centered, concrete, and observable. Provide students with clear expectations for the course, program, and degree. Show underprepared students where they may need to seek assistance in order to meet those expectations. Provide consistency for instructors preparing different sections of a course. Allow communication of our achievements to the community.

Tips for creating useful, simple learning outcomes:

1. Learning outcomes and competencies should reflect existing college, department, program and course outcomes (what we want the students to learn as a result of their SMC experience) and competencies (how students demonstrate they have achieved the outcomes).
2. Review your program’s student learning outcomes. Select a couple of specific competencies, which would demonstrate that a student had achieved an outcome. Then pick performance measures (e.g. embedded test questions, rubrics for scoring papers or projects).
3. If current outcomes and competencies do not reflect your area’s goals, revise them. Focus on a small set of the most important outcomes (3-5 is a good number). Consider merging two or more similar outcomes into a single outcome to simplify.
4. Good outcomes are stated with action verbs that describe what the student should be able to do, produce, or demonstrate as a result of the course. Avoid using the verbs “understand”, “learn”, “know”, as these are difficult to measure. Instead use ‘explain’, ‘demonstrate’, etc.
5. existing assessment instruments to evaluate whether students achieve your course/ program/ department outcomes and competencies. Are you already using a standard final exam? Are you already evaluating a capstone project? If so, use the exam or the evaluation of the project as your assessment instrument. State a benchmark for success.
5. Select an assessment cycle. Assess once per year or once every two years, since it takes two full cycles of assessment to close the loop and evaluate improvements to the learning environment.
6. Coordinate assessment efforts. If your program is accredited by an outside agency, use the outcomes/competencies/assessments required by that accrediting agency.
7. Use predominantly direct assessments (e.g., embedded exam questions or rubrics that assess a portfolio, paper, or project), augmented by indirect assessments (e.g., graduate surveys or alumnae surveys). Direct assessments provide more objective assessment of learning. Indirect

assessments reflect values and attitudes. Triangulation of results gives a better picture of achievement.

8. Use formative assessments (assess the learning process during the course of the course/program/degree) as well as summative assessments (assess the end result of participation). Formative assessments give the instructor feedback on how well students are learning quickly and efficiently. Formative assessments permit instructors to change their teaching strategies to meet the needs of the students before the course ends.