Program Assessment: Writing Learning Outcomes

The Program Assessment Process

- Specify intended outcomes
- Identify program goals
- Measure whether students are meeting those outcomes
- Improve your program based on results

Cathy Barrette, Director of Assessment
Wayne State University
Learning outcomes are statements of the intended results of the program

- *Specific, measurable* statements of what graduating students *should know, be able to do, or value*

- Derived from the mission statement

- Focused on the results of student learning, not on the learning process or on teaching

- Student services programs may have program outcomes that describe operational performance instead.
* Explicitly stating learning outcomes enables faculty and staff to:
  * Clearly express the benefits of the program to stakeholders in concrete terms
  * Inform students about what they will learn
  * Attract students to your program
  * More effectively request donations, funding, resources
Programs’ learning outcomes should reflect a cognitive level appropriate for the degree.
For example, the expectations in a graduate program should be higher than in an undergraduate program in the same field.
Bloom’s Taxonomy is a useful tool for scaling learning outcomes by cognitive difficulty.
## Bloom's Taxonomy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<tr>
<td>Remember</td>
<td>Define, duplicate, list, repeat, state</td>
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<tr>
<td>Understand</td>
<td>Classify, explain, describe, identify, locate, select, translate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apply</td>
<td>Execute, implement, solve, use, interpret, operate, sketch</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analyze</td>
<td>Differentiate, organize, relate, compare, contrast, test</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluate</td>
<td>Justify a stand or decision; appraise, argue, defend, critique, judge, select, support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Create</td>
<td>Produce new or original work; design, assessment, construct, formulate, investigate</td>
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**Levels:** Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyze, Evaluate, Create
* MA students will [locate] relevant primary and secondary sources.
* MA Students will [analyze] relevant primary and secondary sources.
* MA Students will [analyze] current historiographical debates in a chosen field of history.
* MA Students will [articulate a historical argument], using evidence based in primary and secondary sources.
* Student **integrates** knowledge of health promotion, health restoration and supportive measures in management of nursing care of individuals, families and communities in diverse populations.

* Student systematically **evaluates** the processes and outcomes of healthcare using established criteria.

* Student **utilizes** innovations and technology in planning, delivering, and evaluating nursing care and nursing care outcomes.
Course-level learning outcomes should contribute to/align with program-level learning outcomes:

**Program Learning Outcomes:**
Doctor of Physical Therapy

Students provide interventions to achieve patient goals.

**Contributing Course Learning Outcomes**

- **PT 5100:** Students recall appropriate exercise intervention.
- **PT 6100/7320:** Students implement an exercise program for a patient who has a neurologic or orthopedic injury.
- **PT 8800/8820:** Students select an exercise intervention for an actual patient.
Examples:
Student Services Learning Outcomes

* Dean of Students Office, Student Community Service
  * Students will identify opportunities to become involved in community service activities.

* Counseling and Psychological Services:
  * Clients will demonstrate motivation for self-improvement and personal responsibility.
Examples: Student Services
Operational Outcomes

* Testing, Evaluation & Research Services:
  * Students will increase their participation in SET.

* Ombud’s Office
  * The Ombud’s Office provides relevant information and/or referral to all who contact it.
To help you identify your program’s learning outcomes, consider the following questions:

* What can ideal graduates/clients from your program do with what they learned?
* What do they value or care about?
* What kinds of job skills do they take into the workforce and the community?

Your answers can form the basis of your program’s learning outcomes.
Learning Outcomes: Pitfalls to Avoid

* Combining two or more behaviors into one outcome
* Describing an outcome that is not measurable
  * Too vague
  * Too broad or inclusive
* Focusing on the process of learning rather than its outcomes
* Writing for a specialist audience rather than a general audience
A curriculum map identifies the relationship between courses students take and the program’s learning outcomes.

The level of development of each outcome can also be specified by indicating whether each outcome is:

- I - Introduced
- D - Developed/Practiced/Reviewed
- M - Mastery demonstrated
By explicitly identifying which learning outcomes are addressed in each course and at what developmental level, programs can easily determine whether:

* the program addresses all learning outcomes in a balanced way
* there are gaps or an overemphasis in any particular learning outcome
* students have progressively more challenging opportunities to build their skills and knowledge to a mastery level.
Organized by program learning outcome, course, and development, not by course learning outcomes or by time/semester in the program.
Curriculum Map: Guiding Questions

* Which course(s) contribute to each learning outcome?
* To what degree?
  * I- Introduced
  * D-Developed/Practiced/Reviewed
  * M-Mastery demonstrated

(A template for creating a curriculum map is available on the WSU Assessment website.)
Want More Information?

* Additional presentations and the assessment handbooks explain how to:
  * Write mission statements
  * Write learning outcomes and curriculum maps
  * Choose assessments
  * Understand and use results
  * Use Planning to record your work
  * Each part has examples and pitfalls to avoid as well!
Local Resources for Program Assessment

* Cathy Barrette, WSU Director of Assessment
  c.barrette@wayne.edu
  (313)577-1615
* WSU Assessment website
* Office for Teaching and Learning staff, workshops and website