How to Write An Effective Learning Outcome Statement

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Quick note about remote sessions:

1. Given the nature of the audio portion of the remote session I will mute the line for the majority of the time. This means that the only person you will be able to hear is me and I will not be able to hear any of you. This eliminates any background noise.

2. I will pause every few slides to take questions and then we will have a general question/discussion time at the end.

3. Very project-specific questions are probably best answered on an individual basis; please feel free to contact myself or your assessment consultant at StudentVoice to discuss how to implement this information!

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Student Learning Outcomes Assessment is a hot topic!

What are colleges and universities doing about 'it'?

- Staffing assessment positions
- Attending to the national dialogue/using existing resources

  - Learning Reconsidered 2 (LR2) as 'required' reading
  - CAS/FALDOs
  - Bloom's taxonomy

- Assessment retreats and workshops
- Sending groups or committees to conferences like the recent LR2 conference/CAS conference
- Finding a process/mechanism that works for their institutional context (dissecting mission/values/guiding documents, committees, brainstorming, even... working with a company like StudentVoice!)
- They are not re-inventing the wheel

Learning Outcomes Assessment

Outcomes assessment is the <u>most valid way </u>of demonstrating the effectiveness of services, programs, and facilities, especially in <u>defending and promoting higher education</u>, and also in <u>meeting accreditation standards</u>. It is also most difficult, complex and misunderstood of all the assessment methodologies.

(Upcraft & Schuh, 1996)

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Outcomes Assessment…

- Clarifies divisional and departmental "fit" with institutional vision, mission, goals and/or strategic plans

- Clarifies to students and other constituents what students can expect to gain and what the program will accomplish

- Provides different kinds of data and evidence about services - moves beyond satisfaction and tracking use to describing effectiveness

- Links Student Affairs and Academic Affairs; links curricular and co-curricular

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Biggest Challenges to Assessing Learning

- Students do not experience college in a way that makes outcomes assessment simple.

- Some learning outcomes may take months, years, or a lifetime to manifest.

- A survey may not cut it.

- Assessing learning is more time consuming and more difficult, compared to other assessments.

- Can be difficult to specifically identify what you want students to learn

- Just getting started...

Accomplishing Assessment

Professionals conducting assessment should be able to:

1. Distinguish student learning outcomes from operational indicators and metrics, including measures of student satisfaction.

2. Define a student learning outcome.

3. Explain overall institutional student learning outcomes and their relationship to mission.

4. Describe specific intentional learning experiences that the institution provides to address those overall outcomes.

Continued…

5. Discuss how specific programs, services, and learning experiences provide support for students' achievement of desired institutional learning.

6. Derive and use, in collaboration with colleagues, a common format and structure for writing student learning outcomes.

7. Design robust assessment plans to address measurement of the achievement of learning outcomes.
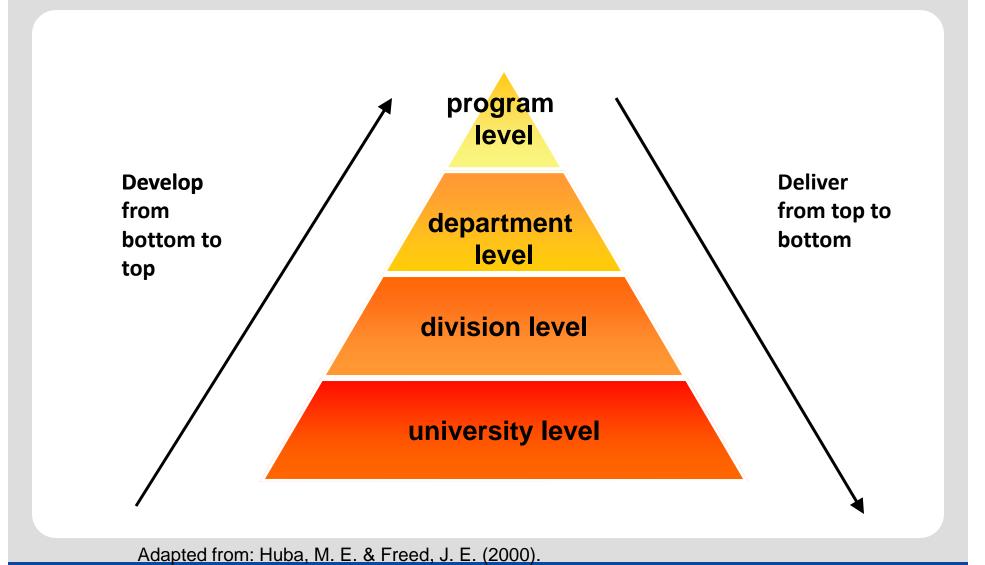
There are more…

Assessment Reconsidered, pgs. 63-64

Strategic Plans, Missions, Goals, Objectives, and Outcomes…

Where to begin?

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Connecting missions, goals, objectives, outcomes

program level

department level

division level

university level

Develop from bottom to top

Deliver from top to bottom

Adapted from: Huba, M. E. & Freed, J. E. (2000).

Connecting to the "Big Picture"

College or University mission/goals

↓

Division **mission**

↓

Division/departmental **goals**

↓

Division/departmental **objectives**

↓

Outcomes for students and programs

Example of the connection

University and Student Affairs Mission or Goal:

Students will become **life-long learners** and will use the skills they learned in college to approach life in a **global environment**

Student Affairs Objective:

Provide experiences that develop and encourage the use of **critical thinking** skills

Greek Life Outcomes:

1. At the conclusion of the Greek Life Anti-Hazing presentation, students in attendance will be able to **identify** 5 behaviors or activities that constitute hazing.

2. Chapter leaders attending the Leadership Summit will be able to **compare and contrast** situations that may constitute hazing.

3. The Judicial Board members will be able to **assess** the cases brought before them in order to **evaluate** appropriate consequences for policy violations.

Example of the Connection

University & Student Affairs Goal	Student Affairs Objective	Greek Life Outcomes
Students will become life-long learners and will use the skills they learned in college to approach life in a global environment.	Provide experiences that develop and encourage the use of critical thinking skills	At the conclusion of the Greek Life Anti-Hazing presentation, students in attendance will be able to **identify** 5 behaviors or activities that constitute hazing.
		Chapter leaders attending the Leadership Summit will be able to **compare and contrast** situations that may constitute hazing.
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Goals and Objectives

- Broad, general statements about how you want students to be changed because of programs, services, and interactions.

- Statements about what the program/service will accomplish or provide.

- Related to the vision and mission of the college and the division.

Levels of Goals or Objectives

- Institutional

- Divisional

- Departmental

- Program-level

The Challenge…

Creating measurable learning outcomes based on your goals and/or objectives.

Outcomes

- Desired effect of a service or intervention
- Much more specific than a goal
- A learning outcome is participant (student) centered

Learning versus Program Outcomes

- **Program Outcomes** examine what a program or process is to do, achieve or accomplish for its own improvement; generally needs/satisfaction driven.

- **Learning Outcomes** examine cognitive skills that students (or other stakeholders) develop through department interactions; measurable, transferable skill development.

Effective Learning Outcomes...

Are student-focused

Focus on learning resulting from an activity rather than the activity itself

Reflect the institution's mission and the values it represents

Align at the course/program, academic program/department, divisional, and institutional levels

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Effective Learning Outcomes

Focus on skills and abilities central to the discipline and based on professional standards of excellence

Are general enough to capture important learning, but clear and specific enough to be measurable

Focus on aspects of learning that will develop and endure but that can be assessed in some form now

Huba & Freed (2000)

Components of a learning outcome:

Audience/Who

Who does the outcome pertain to?

Behavior/What

What do you expect the audience to know/be able to do?

Condition/How

Under what conditions or circumstances will the learning occur?

Degree/How much

How much will be accomplished, how well will **the behavior** need to be performed, and to what level?

Component Example

Students attending the smoking cessation program will be able to identify the five main effects of smoking on one's health.

- Audience (who)?
- Behavior (what)?
- Condition (how)?
- Degree (how much)?

Behavior = Bloom

One way to specify the intended behavior in a learning outcome is to utilize Bloom's taxonomy:

1. Knowledge: define, list, identify
2. Comprehension: describe, explain, restate
3. Application: apply, practice, experiment
4. Analysis: compare, contrast, interpret
5. Synthesis: organize, design, create
6. Evaluation: assess, judge, convince

Each level builds on the preceding level

Other Guiding Documents

- Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS)
- Learning Reconsidered and Learning Reconsidered 2
- Accreditation guidelines

Learning Outcome Examples

1. As a result of attending five counseling sessions at the Student Counseling Center, students will be able to identify one or more strategies to cope with their problems.

2. At the conclusion of the Greek Life Anti-Hazing presentation, students in attendance will be able to identify 5 behaviors or activities that constitute hazing.

3. Faculty who attend the NSSE workshop will be able to identify 3 ways their work contributes to the institution scoring well on the NSSE benchmarks.

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Outcome writing: The 3 Ms

1. <u>Meaningful</u>: How does the outcome support the departmental mission or goal?

2. <u>Manageable</u>: What is needed to foster the achievement of the outcome? Is the outcome realistic?

3. <u>Measurable:</u> How will you know if the outcome is achieved? What will be the assessment method?

Learning Outcome Statement:

A Students will …

B <learn what>

C <under these circumstances / conditions>

D <to this level of efficiency / effectiveness>

Not always so easy…

Initial Problems Encountered When Writing Learning Outcomes

Describe program outcomes, rather than learning outcomes

Too vast/complex, too wordy

Multiple outcomes in one learning outcome statement (the word "and" is usually your first clue!)

Not specific enough (e.g., effective communication skills)

Not measurable

Learning outcomes…describe what students will **learn**

Activities…describe what students will **do**

Taking it one outcome at a time

- Start with a small manageable win (outcomes and populations).

- Select one student learning outcome area to focus on during an academic year (such as intercultural competence, personal responsibility, or civic engagement).

- Write learning outcome statements specific to that area that has meaning for your departmental context.

- By focusing on one outcome as a division, that allows departments to see their role in some of the global/big picture outcomes, as well as interconnections between departments - creating opportunities to collaborate on assessments.
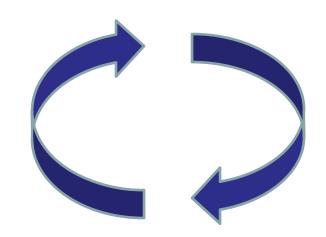
*University of North Carolina at Wilmington

The Assessment Cycle

1) Develop or revise divisional, departmental, or program goals, objectives, and outcomes

6) Use results to inform decisions and practices; provide evidence for student learning

2) Provide learning experiences (programs, services, activities, classes, etc.)

5) Review assessment results

4) Identify, develop, and administer measure(s)

3) Determine outcomes assessment method(s)

Questions/Discussion

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