

# DEVELOPING COURSE LEVEL STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

## WHY COURSE LEVEL STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES?

Student learning outcomes name the skills, areas of knowledge, and habits that students will demonstrate by the end of a course. Identifying student learning outcomes moves us away from thinking primarily about what the teacher will deliver and toward thinking about what students will be able to demonstrate. The problem with the delivery model is that it assumes that if we deliver it, students will learn it. In the delivery model, a successful semester is one in which the teacher covered all the content. But, as many of us have discovered, getting through all the content does not ensure that students have learned it. Thus, starting with student learning outcomes helps us articulate what we most care about students learning and enables us to design our courses to meet those outcomes.

## WHAT SHOULD COURSE LEVEL STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES DO?

Course level student learning outcomes should:

- Identify the key areas of content knowledge, skills, and/or habits students should be able to demonstrate by the end of the course.
- Be assessable. There should be opportunities in the course for students to demonstrate these outcomes.
  - Note: The assessability requirement means that there are things you will want for your students that will not be student learning outcomes. I want my students to care about justice, but I can't really assess that. I can, however, assess whether they can differentiate between different theories of justice or apply a particular understanding of justice to a current situation.
- Be reasonably under your control.
  - This means that you should be able to make changes in your class that affect how well students achieve the outcome. If you have to change the structure of society or everything about our educational system in order for students to meet the outcomes, you have a life project, not an outcome.
- Be manageable.
  - Each outcome should only assess one thing and you should only have between three and six outcomes total.
- Align with department and program outcomes.

- Be clear to students. Student learn better when they know what they are being asked to learn.
  - In other words, not only put them on your syllabus, but talk to students about them.

## HOW TO CRAFT COURSE LEVEL OUTCOMES

- Think about what is essential learning in your course. If you are teaching an extant course, think about your assignments and activities. What learning do you care most about students doing and demonstrating?
  - Remember: you may also care about character or morals. Great. Keep caring. But don't make them student learning outcomes.
- Be as specific as possible on what you want students to do...and make it something you can measure. Measuring appreciation for something, for example, is really hard. Measuring whether students can compare two things is possible.
  - Hunter College has developed a helpful version of Bloom's taxonomy called "Spit, Synthesize, and Speculate" to help with this process. This webpage has a useful list of verbs that align with each category: <http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/academicassessment/HowTo/AssessMyCourse/IdentifyCLOs>
- Formulate the outcomes using this basic formula:
  - Students will [active verb] [skill, habit, or content area].
    - There should only be one active verb since you should only be assessing one thing per outcome.
    - Sometimes it is helpful to have a "by [however students will demonstrate it] but sometimes that does not provide enough flexibility.
  - Examples:
    - Students will be able to describe three major theories about religion.
    - Students will be able to critique the use of statistics in a peer-reviewed psychology journal article.
    - Students will be able to distinguish between three types of health-care delivery systems.

## NOW WHAT?

Once you have student learning outcomes for your course:

- Design your course to address the outcomes. You may design your course to do other things as well (such as helping your students become more just human beings), but you should also be designing the course to help students meet the outcomes.
- Think about formative as well as summative assessment. See here [http://www.crlt.umich.edu/gsis/p4\\_8](http://www.crlt.umich.edu/gsis/p4_8) and <https://library.gwu.edu/utlc/teaching/classroom-assessment-techniques-cats> for ways to assess student learning throughout your course. Assessment isn't only about seeing if students achieved the outcome. It is also about figuring out how well they are progressing toward that achievement throughout the semester.
- Assess the outcomes and think about how you might change the course as a result of your findings.