

Student Learning Outcomes

Definition of Student Learning Outcomes:

Student learning outcomes are defined in terms of the knowledge, skills, and abilities that students have attained as a result of their involvement in a particular set of educational experiences.

Why the Learning Outcome Approach to Education?

The learning outcomes approach reflects a conceptual shift towards making learning more meaningful and effective. For a variety of understandable reasons many students approach education as “alienated intellectual labor,” rather than something that is good for them, learning that enhances their lives. Making education more meaningful for these students requires that they acquire a sense of the educational project as enabling them to lead a richer and more empowered life rather than a task done primarily to satisfy the demands of others. By explicitly building educational experiences based on what students should be able to do with their knowledge, the learning outcomes approach helps the educational community understand the point of the activity.

Some of the benefits of using student learning outcomes are as follows:

1. Increased student awareness of and involvement in their own learning
2. A common language and framework for discussions about learning within departments
3. A context for course design and revision
4. An approach to curriculum assessment and change
5. An important first step toward clear communication of expectations to students
6. A requirement of accrediting agencies.

Many faculty feel they already are taking a learning outcomes approach to education and all they need to do is change some terminology on their course outlines, that is, ensure that their course objectives are measurable. Others fear the imposition of a corporate model on education with outcomes being centrally imposed, courses being modularized, and faculty being de-skilled and replaced with assessors and facilitators, and perhaps even computers. Lastly, many academic faculty see the emphasis on outcomes as pressure for making education more directly serve the short term needs of the economy and demands of the business community, rather than the development of the student’s critical thinking and intellectual independence. To ensure that these fears do not become realities, faculty must embrace and take ownership of the student learning outcomes approach.

Types of Student Learning Outcomes:

1. Institutional
 - a. Result of obtaining a degree or certificate from the institution
2. Program-level
 - a. Result of finishing a program
 - b. Result of completing a student services program activity
3. Course-level
 - a. Result of completing a course

Each degree and certificate from an institution need not fulfill every institutional student learning outcome. However, each degree and certificate must meet at least one of them. Likewise, each course within a program need not fulfill every program-level student learning outcome. However, each course must meet at least one of its program's established student learning outcomes. By contrast a course should meet every one of its stated student learning outcomes.

Examples of Institutional Student Learning Outcomes¹

- **Critical Thinking:** Ability to analyze problems, conceptualize theses, develop arguments, weigh evidence, and derive conclusions. This outcome includes both inductive and deductive logical reasoning and methodological processes.
- **Communication:** Ability to articulate the critical thinking outcomes in writing and/or speaking or by other modes of communication.
- **Self-awareness and Interpersonal Skills:** Ability to analyze one's own actions, to see the perspective of other persons, and to work effectively with others in groups.
- **Personal Actions and Civic Responsibility:** Ability to understand one's role in society, take responsibility for one's own actions, make ethical decisions in complex situations, and participate actively in a diverse democracy.
- **Global Awareness:** Ability to articulate similarities and contrasts among cultures, times and environments, demonstrating understanding of cultural pluralism and knowledge of global issues.
- **Technological Awareness:** Ability to understand the applications and implications of technology and to use technology in ways appropriate to the situation. This outcome includes information and competency skills.

¹ From Mesa College

Examples of Program-Level Student Learning Outcomes:

1. Oral and Written Communication: “Write an essay that responds persuasively and insightfully to a current societal issue.”
2. Oral and Written Communication: “Select a speech being delivered by a prominent world figure or community leader and critically evaluate it using the principles of good oral communication.”
3. Tutor Education Program: “Plan effective tutoring sessions using a variety of strategies.”
4. Tutor Education Program: “Use effective interpersonal skills to adapt the learning environment to the needs and learning styles of the tutee.”

Process:

As a result of developing student learning outcomes, faculty in instruction and student support services should engage in discussions of ways to deliver instruction to maximize student learning. Those providing student support services should also develop student learning outcomes and evaluate the quality of their policies, processes, and procedures for providing students access and movement through the institution. And finally, student learning outcomes should be at the center of the institution’s key processes and allocation of resources.

The process involves the following steps:

1. Develop student learning outcomes.
2. Identify a method to assess each of the student learning outcomes developed.
3. Engage in the teaching-learning process.
4. Assess whether or not the student learning outcomes are achieved.
5. Evaluate the assessment technique and the level at which the outcomes are achieved.
6. Make appropriate changes to the program, as needed, to achieve desired outcomes.
7. Evaluate student learning outcomes in the regular program review process.

Program:

May be used to describe a Community College System approved program or more loosely describe a collection of somewhat related disciplines. (Definition approved by the YCCD Academic Senate, adapted from a State Academic Senate Definition, as outlined in “Roles and Responsibilities of Faculty Academic Chairs,” adopted spring 2004)