Conversations about Learning Outcomes

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By the end of this workshop, you should be able to:

**Define** learning outcomes and **describe** the rationale for writing them

**Identify** supports that you or your unit/faculty need in implementing outcomes
Agenda

Course-level learning Outcomes
• Definitions, examples, benefits to students & instructors

Program-level Outcomes

What’s happening at UofA?
• Science, Augustana

Discussion
Well written learning outcomes:

Well written learning outcomes (course level) describe what students should be able to know, do, think, or care about at the end of a course. They

- Are written in SPECIFIC and BEHAVIOURAL terms that are easily interpreted by students (start with an action verb)
- Are measurable/assessable

An outcome describes what you want students to DO with what they learn and how they will show you what they have learned.
Consider a few examples

1. Students will understand the critical elements of effective writing.
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We (at the CTL) caution against using the word “understand” as a standalone verb in a learning outcome.
Consider a few examples

Students should be able to

- **recognize**, and **individually produce**, writing appropriate to the genres and formats of professional communication (technical writing)
- **contrast** features and limitations of various sampling procedures and research methodologies (statistics)
- **execute** different choreographic styles (dance)
- **critique** common myths about Mexican immigration (history)
Benefits to Students

Principle of Learning:
• “To become self-directed learners, students must learn to assess the demands of the task, evaluate their own knowledge and skills, plan their approach, monitor their progress, and adjust their strategies as needed.”

Students who naturally self monitor (or who are taught to self-monitor) their own learning, learn better

Benefits to Instructors

- Communicate your intentions
- Framework for selecting and organizing course content
- Guide your decisions about appropriate assessment and evaluation methods
- Framework for selecting appropriate teaching and learning activities
Course-level learning outcomes

CTL Offers:

• Consultations with individual instructors to write/review your learning outcomes
• Invited workshops for groups of instructors
• Concepts in Course Design (workshop series in spring/summer)
Program level outcomes:

Definition:

“Statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after the completion of a process of learning.” (Kennedy, Hyland, & Ryan, 2006, p. 5)

At the program level, outcomes describe learning that will be common to all graduates of a program.

Program level outcomes:

• Describe significant and essential learning (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) that students will have learned by the end of a program

• Can be reliably demonstrated by students

• Demonstration of learning is key – it is how students show “significant learning” (Spady, 1994).
Program-level learning outcomes:

• Develop a **broad view** of what you want students to learn by keeping in mind the “**enduring understandings**” for a program

• Demonstrate alignment with external accreditation and university mission

• Promote consistency across a program

• Provide a **framework** for determining more specific learning outcomes in courses

• Can help students understand why they are taking the program (or why they should enroll in it)
Characteristics of program-level learning outcomes:

- Reflect broad conceptual knowledge and adaptive vocational and generic skills
- reflect essential knowledge, skills or attitudes;
- focus on *results* of the learning experiences;
- reflect the desired end of the learning experience, not the means or the process;
- represent the *minimum* performances that must be achieved to successfully complete a program

(\url{http://liad.gbrownc.on.ca/programs/InsAdult/currlo.htm})
Examples of Program-level learning outcomes:

• **General** program outcome for Chemistry: “to develop in students, through an education in chemistry, a range of appropriate generic skills of value in chemical and non-chemical employment.” (http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/SBS-chemistry-14.pdf)

• **Knowledge** program outcome for Communications Studies: “the roles of communication systems, modes of representations and systems of meaning in the ordering of societies” (http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/SBS-Communication-Media-Film-and-Cultural-Studies-16.pdf)

• **Skills** program outcomes for English: “analyse texts and discourses, and respond to the affective power of language, using appropriate approaches and terminology” (http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/SBS-English-15.pdf)
Small group discussion

1. What is motivating your unit/faculty to develop learning outcomes? (Or, if you aren’t yet moving in this direction, what has prompted you to think about developing learning outcomes?)

2. Where are you in the process?

3. What’s worked for you so far and what challenges are you facing (have you faced)?
Small group discussion

4. What are your next steps and what supports would be helpful to you?
Discussion