What are Student Learning Outcomes?

**Student Learning Outcomes are:**
- expectations of what will “come out” of a program
- the values that guide an experience, why we are here
- the criteria by which we evaluate, and strive improve, our work
- specific statements of what students will learn (must be measurable and achievable)

A student learning outcome is a concrete action that a student demonstrates as a result of learning—a demonstration of knowledge, a skill, or a value (Shenoy, 2016). Outcomes should make it clear to students what they will be able to do as a result of engagement. Strong outcomes are student-centered, comprehensive, aligned, degree-appropriate, and measurable statements about what student can know and do by the end of a course of study (Shenoy, 2016).

**Objectives** are statements articulating what the program realistically intends to accomplish (Bresciani, Zelna, & Anderson, 2006). They are concrete ways that we will meet our goals and describe what the program will do or what the student is to do (Portland State University, 2011).

**The Challenge**

Language relating to outcomes and/or objectives is not consistent across accrediting bodies, regions, states, or even institutions (Fuhrmann, 2009). It is important that we in our Division work towards ensuring that we are using the same terms to facilitate common dialogue. If, however, we find that our terms are dissimilar, do not get stuck on the labels. Investigate and see if we mean the same things; essentially input (what we are putting in and want the student to carry out; goals and objectives) and output (what results; including what the student has learned or student learning outcomes).

**Characteristics of Well-Written Student Learning Outcomes**

An outcomes approach means that: 1) our perspective on what we do shifts from inputs to outcomes; 2) we need make our values explicit in order to be able to evaluate them; and 3) outcomes need to be observable to be evaluated. The key to a good outcome/objective statement is the verb. However, some verbs that are linked to learning (i.e. understand, know) should be avoided. Instead, verbs should focus on observable and measurable action (i.e. describe, demonstrate). Online, you can easily find various lists of “action verbs for learning” (Fuhrmann, 2009).

**Example 1: One Objective with Outcomes from Various Units/Experiences**

**Objective:** To encourage a physically active and healthy lifestyle through various programming.

**Outcomes:**
1. Students will demonstrate knowledge of outdoor recreation safety procedures. (Campus Recreation - a semester long class on a particular outdoor activity such as kayaking with observation as the measure)
2. Students will identify the recommended daily number of serving for each food group. (A one-hour program on nutrition by Dining - program evaluation at the end to measure learning)
3. Students will apply knowledge of healthy lifestyle choices to their day to day life (Health Promotion program - measured through journaling or portfolio)
Example 2: Outcome with Measures
Objective: Reduce student misconduct through a variety of educational interventions.
Outcome: Students that violate The Code will demonstrate insight into how their behavior affects all aspects of their life. (This is one component of reducing misconduct-the development of insight into behavior)
Activities: Assigned paper with specific questions regarding incident and reflection
Measures: Rubric using a theory on Insight to review papers.

Example 3: Outcome with Measures
Objective: Educate students about the importance of being engaged within their communities by providing….
Outcome: Students who participate in the service programs will articulate how being engaged within their communities is connected to their personal growth. (this is one component of “importance of being engaged…”)
Activities: Various programs i.e. Alternative Break
Measures: Survey/self-report, student portfolio (artifacts with reflection-rubric to review)

Types of Outcomes

**LEARNING**
Divisional learning outcomes allow for integration and shared responsibility for student learning across departments,

**DEPARTMENTAL** learning outcomes define what students will learn through multiple programs and services offered within the department,

**PROGRAMMATIC** learning outcomes define what students can achieve through participating in one or more activities or services within one program area of a department, and

**ACTIVITY-BASED** learning outcomes define what students can achieve through participation in a singular activity or service at one point in time. (Bureau, 2007; Manderino and Meents-DeCaigny, 2012).

**OTHER**
Program outcomes are aggregate effects of a program, service, or intervention, e.g. an increase in the number of students receiving seasonal flu vaccine. Learning can be inferred on an aggregate level, but is not directly demonstrated/measured for each individual, and

Operational or Administrative outcomes are metrics that document how well the operational aspects of a program or activity are functioning; they are useful however they do not document learning (Henning & Roberts, 2016).

For Tips on Writing Outcomes, see the “Writing an Outcome” document (Oaks, 2012) and UTD SLO Rubric Worksheet (Shenoy, 2014).

References