

## Guide to Creating Student Learning Outcomes

Outcomes should help to define your program and how it differs from all of the others on campus. The statements should indicate the skills and experiences that your students are expected to attain before graduation. So, before you get started, take a moment to consider what makes your program distinctive.

When people complain about the time assessment takes, they may be thinking of Student Learning Outcomes (henceforth: SLOs). If you do not have a readily available abstract thinker (easily recognizable by their amazing ability to walk into solid objects and get lost on campus) AND you are not one yourself, then we have these helpful steps:

### 1. Complete the following phrase:

**“When they complete our program, students will be able to . . .”**

(Barbara Walvoord, *Assessment Clear and Simple*)

Or, if you prefer:

Students will <<action verb>> <<something>>

One of the biggest pitfalls is creating SLOs that are not assessable. Here are some phrases to avoid:

<b>be aware of</b>	<b>have a (firm) grasp of</b>
<b>have an awareness of</b>	<b>have a (an in-depth) knowledge of</b>
<b>be conversant with</b>	<b>of</b>
<b>be familiar with</b>	<b>be prepared for a variety of</b>
<b>display a broad and full grasp of</b>	<b>have a (good) sense of</b>
<b>develop awareness (understanding)</b>	<b>understand</b>
	<b>have an (a broad) understanding of</b>

They sound pretty on paper, but you won't be able to measure them.

Outcomes should be "SMART":

**Specific:** Be clear about what your students need to be able to accomplish, as well as when, where or how; use action or concrete verbs

**Measurable:** Write your outcomes so that it is quantifiable and a target can be set - so you will know when it has been reached!

**Achievable:** Know the outcome is something that your students can accomplish within the parameters of your program and its mission.

**Relevant:** The statement should matter and provide you all with information that is worthwhile.

**Timely:** When will the outcome be done? Identify a specific time frame.

Last, but not least, don't go crazy. You do not need 15 SLOs. Realistically, your program should have about five (give or take a couple...not ten, but a couple). You are only going to assess one to two SLOs each year, so if you and your colleagues can only agree on one SLO, that is okay. There is an urban legend that one biology department could only agree on one SLO: our students will be able to use a microscope.

Amazing... but mostly because someone somewhere has bothered to create an assessment urban legend.

If you are still stuck at square one waiting for inspiration to strike (or strike down an argumentative colleague...), then try looking for ideas via online sources:

- Check out what other programs on campus have done.
- Do a web search for your program + student learning outcomes, and see what others in your discipline are doing.
- If your discipline has a national organization, visit their webpage and see if they have recommended outcomes.
- The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) has a website with additional information and guidelines:

<http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/SLOSresources.html>

If none of the aforementioned has helped and you really think you just need some intervention, then contact us about our peer consulting program. Consultants are here to help you with any aspect of programmatic assessment, including, but not limited to, the creation of SLOs.