

Creating Student Learning Outcomes

Creating Student Learning Outcomes for the Department or Program

The first step for departments to conduct effective assessments of student learning is for their faculty to develop a shared understanding of the knowledge and skills that their graduates should be able to demonstrate as a result of their course of study. This is where departmental learning outcomes come in.

What are learning outcomes?

Departmental or programmatic learning outcomes broadly describe the learning that will take place across the curriculum through concise statements, made in specific and measurable terms, of what students will know and/or be able to do as the result of having successfully completed a program of study.

How are learning outcomes different from learning goals?

These two words are often used interchangeably and both are related to the teaching and learning that is expected to take place in the classroom and over the course of a student's career within a department. However, the difference between goals and outcomes lies in the emphasis on who will be performing the activities. Learning goals generally describe what an instructor or program aims to do; i.e., "The curriculum will introduce students to the major research methods of the discipline." Whereas, a learning outcome describes in observable and measurable terms what a student is able to do as a result of completing a course or program; i.e., "At the completion of this program students will be able to explain the differences between research methods and identify strengths and limitations of various research designs." The creation of effective learning outcomes focuses on the student and what he or she can do, not on what the instructor has taught.




Looking for information on **course objectives**? Go to DePaul's [Teaching Commons](#) for more information.

Writing Learning Outcomes

Writing Learning Outcomes

Writing learning outcomes should be a reflective, faculty-guided process as the members of the department best understand their discipline and their expectations of their majors. Many departments find the following steps to be helpful as they begin the process of creating learning outcomes for their majors.

1. Reflect with other faculty (and whenever possible alumni and students) on the question: What it is that graduates should know or be able to do with a degree in your discipline?

2. Refer to resources from your discipline, department, college, and the university about expectations of graduates. Disciplinary associations often have websites and publications that provide useful assessment materials. Institutional expectations of students can often be found in department and institutional learning goals, missions, and vision statements.
3. Draft questions in outcome form. In order to keep the outcomes student centered, begin each one with “Students will be able to...” and choose action verbs that can be observed and measured. TLA has handouts that can assist you in choosing action verbs (short list [here](#)  and longer list [here](#) ) and evaluating [learning outcomes](#) .
4. Group outcomes in broad categories based on similarity to determine if one outcome can take the place of several:

“Students will be able to design and conduct experiments to address questions germane to the discipline.”

“Students will be able to design and administer surveys that address questions appropriate to the discipline.”

“Students will be able to conduct interviews and focus groups that address questions relevant to the discipline.”

In this case if the ability to design and execute research within the discipline is a valued skill for graduates to have, it may be more appropriate to rephrase the outcome as:

“Students will be able to design and execute research plans using the major methodologies of the discipline (experiments, surveys, qualitative techniques, etc.) to answer disciplinary specific questions.”

5. Share the draft outcomes with others to be certain that the most significant learning is captured in the outcomes and that the language is written in such a way that it is understandable to those who do not have a background in the field (advisors, potential students and their parents, employers).