LEARNING OUTCOMES

"In contrast to the institutions of the world, which teach us to know something, the gospel of Jesus Christ challenges us to become something." ***Dallin H. Oaks, "The Challenge to Become," Ensign, November 2000***

PURPOSE

Learning outcomes describe the purpose of the lesson, class, or program. They describe what your students will be able to do, or what they will have become, at the end of the learning experience. Learning outcomes answer the question: How will your students be different on the last day of class?

DESCRIPTION

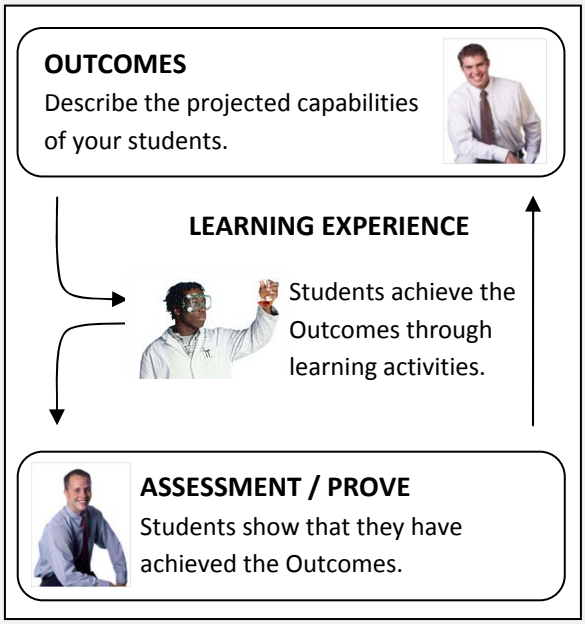
Outcomes should guide all aspects of your course and program design. Taken collectively, these statements describe the abilities and characteristics of a BYU–Idaho graduate—a disciple-leader in your discipline. While content outlines, curriculum descriptions, and syllabi are important planning resources, they are not substitutes for learning outcomes.

Effective learning outcomes are described in terms that are succinct and accessible to students, allowing them to recognize their own learning gains. Such outcome statements allow students to discern whether they have grown and progressed to a certain point based on the learning experience.

Here are some key characteristics of effective outcomes statements:

Diverse

Learning outcomes include a wide variety of student ability. These could include student abilities to create, to understand, or to analyze. You can state learning outcomes in ways that include and go beyond declarative knowledge. There could be non-cognitive outcomes ranging from attitudes, perceptions, and motivation to outcomes for psychomotor, interpersonal, and spiritual development. Outcomes can focus on process as well as products allowing you to categorize and diversify outcomes while including elements of a student's ability to *know*, to *do*, and to *be* (or become).



Outcomes can be stated concretely for improved clarity and efficiency. They can also be stated abstractly to increase opportunities for student exploration and creativity. Including both types of learning outcomes may be appropriate throughout your course design.

Measurable

Outcomes lay the groundwork for assessment, or the "Prove" component of the Learning Model Process. From this, you can then create measurements that align with the stated learning outcomes. Admittedly, some outcomes are more difficult to measure. For example, Elder Eyring foresaw the following conversation about the quality of a BYU-Idaho graduate: "Well, come with me to Rexburg. 'And I may not be able to show it to you, and I may not be able to prove it to you, but you'll feel it'" (BYU–Idaho Devotional, September 18, 2001). At BYU–Idaho it is appropriate to include such aspirations. Though difficult, you should develop proxy measures to describe and assess these outcomes.

BYU IDAHO | LEARNING MODEL OVERVIEW

Shared

You, your students, and your department should know what the intended learning outcomes are, and how you intend to help the students achieve them. Allow students the opportunity to demonstrate that they have achieved the intended outcomes. Students should not be assessed on unstated outcomes.

EXAMPLES

There are multiple taxonomies for organizing outcomes. The "know, do, be" taxonomy represented in the examples below is only illustrative and not necessarily prescribed. Drafting Learning Outcomes provides additional examples and details on how to write outcomes.

To Know Outcomes

- **Effective.** Describe the events and evolution of thought leading to the writing of the American Constitution.
- **Less Effective**. Understand the key concepts on the American Constitution covered in chapter 17 of the text.
- **Note.** This outcome is an example of a student's ability to "know." The effective example clearly states what the students will know, and how they will *show* that they know it. The less effective example describes a content area, but does not describe a student's ability within that area.

To Do Outcomes

- **Effective.** Plan and conduct experiments to find the functional process within two different working thermodynamic systems.
- **Less Effective**. Learn thermodynamic systems.
- **Note**. This outcome is an example of a student's ability to "do." The effective example succinctly describes an application within the content area. The less effective example describes a specific subject, but not a student's ability within it.

To Become Outcomes

- **Effective**. Become a scientist with a small "s" by developing the habit of inspired inquiry and seeing the world through a scientific lens.
- **Note**. This outcome is an example of a student's ability to "become." Outcomes of this nature usually exceed the scope of a single measurement and are not easily assessed. However, they can still be included in course planning and delivery as they represent the deeper aspirations of helping students "become."

TIPS

- **Begin at the end.** Writing outcomes before deciding on content, learning activities, or assessment strategies allows these activities to become means to an end, and not an end in itself.
- **Within reach.** The outcomes are bounded so students can realistically achieve them in a limited amount of time. The outcomes are challenging enough to stretch the students, but not so difficult as to be out of reach.
- **State in measurable terms.** Students are able to judge their progress when you state outcomes in such a way that they can recognize their achievement.
- **Nesting Outcomes.** Outcomes can be developed at the program, course, unit, or lesson level. Use outcomes to not only develop your curriculum, but also to design your teaching plan.

PITFALLS

- **Content focus.** An outcomes statement describes what students will be able to do at the end of the learning experience, or what they will have become. It is not a content outline or a description of the topics to which a student is exposed.
- **Absence of Outcomes.** The instructor has not specified the course or lesson outcomes, but plans lessons based on an intuitive sense of what the students should know. This makes it difficult for students to know what they have learned and what they should study for.

CAMPUS PRACTITIONERS

Lary Duque, Caryn Esplin, Bruce Kusch

KEY ARTICLES

Merrill M.D. (in press). Task-centered instructional strategy. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*.

Wiggins, G.P., & McTighe, J. (1998). What is backward design? In *Understanding by Design* (2nd ed., pp. 7-19). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

OTHER RESOURCES

- Drafting Learning Outcomes
- Terminal and Enabling: Selecting the Scope of Your Outcomes
- BYU-Idaho Specific Learning Outcomes