Guidelines for Assessing Learning Outcomes

Program Learning Outcomes are statements describing significant and essential learning that students will achieve at the completion of a course, experience or program. They are clear statements that articulate the knowledge and skills that students must demonstrate or produce at the completion of the program. These outcomes form the basis for assessment of student learning outcomes.

Constructing Learning Outcomes:

- What do you want students to know or be able to do at the end of your program?
  The answer constitutes the learning outcomes for the program.
- Tips: use strong action verbs to construct program learning outcomes

(examples of strong verbs include: create, analyze, apply, compare, evaluate, identify, represent, interpret, formulate, calculate, design, distinguish).

CHECKLIST:

- Do learning outcomes reflect the Mission Statement of the Program?
- Are outcomes well written and concise?
- Is each outcome written with a strong action verb?
- Are the outcomes SMART? Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Timely.

Rubric for Assessing Learning Outcomes

Exemplary	Acceptable	Developing
• Outcomes are SMART - specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, timely. • Outcomes are aligned with program and institutional goals • Outcomes clearly address the breadth of knowledge, skills, or services associated with program • Outcomes are well-written and concise. • Outcomes contain action verb emphasizing student activity.	• Outcomes seek to be SMART - specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, timely. • Outcomes are aligned with program and institutional goals. • Outcomes address the breadth of knowledge, skills, or services associated with program • Outcomes are appropriate, but language may be vague or need revision.	• Outcomes do not appear SMART • Outcomes not aligned with program or institutional goals. • Incomplete—does not address the breadth of knowledge, skills, or services associated with the program • Language of outcomes needs attention.

Help for Creating Tools and Establishing Measures

Information Required	Key Question(s)	Information Source(s)	Data Collection Methods
What Do You Need to Answer the Question?	**What Do You Want to Know?**	**Where Are You Going to Get It?**	**How Are You Going to Get It?**
• Mission Statement • Department/Unit/ Program Objectives and/or Learning Outcomes **BOX 1**	• Success Rate • Scope • Timeframe • Population **BOX 2**	• Stakeholders • Program officials or participating students • Databases BOX 3	• Structured Surveys • Focus Groups • Structured Interviews • Case Studies • Data Extractions • Document Retrieval • Benchmarks BOX 4

BOX 1 - We already have what we need—a Mission Statement that established the work of our department, program or unit, (basically, why it exists) and Program Objectives or Learning Outcomes that you earlier developed for your department, program or unit.

BOX 2 - Success rate examples: How many students are successfully meeting the benchmark(s) in your pre-college program, or how efficiently is trash being collected, or how quickly are students moving through their bursar stops, or how can the wait time for a student who requests a tutor be reduced, or how quickly does the Help Desk respond to requests, etc. Our timeframe is usually a semester, or the entire school year, and our population could be everything from servicing returning combat vets to parents who bring their children to the daycare center to probationary students seeking re-admittance or to high-school students in our pre-college programs.

BOX 3 - The population you serve, or, in many cases, the services you provide. You might already have records or documents to get you started on the assessment cycle.

BOX 4 – Listed are some of the TOOLs you might use to retrieve or generate the information you seek. Many of you could use surveys, but there are other means as well. In departments, programs or units that have learning outcomes, a rubric might be more appropriate. For others, three focus groups per semester might be more appropriate. The crucial point is that you are consistent in whatever TOOLS you chose for the assessment over time so that you can see patterns, both good and bad, to which you can respond.