

Topic: What Is the Difference Between a Student Learning Outcome and Other Outcomes?

What Is a Student Learning Outcome?

Student learning outcomes specify the key knowledge, skills, abilities, or competencies that students in a particular degree program should know, have, or be able to do upon completing the program. They complete the statement “At the end of the program, students will be able to....” Student learning outcomes should be specific to a particular academic degree and distinguish one degree program from others offered within the academic college or university. A good student learning outcome:

- Addresses an observable, attainable knowledge area, skill, ability, or competency.
- Is narrowly focused and measurable.
- Is stated at the appropriate cognitive level for the degree (bachelor’s, master’s, or PhD) and based on the expectations of the program.
- Is related to the mission of the program and/or university.
- Is meaningful to the program.

What Is a Student Outcome? What Is an Administrative Outcome?

Student outcomes reflect the services a program provides or delineate programmatic student achievement areas (e.g., retention and graduation rates). Administrative outcomes reflect areas of efficiency, quality of operations, quality of services provided, or professional development or training of personnel. Student outcomes and administrative outcomes should reflect areas in which the program or unit both wants to and can improve. They are distinct from program, unit, or university requirements.

A good student or administrative outcome:

- Addresses a specific action, behavior, or achievement goal and is meaningful to the unit or university.
- Is narrowly focused and measurable.
- Is achievable or can be improved upon if not achieved.
- Is related to the mission of the program, unit, and/or university.
- Is bound by a period of time (if applicable).

Examples of Student Learning Outcomes

From undergraduate programs:

- Students will be able to identify major philosophical figures and explain their historical context.
- Students will be able to explain various creative and technical roles involved in producing a theatrical or cinematic production.
- Students will be able to apply the X theory to a real-world scenario in the field.
- Students will be able to explain how past events in the area of X impact contemporary society.

From graduate programs:

- Students will be able to identify research questions or problems pertinent to their field of study.
- Students will be able to design and complete a creative work.
- Students will be able to formulate hypotheses and design a research study.
- Students will be able to critically analyze scientific research and findings.

From general education programs:

- Students will be able to evaluate the credibility and the use/misuse of scientific information.
- Students will be able to synthesize information to draw a reasonable conclusion.
- Students will be able to effectively conduct an oral presentation.
- Students will be able to interpret mathematical models and draw conclusions based on the information.

From academic and student support service units:

- After a workshop, students will be able to identify ways to reduce high-risk substance abuse behaviors.
- Peer educators will be able to communicate accurate health information to students in presentations.
- Student workshop participants will be able to identify aspects of campus culture that can impact the frequency of sexual violence.
- Student attendees will be able to identify at least three services provided by the Student Success Center to help students on academic probation.

Examples of Student Outcomes

From undergraduate programs (Note: To demonstrate compliance for standards, 8.2a or 8.2b institutions only need student learning outcomes. This example and the one for the graduate program is presented merely to illustrate what a student outcome would look like for an academic program.):

- Students in X program will engage in experiential learning activities (e.g., internships, service learning, undergraduate research, or study abroad experiences).
- Students graduating with X degree will be employed in X industry or a related field within 12 months of completing the program.
- Students enrolled in X program at the end of their sophomore year will complete the program within 4 semesters.
- Students graduating from X program will obtain licensure within 12 months of completing the program.

From graduate programs:

- Within 6 months after graduation, MS students in X program will have continued on in an advanced degree program or secured employment within the field.
- PhD students in X program will be the primary author on a refereed publication at the time of degree completion.
- Students in X program will present research results at a regional or national conference.
- MS students in X program will complete their degree within 4 semesters.

From academic and student support service units:

- University students will participate in first-year experience courses.
- Attract student attendees to art center performances.
- Provide undergraduate students access to research funding.
- Provide student athletes education on the university's honor code.

From university student achievement:

- Increase representation of underrepresented minority students in the entering class to 25% by 2025.
- Increase the percentage of on-campus students living in learning communities to 75% by 2025.
- Increase the four-year graduation rate for entering freshmen to 70% by 2023.

Examples of Administrative Outcomes from Academic and Student Service and Administrative Units

- Provide leadership and outreach to the profession (Institutional Effectiveness).
- Ensure an accurate and user-friendly student registration process (Office of Registrar).
- Engage in ongoing professional development to maintain area expertise (Academic Advising).
- Increase student giving by growing senior class donors (Advancement).
- Promote diversity, equity, and inclusion through programming within the administrative unit (Undergraduate Studies).