Setting Learning Outcomes

What are learning outcomes?
Learning outcomes are measurable statements that articulate what students should know, be able to do, or value as a result of taking a course.

Learning outcomes often take this form:
At the end of this course, students will be able to (Action verb) (Learning statement).

Some examples of outcome stems:
Students will be able to describe
Students will be able to explain
Students will be able to apply
Students will be able to critique
Students will be able to draft
Students will be able to create
Students will be able to design

Once you have drafted learning outcomes, you can use them to design your course to prepare the students to achieve them. In order to lead the students to that knowledge and those skills, consider what reading you might assign, what class lecture and discussion might include, what learning activities might be effective, and how student learning might be measured. Use learning outcomes as a tool; let them inform your choice of teaching strategies, course activities and assessments.

Why set learning outcomes?

Setting learning outcomes will make it easier for instructors to:
• Make hard decisions about selecting course content.
• Design assessments that allow students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills.
• Design teaching strategies or learning activities that will help students develop their knowledge and skills.
• Measure student learning accurately and effectively.

Having access to articulated learning outcomes (in a syllabus, for example) helps students:

- Decide if the course is a good fit for their academic trajectory.
- Identify what they need to do to be successful in the course.
- Take ownership of how their progress.
- Be mindful of what they are learning.

How can you develop learning outcomes?

- Ask yourself: what are the most important things a student should know (cognitive), be able to do (skills), or value (affective) after completing the course/program?
- Consult a list of action verbs, which are verbs that result in overt behavior or products that can be observed and measured. Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives provides some useful verbs to write objectives for different levels of learning.
- Draft a list of possible learning outcomes. Be realistic in considering what is possible for students to accomplish in your course. Only keep the most essential learning outcomes.

Bloom's Taxonomy

Bloom's Taxonomy

create — Produce new or original work
Design, assemble, construct, conjecture, develop, formulate, author, investigate

evaluate — Justify a stand or decision
appraise, argue, defend, judge, select, support, value, critique, weigh

analyze — Draw connections among ideas
differentiate, organize, relate, compare, contrast, distinguish, examine, experiment, question, test

apply — Use information in new situations
execute, implement, solve, use, demonstrate, interpret, operate, schedule, sketch

understand — Explain ideas or concepts
classify, describe, discuss, explain, identify, locate, recognize, report, select, translate

remember — Recall facts and basic concepts
define, duplicate, list, memorize, repeat, state