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# What are Learning Outcomes & what is their purpose?

Presentation includes information from workshops originally  
presented by DePaul University, Loyola University, & Virginia  
Tech

# Workshop Agenda

1. Overview of assessment and what it means for you and HLC
2. Definition and Purpose of Learning Outcomes
3. What to write when you're creating Learning Outcomes
4. Questions

# Workshop objectives

- Define and identify learning outcomes and related concepts
- Distinguish between levels of learning outcomes
- Identify relevant considerations when writing learning outcomes
- Write effective learning outcomes



Part I

# ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

# Assessment Overview

- Assessment overview
  - What is assessment?
  - Why do we do assessment?
  - Are we required to do assessment?
- Developing a Program Assessment Plan: What is included in the three part series?
  - Part I: Developing a mission statement, writing good student learning and program outcomes, and developing a curriculum map
  - Part II: Implementing appropriate measures, creating additional assessment maps, developing targets, and analyzing data
  - Part III: Designing an action plan, closing the loop, and reporting results

# What is assessment?

Suskie (2009, p.4) defined assessment as an ongoing four-step process:

1. “establishing clear, measureable expected outcomes of student learning;
2. ensuring that students have sufficient opportunities to achieve those outcomes;
3. systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well student learning matches our expectations;
4. using the resulting information to understand and improve student learning.”

# The Assessment Cycle



# What does Assessment do for you?

- Helps identify a program's strengths and areas for improvement
  - Provides student learning evidence for stakeholders including discipline-specific and regional accreditors
  - Highlights the positive contributions of the program to stakeholders
  - Encourages collaboration among faculty in the program
  - Creates a program vision and ideal
  - Encourages the review of the curriculum as a whole

**BUT THE PRIMARY BENEFIT OF ASSESSMENT is an improved teaching and learning process**



# What are the HLC requirements for program assessment?

- The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Comprehensive Standard
- Criterion 4. Teaching and Learning: [Evaluation](#) and Improvement. The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments, and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness for student learning through processes designed to promote continuous improvement.
- 4.B. The institution demonstrates a commitment to educational achievement and improvement through ongoing [assessment](#) of student learning.
  - The institution has clearly stated [goals](#) for student learning and effective processes for [assessment](#) of student learning and achievement of learning [goals](#).
  - The institution assesses achievement of the learning [outcomes](#) that it claims for its curricular and co-curricular programs.
  - The institution uses the information gained from [assessment](#) to improve student learning.
  - The institution's processes and methodologies to assess student learning reflect good practice, including the substantial participation of [faculty](#) and other instructional staff members.

# What are some things HLC considers when examining this standard?

- “How are expected outcomes clearly defined in measureable terms for each educational program?”
- What assessment instruments are used and why were they selected?
- Have the programs assessed the extent to which they have been successful in achieving their learning outcomes?
- If called for, have program improvements been made as a result of assessment findings?”



Part II

# **DEFINITION AND PURPOSE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES**

# What is a learning outcome?

A statement in specific and measurable terms of what a student will know or be able to do as the result of having successfully completed a program.

# Characteristics of Learning Outcomes

(Maki, 2010)

- Describes what a student should be able to demonstrate, represent, or produce
- Relies on active verbs
- Aligns with collective program and institutional level educational intentions
- Aligns with your program's curriculum
  - multiple and varied opportunities for students to achieve outcomes

# Purpose of learning outcomes

- Learning outcomes inform students of what knowledge and skills they will gain through the course of a program of study.
- They indicate what knowledge, skills and abilities students will have mastered (and the level of mastery) at the end of their course of study.
- They communicate expected standards of performance.
- They provide a structure for evaluating student learning.

# Learning Outcomes

## Student Learning Outcomes

Derived from mission and purpose

Measures contributions to student learning (was the experience transformative?)

Achievement = Effectiveness

Require criteria to define levels of effectiveness

Individual and collective feedback to shape department programs and services

Assessment: how effective were we?

Is the train headed in the right direction?

Are students learning something?



Part III

# **WHAT TO WRITE WHEN YOU'RE CREATING LEARNING OUTCOMES**



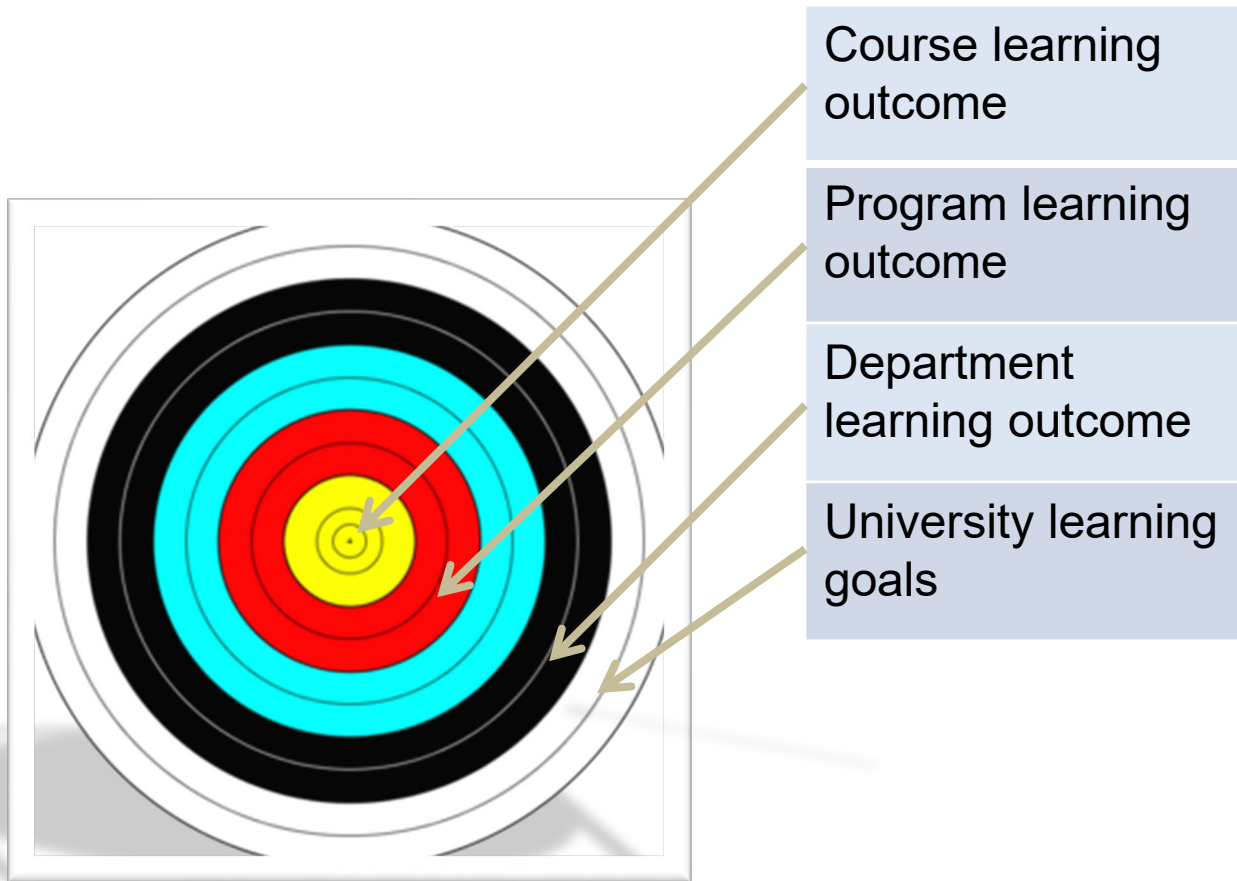
# Layers of Learning Outcomes



# Levels of Learning Outcomes

- University Goals/Objectives
  - *allows for integration, shared responsibility for student learning across departments*
- Department Level Learning Outcomes
  - *students can learn through multiple programs and services offered within the department*
- Program Level Learning Outcomes
  - *students can achieve through participating in one or more courses, activities, or services within one program area of a department*
- Course Level Learning Outcomes
  - *students can achieve through participation in a singular activity or service at one point in time*

# Level of Specificity



# Outcome Alignment

- Make sure your outcomes align with the appropriate level of learning outcome
- The broader the audience, the broader the outcome
- As learning outcomes become more specific, they are less likely to apply to higher level goals, but are easier to assess.

# Activity #1

Write down what you hope to teach your students during your program. Make sure that these ideas are realistic and attainable, as these serve as loose goals to help guide your outcome writing. Having 3-5 outcomes is ideal.

# Being more specific

- “KSAVES”

When constructing learning outcomes, consider the essential:

**Knowledge**

**Skills**

**Abilities**

**Values**

**Ethics**

students should possess by the time they complete a program, then “operationalize”

Source: <http://acp.depaulia.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2015/01/Writing-and-Revising-Learning-Outcomes-Workshop-10-24-2014.pdf>

# The big questions

- What are the most important things for students to learn in the program?
- What will students need to be able to do to take the next steps after they graduate from the program (work, continuing education, etc.)?

# How Do You Know?



# Determining Essential 'KSAVES' to Meet Learning Goals (from activity 1)

Once you have your goals written, think about what achieving these goals would look like. How would you be able to observe this in the actions or behaviors of your students?



# Questions about Learning Outcomes?

# Resources for writing learning outcomes

- **At UND:**
  - **Director of Assessment and Accreditation**
    - Dr. Tim Burrows
      - Email: [timothy.burrows@und.edu](mailto:timothy.burrows@und.edu)
    - Assessment website:  
<https://www1.und.edu/research/institutional-research/assessment/>