



Tim Burrows,
Ph.D.

Director of
Assessment &
Accreditation

Writing & Measuring Effective Unit Outcomes

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

Workshop Agenda

1. Definition and Purposes of direct and indirect measures
2. What to write when you're creating outcomes
3. How to assess your outcomes
4. Questions

Workshop objectives

- Identify relevant considerations when writing unit outcomes
- Write effective outcomes
- Determine the most effective assessment for your unit's outcomes



Part I

WRITING EFFECTIVE UNIT OUTCOMES

Best Practices in writing outcomes

Clear and concise

Observable & Measurable

Use action verbs

Manageable number

Tied to Institute and Operational Unit missions/goals/values

Consider professional organizations' expectations (as appropriate)

Realistic

Meaningful

What are Characteristics of Good Student Learning Outcomes; Maki (2010)

If outcomes were math...

- **Basic formula:**

The unit + will (or will be able to) + action verb
(target audience) (future tense) (measurable behavior)

+ description = **Unit Outcome!**
(description of what the unit will able to do)

- **Example:**

The unit + will (or will be able to) + action verb
(The Office of Financial Aid) (will be able to) (predict)

+ description = **Unit Outcome!**
(the number of cadets needing financial aid for the upcoming AY.)

Adding to the equation

- Outcomes can also include:
 - **Degree of achievement**
 - Quantification (e.g. percentage of change)
 - *Physical Plant will **reduce the amount of average daily electricity use by 15%** compared to last year.*
 - Standard (e.g. without making any errors, at a professional level)
 - *Career Services will **provide job skills training to 75% or more of cadets in accordance with CAS standards.***
 - **Criteria**
 - Using what tool or activity (e.g. using open house survey, through focus groups)
 - *Admissions will **use multi-year trends from open house survey data to identify** areas needing improvement in customer satisfaction.*
 - **Conditions**
 - Specification of the program (e.g. “As a result of participating in the workshop on eVA, faculty and employees...”)
 - *Employees who **complete the program for computer security** will be able to identify and reduce the risk of creating a data or security breach.*

<http://assessment.uconn.edu/primer/goals1.html>

http://www.uta.edu/ier/Resources/ABCD_Outcome_Writing_Model.pdf

<http://ets.tlt.psu.edu/learningdesign/objectives/writingobjectives>

Example Outcomes

- The Title IX Coordinator will provide information and updates regarding UND's campus climate to the student body and employees a minimum of 3 times per AY.
- The UND infirmary will provide effective care for students in a timely manor, 95% of the time (within one hour from check-in to release).

Common slip-ups

- Using “understand,” “have knowledge of,” “be aware of,” “appreciate” ...
- Not enough/too many outcomes
- Outcomes that are too complex (difficult for stakeholders to understand)



Part II

MEASURING EFFECTIVE UNIT OUTCOMES

What should you consider when choosing an assessment measure?

- Assessment measure is compatible with the outcome
- The measure selected should provide reasonably accurate, useful information
- The measure would yield results specific enough to know where improvements can be made

What should you consider when choosing an assessment measure?

- Consider what is already being done:
 - Campus surveys
 - Find out what is being done locally or institution-wide that might map to your outcomes
 - Utilize one activity for several outcomes where possible

When selecting your measure, what should you ask?

- Is the measure a reasonable indicator for what is specified in the outcome?
- Would this assessment method assist the unit in other ways (meeting accreditation standards, provide feedback, etc.)?
- Will the results of the assessment produce data that are trustworthy and understandable?
- Is the development/preparation time involved in using this measure reasonable?

Direct Measures

- Direct measures are tangible, visible, and observable
 - Allow someone to directly observe the results of a task or activity
 - Show a demonstration of an activity, project, or resource
 - Indicate a service or activity implemented by the program
- For each outcome the unit should have at least one direct indicator of success.

Examples of Direct Measures

- Unit outcomes:
 - Number of faculty meeting certain criteria (ex. % attending a workshop) or number of projects or initiatives implemented (ex. Building renovations, donations secured, etc.)
 - Enrollment numbers / number of available classrooms
 - Cost for attending UND (tuition & room/board)

Indirect Measures

- An indirect measure is subjective and not directly observable
 - Asks faculty or students to reflect on their experience but does not provide direct evidence of the experience
 - Infers faculty or student experience
- For each outcome, a unit can have a combination of both direct and indirect indicators for success.

Examples of Indirect Measures

- Survey research: National or local instruments
 - Exit surveys/senior surveys, alumni or employer surveys such as the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)
 - UND Faculty Survey
 - Environmental evaluations
- Exit interviews and student focus groups
- Self-assessments
- Peer ratings



Questions about Unit Outcomes?

Resources for writing learning outcomes

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