

Writing Appropriate SLOs

A “measurable” student learning outcome (SLO) uses unambiguous words that convey what students must accurately learn. More specifically, statements constructed using words (i.e., “action” words/verbs), phrases, and syntax which adequately describe the desired learning in such a way it is possible to discern (assess) if the intended learning was accomplished. The statement needs to state or imply what evidence (data to collect) is required to confirm whether or not the desired learning was achieved.

Writing “good” student learning outcomes is both an art and science. To succeed in this creative process, write intentional statements based on the following essential criteria:

- ✓ **Stated in terms of the learner** - Student learning is the intent. Therefore, the statement must focus on describing what students in the major (minor, program, etc.) are expected to accomplish by the time they complete the program or, perhaps, at certain points along their academic (or student life) journey.
- ✓ **Focuses on a specific learning domain** – There are three recognized learning types or domains: cognitive (*know*), affective (*feel*), and psychomotor (*do*). An acceptable learning outcome identifies desired learning within one of these domains. If additional domains are desired, construct additional statements rather than attempting to include multiple domains within a single outcome statement.
- ✓ **Uses terms and language that facilitate measurement** – Using clear, unambiguous words that describe a tangible result or observable product and makes it possible to determine what evidence (feedback, data) is needed to ascertain if or when the desired learning is accomplished. Word choice is difficult because words mean different things to different people. Even so, attempt to use words that “reflect” or describe the desired learning as clearly as possible. “Action words” such as *create, apply, communicate, integrate, demonstrate, produce*, etc., are ideal.
- ✓ **Sets forth a realistic and reachable expectation** – Statements must set forth realistic and reachable learning expectations. Asking students to master every skill is an unreasonable expectation. What is realistic and reachable differs based on available resources, the specific student level (undergrad, grad, etc.), and the faculty’s and/or staff’s shared professional judgment.

Here are three additional considerations to keep in mind:

- SLOs are representative or key indicators. It is impossible to identify every learning outcome provided by the program. Programs typically select and focus on 5 to 12 student learning outcomes, but there is no magic number. Student life departments

often pursue fewer student learning outcomes and put greater emphasis on capacity outcomes.

SLOs should be identified and written based on current industry standards and the professional judgment of the faculty; learning experiences are then devised to accomplish the SLOs. A good strategy is to formulate program-level SLOs based on existing course objectives from across the curriculum. Review all the course objectives and determine which ones are the most critical and represent key outcomes for all graduates in the major or participants in the program. This can be a hard task because it is easy to think all the course or program objectives are important. The winnowing process isn't easy, but retaining too long of a list makes it impossible to assess every outcome. Be selective!

- SLOs must support the program's mission statement as well as reflect the CBU University Student Outcomes. Once the outcomes exist, it is necessary to accomplish specific assessment activities linked to each outcome statement— which is made easier by well-stated SLOs.
- Classical “behavioral learning objectives” include how to recognize successful learning by stating the expected criterion (“how well”; e.g., five out of six, in three minutes, with no mistakes, 80% correct, accurate to three decimal places, etc.). Including this element in SLOs is not necessary. However, in the Overall Assessment Plan (OPlan) it is necessary to identify one or more assessment methods for each outcome, including the expected criteria.

Examples:

- List the steps in the language acquisition process and its effect on language acquisition among both individuals and contextual variables. [*Know*]
- Is able to explain, verbally or in writing, his/her personal values related to using biblical principles in making ethical business decisions. [*Feel*]
- Analyze conflict situations and identify needed conflict management skills. [*Do*]

It is common, but not required, to use an introductory clause preceding the written student learning outcomes. For example, “*Students who graduate with a bachelor's degree in History shall be able to:*” (followed by the SLO list).