

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Learning

If student learning is the primary measure, outcome goal of our university, then what and how much students learn must be the criteria by which the value of student affairs departments are judged as opposed to the numbers of programs offered or students served.

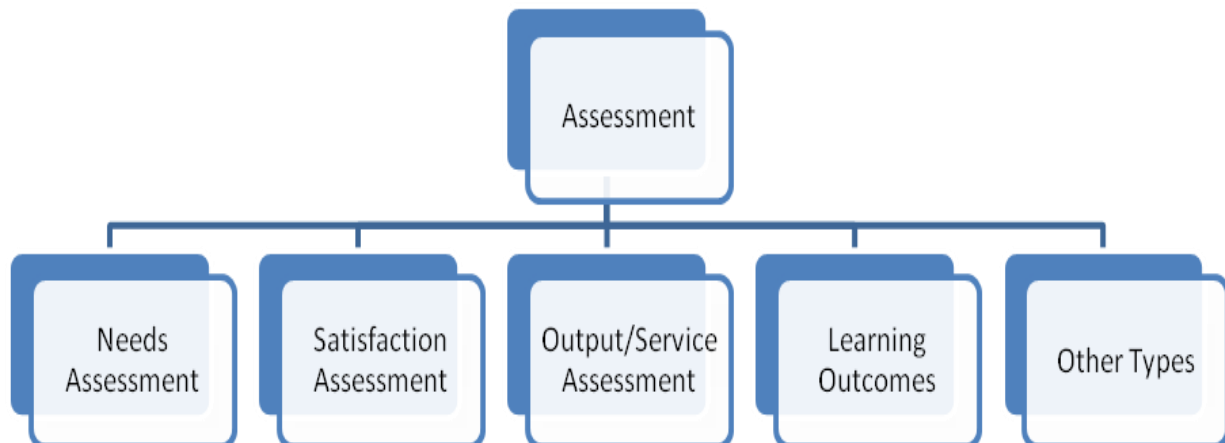
Learning Reconsidered introduced a new way of understanding learning, defined as transformative learning. This type of learning places the student at the center of the learning experience.

The previous style of learning was informative learning or transfer of knowledge where a person with greater knowledge and experience (the teacher/educator) transferred the knowledge to the student. If the student could reiterate that knowledge in some way such as on a test, the student was said to have learned the information.

In transformative learning, the student is at the center of the learning experience and is an active participant. Learning requires reflection of the student on an experience or new information. Following reflection, the student changes his/her perspective and meaning related to the issue and the student incorporates this change into his life. This represents an “a-ha” moment for the student.

Student Learning Outcomes

Student Learning Outcomes are not the same thing as assessment. There are various types of assessment and learning outcomes are only one of the types of assessment. Examples of types of assessment include but are not limited to assessment of needs, satisfaction, outputs/service outcomes and learning outcomes assessment.



Definitions of Student Learning Outcomes:

- Concise measurable statement that specifies what students **will know, be able to do or be able to demonstrate** when they have completed/participated in a program/course/project or received a service. Outcomes are usually expressed as knowledge, skills or attitudes.
- A measurable result of a specific, planned educational experience for students.

Outcomes specifically describe the end result of the program/activity/service. They express what the student should know. These outcomes must be measurable. That does not mean they must be “countable”. You must be able to identify or observe how you know the students are able to do what you said they would be able to do as a result of your program/event/service. You must be able to gather evidence that learning occurred.

Student learning outcomes are not what you are going to do to the student, but rather what you want the student to know or do as a result of an initiative, course, activity or service. Focus on the student, not the activity. To be measurable, (identifiable vs. countable), outcomes use active verbs such as demonstrate, articulate, illustrate, conduct, define, apply, compose, integrate, convince, create, plan, compare and summarize. Bloom’s Taxonomy is a useful tool for choosing action verbs that accurately describe a desired level of student learning.

Student behavior as an outcome

You cannot change student behavior but you still may still have taught them to behave in the appropriate manner. Rather than stating “students will make ethical decisions”, you may want to assess the extent to which students define and describe ethical behavior. Then you may want to examine the extent to which students apply and analyze ethical behavior or the lack of it in case students. See if they can discriminate between ethical and unethical behavior in a case study presented to them.

Student Learning Outcome Questions:

- What do students need to know in order to be well prepared to leave our institution?
- How are we teaching them that information?
- Do we provide them opportunities prior to their leaving for them to demonstrate that they have learned what we think they should?
- How will we know that they have learned what we think they should?

How is a Student Learning Outcome Different from Student Satisfaction?

Student learning outcomes measure the actual learning of a student, whereas satisfaction assessment measures how a student feels about something. Learning is a lasting event rather than achieving immediate satisfaction. Satisfaction is defined as contentment, gratification and acceptance. Satisfaction is being content with a program or service. However, satisfaction does not show if students actually learned something from the program/event/service. Measuring satisfaction can be helpful; however, measuring student learning helps us determine whether or not the overall mission of higher education is being accomplished – are students learning?

What are the characteristics of good Student Learning Outcomes?

- Practical
- Measurable
 - Must be able to measure – to identify or observe
- Meaningful
- Specific
- Consistent
- Sensible
 - Is this going to matter in the student's life?

How can assessing Student Learning Outcomes help students and organizations?

By evaluating students based on learning outcomes, we can determine any changes we can make to improve our programs/services to keep up with the needs of our constantly-changing student population.

Other benefits of Student Learning Outcomes:

- Provides the information for on-going departmental and organizational improvement and can assist with QI projects
- Provides benefit for the departments
 - Helps departments understand how to better facilitate student learning
 - Provides departments with feedback (Are your services providing what they are supposed to beyond student satisfaction? What skills are students learning? Are these the skills we want them to learn? Are these the skills we are teaching them?)
- Provides benefit for the students
 - Enables students to articulate what they are learning and have learned from attending our university, outside the classroom as well as inside.
 - Helps students be able to explain what they can do and what they know.
 - Enables students to better understand where they can learn particular knowledge, skills and attitudes.

Student Learning Outcome Process Questions:

- What general outcome are you seeking?
- How would you know the outcome if you saw it? (What will the student know or be able to do?)
- How will you help the students learn it?
- How could you measure each of the desired behaviors listed in #2?
- What are the assessment findings?
- What improvements might be based on assessment findings?

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**SIX CATEGORIES OF STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES
(BASED ON THE STUDENT LEARNING IMPERATIVE)**

Student Learning Outcomes	What Does This Mean?
Complex cognitive skills	Reflective thought, critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, intellectual flexibility
Knowledge acquisition	Mastery of subject matter and application of knowledge
Intrapersonal development	Autonomy, values, identity, aesthetics, self-esteem, maturity
Interpersonal development	Understanding,, and appreciating human differences, ability to relate to others and establishing intimate relationships with others
Practical competence	Career preparation, managing one's personal affairs (money, schedule, etc.), economic self-sufficiency
Civic responsibility	Responsibilities as a citizen in a democratic society and commitment to democratic ideals

BGSU adapted from Schuh, J.H., Upcraft, M.L., and Associates (2001). Assessment practice in student affairs: an application manual. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

References:

Bresciani, M.J., Zelna, C.L., Anderson, J.A. (2004) *Assessing Student Learning and Development: A handbook for practitioners*. NASPA.

American College Health Association Presentations and Hand-outs by Glenn Egelman, M.D., Director, Bowling Green State University Student Health Center and Donna Schoenfeld, M.S., Director of Health Enhancement, Northern Illinois University

Presentation at Learning Reconsidered Institute by Katie Busby, Ph.D., Director of Assessment and Planning, University of Alabama

Lectures and publications by Richard Keeling, M.D. of Keeling and Associates, New York City, N.Y.

Numerous other conference hand-outs and readings