Student Learning Outcomes: A Quick Look

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What are Student Learning Outcomes?

Student learning outcomes (SLO) describe the knowledge, skills, and dispositions (i.e., values and attitudes) students are expected to develop by the end of a program or other learning experience. SLOs are critical components of an assessment plan. This document primarily refers to SLOs for academic programs; however, the information provided is also relevant for developing SLOs for academic and co-curricular projects, courses, workshops, activities, and the like.

Here are examples of program-level SLOs from various disciplines:
- Students will critique the methods historians have used to interpret the past.
- Students will evaluate environmental issues from a sustainability perspective.
- Students will forecast weather using meteorological data.
- Students will describe linguistic features of the foreign language in which they specialized.

Why Student Learning Outcomes are Important

SLOs are valuable at the course, program, and institutional levels in a number of ways.

1. <u>SLOs communicate what faculty intend for students to get out of a course, major/program of study, and university degree.</u> SLOs provide a way for faculty to communicate to students and other stakeholders (e.g., parents and employers) what faculty intend for students to learn from a course they take, from a major they select, and from completing a university degree. Faculty can share SLOs with students through course syllabi and a major/program of study website. The university can share SLOs through the university website.

2. <u>SLOs are a planning tool for course design/redesign.</u> Developing SLOs as a first step when creating a new course or redesigning an existing course helps establish what an instructor hopes students will learn by the time students complete the course. Using the SLOs as a guide, the instructor can then identify what students will need to do to demonstrate that they achieved those outcomes. In this step, the instructor identifies assessment methods. Finally, the instructor can determine what teaching and learning activities are needed during the course for students to achieve the learning outcomes and be successful on the assessments. Course-level SLOs can be connected to program-level SLOs to help demonstrate how the course contributes to the program curriculum.

3. <u>SLOs are a guide for selecting course instructional activities.</u> SLOs can be used as a guide to determine what students will do (i.e., learning activities) and what an instructor will do (i.e., teaching activities) to ensure students achieve the learning outcomes.

4. <u>SLOs are a planning and assessment tool for program/departments.</u> Programs create SLOs that describe the knowledge, skills, and dispositions students are expected to develop by the end of a major or program of study. SLOs communicate information about the department's identity and values and provide a common language that students, faculty, staff, and other stakeholders share. SLOs serve as guides to help faculty determine the courses that address each outcome. Faculty can develop curriculum maps with the learning outcomes and the

program courses to determine if there are redundancies (multiple courses teaching the same content) or gaps (some learning outcomes not addressed in any course) in the program. The SLOs also help faculty and advisors guide students during academic advising and course selection in their major.

5. <u>SLOs allow for improved academic advising.</u> SLOs can be valuable tools for helping students select courses during academic advising. When students need to select general education courses, an advisor can help students select general education courses that provide the best opportunities for students to achieve the general education SLOs. Similarly, when students are selecting courses in their major, an advisor can review program-level learning outcomes and help students select a course plan that provides the best opportunities for students to achieve the SLOs for the major.

6. <u>SLOs are a planning tool for institutional assessment and accreditation.</u> Course-level and program/department-level SLOs communicate the learning goals for disciplines. Course-level and program/department-level SLOs can be linked to institutional SLOs to show how they contribute to the intended learning for university graduates. SLOs address accrediting body requirements. Accrediting bodies require institutions to have program SLOs, assess the SLOs, and improve student learning based on information gathered from assessment.

Who Should Develop SLOs

All faculty responsible for and involved in a program curriculum or learning experience should be involved in the process to develop SLOs. Programs and faculty are also encouraged to get feedback from their students and other stakeholders about program SLOs.

Who Should Know about the SLOs

All major stakeholders should be aware of the SLOs. At a minimum, this includes full and part-time faculty, students, fieldwork and internship supervisors, and student support personnel who work with the program. Other stakeholders could include parents, employers, and alumni/ae of the program. Programs can list SLOs on their UNC websites, on course syllabi, in program brochures, and the like.

How Many SLOs Should a Program Have

Generally, academic programs have 5-10 program-level student learning outcomes. However, there is no firm rule about how many SLOs a program should develop. Programs should develop enough SLOs so that they can determine if students are leaving the program with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are important. However, there shouldn't be so many SLOs that it becomes impractical for programs to collect and analyze data for all of the outcomes.

Checklist for Evaluating SLOs

This checklist is a summary of the guidelines for creating SLOs. Use the checklist to create, evaluate, and revise SLOs.

Checklist Question	Does the SLO meet the guideline?	
	Yes	No
1. Does the SLO directly link to the program mission?		
2. Does the SLO describe capstone knowledge, skills, and dispositions developed across the entire curriculum?		
3. Does the SLO describe observable and measurable actions?		
4. Does the SLO describe learning directly related to the academic discipline?		
5. Does the SLO avoid including multiple outcomes in a single statement?		
6. Is the SLO concise?		
7. Does the SLO use the recommended format?		
8. If relevant, does the SLO accommodate special accreditation or certification requirements?		

Need Help?

Need help creating/revising SLOs? Contact the UNC Assessment Office at Assessment@unco.edu.

References Used to Create Student Learning Outcome Resource

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