

Course Outcomes

November, 2009

All courses in SGPS are being revised to reflect student learning outcomes.

To convert objectives (teacher-centered, "this is what I'm trying to teach") to learning outcomes (student-centered, "this is what students should be able to demonstrate"), all you need to do is figure out what the students will be doing to **demonstrate** that they've acquired the knowledge, skill-base, awareness, that constitute the point of the course.

An outcome should delineate the higher-order abilities that students can do at the end of a course/lesson. The students' demonstration of the skill should result in some product that can be assessed. In short, these "outcomes" are the student "products" that you will be grading.

For example, in one of our courses, the first objective reads: "learn how to define a number of entrepreneurial terms."

A possible problem with that "objective" is that it is lower-order thinking and doesn't seem to have an end-product attached to it. The "how to define" also creates a bit of vagueness about exactly what students will be **doing** to demonstrate their acquisition of the ability.

An outcome has some kind of higher-order thinking verb attached to it, such as "build," "analyze," "apply," "create," "synthesize," "write," "produce," "evaluate," etc. Then, that verb needs an object (**what** will students build, analyze, apply, and so on). The outcome tells students very clearly what "assignment" they will be producing and what skills/knowledge they are demonstrating by completing the assignment.

Each course will have about 4-6 outcomes. When you start to build a course, start with the outcomes: what will the students be able to do at the end of the course? [Notice I used "do," not "understand," or "know."]

Arrive at Outcomes by Extracting them from Assignments

One approach is to think of the major graded assignments in the course. These are considered the products/demonstrations of the knowledge/skills. What is it that students demonstrate by doing that assignment and what exactly are you grading when you assess that assignment?

That answer (written in the form of a sentence) would be the learning outcome.

If you cannot reason back to a higher-order outcome for the assignment, perhaps the assignment is not rigorous enough. An assignment that only asked for students to use entrepreneurial terms and nothing higher order than that, would not be a college-level assignment.

Or, Start with the Outcomes, and Create Assignments that Give Students Opportunities to Practice and Develop Their Skill in Demonstrating their Achievement of the Outcomes

In this approach, decide what the 4-6 outcomes for the course should be.

Then assign the work, (exercises) : what exercises will students do, what work will they produce, that will give them opportunities to practice each of the outcomes?

Conversely, test every exercise with the question, "why?" Why are they having to read this, write that, discuss the third thing, research the fourth, and so on: does every single exercise help them practice one of the course outcomes, or a subheading under a course outcome? By the end of the course will the students have done exercises in a variety of ways to practice and develop their ability to demonstrate all of the outcomes?

If you have exercises that don't relate to a course outcome, then reframe exercises that do relate.

If you have outcomes with few or no exercises for students to use toward attaining them, add such exercises.

Outcomes that Need to be Included in Every Course

One more item: there are some standard outcomes that should be included in every course. For **undergrads**, every **Program** should have an outcome relating to critical thinking, college-level writing and research, etc. and every **course** will need something like:

- College Skills:
Students will refine their analytical, critical, and information literacy skills. (i.e., improve their writing, ability to present argument, do academic research, and apply their learning effectively in the field of the course). There should also be an outcome for increasing skill with APA style, meaning specific exercises designed to effect this need to be present.

This means parts of many exercises throughout each course need to address these issues (they need to be **actively taught in every course**).

At the graduate level, every **Program** needs an outcome related to research skills and active use of the major research tools of the field, and in each **course** we need something like:

- Research skills, including information literacy, specific to the course
- familiarity with the major reference and research tools specific to the course

In each course, aspects (subheadings) of these outcomes need to be **actively taught** and learned.