Writing Student Learning Outcomes

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) describe what a student should be able to DO at the end of a course or program.

- SLOs use action verbs from Bloom's Taxonomy with an emphasis on higher-order thinking skills.
- There should be 3-8 SLOs for each class or program. When in doubt, fewer is better.
- **SLOs should be included in course syllabi.**
- SLOs should be the same for all sections of a course. However, each instructor may include on their course syllabi additional outcomes and/or course expectations.
- SLOs should be written in language that students (and those outside the field) are able to understand.
- SLOs are typically not content-specific.
- SLOs should focus on big-picture, overarching concepts, skills, or attitudes.
- SLOs ask students to apply what they have learned.
- SLOs must be assessable and should suggest or imply an assessment. If they do include the method of assessment, it should not be too specific - a given SLO for a course should be appropriate for anyone teaching the course.
- Avoid starting SLOs with the words such as "understand", "learn", "know", etc. since these indicate internal mental processes for the students. (It might be possible to use words like this if the assessment method is indicated in the SLO.) Focus instead on what students will be able to do, produce, or demonstrate.
- Ideally, each course or program should include SLOs from more than one domain (cognitive, psychomotor, and affective).
- When writing SLOs, think about how you will assess each one.

Helpful hints:

- Brainstorm the 3-8 most important things a student should leave your class being able to DO.

- Sometimes it helps to think of any major, important assignments you give (term papers, projects, in-depth lab reports, final speech, performance, etc.) and write a student learning outcome tailored to that assignment. The assessment of that particular SLO would be the assignment itself.

- Key questions on your final exam could also be a starting point for an outcome. What question(s) do you always ask on your final? Why? What are you trying to get students to demonstrate by asking that question? That's an example of an outcome.

- The outcomes should make sense for the class. Once you have written them, compare them to the course outline, articulation agreements, prerequisites, etc. Get feedback from other instructors in your department.

- Take the online teaching goals inventory: http://www.uiowa.edu/~centeach/tgi/index.html It may help you clarify the teaching goals most important for you. You can then write SLOs that encompass these goals.

Background Information: Steps in the Assessment Process

1. Decide what students should be able to DO at the end of your class. (Develop student learning outcomes.)
2. Provide opportunities for students to learn and get feedback on their work.
3. Collect evidence to see if students are actually able to do what you think they should be able to do.
4. Analyze the evidence, come up with a plan for improvement, and implement the plan.

The idea behind assessment is to focus on what the learner is able to **do** (rather than what the instructor covered) and to be engaged in continuous questioning and improvement of student learning.
The very first step is to develop statements of **outcomes** for classes. These outcomes should be included in the syllabus for the class.

Some of the easier assessment methods:

- Analyze selected test questions
- Student surveys

- Reflective Essays
- Assess major assignments such as term papers, research projects, in-depth lab reports, final projects, final performances. These can be assessed using a rubric – a scoring sheet that you design. The rubric should list each trait you are assessing (organization, clarity, creativity, documentation, word use, impact, etc.) along with some description of what constitutes "excellent", "good", "average", "poor" performance on each aspect. When grading the assignment, fill out the rubric. You can then keep the completed rubrics and use them to analyze the class performance on the assignment. You will then have data to analyze. You can then easily see which aspects of the assignment were particularly troublesome for students. The next step is to make a plan for improvement – how could you help students perform better next time? You can focus more time and energy on improving the areas students had trouble with.

Resources:

Assessing Student Learning in Community Colleges (2004) – an online course or downloadable workbook for various topics and hands-on work in assessment. It is very thorough and easy to use.
http://online.bakersfieldcollege.edu/courseassessment/

Laney College Learning Assessment Committee website
http://www.laney.peralta.edu/learningassessment
To navigate to the Assessment committee website from the Laney College website: Laney website (http://www.laney.peralta.edu): Instructional Programs: Shared Governance: Committees: Learning Assessment Committee

The Laney College Library has a collection of books on assessment. For a list of these titles, go to the Laney College Learning Assessment Committee website (at the address listed above).

Recommended Reading:

Assessing Student Learning: A Common Sense Guide, Linda Suskie, Anker, 2004.

Assessment Clear and Simple: A Practical Guide for Institutions, Departments, and General Education, Barbara E. Walvoord, Jossey-Bass, 2004.

Introduction to Rubrics: An Assessment Tool to Save Grading Time, Convey Effective Feedback, and Promote Student Learning, Danelle D. Stevens, Stylus, 2005.

Effective Grading: A Tool for Learning and Assessment, Barbara E. Walvoord and Virginia Johnson Anderson, Jossey-Bass, 1998.

Assessing Academic Programs in Higher Education, Mary J. Allen, Anker, 2004.