

## Guidelines for Including Learning Outcomes on Course Syllabi

Prepared by the Center for Teaching, Research, and Learning

Course syllabi traditionally provide students with an overview of the course, topics that will be covered, a list of readings and assignments and due dates, a description of your grading system and class attendance policies. This handout focuses on ways you might include student learning outcomes on your course syllabus.

### How do Course Goals and Student Learning Outcomes Differ?

Course goals are broad, general statements that provide a framework for the course. They can be presented in narrative form as part of the course description or listed separately. Goals help frame your content and approach to learning, but do not specify *what you expect students to learn or how you will assess their mastery of course content*.

**Examples of Course Goals:** This course will:

- Improve** your understanding of \_\_\_\_\_.
- Help you gain an **appreciation** for multiple, global perspectives within \_\_\_\_\_.
- Help you see the **value** of \_\_\_\_\_.
- Explore** the relationship between \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
- Encourage** you to become reflective, critical learners \_\_\_\_\_.
- Provide opportunities** for collaboration, investigation and \_\_\_\_\_.

**Other terms used to define goals:** consider, take into account, become familiar with, examine, take a look at, participate in; these are all “big picture” statements that cannot be measured. Goals can also focus on dispositions: attitudes, perceptions or feelings or make general statements about topics to be addressed.

**Student Learning Outcomes focus on what you expect students to learn in the course.** These statements are specific and translate your course goals into measurable outcomes. They help you determine how students will demonstrate mastery of the material and skills covered in your course. They can begin with the phrase: “Students will be able to”. Here are some examples:

- Define** the relationship between \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
- Examine** diversity within \_\_\_\_\_.
- Present** alternative theories of \_\_\_\_\_.
- Apply** \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_.
- Analyze** the relationship between \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
- Compare and contrast** the following theories with regard to \_\_\_\_\_.
- Critically examine** \_\_\_\_\_, grounding their own opinion in course theories.

**Other terms that might be used to define learning outcomes:** describe, research, identify, categorize, explain, demonstrate, perform, write, evaluate, report, create, discuss, appraise, synthesize, construct, design, present.

**Learning outcomes also express the sophistication of your expectations.** For example, describing how a process works or defining content related terms may be important in a given course but will be less complex than tasks that require students to analyze, synthesize or demonstrate critical thinking and problem solving skills.

## Student Learning Outcomes Connect to Course Assessment and Grading Policies

The more clearly you state your student learning outcomes, the easier it is to tie them to assessment measures: tests, quizzes, research papers, reflections, presentations, internships, group projects, experiments or performances. The chart below illustrates how this might work. I.e. for each student learning outcome, how will your students demonstrate competency? Will it be an exam question, a paper topic, the focus of an individual or group presentation? What will students need to do or write to demonstrate to you that they have mastered a concept or skill? For example:

Student Learning Outcome		Assessment Measures
Students will be able to investigate, critique, evaluate		Research paper, exam question, laboratory experiment
Students will be able to collaborate, identify multiple perspectives		Group task or project, peer editing, an assignments given at the start of the semester and revised at the end
Students will be able to demonstrate, implement, create, apply		Internship, group project, experiment, performance, research paper
Students will be able to analyze, synthesize, evaluate		Research paper, exam question, project
Students will be able to describe, compare/contrast, critically examine		Research paper, exam question, demonstration, group project, performance

## How Many Student Learning Outcomes do you want to Include?

When deciding how many student learning outcomes to include on your syllabus, you might consider the following:

- What is the most important **content** for students to learn?
- Which specific **skills** do you want students to acquire or refine in this course?
- Which **dispositions/attitudes** do you want to emphasize in this course?

There is no set number of recommended learning outcomes; if you consider at least one or two per course goal you can ensure that you have the information you need to assess student competency and understanding.

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## Course Objectives

Clearly stating course objectives helps students see the overall course framework. Relevant points to include are

- What do you hope to cover, introduce and explore during the semester?
- Which content and skills are most important to you in this course?
- What are you going to evaluate?