My five-year old granddaughter Jane has to be encouraged to eat her vegetables. When she lived with us this summer, we often said: “Now eat your carrots, Jane, they will give you good night vision.” Her mother later heard Jane piously proffering the same advice to her little brother: “Eat your carrots, John, they will give you good night vision.” When her mother heard this she said, “That’s right. Jane, do you know what ‘vision’ is?” “Of course I do, mom,” Jane said: “Dreams from God.”

Wouldn’t it be great if we could obtain the vision we need simply by eating carrots! For we depend on vision—in our personal lives, in the Church, and at BYU. As I have often said, BYU is built on dreams as much or more as on bricks and mortar. It exists first and foremost as an idea and ideal toward which we are striving. The Prophet Joseph envisioned a Mormon university that would become “one of the great lights of the world.” Brigham Young and Karl G. Maeser dreamed of a school where even the alphabet and times tables would be taught with the Spirit of God. Alfred Kelly saw a vision of the campus with thousands of students thronging through temples of learning in the early morning light. BYU still exists as an idea and an ideal in the hearts of those who work and study here, as well as all those who guide, support, and love BYU.

Just over a decade ago, I was asked to articulate our collective dreams for what we expected students to gain from their BYU education. The result was The Aims of a BYU Education. This statement sought to summarize the prophetic direction given to the University over the years and to extend the visionary mission statement developed during the Holland administration.

Now, ten years later, every department has been asked to articulate the learning outcomes it envisions for students who complete each degree program. These should communicate in clear and simple ways what we expect our students to be able to do as a result of their particular program of study.

To jump start this task, the program goals that you developed last year for accreditation have been put on a website entitled “learningoutcomes.byu.edu.” I invite each of you to go to this site and review the outcomes for your respective programs.

For some, these outcomes will be very familiar: You have communicated them to students for years, have measured student performances against them, and used this information to improve your programs. For others, your program goals will be unfamiliar and may still need to be more carefully defined and then translated into learning outcomes. A helpful document to assist in this task has been prepared by David Whetten of the Faculty Center; it is attached to this memo. Ideally learning outcomes are clear, simple, and few.

Now is the time to ensure that we have in place a clear vision of our learning outcomes for each degree program. Soon—and I suggest sooner rather than later—we need to share these learning outcomes with our students so that, to paraphrase Thoreau, each student can “advance confidently in the direction of his [or her] dreams.” This will require clarity of vision. So let us eat our carrots.

Thanks for what so many of you are doing (on top of everything else faculty have to do at this time of year!) to complete this critical task.
Guidelines for Writing Expected Learning Outcomes  
(Program Level)

To promote teaching and learning excellence and to meet accreditation requirements, all BYU academic programs have been asked to formulate expected learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are statements of what students will be able to do as graduates of a particular course/program of study. Learning outcomes may be written at the university, program, and course levels.

This document focuses on learning outcomes and their assessment at the program level (i.e., the non-shaded area in the table below). Program learning outcomes should reflect the Aims of a BYU Education and guide the development of more specific learning outcomes for courses within the program (see Student Learning Assessments, 2003, p. 13-14).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Outcomes (Expectations)</th>
<th>Assessments/Evidence of Learning</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>Course</td>
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**Learning Outcomes**

*Questions to consider:* What is most important for students to learn in this program? What should graduates of this program be able to do? How do this program’s learning outcomes reflect the Aims of a BYU Education and requirements of applicable accrediting bodies? (See Student Learning Assessments, 2003, p. 22.)

**Tips:** Use action verbs** to express what students will do, e.g., analyze, create, compare, evaluate. (The use of action verbs facilitates alignment of program and course learning outcomes and assessments.) When writing program learning outcomes, anticipate how student learning will be assessed in relation to each expectation.

**General format:** Program graduates will be able to *(verb + ________________________________).*

**Example 1:** Program graduates will be able to assess their own strengths and weaknesses and adjust future performance in light of their self-assessments.

**Example 2:** Program graduates will be able to understand, interpret, explain, analyze, and assess representative philosophical texts, teachings, and problems.

**Example 3:** Program graduates will be able to design, provide, and evaluate healthcare for individuals and groups, including attention to human responses in actual and potential health problems.

**Example 4:** Program graduates will be able to effectively discuss important issues in sociology in light of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

**Verbs** to consider when writing learning outcomes include, *but are not limited to:*
analyze, dissect, detect, test, deconstruct, discriminate, distinguish, examine, focus, find coherence, survey, compare, contrast, classify, investigate, outline, separate, structure, categorize, solve, diagram, determine evidence and conclusions, judge, calculate, criticize, debate, experiment, identify, illustrate, interpret, explain, evaluate, justify, recommend, verify, monitor, test measure, appraise, assess, compare, conclude, contrast, plan, criticize, discriminate, estimate, explain, interpret, relate, revise, score, summarize, support, value, create, hypothesize, design, construct, invent, imagine, discover, present, deduce, induce, bring together, compose, pretend, predict, solve, organize, modify, improve, suppose, produce, set up, propose, formulate, arrange, assemble, categorize, collect, revise, combine, devise, explain, generate, manage, perform, prepare, rearrange, reconstruct, argue for, relate, reorganize.
Learning Assessments

Questions to consider: How will each learning outcome be assessed; what evidence of student learning is most relevant for each learning outcome? What criteria will be used to evaluate this evidence? In other words, what constitutes student performance at an exceptional, acceptable, and unacceptable level?

Tips: Develop a strategy to systematically and routinely collect, store, and retrieve assessment evidence pertaining to each learning outcome. Use multiple kinds of assessments for each learning outcome including: direct outcomes, such as outcome-related course assignments, exams, and capstone course projects, as well as indirect outcomes, such as employer, alumni and senior surveys. (See Student Learning Assessments, 2003, p. 29; Levels of Assessment, 2005, pp. 9-10; Taking Responsibility, 2004, pp. 30-35.)

General format: Student achievement of this learning outcome is assessed by ________________ and ________________.

Example 1: Student achievement of this learning outcome is assessed [directly] by instructor evaluations and [indirectly] by student self-assessments and acceptance into leading graduate programs.

Example 2: Student achievement of this learning outcome is assessed [directly] by reviewing samples of student work (i.e., essay examinations, capstone projects) and [indirectly] by employer surveys and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE).

Example 3: Student achievement of this learning outcome is assessed [directly] by student scores on the national proficiency exam (CPA) and [indirectly] by program review data and job placement rates.

Example 4: Student achievement of this learning outcome is assessed [directly] by sample student portfolios that reflect the students’ overall work in the program and [indirectly] by senior surveys.

References

