

# Guidelines for Writing Expected Learning Outcomes (Program Level)

To support 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. 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).

## 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\* in learning outcomes to express what students will be able to 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 [*action verb*] + [something].

**Example 1:** A graduate of this program will be able to effectively *evaluate* research designs, methods, and conclusions.

**Example 2:** Graduates of this program will be able to *assess* their own strengths, weaknesses, and omissions and be able to adjust future performance in light of their self-assessments.

**Example 3:** Graduates of this program will be able to effectively *communicate* both formally and informally through speaking, writing, and listening.

**Example 4:** A graduate of this program will be able to *collaborate* in designing and implementing problem-solving processes.

\* **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, infer, inspect, inventory, question, relate, select, coordinate, select, decide, rate, debate, 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?

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

**General format:** Student achievement of this learning outcome is assessed [directly or indirectly] by \_\_\_\_\_ and [directly or indirectly] by \_\_\_\_\_.

**Example 1:** 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.

**Example 2:** Student achievement of this learning outcome is assessed [directly] by instructors' observations and [indirectly] by student self-assessments and feedback from those leading the graduate work of former students.

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

**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

Association of American Colleges and Universities (2004). *Taking Responsibility for the Quality of the Baccalaureate Degree*. Washington, D.C.

Middle States Commission on Higher Education (2003). *Student Learning Assessment: Options and Resources*. Philadelphia.

Miller, R. & Leskes, A. (2005). *Levels of Assessment from the Student to the Institution*. Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

## Sample Program-Level Learning Outcomes

A graduate of this program will be able to design civil engineering systems.

Graduates of this program will be able to create a learning environment that encourages positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation.

A graduate of this program will be able to analyze English grammatical structures using traditional grammatical terminology.

A graduate of this program will be able to use writing as a means of discovery by composing academic essays that demand mature and creative thinking, the orderly development of ideas, and vigorous argument.

Graduates of this program will be able to understand, interpret, explain, analyze, and assess representative philosophical texts, teachings, and problems.

Graduates of this program will be able to present dance in a manner which reflects values centered in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

A graduate of this program will be able to design, provide, and evaluate care for individuals and groups, including attention to human responses in actual and potential health problems.