



STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES 201

University of Rhode Island, Student Affairs Assessment Committee, 9-13-07

Myths and Mistakes of Student Learning Outcomes

MYTHS

- 1. I don't have time to do this.**
Most of us are doing some form of assessment in our departments currently. Learning outcomes are just taking a different approach to the assessment. While it does take a little time to incorporate a new system of doing things, once integrated into the daily process, learning outcomes don't take a lot of time.
- 2. I don't know where to start.**
You have many resources at your fingertips to help you get started with the learning outcomes process. Your first step needs to be to contact the Student Affairs Assessment Committee. We are here to help you.
- 3. I don't know anything about learning outcomes.**
As with any new initiative it takes time to learn the nuances of the process. We have tools, resources and literature to help educate you on student learning outcomes. Start by reading the Student Learning Outcomes 101 handout.
- 4. If I wait long enough the learning outcomes phase will pass.**
Every indication we have is that learning outcomes are here to stay. They are a trend nationally and have proven to be quite useful in higher education. Secondary education has been using them for decades, and we have finally realized the importance of including them at the higher education level.
- 5. I can't incorporate what I already have on assessment into learning outcomes.**
Many of the assessments departments are already doing could be slightly modified to include learning by students. You also don't have to abandon your own terminology in your field; you can include your language in the template.

MISTAKES

- 1. The learning outcomes don't follow department, division or University goals.**
All learning outcomes statements should have meaning for you, your department and the students participating in the program. This meaning should be derived from the specific goals of your department.
- 2. The learning outcomes include words that are impossible or hard to measure.**
Try to avoid terms such as show understanding, develop awareness, possess a level of comfort, appreciate, become aware of, become familiar with, know, learn. Use Bloom's Taxonomy to find good verbs for writing learning outcomes.
- 3. The learning outcomes include too many skills in one statement.**
Writing outcomes that have multiple skills listed in them makes the learning outcome complex and hard to achieve.
- 4. Learning outcomes are written to include everything possible a student could learn by participating in the activity.**
Learning outcomes should focus only on the keys things the student should learn as a result of the activity.
- 5. The learning outcome statement is actually not a learning outcome.**
For example: The student will complete a self-assessment survey; The student will utilize the services of x office.
- 6. The learning outcomes are not written in the Student Affairs format.**
Having a common format makes reviewing and identifying what each department is doing a lot easier.
- 7. The learning outcomes attempts to focus on every domain/sub-domain.**
Focus on what is most applicable to your department.
- 8. The learning outcomes measures satisfaction or performance evaluation rather than the learning of the student.**



Measuring whether someone liked something or not; whether the person would recommend the program or not; how many used it; or how well someone did something is not measuring the learning that occurred. Make sure you can ask the question "Is learning being demonstrated?"

9. **There are too many learning outcomes.**

It is impossible to assess 30 outcomes in a year. Focus on the priority areas for your department/program. Identify a few key learning outcomes that are important and that can be easily assessed.

10. **Only one person wrote, reviewed, edited and implemented the learning outcomes.**

Even if you are a one person shop, make sure you have other people review your outcomes and help (delete) ask questions to make sure you are assessing your students to learn.