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How to Assess My Course

Identify Course Learning Outcomes

What are student learning outcomes?

Student learning outcomes are goals that describe how a student will be different because of a learning experience. More specifically, learning outcomes are the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and habits of mind that students take with them from a learning experience (Suskie, 2009).

Why create course-level student learning outcomes?

They help *instructors* by:

- Clarifying decisions about course content, assignments, and teaching strategies.
- Enabling course-level discovery about how well students are learning.

They help *students* by:

- Clarifying what they will be expected to know and do by the end of the course.
- Enabling self-reflection on their learning progress throughout the course.

What makes for good course-level student learning outcomes?

In order to have any of the benefits described above, student learning outcomes must:

- Describe what students should know and be able to do at the end of the course.
- Specify an action that faculty can both observe and measure.
- Be limited to between three to six per course.

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How do I write good course-level student learning outcomes?

- *If you have already been teaching the course*, you already have an idea of what you want students to know and do; this process is just articulating your outcomes more explicitly. Therefore, the best place to start is by looking at what you require from students in your course content, assignments and exams.

- *If you are designing a new course*, time to brainstorm. Think about what you want students to be able to know and do and how they will demonstrate that they have achieved that learning. To get inspiration, think about how you learned the material, talk to other faculty, or review similar course syllabi online.

- *Either way*, think about the actions you're asking student to do to demonstrate their learning. What level of thinking are you requiring? Then choose a verb that matches that level of thinking. Check out a revised version of Bloom's taxonomy, "Spit, Synthesize, and Speculate", to help with this matching process.
  - "Spit": Students must remember or recall concepts you have taught them.
  - "Synthesize": Students must not only remember concepts, but place them within a larger context.
  - "Speculate": Students must generate new knowledge based on the individual concepts and larger context.

"Spit" Verbs	"Synthesize" Verbs	"Speculate" Verbs
• Define	• Analyze	• Plan
• Identify	• Discuss	• Design
• Match	• Distinguish	• Generate
• Name	• Compare	• Compose
• Recall	• Explain	• Propose
• Recognize	• Apply	• Transform
• State	• Classify	• Critique
• Describe	• Illustrate	• Create

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Map Assignments to Outcomes: Course Maps

What is a course map?

A course map depicts how you will assess each of your course learning outcomes.

Why create a course map?

Course maps are the road maps for course assessment. They show which assignments or exams (or parts of assignments or exams) you will use as direct evidence for student learning outcomes. It can also be helpful in highlighting whether your assignments cover all outcomes and effectively assess your learning priorities.

How do I create a course map?

1. Create a table or chart that lists each of the student learning outcomes for your course.

2. For each of your student learning outcomes, list what exams, papers or activities (or items on those exams or grading criteria for papers/activities) have been designed to address that particular outcome.

What do course maps look like?

Learning Outcomes	Assessment
Recognize...	Exam 1, Q1, 2, 3
Synthesize...	Paper 1, Criterion 1
Apply...	Project 1, Criteria 1, 2

Go further!

If you are teaching a course that satisfies a Pathways requirement, consider adding a column to your course map that includes that requirement's associated learning outcomes.

Want examples of good course maps? Visit the Sample Tools page on our website.

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Assess Student Learning: Rubrics and Item Analysis

What are rubrics?

A rubric is a type of scoring guide that assesses and articulates specific components and expectations for an assignment. Rubrics can be used for a variety of assignments: research papers, group projects, portfolios, performances and presentations.

Why use rubrics?

They help *instructors* by:

- Bringing consistency to grading from student-to-student
- Saving time with quicker scoring/ grading
- Facilitating feedback to students
- Clarifying expectations to students
- When rubric criteria are tied to learning outcomes in a course map, quickly assessing where students are struggling or succeeding in their learning.

They help *students* by:

- Explaining instructor expectations clearly
- Promoting reflection on the learning process and progress
- Allowing for timely revision through quick, clear feedback

What makes for a good rubric?

- Concrete, measurable criteria
- Performance descriptors that are both comprehensive and mutually-exclusive (no overlaps)
- Input from colleagues, assessment professionals, and students

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How do I create a good rubric for an assignment?

- Create a table and list the measurable grading criteria in the first column with optional weights.
- List the range for performance quality in the first row (for example, "Beginning", "Emerging" and "Exemplary) with an accompanying points scale.
- In each box, write descriptors that represent each level of performance.

What is item analysis?

Item analysis provides statistics on individual test questions which, when tied to learning outcomes, provide direct evidence for student learning.

Why use item analysis?

When exam questions are tied to course learning outcomes in a course map, item analysis helps instructors quickly assess where students are struggling or succeeding in their learning.

How do I conduct item analysis?

Once each item (question) is mapped to a learning outcome, an assessment of learning comes down to merely looking at the aggregate scores on each item or set of items.

Did you know?

- Research shows that providing a rubric to students ahead of time improves their performance (Reddy and Andrade, 2010).
- Students can play a key role in the development of a rubric by testing it out themselves with their own work, that of their peers or sample work.
- At Hunter, you can create rubrics and grade electronically-submitted work, as well as conduct an item analysis on an electronic exam, right in Blackboard.

Want examples of good rubrics? Visit the Sample Tools page on our website.

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Close the Loop: Adjust Pedagogical Practice

What Does it Mean to "Close the Loop?"

The purpose of course-level student learning assessment is to find where students are struggling and succeeding and make adjustments on the basis of those findings. The "loop" indicates that this is a continuous process of identifying outcomes, assessing learning, using this learning to improve teaching, and then once again identify outcomes.

Why "Close the Loop?"

Closing the loop is the part of assessment where you get to take action, where you get to be creative and innovate. Based on your findings of where students are struggling or succeeding, you can decide how to adjust your pedagogy. For example:

- Maybe you find that students are having trouble applying a major theoretical concept, as evidenced in a rubric analysis of the final paper. Perhaps they need more practice with this type of thinking earlier on in the course, so you decide to assign small projects that ask them to tackle the concept bit by bit and apply it in multiple circumstances.
- Maybe you find that students can discuss some frameworks better than others, as evidenced by scores in an item analysis of an exam. Perhaps you teach the two frameworks in different ways, and can apply some methods from the framework with better outcomes to the framework with weaker outcomes.
- Maybe you find that students are having trouble interpreting graphs in their final exam. Perhaps a component of the course is coordination with the Dolciani Math Learning Center or set of online exercises at Sapling to provide a deeper, more intensive exploration of this skill.
- Maybe you find that students are having difficulty finding appropriate sources for their research paper. Perhaps collaborating on a workshop with the Hunter College Libraries could greatly improve student leaning in this area.

Did you know?

Hunter's Technology Teaching & Learning Group is a great place to start to explore innovative pedagogical practice.