# STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES—MAJOR/MINOR/PROGRAM/COURSE LEVEL

Explicit learning outcomes benefit faculty and students by:

- Clarifying how each course and other learning experience contributes to the program
- Promoting coherent and focused content
- Placing the emphasis on the student's learning
- Promoting consistency across sections so students have adequate background for higher-level courses and advanced learning experiences

Students should be informed about the expected outcomes for each course/learning experience and for their overall program so they can understand the purpose of each learning component in the overall program, thereby becoming more active participants in their own learning.

Student learning outcomes provide a focus for four processes:

- Alignment of course/learning experience content and curriculum content with intended outcomes
- Alignment of instructional approaches with intended outcomes
- Assessment of the extent to which intended outcomes have been attained
- Revision of course/learning experience content, curriculum content, and instructional approaches to enhance the attainment of intended program outcomes

A learning outcome is a statement specifying **an important component of the knowledge or skills acquired by the student in the course, learning experience, or program.** The statement of a learning outcome should make it evident that the student can demonstrate the knowledge or skill in a way that is overt and measurable; that is, the student can create a product or engage in a performance that is visible or audible.

Learning outcomes should describe the most important aspects of student learning. At the program or major level, it is recommended that outcomes should be stated broadly. At the level of a single course, some of the outcomes may be more specific than those stated for a major. A long list of very specific outcomes is not necessary at either level. In most cases, five to eight statements are sufficient to capture the essential learning outcomes of a program, and fewer for a single course.

## Examples of learning outcomes—undergraduate major/minor/program level:

Students completing this program will be able to:

- summarize and critique research reports published in political science journals. (Political Science)
- "identify, describe, and classify common, and some uncommon, earth materials (minerals and rock); make scientific observations of these earth materials in the field and in the laboratory; and interpret their observations in a scientifically sound manner." (Geology – Illinois State University)
- "analyze the impact of social policies on client systems, [social] workers, and agencies." (Social Work – Illinois State University)
- "prepare a set of financial statements in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles." (Accounting – University of Nevada-Reno)

**Examples of learning outcomes—course level:**

Students completing this course will be able to:

- "prepare . . . and present effective informative and persuasive public speeches." (Introduction to Speech Communication – ISU)
- "identify various psychosocial factors . . . that play a role in the behavior change process and utilize them in individual and group program planning." (Health Behavior Change – Arizona State University)
- "produce writing with APA or MLA formal documentation, which consists of in-text citations and final list of all sources cited." (English Composition I – Ivy Tech)

**Counter-examples:** There are several common types of statements that resemble learning outcomes but that would be more explicit or more useful if rewritten to conform to the format illustrated above. These are:

- Invisible/inaudible knowledge: It is stated that the student will know something or gain an appreciation of something, but not that the student can do something. Example:
  - [Students will] "understand the operations of financial institutions and the services they provide." (Introduction to Financial Services – Ivy Tech)
  - Rewrite as: Students will be able to describe the operations of financial institutions and the services they provide.

- Learning process: The process of learning is stated, rather than the outcome. Example:
  - The student will read a textbook describing the history of Western music.
  - Rewrite as: The student will be able to summarize the important features of major periods in the history of Western music.

- Teaching perspective: The statement is made from the perspective of the instructor or as a goal of instruction, rather than from the perspective of what the student has learned and can demonstrate. Example:
  - "[This course will] provide learners with the theoretical underpinnings of oral history as a 'way of knowing'." (Theory and Method of Oral History – Union Institute & University)
  - Rewrite as: Learners will be able to identify the theories employed by researchers who use oral history methods.

- Student satisfaction with the course or the instructor: It is stated that the student will have a rewarding experience in the course or program. Example:
  - Students will come to see that statistics can be fun, like solving puzzles.
  - Rewrite as: Students will be able to apply basic techniques of hypothesis testing to draw conclusions about populations from samples.

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