How are Program Outcomes and Student Learning Outcomes Different?

North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University

Program outcomes do not describe student learning. Rather, they reflect the services a program provides or describes programmatic elements, such as percent admits from those who applied, percent retention rate, number of graduates, number of faculty publications, and class size. Program outcomes are distinct from program requirements that all students must meet in order to graduate.

A good program outcome

- Addresses a specific action, behavior, or achievement
- Is narrowly focused and measurable
- Is achievable or can be improved upon if not achieved
- Is related to the mission of the program and/or the university
- Is meaningful to the program

Examples of good program outcomes

- Students in the undergraduate program in physics will engage in experiential learning activities (e.g., internships, service learning, undergraduate research, or study abroad experiences)

- Students enrolled in the dairy science BS program at the end of their sophomore year will complete the program within 4 semesters.

- Students graduating from the dietetics program will obtain licensure within 12 months of completing the program.

- The MS in accounting program will increase the diversity of its applicant pool.

- The chemistry program will provide teaching opportunities for PhD students.

Note that in these outcomes, what students know or are able to do is not the focus; the focus is on the activities students do as a result of being in the program.

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) describe what we want our students to know or be able to do: key knowledge, skills, abilities, or competencies. Usually, they complete the statement, "At the end of the program, students will be able to . . . ."

A good student learning outcome

- Addresses an observable, attainable knowledge area, skill, ability, or competency
- Is narrowly focused and measurable

- Is stated at the appropriate cognitive level for the degree (bachelor's, master's, PhD)
- Is related to the mission of the program and/or the university
- Is meaningful to the program

Examples of good student learning outcomes

- Graduates of the Chemistry BS program will be able to use modern library search tools to locate and retrieve scientific information about a topic, chemical, chemical technique, or an issue relating to chemistry.

- At the end of the program, students will be able to communicate the concepts and results of their laboratory experiments through effective writing and oral communication skills

- Upon completion of the Women's Study major, students will be able to identify diverse epistemological and methodological approaches to the study of women.

- Working from nature, manufactured objects, and the human figure, students in their last semester demonstrate refined skills in communicating what they see.

ASSESSMENT & ANALYTICS

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