

Frequently Asked Questions About Student Learning Objectives and Outcomes

1. Will this take extra time?

Yes, doing the necessary critical thinking about the essential learning your students should accomplish in your courses will be a valuable asset to the teaching and learning in your classroom.

2. Will the my outcomes be used in my evaluation?

You will use the feedback you obtain from your student learning outcomes to improve your teaching. In evaluation, MJC is looking for you to work toward becoming the best instructor you can be. If you are responding to the feedback about your students' performance with changes to promote learning you are excelling as an instructor. You are not going to be required to report individual instructor data. The data will be viewed as an aggregate.

3. Does having to produce learning objectives detailing the learning context and how mastery is determined compromise academic freedom?

Because you are facilitating the mastery of essential competencies in a course, you determine the learning context, and how you will measure the outcomes and what you will do in response to the information you obtain. You are in control of the entire process. To the extent that you are expected to identify the learning context and the means you employ to assess the learning, you may view this as a compromise, but in practicality, this is the core of the teaching and learning cycle.

4. Do I really have to collaborate with colleagues who teach the same courses, or can I just do this on my own?

Yes, collaboration with colleagues is essential to this process. The accreditors are looking for outcomes that are agreed upon by instructors who offer the same course. Their interest is in knowing that the student regardless of the instructor's approach to the course masters core concepts.

5. Isn't this just a fad that will pass?

Definitely not. This is a *global* paradigm shift in education that is asking us to put student learning at the center of everything that we do. To ensure that we are quickly responding to the needs of learners. To do this, we must shift from viewing our activities from what the instructor does to what the student learns. Scholarship and practice is showing that this model is much more effective and efficient in improving learning.

6. Can't I just get student learning objectives from someone else who has already prepared them?

You may want to find websites of instructors you respect and see if they have developed student learning objectives that you might adapt for your courses. It is not likely that another instructor who is not your colleague would have a teaching and learning situation enough like yours to have created student learning outcomes that really fit your teaching. The emphasis is on each individual instructor, in collaboration with his or her colleagues, developing the core competencies specifically for their own classroom. The ownership of student learning outcomes is essential to academic freedom and instructors

are encouraged to exercise this freedom.

7. Who is going to collect this data from instructors?

At this time MJC is developing the procedures for this. It is likely that the college researcher and the student learning outcomes facilitator will create this report for accreditation. Again, no individual data will be reported, the data will be evaluated as an aggregate.

8. Do we really have to do this?

Yes. The accreditation of our college depends on it. Without accreditation, our students can't receive financial aid, nor will our units transfer to other accredited institutions. As long as we value these things - and the welfare of our students, we must do what the accreditation body asks us to do.

9. Don't we already do this?

Yes and no. As educators practicing the 9 principles for good practice in undergraduate education we all strive to make continuous improvements in our courses so that student learning is maximized. The difference with the student learning objective and outcome strategy is that we collect **evidence** to support the changes we may have made on an intuitive basis. Another difference is the focus on the mastery of specific core competencies our students must take away from our courses to be successful to their next course, their degrees, even to their baccalaureate degrees or certifications. If you have used made your expectations explicit and tangible, and used strategies to objectively determine that they have mastered the essential knowledge, skills, behaviors, or attitudes in your course or program, you are well on your way to completion of the SLO process.

10. Is anything really going to change if I do all this?

Yes. First, instructors are going to know for sure how well students are mastering the essential competencies. Second, with evaluation of such unfavorable outcomes, instructors will be more empowered to identify the root causes of the performance gaps. Third, the results of this approach will be used to justify changes in programs and resources and make program review a much more meaningful and useful process. Fourth, implementation of the SLO process will allow our college to value the activities of the college office of research and planning to the extent that it becomes a more comprehensive resource that benefits everyone at the college.

11. What happens if I don't do this?

You would not be in compliance with the demands of the accreditation board and therefore, would not be an asset to our college achieving accreditation. The accreditors do not focus on individual faculty activity as much as they value the collaboration of colleagues who teach the same course, those who share in the teaching of sequential courses and those whose courses contribute to a program. A program can be a specific recognized program and the associate of arts or science degree is considered a program. All courses contribute to programs. Therefore, your colleagues will be depending on your participation. Your absence in this collaborative process will affect your colleagues' ability to be effective in creating student learning objectives, measuring the outcomes and implementing changes within the classroom and at the program level for the improvement of student learning and success.

12. Who do I contact for help?

The student learning outcomes committee is an on-going committee of the academic senate. All members of this committee are available for support of the implementation of the SLO process. In addition, the campus provides a student learning outcomes facilitator and we are hoping an instructor will be available as a mentor in each discipline. There will be a summer institute available in alternating years and a series of trainings on campus during the alternate

summers. Comprehensive workshops with follow-up sessions will occur each semester. Finally, you can contact our SLO facilitator for individual training.

- 13. What if I get a really poor outcome when I measure mastery of the objective?**
CONGRATULATIONS! You are now empowered to make changes that will improve student learning or success. Our success as an institution is NOT measured by how well our students are learning, but by how well we respond to evidence about their learning or success at the college in order to improve it!
- 14. Why should I participate in this if I am not an instructor?**
Student learning experiences don't just occur in the classroom. Support for learning is required across the college community. For example, students need to be able to readily utilize the available resources in the library. Every one of us is here to improve student learning. The challenge is knowing how to directly improve our work and our processes to have that impact.
- 15. How long does it take to develop one student learning objectives?**
In the beginning, one learning objective may take 15 minutes as you learn to isolate those variables you use to facilitate learning and to measure mastery. However, with practice, it should become quick, painless, and easy. In fact, many instructors have learned to enjoy the process of making explicit their own strategies.
- 16. How long does it take to measure student learning outcomes?**
It could take a year to plan, assess, evaluate and make a plan for responding to student learning outcomes. After that, the process continues as you collect the data and make timely and effective changes to improve student learning and success.
- 17. How is the assessment of student learning objectives different than assigning a grade?**
The primary difference is in the use of the assessment results. The assignment of a grade quantifies the overall level of student achievement or competency, allowing for a common basis of comparison assuming all faculty utilizes the same standards for grading. The grade, however, gives little information about what a student has learned. Additionally, student learning outcomes look at the achievement of the student population, not at the individual student.