A utilization-focused approach to developing, mapping, and assessing student learning outcomes in college foreign language programs

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Foreign Language Program Evaluation Project
National Foreign Language Resource Center,
University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa, 2012
Module II
Developing Meaningful Student Learning Outcomes

- Developing SLOs
- Mapping SLOs
- Situating
- Utilizing
- Reflecting
- Planning
- Implementing
Module II guides you through the process of conceiving and stating student learning outcomes for language education programs. Student learning outcomes are a key part of the outcomes assessment framework: they are the specific transformations in student skills, knowledge, and dispositions that educators in your program want to see students undergo (e.g., “Students will be able to express themselves confidently in a variety of oral and written registers.”). Outcomes, then, should express—and derive from—your program’s unique educational vision or mission. Moreover, this module will help you create learning outcomes statements in such a way that they are as meaningful, and useful, as possible for people in your department or program. To this end, the steps below describe a method for developing outcomes statements that is collaborative and focuses carefully on the intended use and users of outcomes statements.
How to use the module

Because outcomes assessment should be a collective endeavor, we encourage you to go through this module together with your colleagues. The module includes tasks and resources that will help facilitate your outcomes assessment planning.

→ Work on the questions with your colleagues.

→ If you see this icon, access the resources for further information and examples by clicking on the link provided.
Key program statements: Mission, goals, and outcomes

Mission, goals, and learning outcomes statements give direction for program design and improvement. A mission statement provides the philosophical basis for the program goals and outcomes. For the next few slides, take a look at example statements from the University of Evansville Foreign Languages Department and examine how the mission is elaborated in the goals and outcomes.

**RESOURCE**


- Information on University of Evansville’s major-degree outcomes assessment at the Department of Foreign Languages is available on their website: [http://foreignlanguages.evansville.edu/programs.html](http://foreignlanguages.evansville.edu/programs.html)
Developing SLOs

Key program statements: Mission, goals, and outcomes

Program values and beliefs broadly expressed as a mission statement

Mission statement realized in detail as actions and deliverables.

Program-level student learning expectations anchored to the mission and goal statements

Various sub-program level outcomes (e.g., course-level) couched within larger program-level outcomes (e.g., degree outcomes)
A mission statement is a concise summary of the department’s unique contribution to the institution and to society. It reflects the purpose, values, and beliefs of the program, and provides reasons for why the program exists. The mission statement contextualizes and guides the programs’ goals and learning outcomes.

From Grau Sempere et al., 2009:

**Mission:**

Foreign languages are an essential component of the great tradition of teaching and learning in the liberal arts. By teaching students to communicate in other languages, allowing them to gain knowledge and an understanding of other cultures, helping them to make connections with other disciplines, providing them with insight into the nature of language and culture, and requiring them to participate in multilingual communities both at home and abroad, the programs in the Department of Foreign Languages play a critical role in preparing students for the personal and professional challenges of a multicultural society and a global marketplace.

The mission statement situates language learning in the wider educational domain of liberal arts, describes the general benefits of language study, and articulates how educators aim to prepare students for participation in global and multicultural contexts.
Goals describe how the mission is going to be achieved. A goal is a statement on what the program provides (e.g., service, support, deliverables, staff/personnel, learning environment, resources) and tries to do (e.g., teaching practice, support students and institution) not only for the students but also for the internal personnel, other departments, institution, community, discipline, etc.

From Grau Sempere, et al., 2009:
The GOALS of the Department of Foreign Languages:

a) to prepare majors for successful competition in professional programs, graduate school and the workplace.
b) to provide programs of study leading to a Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts or a Bachelor of Science in Education in French, German and Spanish, Japanese Studies, Latin American Studies and Russian Studies.
c) ... [abbreviated]d) to impart a knowledge of the literatures and cultures represented by these languages.
e) to continue its excellent record of teaching through a diverse and innovative curriculum that meets the expectations and needs of our students.
f) to foster interdisciplinary studies with the other departments, i.e., Business, Communication, Education, International Studies, Political Science, Theatre, and so forth.
g) -- i) [abbreviated]

Like the mission statement, the goal statements describe what educators at Evansville want to achieve, though the general notions in the mission are developed in greater detail and itemized in particular educational and professional domains.

The goals also articulate specific educational aims of the program, such as continuing a tradition of teaching excellence and providing particular language learning environments.
Learning outcomes express specific knowledge, skills, and dispositions (values and attitudes) students develop as a result of their (learning) experience in a program (“Students will be able to...”). Outcomes can express learning targets at various programmatic levels (e.g., major, minor, lower-division, language requirement, and course levels).

Grau Sempere, et al., 2009:

**Student learning outcomes**

a) Students express themselves confidently in a variety of oral and written registers, keeping in mind the communicative context and conventions of the particular culture.

b) Students read and comprehend texts in the target languages tailored to a variety of communicative needs.

c) Students write documents in the target languages tailored to a variety of communicative needs, keeping in mind the conventions of the particular cultures.

d) Students understand native speech.

e) Students employ a variety of coping strategies to communicate both verbally and non-verbally in the target languages.

f) -- j) [abbreviated]
Download the complete mission, goals, and outcomes statements of the Department of Foreign Languages at the University of Evansville. Look for the conceptual links between the statements and how ideas in the mission statement are parsed into greater detail and itemized in the goals and outcomes statements. Access the document [here](#).
Mission:
“…By teaching students to communicate in other languages, allowing them to gain knowledge and an understanding of other cultures, helping them to make connections with other disciplines, providing them with insight into the nature of language and culture…”

Goals:
(b) Foster the development of the four language skills- speaking, writing, reading and comprehending the living languages currently offered on campus; French, German, Japanese, Russian and Spanish.
(c) Impart a knowledge of the literatures and cultures represented by these languages.

Outcomes:
(a) express themselves confidently in a variety of oral and written registers, keeping in mind the communicative context and conventions of the particular culture. …and more
(f) demonstrate a familiarity with the current events, the pop culture and the social structures of the countries/cultures in which the target languages are spoken. …and more

See how the mission and goals of fostering four-skills language capabilities (blue texts) are broken down into separate statements as outcomes (a), (b), (c), and (d). Similarly, building of knowledge (orange texts) in the mission and goals are further elaborated in outcomes (f), (i), and (j).
Does your program have a mission statement and goals?

→ If so, these statements (as well as other sources of program information) should provide a foundation for your student learning outcomes statements.

→ If your program has yet to develop mission and goals statements, the assessment committee is one appropriate forum within which individuals in the program can democratically develop mission and goals statements through collaborative dialogue and consensus building.
Why state outcomes?

A primary aim of stating learning outcomes is for educators to express the educational targets the program wants students to achieve.

“Specification of the outcomes of college FL programs provides us with a decisive opportunity to state who we are, why we exist, what our value is to learners, institutions, and society, and, quite frankly, why we should not be shut down and why we should play a serious role in any comprehensive approach to a truly liberal education.” (Norris, 2006, p. 577).

“We have a social and moral responsibility towards our students and towards society at large to state as clearly as we can what it is that we do for them and why what we do is valuable.” (a survey respondent from Watanabe, Norris, & Gonzalez-Lloret, 2009)
Characteristics of outcomes

Characteristically, outcomes statements…

• describe what students learn instead of what instructors teach or deliver;
• are specific and clear enough to provide information useful for assessment and curricular improvement;
• reflect aspects of institutional and departmental mission and goals;
• represent the educational value and values of a program;
• are collaboratively created and consensus-based;
• may evolve as evidence is gathered about student needs and achievements, curricular effectiveness, faculty expectations, and other factors.
SLO statements typically consist of three components:

(a) an action verb that identifies expected learner performance in understandable terms

Example 1: Students will demonstrate sensitivity to the aesthetic and symbolic qualities of language and to the relationships between form and content, with attention to how authors use words to create particular effects.

(b) a learning statement that specifies what learning will be demonstrated in the performance

Example 2: Speak Arabic at the ACTFL Advanced Level, demonstrating an ability to negotiate both survival and basic professional situations.

(c) where relevant, a broad depiction of the criterion or standard of acceptable level of performance.
Characteristics of outcomes

Additional concerns:

Collectively, SLOs should provide a comprehensive depiction of the main learning expectations/values of a program of study. In crafting outcomes, it is important to consider…

- all of the distinct types of knowledge, abilities, and dispositions developed through the educational program;

- any potential inter-connectedness or cross-disciplinarity of learning expectations; and

- the realities of what may, and may not, be feasibly achieved within a sequence or program of study.
Consider the SLOs below. What types of outcomes are they (i.e., knowledge, skill, or disposition)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example SLOs: Minor in Arabic Asian and Near Eastern Languages, Brigham Young University</th>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>Dispositions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students will be able to…</td>
<td></td>
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<td><strong>speak Arabic</strong> at the ACTFL Advanced Level, <strong>demonstrating</strong> an ability to negotiate both survival and basic professional situations.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>read and understand</strong> Arabic newspapers, specifically front page, international page and Arab World page news articles, without the use of a dictionary or other aids.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>listen</strong> to Arabic news broadcasts, <strong>understanding</strong> the basic topics and main points of the majority of items.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>write</strong> notes and short essays in Arabic at least at the ACTFL Intermediate High level.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>demonstrate</strong> familiarity with the cultures and modern history of Islamic peoples.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>value</strong> the contributions of Islamic religious and cultural traditions (including music, art and literature) to world civilization.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>view</strong> themselves as agents for promoting understanding and dialogue between the Islamic World and the West.</td>
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SLO development process

The following six steps provide a suggested route to the collaborative development of effective outcomes statements. A key notion to keep in mind is that outcomes should be collaboratively created and consensus-based. Ultimately, the usefulness of outcomes statements hinges on a democratically inclusive and participatory development/drafting process.

Step 1 ➔ Identify the program for which SLOs will be written
Step 2 ➔ Identify uses, users, and audiences for SLOs
Step 3 ➔ Identify sources of information and methods for generating SLOs
Step 4 ➔ Draft and revise SLO statements
Step 5 ➔ Plan for SLO review
Step 1: Program under focus

There are a variety of programs within a department. For which program do you intend to develop the outcomes?

Degree programs:
- major, minor, certificate programs
- First year program
- Second year program
- Third year program
- Fourth year program

Degree-level outcomes
Curricular-level outcomes
Course-level outcomes
Other types of program-level outcomes

Developing SLOs

Task 5

Study abroad program
Service learning program
Extra-curricular program
Tutoring program
Step 2: Identify uses & users

How would different program stakeholders use the outcomes? What intended uses of outcomes would they pursue?

- faculty
  - communicate what students should know, understand, be able to do, and value by the time they complete the program.
  - clarify and guide course, curriculum, teaching, and assessment design.

- students
  - become aware of what they are expected to learn.
  - focus their studying time and energy better, thus improving learning.

- graduates
  - showcase knowledge, skills, and dispositions relevant for the workplace.

- administration
  - demonstrate outcomes to accreditation body.
  - ensure articulation between institutional and program mission/outcomes.
Step 2: Identify uses & users

How would different program stakeholders use the outcomes? What intended uses of outcomes would they pursue?

**future students & parents**
- become aware of program expectations.
- become aware of what is unique and valuable about the program.

**employers**
- find graduates with relevant knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

**institution**
- meet accreditation requirements.
- see links between program outputs, institutional goals, and mission.

**FL education and beyond**
- share professional knowledge and uphold standards of learning quality and outcomes.
- demonstrate value of foreign language education to society.
Step 2: Identify audiences

- Have the assessment WG identify audiences and individuals that should be made aware of the program’s outcomes statements, as well as methods by which SLOs will be communicated to them (e.g., syllabi, web site, program brochure, report to administration, letter to students).

- Further, identify who is responsible for communicating SLOs to intended audiences, and in what venues or forums (see an example from the Brigham Young University website: http://learningoutcomes.byu.edu/).

- Before disseminating, consider whether audiences will understand the SLOs easily. If not, is annotation or other explication necessary?
How do you intend to use the outcomes, once stated? To which audience will SLOs be communicated in what fora?

### Developing SLOs

#### TASK 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who is going to use the SLOs? What will those individuals use the SLOs for?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SLOs will be used by…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

#### To which audience will SLOs be communicated?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SLOs will be communicated to…</th>
<th>Via…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Annotation or explication of SLOs needed for the audience above?  
- Yes
- No
Various sources of information can (or should) be used to help draft SLOs statements. Are there any ideas that can help you conceive or draft outcomes statements? Try to tap into program stakeholders’ perceptions or locate relevant information that will inform your SLOs.

You may want to consider incorporating multiple views when stating the outcomes, such as...

- tenured faculty
- Instructional faculty
- graduate teaching assistants
- current students
- alumni
- other stakeholders (e.g., funders)
Step 3: Information base

What information do you have already and what information do you need to gather in order to draft and validate the outcomes?

**WHAT**

- Learners’ perception of needs
- Learners’ perceived achievement level
- Level & variability of learner performance
- Institutional vision, mission, and outcomes
- College-wide expectations
- Current course-level outcomes (syllabus, course description)
- Example SLOs from peer institutions
- Standards from professional organizations (e.g., National Standards, CEFR, etc.)
- Other?

Gather these information by…

**HOW**

- Survey
- Interview
- Focus group
- Performance test (exit test, portfolio, etc.)
- Observation
- Document analysis
- Other?
## Identify sources of information and methods for generating SLOs: responsibilities, tasks, and information sharing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informants &amp; information source</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whose views should be reflected?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Information gathering

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Info-type:</th>
<th>Method:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐ perceived learning needs</td>
<td>☐ survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ perceived achievement level</td>
<td>☐ interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ level &amp; variability of learner performance</td>
<td>☐ focus group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ institution or college-wide expectations</td>
<td>☐ performance test (exit test, portfolio, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ current course-level outcomes</td>
<td>☐ observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ example SLOs from peer institutions</td>
<td>☐ document analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Standards from professional organizations (e.g., Standards for FL Learning, CEFR, etc.)</td>
<td>☐ other?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Other information?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>By when should the information be gathered?</th>
<th>How are gathered information going to be analyzed and interpreted?</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who will be responsible for gathering the information?</th>
<th>How are the results going to be shared?</th>
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</table>
Step 4: Draft & Revise

What will the drafting and revising process look like? How will the information gathered in Step 3 be shared during the drafting process? Who does the actual writing? Who should be reviewing and providing input? What is the timeline?

Step 5: SLO Review

Once outcomes are developed, they should not be static representations of student learning, ‘set in stone’. SLOs should be reviewed from time to time and checked for efficacy, meaningfulness, and usefulness. Key changes in the program that might precipitate outcomes review include: assessment findings, changes in student population, faculty turnover, budget cuts/increases, creation of new resources or new programs, etc.
Plan for drafting, revising, and communicating SLOs.

### Draft & revise outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tasks</th>
<th>Who?</th>
<th>When?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing initial draft of outcomes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Reviewing the draft</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Providing input on the draft</td>
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### Communicating outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where do you plan to disseminate SLOs?</th>
<th>Department website</th>
<th>Department brochure</th>
<th>Course syllabi</th>
<th>Curriculum documents for instructors</th>
<th>Assessment reports to the institution</th>
<th>Other locus:</th>
<th>Who is responsible for communicating the SLOs to the intended audiences?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐ Department website</td>
<td></td>
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<td>☐ Department brochure</td>
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When/how often should the stated outcomes be revisited?  

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Example SLO development process

Assessment WG
Dept. chair, one tenured, and one non-tenured faculty

The WG reviewed example FL outcomes
The WG drafted tentative outcomes
As an entire department: Brainstorming sessions: 3 revisions
Feedback from students (majors) + expert feedback
Entire Department: Final vetting of outcomes
Entire Department: Made curricular changes
The WG mapped outcomes to existing curriculum

For more detailed information, read Grau Sempere, Mohn, & Pieroni (2009)
...months of hard work sparked very animated and fruitful conversations among all department members (adjunct, contract, junior tenure track, and tenured faculty)...a small committee of faculty members worked well together and always kept departmental colleagues involved. As a result, the entire group experienced an enhanced can-do attitude, a positive feeling of team work, a sense of collective ownership of the project, and a better understanding of our identity and goals as a department. Who could have predicted that an evaluation project would elicit faculty excitement?
Checklist for reviewing your SLO statements

- Do SLOs state what students gain, not what teachers aim to deliver?
- Do the stated outcomes cover all of the primary values that define student learning in your program and classes? Are any important ones missing?
- Are the statements reflective of faculty’s belief about language education? Are they somewhat skewed towards certain perspectives or certain outcomes?
- Are the SLOs reflective of your current curriculum and instruction? Does your program provide opportunities for students to master the stated outcomes?
  → Learn about curriculum mapping. Go to Module III to verify whether your program provide opportunities for students to master the stated outcomes.
- Do SLOs capture a reasonable expected change and target in students’ knowledge, abilities, or dispositions?
- Will SLOs be understood easily by diverse possible audiences (language, jargon, etc.)?
Conclusion

A set of well-articulated student learning outcomes is the cornerstone of useful student learning outcomes assessment. The planning, drafting, and reviewing processes described above help to ensure that outcome statements are conceptually precise, and are regarded by people as meaningful articulations of what the department or program is trying to achieve with respect to student learning. Put another way, this systematic process—of identifying the program in need of SLOs; identifying uses, users, and audiences for SLOs; identifying sources of information and methods for creating SLOs; and writing, revising, and reviewing SLOs—aims to make these statements as useful as possible for future assessment efforts. The subsequent modules (III, IV, and V) will guide you through the next step of integrating and situating your SLOs in an overall assessment framework—a key use of which will be gauging how well students are attaining these important targets—though in a way that aims to make the entire enterprise as productively useful as possible.