

## Developing Program Learning Outcomes

### What is a Program Learning Outcome?

A program learning outcome (PLO) is what a student knows, thinks or is able to do after completing all of the courses required to complete a particular program of study.

### What steps should be taken to develop PLOs?

1. Faculty should identify the program's primary goals for student learning. It may be helpful to conduct the following exercise:
  - Imagine you have met one of your most successful students 5 years after graduation. What would you want the student to tell you she remembered from the program?
2. The goals developed in step 1 may then be translated into program learning outcomes that are observable and measurable statements of intended student learning. Most PLOs will follow the format "Students will + **action verb** + result/trait/product." Consider the examples below.
  - a. Students will **administer** the appropriate treatment to the patient.
  - b. Students will **produce** professional-quality video products.
3. Keep the language simple and focused on one student attribute. However, the statement should be broad enough to be examined from more than one perspective. Consider the following examples:
  - Too specific: Students will write an 800-word essay on the effects of Belgian colonization on the African continent.
  - Too broad: Students will be able to communicate.
  - Appropriate: Students will communicate effectively in a variety of mediums.
4. Ensure the statement is student-centered. Instead of focusing on what the program does, focus on what students will be able to do at the end of the program. Consider the following examples:
  - Program-centered: The program prepares students for successful careers in surgical technology.
  - Student-centered: Students will demonstrate knowledge of foundational surgical technology principles.

How many PLOs does my program need?

While many programs will have between 5–7 program learning outcomes, there is no specific number of PLOs required by SACSCOC. Each program must decide on the PLOs that represent the learning required to earn the credential (AS, AAS, AA, BAS, BS, TC, WC) being awarded by the program. Keep in mind that each outcome must be assessed at least twice within a 10-year period.

Additional examples of program learning outcomes

- Students will identify and perform haircutting techniques that are appropriate for a particular client.
- Students will create a developmentally-appropriate lesson plan.
- Students will prepare accurate financial statements in accordance with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles.
- Students will complete advanced-level welding projects using multiple techniques.

Additional approaches to assist in developing PLOs

In developing PLOs, faculty may also consider at which cognitive level they expect students to perform. Cognitive levels and sample corresponding action verbs are provided below.

<b>Cognitive Levels (from lower to higher)</b>	<b>Corresponding Action Verbs</b>
<i>Remember</i> - Can the student recall or remember the information?	Define, duplicate, list, memorize, recall, repeat, reproduce, state
<i>Understand</i> - Can the student explain ideas or concepts?	Classify, describe, discuss, explain, identify, locate, recognize, report, select, translate
<i>Apply</i> - Can the student use the information in a new way?	Choose, dramatize, demonstrate, employ, illustrate, interpret, operate, schedule, sketch, solve, use, write
<i>Analyze</i> - Can the student distinguish between the different parts?	Appraise, argue, compare, criticize, differentiate, discriminate, distinguish, examine, experiment
<i>Evaluate</i> - Can the student justify a position or decision?	Appraise, argue, judge, defend, select, support, value, evaluate
<i>Create</i> - Can the student create a new product or point of view?	Assemble, construct, create, design, develop, formulate, write

While programs are not required to cover them, it may be helpful to consider the following areas and corresponding samples in the table below when developing program learning outcomes.

<b>Area</b>	<b>Sample PLO (All statements beginning with "Students will...")</b>
<b>Discipline Knowledge</b>	Apply dental hygiene principles within the clinical setting
<b>Professionalism in the Discipline</b>	Demonstrate appropriate professional conduct
<b>Critical Thinking</b>	Analyze a common industry problem and provide a solution
<b>Communication</b>	Communicate effectively with prospective clients
<b>Ethical Decision Making</b>	Respond to an ethical dilemma using industry principles

References:

- Bloom, B.S. et al. (1956). Taxonomy of educational objectives: the classification of educational goals; Handbook I: Cognitive Domain New York, Longmans, Green, 1956.
- Larson, R.W. (2011). Developing Program Learning Outcomes. Montana State University.

For questions and additional assistance in developing program learning outcomes, please contact the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Accreditation at [oiea@fscj.edu](mailto:oiea@fscj.edu) or (904) 632-3283.