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Assessment Skills and Knowledge: Tools You Can Use

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Defining Program Objectives

Goals are statements about general aim or purposes of education. They are the broad, long-range intended outcomes of a program, department, college or university. Goals are used primarily in policy making and general program planning.

Objectives are brief, clear statements that describe the desired learning outcomes of instruction. Attention is focused on the specific types of performances that students are expected to demonstrate at the end of instruction.

Measures are the elements used to determine the progress toward an objective.

There are two types of measures. The **baseline measure** is where a department is cur-

rently performing. The **target measure** is where the department wishes to perform in a specific period of time.

Differences between Objectives and Outcomes

Objectives are intended results and consequences of instruction, curricula, programs, or activities.

Outcomes are achieved results or consequences of what was learned -- evidence that learning took place.

Objectives specify what is expected and describe what should be assessed; outcomes are behaviors and

products generated by students after instruction and are the objects of assessment.



Why Do We Need Objectives?

Learning objectives serve several important purposes: They serve to:

- Communicate to *ourselves* what we intend students to learn, whether students have gained appropriate skills, attitudes, and/or knowledge and how successful students have been in accomplishing desired learning objectives
- Communicate expected outcomes to *students* so they can organize their efforts toward accomplishing desired behaviors
- Communicate to *other interested parties* such as professional disciplinary and regional accrediting groups the purposes and degrees of success of our learning activities

If we don't know
where we are going,
any road will take us
there."

"We can all
learn from each
other and have
to opt for
formulating
assessment
plans that work
best in our own
unique
situations."

Characteristics of Good Objectives

Although a good objective is program specific, there are a number of characteristics which generally distinguish good objectives. Characteristics that a good learning objective exhibits:

- action verbs that specify definite, observable behaviors
- simple language
- focus on student rather than instructor behaviors
- describes a outcome rather than a process
- focuses on end-of-instruction behaviors rather than subject matter coverage
- each objective limited to a single outcome
- linked to a goal
- realistic and attainable
- clear to people outside the discipline
- validated by departmental colleagues

Goals versus Objectives

GOALS	OBJECTIVES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goals are broad • Goals are abstract • Goals are general intentions • Goals are intangible • Goals can't be validated as is 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objectives are narrow • Objectives are concrete • Objectives are precise • Objectives are tangible • Objectives can be validated

Performance Vs Student Learning Objectives

Performance and student learning objectives are frequently confused. Although the same principles apply in writing these objectives the purposes of these objectives is totally different.

The purpose of performance objectives is efficiency. Performance objectives is describe our activities as individuals and departments. Performance objectives are used for

institutional effectiveness, and program and individual evaluation.

Assessment of student
learning objectives
monitors student
learning **NOT** faculty
teaching

In contrast program and student learning objectives describe how we want students to be as a result of participation in our educational activities. The purpose of student learning objectives is to promote student learning. Assessment of program and student learning objectives monitors student learning **NOT** faculty teaching.

Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives

In 1956, Benjamin Bloom and a group of educational psychologists developed a classification of levels of intellectual behavior important in learning.

Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives identifies six levels within the cognitive domain, from the simple recall or recognition of facts, as the lowest level, through increasingly more complex and abstract mental levels, to the highest order which is classified as evaluation.

Verb examples that represent intellectual activity on each level are shown below.

1. **Knowledge:** arrange, define,

duplicate, label, list, memorize, name, order, recognize, relate, recall, repeat, reproduce state.

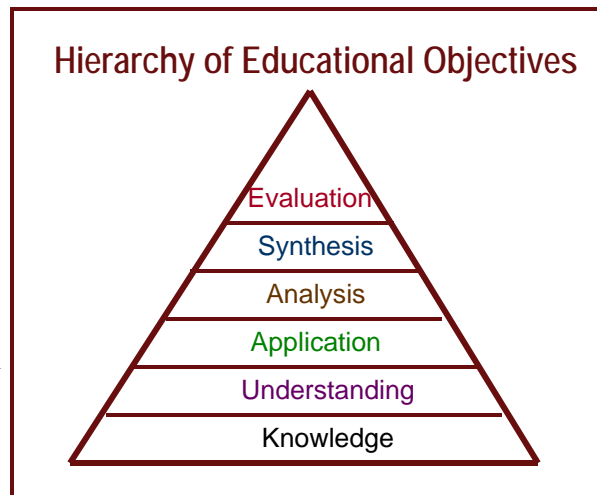
2. **Comprehension:** classify, describe, discuss, explain, express, identify, indicate, locate, recognize, report, restate, review, select, translate,

3. **Application:** apply, choose, demonstrate, dramatize, employ, illustrate, interpret, operate, practice, schedule, sketch, solve, use, write.

4. **Analysis:** analyze, appraise, calculate, categorize, compare, contrast, criticize, differentiate, discriminate, distinguish, examine, experiment, question, test.

5. **Synthesis:** arrange, assemble, collect, compose, construct, create, design, develop, formulate, manage, organize, plan, prepare, propose, set up, write.

6. **Evaluation:** appraise, argue, assess, attach, choose compare, defend estimate, judge, predict, rate, core, select, support, value, evaluate



The ABCD Method for Writing Objectives

The ABCD method of writing objectives is an excellent starting point for writing objectives.

Audience – Who? Who are your learners?

Behavior – What? What do you expect them to be able to do? This should be an overt, observable behavior, even if the actual behavior is covert or mental in nature. If you can't see it, hear it, touch it, taste it, or smell it, you can't be sure your audience really learned it.

Condition – How? Under what circumstances or context will the learning occur? What will the student be given or already be expected to know to accomplish the learning?

Degree – How much? How much will be accomplished, how well will the behavior need to be performed, and to what level? Do you want total mastery (100%), do you want them to respond correctly 80% of the time, etc. A common (and totally non-scientific) setting is 80% of the

time.

Objectives specify what learners will be able to do, or perform, to be considered competent. As such, they provide clear reasons for training.

Another way to view objectives is that they are goals redrafted to state performances in terms that are clearly tangible to the reader.

When writing objectives, be sure to describe the intended result of instruction rather than the process of instruction itself.

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Check Out These Sites

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Assessment plans and web sites vary widely in scope and emphasis. A few you may wish to examine include:

Concordia College (MN): <http://www.cord.edu/dept/assessment/guidelines.htm>

George Mason University (VA): <http://assessment.gmu.edu/ProgramGoals/index.cfm>

Southern Illinois University –Edwardsville (IL): <http://www.siu.edu/~deder/assess/plan.html>

Bonus Site: Truman State University (MO): <http://assessment.truman.edu/index.htm>

Don Reichard, Newsletter Editor

Academic



Assessment

Assessment Skills and Knowledge Workshop **Friday, January 20, 2006, 8:30-3:30** **Maple Room, Elliott University Center**

On Friday, January 20, 2006 The Office of Academic Assessment is offering a one-day workshop to assist academic departments and programs in:

- Creating an Effective Assessment Plan
- Developing Measurable Objectives
- Selecting Assessment Approaches

Individuals charged with or interested in improving their departmental or program assessment plans should plan to attend.

Attendance is limited to 40 participants. Those interested in attending should either contact the Office of Academic Assessment or register using the form available on the Office's web site at: assessment.uncg.edu