

Guidelines for Review of New Course Proposals

When you review new course proposals that have been submitted to the Academic Senate Curriculum Committee, please pay specific attention to the following four items in the syllabus:

- presence of clear, specific, measurable student learning outcome statements,
- the methods of assessments,
- descriptions of assignments, and
- grading formula / distribution of grades over the semester.

Here are some questions to guide you as you examine the syllabi:

- Are the student learning outcomes specific, measurable, and action-oriented?
- Are the methods of assessment “matched” to the student learning outcomes? (in other words, can you tell which assessments address each outcome, and will the assessments actually give the faculty member the information he or she needs to evaluate the students’ progress?)
- Are the descriptions of the assignments clear, and do they give you the information you would need as a student enrolled in the course?
- Do student learning outcomes align with and reinforce the Core competencies, as appropriate to the course?

A brief introduction to student learning outcomes:

Student learning outcomes are not the same thing as course goals. A goal is a statement of what the instructor would like to do with the course, and what sort of impact he or she hopes the course will have on the students. A student learning outcome is a statement of what new knowledge, skills, and/or abilities the student will possess as a result of successfully completing the course.

Well-written student learning outcomes are:

- focused on skills and abilities central to the discipline and based on professional standards of excellence;
- general enough to capture important learning but specific enough to be measurable;
- focused on the learning resulting from an activity rather than the activity itself;
- focused on aspects of learning that will develop and endure but that can be assessed in some form now;
- specific, measurable, and action-oriented.

Student learning outcomes are action-oriented. “Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to...”

- Describe
- List
- Identify
- Explain
- Locate
- Apply

- | | | |
|-------------|------------|-------------|
| • Assign | • Test | • Review |
| • Analyze | • Solve | • Evaluate |
| • Criticize | • Design | • Plan |
| • Question | • Appraise | • Construct |

Notice that the verbs listed range from lower-order cognitive skills—such as remembering, interpreting, and applying—to higher-order cognitive skills—such as analyzing, evaluating, and creating. Ideally, the student learning outcomes for any course should include both lower- and higher-order cognitive skills, with an emphasis on higher-order cognitive skills as the level of the course increases.

Common problems in student learning outcomes, which you should flag for re-examination by the course author, include:

- Using vague terms, such as
 - Appreciate
 - Know
 - Understand
 - Become aware of
 - Learn
 - Become familiar with
- Describing actions taken by someone other than the student, such as
 - The program will ...
 - The course will ...
 - The lesson will ...
 - The professor will ...