Preventing Learning Outcomes and Measures for Academic Plans

The Graduate College, in collaboration with the University Office of Evaluation and Educational Effectiveness, brings you this practical guide in order to assist in the planning or evaluation process by providing tangible examples and dos and don'ts in preparation for academic plan submission. For additional information, and further examples, please visit https://uoeee.asu.edu/creating-plan. The time you invest now will save time later, and will ensure that you are able to collect high-quality assessment data.

Program/Learning Outcomes
Program outcomes are the intended learning outcomes of an academic program. They are demonstrated knowledge and skills your graduates will have acquired by the completion of the program. They answer the question, "What should program graduates know and be able to do?"

Guidelines for Graduate Program Outcomes
Acceptable program outcomes should:

1. Support the mission of the university, college, school, division and department.
2. Directly relate to the program's academic discipline.
3. Be observable and measurable.
4. Focus on learning outcomes (student learning), not curricular inputs such as department resources, instructional methods, etc.
5. Communicate a single outcome rather than combine multiple outcomes into a single statement.

Dos and Don'ts:

Graduate Program Outcome Examples

Nutrition

- "Students graduating from the MS program will demonstrate general competency in nutrition research."
- "Students graduating from the MS program will demonstrate competence in the collection, interpretation, and communication of nutrition research."

Theatre

- "Students graduating from the MFA program will be knowledgeable about the history of theatre."
- "Students graduating from the MFA program will be able to recognize major movements and critical issues in the history of theatre to articulate new interpretations of theatre works."

Assessment and Measures

Once you have identified the program outcomes, you can think of specific methods for measuring the knowledge and skills students should possess. It is appropriate, and often preferable, to use the same measure for more than one outcome.

Applied projects, doctoral dissertations, and other complex culminating experience products typically measure student performance on multiple program outcomes, and are rich sources of information about students' ability to apply knowledge from across the curriculum. As you develop your program outcomes and measures, it helps if you write the desired outcome first, directly followed by the measure. The measures you write can be direct or indirect, quantitative or qualitative, objective or subjective.

Guidelines for Creating Effective Measures

1. Avoid creating additional tests or other assessment activities and instead try to identify exams or other measures of student learning that already occur as part of existing instruction and testing activities.
2. Do not use course grades and/or course completion as a measure of student learning. However, assignment grades can be an appropriate measure, if the assignment measures student learning on a specific outcome.
3. Identify two measures for each program outcome. At least one must be a direct measure; the other may be direct or indirect.
4. Measures should be specific. Identifying a specific exam (for example), in a specific course, creates a plan for data collection for the program assessment.
5. Extensive description of the measure and rationale for its inclusion is not necessary.
6. Avoid combining multiple measures as one. For example, an exam and a paper in a course should be two separate measures.
7. Ensure the measure aligns with the outcome, in that it directly illuminates the outcome it is intended to assess.
Preparing Learning Outcomes and Measures for Academic Plans

Direct vs. Indirect

Direct measures
Students demonstrate their learning through a performance of some kind.

Examples of Direct Measures
- Capstone, applied project, portfolio, theses, dissertations
- Presentations or oral defenses
- Course and design projects
- Artistic creations or performances
- Classroom/homework assignments
- Classroom/online discussions
- Classroom exams or quizzes
- Practical clinical assessments
- Licensure/certification exams
- Papers (research, term, creative, etc.)
- Publications/presentations
- Internships

Indirect measures
Provide information from which we can draw inferences about student learning.

Examples of Indirect Measures
- Student surveys & focus groups
- Exit/alumni surveys and interviews
- Employer surveys and interviews
- Course evaluations
- Job placement data
- Admission to doctoral programs (for master's programs)

Quantitative vs. Qualitative

Consider developing a balance of both quantitative and qualitative measures

Quantitative measures
Entails the collection of meaningful numbers that can be used for further analysis.
Examples include: survey data, performance criteria.

Qualitative measures
Require the use of common criteria to look for recurring patterns and themes within student work.
Examples include: interviews, observations of students and faculty, etc.

Objective vs. Subjective

Keep in mind that your chosen measures may involve objective or subjective responses. Consider the advantages of each.

Objective measures
Have a single correct answer—is either correct or incorrect.

Advantages:
- Provide information on a broad range of learning goals on a single measure
- Encourage broader learning than subjective assessments
- Fast and easy to score
- Can be easily summarized

Subjective measures
Consist of multiple components that can each be assessed for their individual quality.

Advantages:
- Evaluate many important skills that objective measures cannot
- Promote deep and lasting learning
- Assesses skills directly
Designing New Academic Programs:

Planning Considerations

The following considerations will assist you when planning new programs. Consider these questions and gather evidence to answer them as you design innovative high quality programs. Keep in mind there is no magic recipe for program approvals, but we hope these considerations will enable you to prepare strong academic program proposals.

1. Why should ASU offer the new program?
Consider connecting the rationale for your program with broader themes and principles that advance the mission of your Unit and ASU. Identify gaps in current program offerings filled by this proposal and the contributions your program will make.

2. What's the need for a program in this area?
Cite national, regional or local career/job demand data and/or conduct your own market analysis to show the need for the proposed program. Draw from any other evidence source to demonstrate program need.

3. Are there any peer universities that are offering this or a similar program?
Explain the presence of similar programs at peer institutions, describe the growth of these programs in the region or nation, and comment on enrollment trends.

4. What would make the ASU program unique?
Highlight the unique features of your proposed program and explain briefly how these unique program features position your Unit ahead of your competition.

5. Are there ASU programs with similar names?
Search for degrees and programs on the ASU website using terms/words included in your proposed program/degree name. Acknowledge them in your proposal and identify the status of these programs (e.g., inactive/active). If a similar program exists at ASU, obtain an impact statement.

6. What makes this one different?
Explain how your proposed program differs from current existing programs, including the expected outcomes of your proposed program.

7. What is the proposed delivery model?
Explain if you intend to use campus immersion, hybrid, or digital immersion model(s). Justify your choice of delivery model.

8. Who is the target audience, what type of student would be attracted to this program?
Describe the audience you have in mind in terms of demographics, professional backgrounds and executive level positions, and other relevant aspects. Explain how this population overlaps or differs from the audiences of similar programs.

9. What resources will be needed?
Describe if you have the faculty and other academic resources germane to the proposed program. If not, explain how you will obtain them.

10. What are the target fields and potential career opportunities?
Describe the fields/disciplines/professions in which graduates of this program could be hired. If available, explain career opportunities in terms of potential job titles and salary. Cite data about the employability of these graduates drawing from peer institutions and/or national statistics (e.g., [xx]% of graduates obtain a job within [xx] months upon graduation).

11. What are the program’s learning outcomes and assessment strategies?
Specify the learning outcomes of the program and how they will be measured with performance indicators. The University Office of Evaluation and Educational Effectiveness is a great resource to consult for strategies. Examples of learning outcomes can be found at https://uoeee.asu.edu.

12. When designing Executive programs:
- What will make the program experiences different for prospective students compared to similar programs that are not executive?
- What will the special fees cover for the elevated experiences?
- Is the delivery model appropriate for working professionals?
- What type of elevated treatment will be provided? (e.g., VIP advisor service, field experience)