STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES 101

What are student learning outcomes?
Student learning outcomes or SLOs are statements that specify what students **will know, be able to do or be able to demonstrate** when they have completed or participated in a program/activity/course/project. Outcomes are usually expressed as knowledge, skills, attitudes or values.

What are the characteristics of good SLOs?
SLOs specify an action by the student that must be **observable, measurable and able to be demonstrated!**

How can SLOs help students and organizations?
Assessing SLOs…
1. Will help departments understand how to better facilitate student learning.
2. Will provide departments with feedback (e.g. Are your services providing what they are supposed to beyond customer satisfaction? What skills are students learning? Are these the skills we want them to learn? Are these the skills we are teaching them?)
3. Will enable students to articulate what they are learning and have learned from attending URI, inside and outside of the classroom.
4. Will help students be able to explain what they can do and what they know.
5. Will enable students to better understand where they can go to learn particular knowledge, skills, attitudes or values. Ultimately, will provide students with a map of where various learning opportunities are available throughout the university.

How to Get Started:
1. Ask yourself: what are the most important things a student should know, be able to do or demonstrate after completing my program or from utilizing my office/services?
2. Make a list of these and try to write them as SLO statements using the examples and hints provided below. Relate them to the university-wide objectives and outcomes (e.g., www.uri.edu/assessment/primer/URI_Draft_Outcomes.pdf) and the Student Affairs' list of domains and subdomains.
3. Edit and review – refer to "How Do You Fix a Student Learning Outcome?" on this handout, paying careful attention to the verbs used in your SLOs.
4. Submit an electronic copy of your department's SLOs to Student Affairs Assessment Committee at saassess@etal.uri.edu.

HELPFUL HINTS:
- Work with one or two people to draft SLOs--incorporating different perspectives helps.
- Review/edit statements with others in your department.
- Consult resources outside the department. (e.g., email Student Affairs Assessment Committee at saassess@etal.uri.edu).
- Again, focus on a small number of learning outcomes that are most relevant to your services. Three to five may be plenty! (However, individual department requirements may vary.)
- Don't try to cover every domain. Focus on domains that are most applicable to your department.
- Be sure to specify any particular populations you may be assessing. For instance, departments may have some programs in which only certain students participate.
- Clearly differentiate SLOs (which are measures of what students have learned) from assessment of student satisfaction, program evaluation and purely process measures such as attendance.

WHEN WRITING STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES
1. Focus on a smaller number of high priority outcomes – this will lower the burden of assessment and record-keeping.
2. Put learning outcomes in broad categories (i.e., Student Affairs' list of domains or subdomains).
3. Make outcomes as **specific, focused and clear** as possible – general outcomes will be hard to measure!

THE IMPORTANCE OF ACTION VERBS
Action verbs result in overt behavior that can be observed and measured. Sample action verbs are:
- Analyze, apply, argue, arrange, assemble, assess, calculate, categorize, choose, classify, compare, compile, compute, create, criticize, critique, defend, define, demonstrate, describe, design, develop, differentiate, discuss, distinguish, estimate, examine, explain, formulate, identify, illustrate, indicate, interpret, label, list, locate, manage, memorize, order, operate, organize, plan, practice, predict, prepare, propose, question, rate, recognize, repeat, report, reproduce, review, revise, schedule, select, solve, state, translate, use, utilize, write

Certain verbs are unclear and call for covert, internal behavior which cannot be observed or measured. These types of verbs should be avoided:
- appreciate, become aware of, become familiar with, know, learn, understand

Examples – TOO general and VERY HARD to measure…
1. …will appreciate the benefits of exercise.
2. …will be able to access resources at the University of Rhode Island.
3. …will develop problem-solving skills and conflict resolution.
4. …will be able to have more confidence in their abilities.

Examples – Still general and HARD to measure…
1. …will value exercise as a stress reduction tool.
2. …will be able to develop and apply effective problem solving skills that would enable one to adequately navigate through the proper resources within the university.
3. …will demonstrate ability to resolve personal conflicts and assist others in resolving conflicts.
4. …will demonstrate critical thinking skills, such as problem solving as it relates to social issues.

Examples – Specific and relatively EASY to measure…
1. …will be able to explain how exercise affects stress.
2. …will be able to identify the most appropriate resource that is pertinent to their university concern.
3. …will be able to assist roommates in resolving conflicts by helping them negotiate agreements.
4. …will demonstrate the ability to analyze and respond to arguments about racial discrimination.

Personal goals are not necessarily learning outcomes…
> Personal goal: …able to participate in physical activities at least 3 days per week.
> Learning outcome: …able to establish a personal exercise program consistent with professional guidelines.
> Personal goal: …able to receive a satisfactory mark on a difficult writing assignment.
> Learning outcome: …able to apply APA format to papers and assignments.

Expectations are not necessarily learning outcomes…
> Expectation: …will dress appropriately.
> Learning Outcome: …will be able to describe the significance of a professional appearance at work.
> Expectation: …will turn in assignments by scheduled due date.
> Learning Outcome: …will be able to explain the importance of meeting professional deadlines.

**The learning outcome demonstrates that the student has learned!

HOW DO I FIX A STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOME?
- Shortcomings can typically be seen by asking two simple questions, "**CAN IT BE MEASURED?" and "IS LEARNING BEING DEMONSTRATED?"**
- Take a look at the following examples:
  - *Participants will understand the nine reasons for conducting a needs assessment.*
    - Learning is demonstrated, but this SLO will be difficult to measure.
  - *Student will arrive on time daily.*
    - This can be easily measured, but learning is not necessarily being demonstrated.
- We see readily that these learning outcomes have shortcomings.
- We can rewrite these to make the learning outcomes measurable and demonstrative of learning:
  - *Participants will be able to list nine reasons for conducting a needs assessment.*
  - *Student will be able to articulate the necessity of maintaining office hours as publicized.*
- Both of these SLOs answer the two questions. They are measurable and demonstrate that the student has learned!

Writing Learning Outcomes Template
Student Affairs, University of Rhode Island

When writing student learning outcomes…

- <u>Try using this template for writing learning outcomes</u>:

  As a result of students participating in _____ ,

  they will be able to _____ .

  Ex: *As a result of students participating in* <u>the resident assistant training session for writing incident report forms,</u> *they will be able to* <u>write concisely, include factual details in their reports and use language that is non-judgmental.</u>

- <u>After creating learning outcomes, reference this checklist</u>:

1.	Does the outcome support the program objectives?	Y	N
2.	Does the outcome describe what the program intends for students to know (cognitive), think (affective, attitudinal), or do (behavioral, performance)?	Y	N
3.	Is the outcome important/worthwhile?	Y	N
4.	Is the outcome:		
	a. Detailed and specific?	Y	N
	b. Measurable/identifiable?	Y	N
	c. A result of learning?	Y	N
5.	Do you have or can you create an activity to enable students to learn the desired outcome?	Y	N
6.	Can the outcome be used to make decisions on how to improve the program?	Y	N

Fowler, B. (1996). *Bloom's Taxonomy and Critical Thinking.* Retrieved February 23, 2005 from http://www.kcmetro.cc.mo.us/longview/ctac/blooms.htm
Template adapted from: Gail Short Hanson, American University, as originally published in <u>Learning Reconsidered 2</u>, p. 39.