

Student Learning Outcomes at The University of Western Australia

Student Learning Outcomes is an approach to education that shifts the emphasis from teaching to learning, from what the teacher will do to what the student will do. It emphasizes the student perspective by:

- clear and explicit identification of what a learner is expected to know, understand or be able to do as a result of a learning process (outcomes).
- assessment that transparently and defensibly aligns with the outcomes.
- teaching and learning activities that elicit the specified outcomes.
- assessment tasks that are detailed and marked consistently using explicit criteria.

Assessing learning outcomes

At UWA, the quality of the learning outcome is assessed against descriptive grade-related criteria. A minimum acceptable learning outcome would elicit a pass grade, with higher grades being awarded to more complex and sophisticated work.

There are two ways in which a student learning outcomes approach is being implemented at UWA:

1. A course approach

This top-down approach that is ideally suited to a brand new degree or course or the review and revision of a degree or course. The **graduate outcomes** for the course are clearly written, and represent the subject matter, concepts, techniques, skills and attitudes of central importance to the chosen discipline(s). These outcomes may also include outcomes developed from the **University Educational Principles** and related to the specific discipline. From those outcomes and principles the curriculum of the course is constructed, the subdivision of structure into units is made, and the outcomes specific to each of the units are derived.

2. A unit approach

The learning outcomes for a unit are clearly stated so that students are aware of what they will understand and be able to do on successful completion of the unit. For an existing unit, the objectives, or if there are none, the existing elements of content, are rewritten in outcomes format. Clear criteria for the assessment of the learning outcomes is included in the unit outline.

The specific content of some units may offer a particularly rich opportunity to facilitate some of the graduate outcomes and Educational Principles, in which case these can be developed as outcomes for the unit. From the unit outcomes the curriculum of the unit is constructed, and the criteria used in assessment are explicated.

Some expected outcomes of a Student Learning Outcomes approach at UWA

- **Greater academic staff satisfaction with teaching:**
Academic staff will know where their unit fits into the overall degree or course curriculum and exactly what students will be expected to learn in their unit. They can enhance their teaching effectiveness by not spend time teaching content and skills that students are expected to learn in other units. They can more easily redesign their units to include innovative pedagogies and appropriate technologies to support their teaching.
- **Greater student satisfaction with teaching and learning:**
Students will know exactly what they have to learn in every unit. They will know what they have to do to provide evidence of their learning and they will know how it will be assessed. They will know what level of performance will be expected to achieve the various grades of achievement. They can more easily appreciate the relevance of the activities, learning tasks and assessment. Students will begin to take more responsibility for their own learning.
- **Less student appeals in relation to assessment:**
Because students will know what they have to do to provide evidence of their learning, how it will be assessed and what level of performance will be expected to achieve the various grades of achievement there will be less student appeals aboput assessment.

References

Biggs, J. (2003). *Teaching for quality learning at university: What the student does* (2nd ed.). Buckingham, UK: SRHE and Open University