

About Outcomes/Objectives, Measures, Targets, Findings, Action Plans, and Analysis

Outcomes/Objectives

An **Outcome** is a *specific kind of objective that describes a desired result related to your mission*. An outcome statement defines what you expect to happen because of your activities (e.g., students will learn to deliver effective oral presentations).

A **Student Learning Outcome** is a statement regarding knowledge, skills, and abilities students should gain or enhance because of their engagement in an academic program or other structured learning experience. Student Learning Outcomes are the most important outcomes/objectives for an academic program. Both faculty and staff can assess student-learning outcomes. **Special Note:** Ask your QAC resource team about assessing higher-learning student learning outcomes and the new updated Bloom's Taxonomy.

If you are writing a **Student Learning Outcome** statement, you may find it helpful to start out with "Students [or program graduates] will" You make Outcomes/Objectives entries at the start of an assessment cycle.

An **Objective** is a statement of intention, describing a task to accomplish or a goal to meet. Often, but not always, staff teams write objectives and faculty write outcomes.

A well-formulated outcome/objective is **SMART** — **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic, and **T**ime-bound. You can enter an objective in WEAVEonline[®] for a single year (e.g., improve students' ability to complete financial aid forms) or enter one that is continuing (e.g., improve students' ability to communicate effectively). In this case, your means of assessment changes from year to year. You make Objectives/Outcomes entries at the start of an assessment cycle.

Measures

Entering Your Assessment Plan – Measures

Measure: A measure identifies evidence and methods you will use to determine whether you are achieving expected results. Measures need to be quantitative and show performance compared to criteria for success in relation to expected outcomes/objectives.

Measuring student learning is a special case. The best measures for this are direct indicators in which students demonstrate what they know or can do. In this category are portfolios of work over time, exhibitions, clinical evaluations, performances, carefully designed course-embedded assessments, and products such as papers or oral presentations. Indirect indicators, in which students or others report on student learning, are less powerful, though they do have a place in creating "an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time" (from AAHE's Nine Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning).

Important Note: For 2007-2008, many RLC faculty and staff will use rubrics designed to measure the important characteristics students should master when they have accomplished the designated student-learning outcome(s).

Targets

Target: You determine the criteria for success on a given measure for an outcome/objective, either specifying an exact target level [e.g., 85% of oral presentations rated by a panel of reviewers will be scored at or above the "Acceptable" level, using a rubric (scoring scale) developed by the department] or establishing an internal benchmark (e.g., the average turnaround time for a transcript request) and improving on it in subsequent cycles. You need to ask yourself what level of performance by your program would be acceptable and then seek to sustain or enhance that performance.

Findings

Findings: Findings are the results of your assessments; they give evidence of achievement versus a target level for each measure you use. For **Student Learning Outcomes**, findings detail how students performed on the measure; for other outcomes or objectives, findings usually describe performance of the program itself on the measure. As you follow a regular assessment and quality improvement cycle, you set Outcomes/Objectives and Measures early on, then enter Findings, Action Plan, and Analysis later in the cycle.

Action Plans

Action: An action is an organized activity you undertake to help your program more effectively achieve its intended outcomes/objectives. Whenever your program does not achieve the desired target performance level for an outcome/objective, you should plan an action to address that shortcoming. For example, if students did not meet your program's expectations for oral presentations, you might decide to include more instruction and/or more practice to enhance students' development of oral presentation skills. *You can also include planned actions unrelated to assessment findings, e.g., an action to respond to a new opportunity that has arisen during the course of a year.* You make Action Plan entries at the end of an assessment cycle.

Analysis

Analysis: Analysis is your reflection on your program's findings versus the criteria you set for success on your program's intended outcomes/objectives. Here you summarize what you see as patterns of strength and areas that need improvement. You make Analysis entries at the end of an assessment cycle.