Course Learning Objectives in Brief

Creating learning objectives that articulate what you want your students to know, understand, and be able to do by the end of the course will help you develop assessments that measure their progress toward these objectives. When you design or update a course, review your syllabus to make sure that learning experiences (activities, discussions, lectures, assignments, etc.) will provide your students with the tools needed to achieve your course learning objectives.

Writing Effective Learning Objectives

Graduate courses typically have 5-8 course learning objectives. If you find yourself with a much longer list, check for overlap to determine if any objectives can be combined or eliminated.

Elements of Effective Objectives

- Are student-centered: *"After successfully completing this course, you will be able to"*
- Are written clearly and presented in a bulleted or numbered list
- Match learning activities and assessments
- Progress from basic skills and knowledge to advanced understanding and performance
- Break down tasks and focus on specific cognitive processes
- Are aligned with departmental competencies and objectives
- Are written using action verbs
- Are specific
- Are measurable
- Are realistic and achievable
- Are well-defined (avoid verbs such as appreciate, be aware of, become acquainted with, be familiar with, describe, discuss, increase awareness of, know, learn, realize)

Examples of JHSPH Learning Objectives

- Identify biases and their consequences in published literature
- Explain the basic concepts of data quality, summarization, and presentation
- Identify the "weakest links" in clinical management of HIV infection at individual and population levels
- Analyze alternatives in a policy environment using a rational decision making model
- Critique the ethical issues and human rights concerns raised by family planning programs
- Perform a two-sample test and interpret the results
- Apply modern molecular biology techniques to the evaluation of an influenza outbreak
- Link scientific questions with appropriate analytical methods

We sometimes begin with learning objectives that are vague:

- "Understand X"
- "Discuss X"
- "Obtain a working knowledge of X"
- "Gain an appreciation for X"

We can clarify these objectives by asking ourselves what students would do differently if they "understood" or "appreciated" X.

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