

## **A Few Thoughts from Learner -Centered Assessment on College Campuses by Huba and Freed**

### Effective Learning Outcomes

- Are student focused rather than professor focused.
- Focus on the learning resulting from an activity rather than the activity itself
- Reflect and institution's mission and value statements
- Are in alignment at the course, program and institutional levels
- Focus on important, non-trivial aspects of learning that are credible to the public\*\*
- Focus on skills and abilities central to the discipline and based on professional standards of excellence
- Are general enough to capture important learning, but clear and specific enough to be measurable
- Focus on aspects of learning that will develop and endure but that can be assessed in some form now.

(from Learner-Centered Assessment on College Campuses by Mary E. Huba and Jann E. Freed, 2000, p. 98)

The authors use the example of "Student will recall the stages of mitosis." as an example of an outcome that is easy to measure, but is too specific. Similar statements may "decompose" the content of a subject matter and are still common when faculty are called upon to parcel one action verb per statement when writing student learning outcomes. Huba and Freed continue the discussion of articulating outcomes with taxonomies by reminding the reader of the complexities of learning:

"All learning—even the acquisition of a new fact—requires the integration of new material with existing knowledge and is achieved through complex mental processes." P. 112

Furthermore, it is stated that students are unlikely to gain more general skills (as in the first two years of an academic program) such as communication and critical thinking, without disciplinary context. "One can learn effective communication and critical thinking skills only if one has something to communicate and think critically about."

Of course, if we are to allow more general outcomes such as, "Students will be able to design and conduct original and independent scientific research", we must also be clearer about the methods with which we intend to assess those skills. It will also be important to assess that which we feel is most important and related to the continuance of making evidence based decisions emphasizing the improvement of student learning.

It is important for our faculty to be aware of and be able to articulate learning outcomes that are the right mix of levels of learning (Bloom's basic to complex) appropriate to a specific course. I work with the assumption that students who enter higher education are able to (or are willing to try) to think and reason at complex levels, and to endeavor to apply,

synthesize, and evaluate course information. I feel this assumption helps me to constantly have higher expectations for students, especially at the community college. Faculty who work from stated learning outcomes are more likely to scaffold instruction and evaluate the effectiveness of instructional strategies and are more often successful in helping students achieve the intended course outcomes. In addition, those who are willing to be more interactive with students and use formative assessment methods to inform their teaching decisions, will see their efforts reflected in what students learn and how they apply course related information. Students, in the end, will always be responsible for their own learning and degrees of success in college, but the strategies an instructor employs, certainly have an impact.

#### **How do professionals in assessment help faculty?**

1. Engage in developing plans for teaching a diverse and ever changing adult student body population.
2. Search for and try new or different instructional strategies that match content, students, and the delivery styles of different faculty.
3. Communicate about formative assessment strategies that deliver important information about the levels of student achievement in on a regular basis
4. Collaborate with departmental and institutional colleagues in models of assessment that improve programs and student learning.
5. Capture evidence that provides a rich landscape for decision making about curriculum, departmental planning and assessment for student learning.

Learner-Centered Assessment on College Campuses by Mary E. Huba and Jann E. Freed, 2000. Allyn and Bacon, [www.abacon.com](http://www.abacon.com)