

Defining Program-Based Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) and Translating Them Into a Curricular Structure

Introduction

[Semester Conversion](#) provides the University of Cincinnati with an historic, extraordinary opportunity to effect transformational changes throughout UC's academic calendar, curriculum, and pedagogy. At the heart of the semester-conversion process lies curriculum redesign.

What are program-based student learning outcomes (SLOs) and how can you translate them into a curricular structure?

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) for an academic program are defined as the knowledge, skills, or behaviors that a program's students should be able to demonstrate upon program completion. In other words, what is the ideal portrait of the successful graduate of your program?

Program outcomes represent broad statements that incorporate many areas of inter-related knowledge and skills developed over the duration of the program through a wide range of courses and experiences. They represent the big picture, describe broad aspects of behavior, and encompass multiple learning experiences.

Ideally, SLOs represent a point of transition from education into the students' chosen profession.

Our shared goals for this seminar can be divided into two parts, which mirror the process of creativity.

Part I – Crafting the “Big Picture” – seeks to foster *divergent thinking* and thereby to surface and explore novel possibilities.

Part II – Defining Program Boundaries – then enlists our *convergent thinking* to define constraints and guidelines within which we can improvise and fine-tune program details.

In sum, this seminar seeks to help you:

- **Articulate student learning outcomes for your program** – outcomes that encompass a vision of “the ideal graduate” of your program, and outcomes that accommodate pre-existing goals set by other entities (e.g., UC's General Education Competencies or professional guidelines)
- **Define constraints for the design of your program**, including requirements set by UC's Gen Ed program, Ohio's OBR/TAG requirements, and/or a field's accrediting or professional body
- **Craft a framework for your program** that applies UC's Integrated Core Learning – a guide that addresses how the program's learning objectives will be developed and assessed across three touchpoints, namely your students' first-year, mid-collegiate and capstone experiences.



Module 1

Envisioning the Ideal Graduate

The Context: When crafting student learning objectives for your program, there is no better place to begin than with the ideal end in mind, the end of program outcome. This opening module seeks to create a 'blue sky' vision of your program's outcomes. Before considering any limitations, constraints, or challenges, explore your greatest hopes for your graduates and their development.

The Task: Brainstorm the "ideal" graduate of your program. Be sure to describe how you imagine your ideal graduates once they become professionals in their field. You can type your responses in the boxes below.

What does an "ideal" graduate of your program look like? In a perfect world, how will your graduates think and behave? What "tools" – theories, concepts and techniques – will they be able to apply?

For a well-known humorous perspective on this problem, go to YouTube to see the comedy sketch about ["The five minute university."](#)

If these category listings are not applicable to your program, please insert alternative headings.

Thinking	Acting	Knowledge



Module 2

Identifying Patterns Among Pre-existing Program Goals

The Context: Another important question to address prior to program redesign is what do you want your students to learn to become professionals in their fields? What theories, concepts and techniques should they be able to apply upon program completion? In this vein, our professional fields may offer inspiration (e.g., our professional associations and accrediting bodies).

The Task: Examine Gen Ed Requirements and the framework offered by your professional organizations; identify patterns in terms of what is expected of your students once they have completed your program. You can type your responses in the boxes below.

If these category listings are not applicable to your program, please insert alternative headings.

<p style="text-align: center;">UC General Education Competencies</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Goals/Guidelines set by the Profession</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Other expectations...</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical thinking • Knowledge integration • Effective communication • Social responsibility • Information literacy 		
<p>Common Themes</p>		

Module 3

Defining Student Learning Outcomes

The Context: Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) for an academic program are defined as: the knowledge, skills, or behaviors that a program's students should be able to demonstrate upon program completion. The SLOs determined by your team will represent (to faculty and to students both within your program and in the larger university) the **big picture** of your program, depicting broad aspects of desired student capabilities, encompassing multiple and varied learning experiences, and reflecting key criteria of your students' transition from education to profession.

The Task: Comparing the vision of an ideal graduate, from Module 1, and patterns among pre-existing program goals, from Module 2, generate a list of student learning outcomes for your program. You will have the option to type in you SLOs on page 6.

Writing Tips:

- Phrase these outcomes to use higher-order thinking skills, such as “evaluating” or “analyzing”.
- Be sure you can measure or evaluate the outcome in some way.
- Make the outcomes concrete rather than abstract.
- Use active, rather passive, verbs so you specify who is doing what. Passive verbs hide who the actor is, so when specifying actions, active verbs are clearer.

[Click here for a concise list of active verbs.](#) [Here is a more comprehensive list of active verbs.](#)

Below are examples of program-based student learning outcomes.

Bachelor Degree in Business (BBA) – Program-Based Student Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the BBA Program, students will be able to:

- Apply functional and cross-functional knowledge to critically assess business problems.
- Use analyses to inform and develop integrative solutions that improve business outcomes.
- Express ideas clearly, logically and persuasively in both oral and written formats.
- Recognize ethical and social responsibility issues in a business environment and know how to apply a process of ethical inquiry.
- Show how operating in a global market creates business opportunities and challenges.
- Work cooperatively and effectively in a cross-disciplinary team

Bachelor Degree in Health Science (HLSC) – Program-Based Student Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the HLSC Program, students will be able to:

- Plan, execute, evaluate, adjust physical activities and programs appropriate for self and clients
- Provide complete, understandable and accurate information within content areas to clients and community
- Develop and/or disseminate scientific information to the general public and the academic community
- Apply information from various basic and applied science disciplines in a manner that provides for efficient, effective and safe physical activities
- Investigate and evaluate the general state of public health conditions and concerns and develop and apply appropriate programs of action within program content area

**Module 3****Drafting Program-Based Student Learning Outcomes**

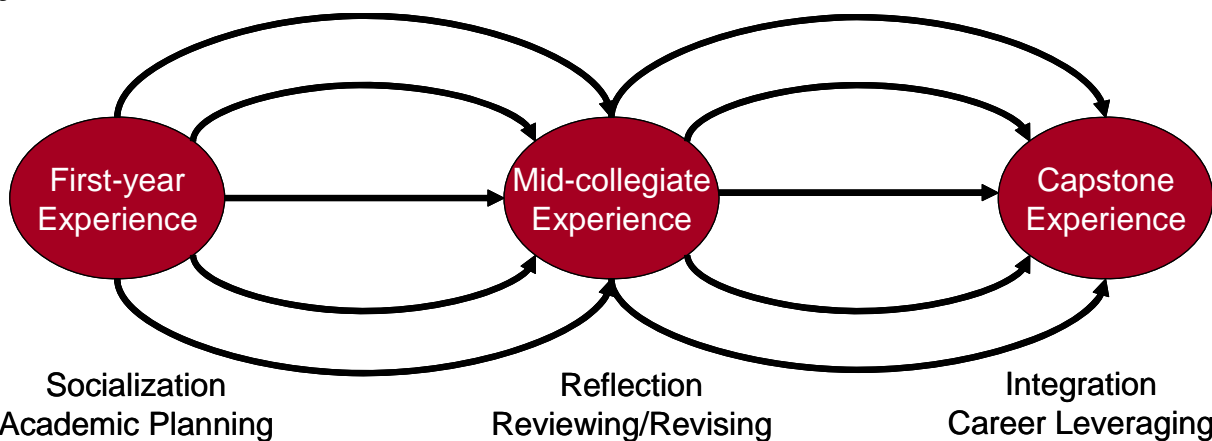
Student Learning Outcome #1
Student Learning Outcome #2
Student Learning Outcome #3
Student Learning Outcome #4
Student Learning Outcome #5
Student Learning Outcome #6
Student Learning Outcome #7

Module 4

Conceptualizing Student Development Phases

The Context: Integrated Core Learning (ICL) was an understanding of student development that surfaced from UC|21 efforts. Its elegance lies in its simplicity. Basically, ICL envisions three touchpoints in a students' developmental process: first-year, mid-collegiate and capstone experiences. Each point marks an opportunity for student reflection, experiential opportunities and planning, as well as for program assessment. **NOTE:** Although ICL relates specifically to UC Undergraduate Programs, the concepts translate broadly. For Graduate Programs, consider these as three phases in your students' development: **beginning/foundations**, **intermediate/reflection**, and **capstone**.

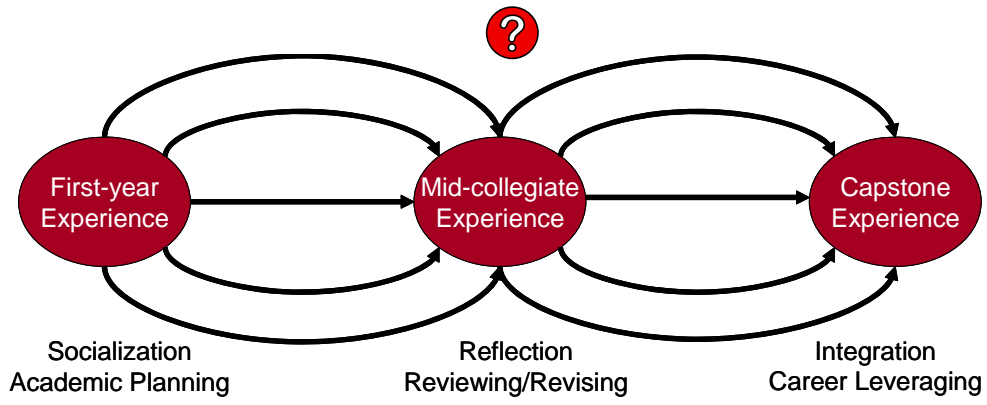
The Task: Consider the nature of each touchpoint. To achieve your stated student learning outcomes, define what needs to occur at each touchpoint. You will have the option to type in your responses on page 8.



Developmental Needs:
e.g., clarify program learning objectives/professional expectations; provide base understandings of core competencies; help students develop their academic plan

Developmental Needs:
e.g., encourage students to question their original academic plan (Does plan fit my evolving personal and professional goals?)

Developmental Needs:
e.g., help students translate their achievements and experiences to support job or graduate program search; provide challenging project to test/stretch their skills



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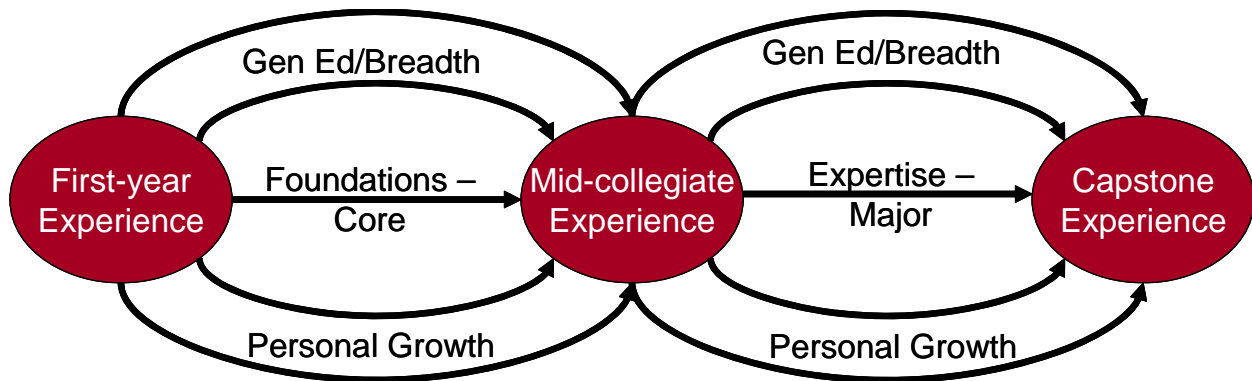
Developmental Needs:

Module 5

Identifying Resources, Opportunities and Constraints Within Each Developmental Phase

The Context: Redesigning curriculum does not imply "starting from scratch." Indeed, each phase of student development may surface **current resources** (e.g., a strong program orientation program, a distinctive introductory course), **potential opportunities** (e.g., an added service learning program, a campus-wide or national assessment tool), and **possible constraints** (e.g., professional exam, maximum number of credit hours). Taking time now to identify these elements can save considerable energy down the road.

The Task: Identify resources, opportunities and constraints relevant to each touchpoint. You have the option to type in your responses on page 10.

Existing Resources:

e.g., current FYE seminar, program orientation

Potential Opportunities:

e.g., add service learning project; need assessment (pre-program or at year-end)

Possible Constraints:

e.g., FYE credit hours must not push students over 15 semester credit hours

Existing Resources:

e.g., required Methods course across all programs in the college; Practicum

Potential Opportunities:

e.g., ILEAP (campus-wide assessment for experiential learning for practicum)

Possible Constraints:

e.g., Students must take professional exam

Existing Resources:

e.g., current capstone course; Gen Ed assessment rubric

Potential Opportunities:

e.g., link capstone to professional and/or study abroad options; enable interdisciplinary options

Possible Constraints:

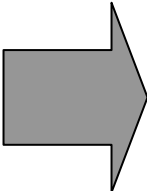
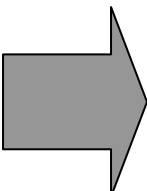
e.g., Ensure that entire program no greater than 120 semester credit hours

Module 6

Drafting a Curriculum Structure for Transformational Learning

The Context: This next module builds from your conceptualized student development process and identified resources, opportunities and constraints. Integrate your insights from Modules 4 and 5 into the structure below, and elaborate.

The Task: Begin elaborating upon a curriculum structure designed to achieve your stated program-based student learning outcomes. More specifically, identify/define key coursework, experiential learning opportunities, assessment means and other elements that might fuel desired learning within each development phase. You have the option to type in your responses on page 12.

Touchpoints (Example)				Academic Objectives
	FYE	Mid-Collegiate	Capstone	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socialization • Academic Planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflection • Review/Revise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration • Career Transition 	
Academics	e.g., FYE seminar	e.g., Methods course	e.g., Capstone course	
Experiential	e.g., service learning	e.g., field practicum	e.g., integrating project	
Assessment	e.g., NSSE or other FYE tool	e.g., ILEAP (gauge experiential learning)	e.g., Gen Ed rubric	
Other (e.g., Advising Support, Career Services)	e.g., mandatory advising to help develop personal academic plan	e.g., group advising opportunities within major/focal area	e.g., career services seminar to develop resume and interview skills	

Program-Based Student Learning Outcomes:

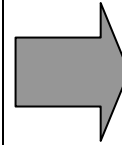
GenEd Competencies:

- Critical thinking
- Effective communication
- Knowledge integration
- Social responsibility
- Information literacy



	FYE • Socialization • Academic Planning	Mid-Collegiate • Reflection • Review/Revise	Capstone • Integration • Career Transition
Academics			
Experiential			
Assessment			
Other (e.g., Advising Support, Career Services)			

Program-Based Student Learning Outcomes (type in your SLOs below):



GenEd Competencies:

- Critical thinking
- Effective communication
- Knowledge integration
- Social responsibility
- Information literacy

