

Writing Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)

This guide offers an overview of the importance of PLOs and recommendations for writing them.

What are PLOs?

PLOs are statements describing the knowledge, skills, values, dispositions, attitudes, and/or experiences that students should acquire through completion of a program of study--bachelors, masters, or other graduate programs, and certificates conferred by Loyola. PLOs capture what you expect that typical students can demonstrate when the program is successful.

PLOs lay the foundation for [alignment](#) across the program's outcomes, assessment strategies, and activities.

Writing strong PLO statements helps you make sure you:

- clearly define what students can do when they successfully complete the program
- design all curricular and co-curricular activities to support the PLOs
- use all the program's human and financial resources to support the PLOs
- align the PLOs with the unit's mission and the university mission
- determine what evidence students need to demonstrate to show they meet the PLOs

Consider the answers to these guiding questions to help you write PLOs.

- What are the most important concepts, skills, and habits of mind students should develop? Use these "[big ideas](#)" as the basis for formulating PLOs.
- What do you want students to remember about the program in six months? In one year? In five years?
- What are the 3-5 highest priority PLOs? The list of PLOs used for academic program reviews should be brief to reflect the highest priority goals of programs.
- Are the outcomes varied? Consider how students will develop a wide range of skills and knowledge. Refer to [Bloom's Taxonomy](#) for descriptions of different levels of thinking. Refer to [Fink's Taxonomy](#) to consider non-cognitive skills.

PLOs should include four components.

1. Audience: Who are the learners? (e.g., students in the program, program graduates, etc.)
2. Observable behavior: What will students be able to demonstrate based on what they learned through the program? (e.g., define, distinguish, show)
3. Condition: Under what circumstances will learning occur? (e.g., at the end of the program)
4. Degree: How well or how much must the observable behavior be performed and in what type of a situation? (e.g., three out of five on a specific rubric applied to an essay from a capstone course, 95% accuracy on a specific test of specific content)

PLOs should be SMART (Specific, measurable, achievable, reachable, timely).

Specific-What do you want students to be able to know, say, and do at the end of the program?

Measurable-How will you and students know when the outcomes have been achieved? Refer to Bloom's Taxonomy for examples of measurable and observable verbs.

Achievable-Does the curriculum support students in developing the knowledge, skills, preparation and training they need to achieve the outcome?

Reachable-Are the PLOs feasible given students' preparation and level of knowledge?

Timely-Are the PLOs in the scope of the program? How much time do students need to achieve these outcomes?

Examples

PLOs for LUC's programs are available for [review](#).

Resources

Caruana, V. (2019). Designing Meaningful and Measurable Outcomes: A First Step in Backwards Design. Retrieved from <https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/course-design-ideas/designing-measurable-outcomes-with-backwards-design/>.

Fink, L. D. (2013). [Creating Significant Learning Experiences: An Integrated Approach to designing College Courses](#), 2nd ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Guidelines for Writing Effective, Measurable Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs). Retrieved from <https://academicprograms.calpoly.edu/program-learning-outcomes>.

Krathwohl, D. R. (2002). A revision of Bloom's taxonomy: An overview. *Theory into practice*, 41(4), 212-218.

McTighe, J., & Wiggins, G. (2012). Understanding by design framework. *Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development*.

Prepared by Jessica Mansbach at the [Faculty Center for Ignatian Pedagogy](#). For more information on learning outcomes, visit these [Course Design Help](#) resources

