Developing Learning Objectives

What It Is

According to Melton (1997), learning objectives are statements that clearly describe what learners are expected to achieve as a result of instruction. Learning objectives describe instructors' expectations for their learners and communicate the knowledge, skills, and abilities learners gain from instructional activities (Carnegie Mellon University Eberly Center, n.d.).

Why it Matters

Clear learning objectives are beneficial to both instructors and students because they communicate the intent and benefit of instructional activities. For example:

- Learners can see the learning path clearly to reach their learning goals.
- Learners can track and monitor their learning progress and make adjustments accordingly.
- Instructors can align the learning goals, activities, and assessments.
- Instructors can ensure course design that is engaging and inclusive.

Apply it:

1. **Consider SMART principles** (Chatterjee & Corral, 2017)**:**
   - **S**pecific – explicitly explain what learners are expected to achieve
   - **M**easurable – state metrics and gather evidence
   - **A**ttainable – realistic learning goals that can be achieved
   - **R**elevant – relates to the overall goals of the program/course
   - **T**ime-bound – can be accomplished within a reasonable time range

2. **Use Action verbs** – **Bloom's Taxonomy**, a framework that categorizes cognitive process goals, uses a variety of **actionable and measurable verbs.** Consider choosing one that aligns with the intended learning outcome when writing objectives.

W&M **STUDIO FOR TEACHING & LEARNING INNOVATION**

3. **Less is more** - Avoid writing too many learning objectives. What is the goal for learners? What are the most important things to master in the course? Driven by this reflection, develop a few (e.g. three to four) learning objectives using SMART principles.

4. **Ask for feedback** – Consider reaching out to fellow trusted colleagues or learners to gain feedback and ensure learning objectives are appropriate and clear before finalizing for a syllabus.

Resources

Engage: STLI Academy - Designing a Course Syllabus
Explore: SMART Objective Development Checklist
Watch: Creating Specific, Measurable, and Actionable Learning Objectives
Watch: Setting Expectations for Your Course
Listen: STLI Podcast - Syllabus Stories
Read: Higher Education Learning Activity Type Taxonomy
Read: Bloom's Taxonomy
Read: Designing an Engaging, Accessible Course Syllabus

References

Armstrong, P. (2010). Bloom's Taxonomy. Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching. Retrieved from https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/blooms-taxonomy/.

Boston College the Center for Teaching Excellence (n.d.). Course Design: Learning objectives. Retrieved from: https://cteresources.bc.edu/documentation/learning-objectives/

Chatterjee, D., & Corral, J. (2017). How to Write Well-Defined Learning Objectives. The journal of education in perioperative medicine : JEPM, 19(4),

Carnegie Mellon University Eberly Center: Teaching Excellence & Educational Innovation: Articulate Your learning objectives. Retrieved from: https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/design/learningobjectives.html

Melton, R. (1997). Objectives, Competencies and Learning Outcomes: Developing Instructional Materials in Open and Distance Learning. London, UK: Kogan Page.

Shabatura, J. (2022). Using Bloom's Taxonomy to Write Effective Learning Outcomes. University of Arkansas Teaching Innovation and Pedagogical Support. Retrieved from: https://tips.uark.edu/using-blooms-taxonomy/

Weave Academy (2022). Introduction to Effective Assessment Practice September Cohort. Writing Learning Outcomes the S.M.A.R.T Way.

Cite This Resource

Studio for Teaching & Learning Innovation. (2023, February). *Developing learning objectives* [Teaching resource]. https://linkhere.com

Updated 2/2023