

# *This Month in Innovation: Rethinking Learning Outcomes*

## **June 2019**

The development of formal curriculum in the United States has historically bounced across the spectrum of utilitarian and hedonistic models; since the inception of our first public high school (Boston, 1821) and development of tax-subsidized elementary schools (1870), metrics were created to assess teaching, learning spaces, attendance, and student performance. In 1918, John Franklin Bobbitt published a utilitarian, "efficient" approach to education in his work *The Curriculum*. He wrote that "education is now to develop a type of wisdom that can grow only out of participation in the living experiences of mankind, and never out of mere memorization of verbal statements of facts. It must, therefore, train thought and judgment in connection with actual life situations...develop the good-will, the spirit of service, the social valuations...necessary for effective group action...citizenship...maintaining robust health...and use of ideas in practical situations." In other words, the modern education should translate into effective action in the real world (L. *efficere*, "accomplishment").

One method we use to objectively assess **educational accomplishment** is by developing learning outcomes. Although this phrase may trigger memories of Bush's failed No Child Left Behind program, current pedagogical research suggests that listing the learning outcomes on your syllabi and assignments will provide the two characteristics that are necessary for all students to accomplish learning equally and inclusively in the higher education classroom:

1. **Transparency:** The purpose, tasks, and criteria for evaluation need to be clearly communicated.
2. **Accessibility:** Each student needs opportunities to receive, process, and express knowledge using formats appropriate to their unique abilities and challenges.

How do learning outcomes work? They establish specific and measurable terms of what a student will know and do by the end of a learning moment. Here are some quick and dirty tips for successful learning outcome design:

**Before** writing learning outcomes for your assignment, determine the [ABCDs](#):

1. **Audience:** Who is the learner?
2. **Behavior:** What is the measurable behavior to be evaluated?
3. **Conditions:** Under what circumstances should the learner be able to perform the behavior?

4. **Degree:** At what level does the behavior need to be performed (i.e., proficiency and competency)?

**Next**, write the learning outcomes for your syllabus or assignment. Use action verbs from [Bloom's Taxonomy](#) to TILT your learning outcomes: state the content knowledge, disciplinary skills, and transferable skills that your students will acquire.

**Finally**, review your learning outcomes for **8 quality measures**. Is each learning outcome:

- Student-centered?
- Connected to learning and transfer?
- Stated using an action verb?
- Concise?
- Observable?
- Measurable?
- Aligned with course, department, and institutional objectives?
- Appropriate for the student's level?

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