Step 3: Student learning outcomes

Who do we share our outcomes with? Idaho State University is accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), and its new standards on Student Learning 1.C.3 are as follows:

*The institution identifies and publishes expected program and degree learning outcomes for all degrees, certificates, and credentials. Information on expected student learning outcomes for all courses is provided to enrolled students.*

How do we set standards for our outcomes? You can decide what percentage you want to achieve acceptable or excellent. You should choose that first and agree to a percentage. For example, "we expect 75% of our students should achieve acceptable or excellent ratings.” When you use a rubric for assessment, as discussed in the next step, you will rate students, count how many you have at each rating, and then calculate what percentage met or exceeded the standard.

What is a student learning objective? A student learning objective indicates what the student will be able to do. It can include soft skills like teamwork or working in a culturally diverse environment. Hard skills relate to things we usually associate with the specific content and skills related to a degree or major. It is something that can be observed or measured. What will students be able to apply and do after they finish your course or program?

How often should we assess our objectives? Until you have your outcomes, it will be hard to create an assessment schedule. External accreditors may visit the campus every five years or, if you don’t have external accreditation, it may be every seven years. General Education classes report to the GERC committee each year. Each Goal is formally reviewed by GERC every five years and they prepare a report similar to a program or accreditation assessment review. Your timetable should indicate that you assessed each objective, used the results, and looked at how well your changes worked at least twice during the period in the cycle for program review, GERC, or accreditation.

How many learning objectives should our program include? It depends on the standards you need to meet for external accreditors. It also depends on your program’s mission. For each goal, you may have 2-5 learning objectives.

How do I know which classes should be assessing learning outcomes for my program? All classes taught on campus need to share course-level learning objectives with enrolled students. Program assessment should occur only in courses required by all majors in your program or degree.