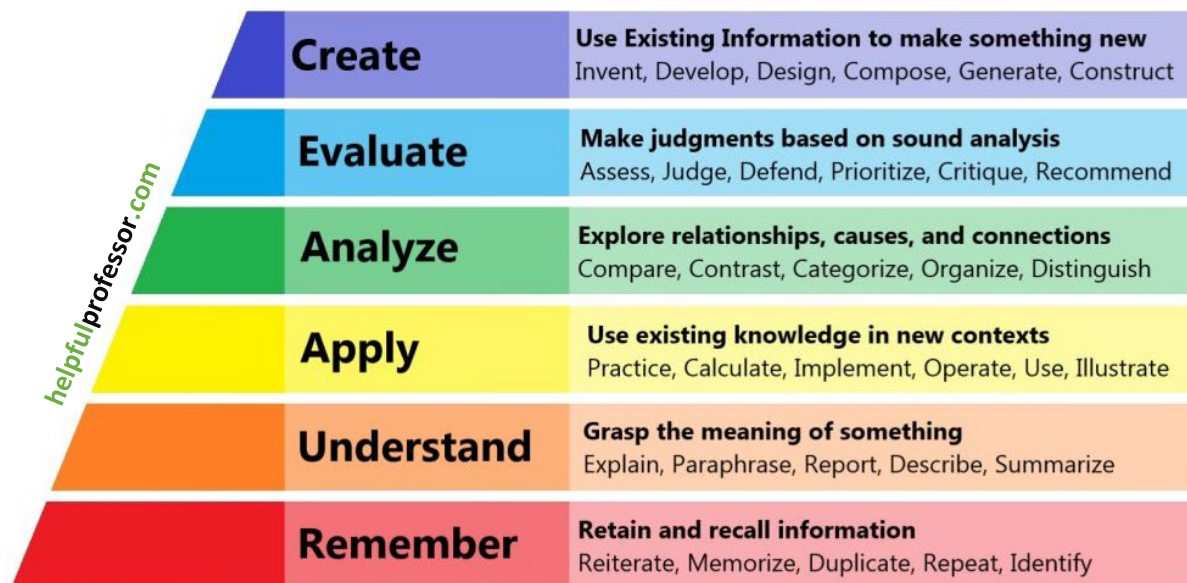# Establishing Program Student Learning Outcomes (PSLOs)

PSLOs typically include ~5-7 statements that describe the breadth of knowledge, skills, or abilities students will be able to demonstrate *by the end* of a program of study.

PSLOs help faculty and students develop a shared understanding about the purpose of their program, which functions to guide instruction and align expectations.

SLOs should be:
- clearly stated and easily understood by students, faculty, etc.
- observable and measurable
- rigorous, yet realistic
- grounded within the discipline
- broad enough to extend to multiple courses within a program

Bloom's Taxonomy is a useful tool for developing measurable SLO statements with strong verbs.

Level	Description	Verbs
Create	Use Existing Information to make something new	Invent, Develop, Design, Compose, Generate, Construct
Evaluate	Make judgments based on sound analysis	Assess, Judge, Defend, Prioritize, Critique, Recommend
Analyze	Explore relationships, causes, and connections	Compare, Contrast, Categorize, Organize, Distinguish
Apply	Use existing knowledge in new contexts	Practice, Calculate, Implement, Operate, Use, Illustrate
Understand	Grasp the meaning of something	Explain, Paraphrase, Report, Describe, Summarize
Remember	Retain and recall information	Reiterate, Memorize, Duplicate, Repeat, Identify

helpfulprofessor.com

This breakdown of knowledge types may also be useful in identifying relevant outcomes:

- **Factual Knowledge** – The basic elements students must know to be acquainted with a discipline or solve problems
- **Conceptual Knowledge** – The interrelationships among the basic elements within a larger structure that enable them to function together
- **Procedural Knowledge** – How to do something, methods of inquiry, and criteria for using skills, algorithms, techniques, and methods
- **Metacognitive Knowledge** – Knowledge of cognition in general, as well as awareness and knowledge of one's own cognition

Anderson, L. W. & Krathwohl, D.R., et al (2001) A taxonomy for learning, teaching and assessing: A revision of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives. New York: Longman.

Example PSLO:
- **Weak** – Students will be able to describe the historically important systems of psychology.
- **Moderate** – Students will be able to describe the psychoanalytic, Gestalt, behaviorist, humanistic, and cognitive approaches to psychology.
- **Strong** – Students will be able to describe the foundational assumptions, central ideas, and dominant criticisms of the psychoanalytic, Gestalt, behaviorist, humanistic, and cognitive approaches to psychology.

Use the space provided below to begin identifying outcomes for your program and which courses may align with each outcome.

Questions for evaluating outcomes (University of Nevada, Office of Academic Assessment):
- Would the program be impaired if this outcome was excluded?
- Does another outcome measure the same concept, or provide similar guidance?
- Is it feasible to measure this outcome given resources, time, and methodologies?

Program Student Learning Outcomes	Course Alignment
1. Students will be able to	
2. Students will be able to	
3. Students will be able to	
4. Students will be able to	
5. Students will be able to	
6. Students will be able to	
7. Students will be able to	

Assessment of Program Student Learning Outcomes (PLSOs)

Assessment is the process by which units evaluate their own effectiveness and document efforts to improve operations. Assessment of academic units includes the systematic collection, review, and use of data to improve program-specific student learning outcomes (PSLOs; see Establishing PLSOs worksheet). The purpose of assessing PLSOs is to:

- gauge the overall "health" of the program
- generate actionable data that can be used to inform change within the program
- encourage and document efforts to improve student learning by faculty
- provide feedback to students regarding their demonstrated knowledge, skills, and abilities

The Basics of Assessment

The assessment process can be summarized in four cyclical steps:

- *Plan* – set intended *outcomes* and develop *action plans*, *measures*, and *targets*
- *Do* – implement *action plans*, or strategies to achieve outcomes
- *Check* – collect and analyze data to determine whether outcomes were achieved
- *Reflect* – discuss *findings*, factors impacting *outcomes,* and opportunities to improve *outcomes*

The basic components and key assessment terms include:

- *Outcomes* – the (intended) result or (desired) impact of (planned) activity
- *Action Plan* – the strategies and objectives devised to achieve the intended outcome
- *Measures* – the tools used to collect data
- *Targets* – the specific level of performance used to indicate success
- *Findings* – the actual results

Developing Assessment Measures

Once an academic program has their PLSOs defined, they will then need to determine how the outcomes will be evaluated, which includes developing appropriate assessment measures. Measures should include the following information:

- Population(s) to be assessed (e.g., all entering first years/all graduating seniors, all students in a specific course, etc.)
- Description of measures including
  - Mode of assessment (e.g., entrance/exit exam, portfolio, essay, etc.)
  - Type of assessment
    - Direct – evaluation of student work products of performance
    - Indirect – evaluation of student perceptions of their abilities
  - Scoring system (e.g., 4 point rubric, 1=Emerging, 2=Approaching, 3=Proficient, etc.)
- Frequency/timing of assessment
- Parties responsible for data collection, analysis, and evaluation of data to inform next steps

Developing Targets

Targets delineate the specific level of performance at which point an outcome has been achieved. Targets should be:

- specific to the measure used to assess the outcome
- rigorous, yet realistic
- clearly justifiable (based on internal or external metrics)

Ex. Our target for the ENGL 2113 essay assignment is an average rubric score of 3.2. Our data indicates a strong correlation (.72) between performance on this essay and later scores on the exit exam. If we can bring our scores up from a 2.8, we may have higher success on the exit exam.

Assessment Measures Worksheet

On this page, choose one to three PSLO's to begin brainstorming assessment measures and targets.

SLO 1:		
Description of Measure:		
Measure Type:	Courses/Populations:	Frequency of assessment:
Data collection and analysis:		Evaluation and next steps:
Target:		

SLO 2:		
Description of Measure:		
Measure Type:	Courses/Populations:	Frequency of assessment:
Data collection and analysis:		Evaluation and next steps:
Target:		

SLO 3:		
Description of Measure:		
Measure Type:	Courses/Populations:	Frequency of assessment:
Data collection and analysis:		Evaluation and next steps:
Target:		