# How to Write 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. Behavior (observable): 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 (of achievement): 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?

Relevant-Are the PLOs relevant to the program, considering 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 in the Loyola University Chicago Catalog.

## 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/.


For more resources please see CLAS Resources.