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TEACHING & LEARNING

This video is part of the online seminar **Designing Courses**, developed by the Reinert Center for Transformative Teaching and Learning at Saint Louis University.

[slide] I'm Debra Rudder Lohe, Ph.D., director of the Center, and I'll be facilitating this instructional video on **Distinguishing Goals from Objectives**.

[slide] **Overview**
In this online seminar, you have already learned the elements of the Teaching Situation, some general principles of course design, and some strategies for developing course goals.

[slide] In this video, we will **consider the difference between course goals and learning objectives** and **examine five sample learning objectives**.

[slide] After this video, you should be able to: **distinguish between course goals and learning objectives** and **begin drafting measurable learning objectives for your own course**.

[slide] Ultimately, the **purpose** of this video is to **introduce you to the concept of learning objectives**, and to **help you distinguish between goals and objectives**.

Let's begin.

[slide] **Course Goals: A Refresher**
We'll start with a quick refresher and recap what you already know about course goals. As we discussed earlier in the seminar, Course Goals are the broad aims an instructor has for a given course. As such, they:

- Express instructor's <u>hopes and/or ideals</u> for the overall course experience
- Convey what the <u>instructor and/or the course</u> "will do"
- May focus on <u>internal states</u> and/or longer-term goals for student development and learning
- May convey what students <u>will do</u> in the course (that is, what the experience of being in the class will be like)
- Provide <u>overarching framework</u> for a course's learning objectives (which can give them a larger purpose or meaning)

[slide] Course Goals are essential for helping instructors make informed decisions about what to include and exclude from given course and for helping students to better understand the larger purpose of a course.

[slide] They are not, however, measurable statements about what students **will learn**. Therefore, you also need to develop student learning objectives for your course.

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[slide] **Course Goals**

If course goals **are about you**, and **your** hopes, wishes, and aims for a course, they focus on the **instructor's** perspective).

[slide] **Course Goals**

Learning objectives, by contrast, are **about learning**; they articulate the specific, measurable things students will **know and be able to do** upon leaving your course; they put the focus on the **learner's** perspective).

[slide] **Features of Effective Learning Objectives**

As with course goals, there are five key features of effective learning objectives. Typically, learning objectives. . .

1. [slide] Express in <u>observable, measurable</u> statements what students will know and/or be able to do (by the end of the course, unit, lesson, etc. If they are not stated in an observable, measurable way, you cannot really measure whether students have achieved them.) In some disciplines, they may be referred to as competencies, learning outcomes, or learning goals – as opposed to course goals.)

2. [slide] Contain <u>action</u> verbs (as opposed to verbs representing internal states of being. This is really important for the observable, measurable criterion.)

3. [slide] Typically describe <u>cognitive</u> outcomes, but may also describe learning for other domains (such as affective, psychomotor, and social domains of learning. We'll talk more about those domains of learning in the next section of the seminar.)

4. [slide] <u>Build on one another</u>, moving from simpler to more complex.
   This means you have to decide which things need to come before which other things and build layers between them accordingly. For instance, complex learning objectives often can be achieved by the **end** of a course, but not right out of the gate; they may need to be broken down into smaller, more manageable objectives first. This kind of sequencing is often referred to as "scaffolding." This simply means that you must build foundations before you can build more complex skills. Particularly with first-year students and/or disciplinary novices, it can be very effective to build skills and conceptual knowledge for simpler concepts or easier tasks before undertaking more complex or more difficult ones.

5. [slide] Should be linked closely to <u>assessments</u> (or activities students undertake to demonstrate their learning, and that you use to evaluate whether learning has taken place). Ultimately, **learning objectives help you to** identify specific assignments and activities that can help students to achieve the learning objectives and can help you to assess that achievement in ways that are consistent with your intentions or aims. This is often referred to as "alignment".)

[slide] **Sample Learning Objectives**

Now that we've discussed the key features of learning objectives, and how they differ from course goals, let's take a look at a few examples. We'll look at five.

[slide] Sample Learning Objective #1

Students will be able to choose and apply appropriate concepts of physics to solve complex problems. The focus here is on actions that can easily be measured in various types of assignments. But the objective is complex and suggests a lot of other learning: the physics concepts must be "appropriate" for specific situations, that is, they must be chosen carefully. This requires **evaluation**, discerning which concepts are appropriate and which are not. The point of this objective is not simply remembering concepts and performing a kind of "plug-and-chug" problem solving skill. The point an analytical skill that helps students solve complex problems and understanding in a deep way why certain concepts are appropriate to certain situations.

[slide] Sample Learning Objective #2

You will be able to explain the plots and cultural contexts of Shakespeare's comedies. The verb "explain" is most often linked to the lower-order thinking skills. (Later in the seminar, we will talk about Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognitive Development, and the ways in which certain skills or knowledge are foundational to others. For Bloom, easier, simpler tasks are often referred to as lower-order thinking skills, whereas more complex and challenging ones are referred to as higher-order thinking skills.)

For Bloom, "explain" it isn't the most complex cognitive skill, but in this objective, it might be more complex than it seems. To explain both the plots and the "cultural contexts" requires something more than simple memory and recall, more than plot summary. Indeed, it may involve higher-order skills like analysis and evaluation. Students might demonstrate their achievement of this objective in any number of assigned tasks – presentations, essays, blog posts, etc.

[slide] Sample Learning Objective #3

Students will be able to identify the stages of project management and determine resource needs for completing a project on-time and on-budget. Here again is an objective that seems simple – "identify" might not seem like a particularly high-order thinking skill, and identifying the "stages of project management" is a kind of recall activity. But it's the full objective that makes it complex. A lot is implied by the latter half of the objective, including critical thinking and evaluation skills, among other things.

Also, this may be a good time to mention that students' demonstrated achievement of learning objectives may look different depending on the specific teaching situation. For example, first-year undergraduates might demonstrate achievement of this objective at one level, whereas first-year graduate students in an MBA program might demonstrate achievement of it at a much higher level. The same objective may be appropriate for both contexts, but the specific assessment criteria would look quite different. This variability is one reason rubrics or other assessment criteria can facilitate student learning at the level you are aiming for.

[slide] **Sample Learning Objective #4**

You should be able to explain theories of gender-identity development in complex, argumentative, well-researched essays. This learning objective combines both content-area knowledge (theories of gender-identity development) with cross-cutting skills (complex, argumentative, well-researched essays). And while "explain" may strike some as too simple a task, for highly theoretical content, it may be a fairly challenging one for students. Obviously, there are smaller objectives that must be layered in before this objective can be met. And as with the previous example, it would be important to establish the criteria you'd be using to assess students' achievement of this objective. Certainly, for instance, students would need guidance to understand what you mean by "complex, argumentative, well-researched essays."

[slide] **Sample Learning Objective #5**

By the end of this course, students should be able to evaluate existing research on a given topic, identify gaps where new knowledge is needed, and design a study that might begin to fill these gaps. This is a good example of a more complex, high-level learning objective. It's not simple, and it demands that students achieve other, smaller objectives, before they can achieve this one. "Evaluate" is a pretty high-level skill, and designing a study to contribute to the knowledge base is also a high-level skill. Certainly, typical undergraduates might not be able to achieve this objective at the beginning of the semester. To help them get there, you'll have to **set smaller objectives along the way.** Finding relevant literature on a given topic, reading studies critically, and identifying the specific parts of a study are all precursor skills to achieving this larger objective.

[slide] Compared to course goals, you should notice that all of these objectives are much more specific and much more measurable. Additionally, (at least in some) there is explicit mention of the methods that measurement might take (the specific form in which the instructor would **see** achievement of the objective demonstrated).

[slide] A few final thoughts about these sample objectives: It is worth remembering that none of these is likely to be the single learning objective for a given course. None stands on its own.

Given how complex some of them are – that is, they imply several smaller steps before they could be achieved – they are likely to be situated **in relationship to** other learning objectives for the courses in which they occur. And some include what we might call "cross-cutting skills" – such as writing skills – that are not specific to the sample course, but are important in that context.

[slide] **Recap: Learning Objectives**
As we end this video, let's recap the key features of learning objectives. They . . .

- ❖ Express in <u>observable, measurable</u> statements what students will know / be able to do upon leaving your course
- ❖ Contain <u>action </u>verbs that can be observed
- ❖ Typically describe <u>cognitive</u> outcomes (but also may describe psychomotor, affective, and social outcomes)
- ❖ <u>Build on one another</u>, moving from simpler to more complex
- ❖ Are closely linked to <u>assessments</u>

[slide] In the next section of the seminar, we'll look at how you can use objectives to **structure** learning.

Please go back to the online seminar and continue working.

Credits