STEP FOUR – Develop Learning/Operational Outcomes for Each Goal

What is an outcome?
An outcome is “the desired effect of a program, service, or intervention but is more specific than a goal. It is participant focused.” (Henning, 2007).

Each learning/operational goal will have several associated learning and/or operational outcomes. Learning/operational outcomes should align with the functional area and learning/operational goal. They should also further define the goals in specific terms. The number of outcomes developed will depend on how broad the goal is and how complex the intended learning is. It’s ok to have a lot of outcomes, you don’t have to assess them all.

A learning outcome focuses on “how students will be different because of a learning experience, the knowledge, skills attitudes and habits of mind that students take with them from a learning experience” (Suskie, 2009, p.117).

*Example:* As a result of participating in Torero Days, students will be able to recognize the University mission statement.

Aside from learning opportunities, there are many things we do to support the student experience like providing a safe, place for them to live, providing healthy options for dining, delivering services effectively and efficiently, etc. The services we offer that attend to the base of Maslow’s hierarchy (physiological needs, safety, etc.) are considered operational outcomes rather than learning outcomes. Operational outcomes describe the intended effect that a service has instead of what a student learns by participating in a program, service or other intervention.

*Example:* As a result of renting equipment from Outdoor Programs, students will be able to describe their experience as receiving good customer service.

Why write learning outcomes?
Writing learning outcomes helps us to be more intentional about the learning opportunities we offer students and creates the opportunity to measure the learning that occurs. This means that we can:
- improve our ability to tell students what we hope they will learn through their participation in a program, leadership opportunity or service we offer;
- be more precise about the strategies we offer to meet the articulated outcomes;
- consider how we will assess learning at the start of the process.

All of this leads to more effective learning opportunities for our students.

Some questions to keep in mind as your write your learning outcomes and consider related assessment and program improvement:
- What do we want our students to learn?
- How will we know if they learn it?
- What will we do if they don’t learn it?

As a division, we will use the following formula for writing learning outcomes. Writing outcomes with at least 1-2 other people often produces the most effective learning outcomes by incorporating multiple perspectives and engaging multiple people in the process.
Formula for Writing Learning Outcomes:

**Condition** + SWiBAT + Bloom Word + What

As a result of participating in Torero Days, students will be able to recognize the University mission statement.

**Condition** – the condition describes the program, leadership opportunity or service students will participate in or experience where the learning is intended to occur.

**SWiBAT** – an acronym for students will be able to... Using this format helps you write the learning outcome in a way that is focused on students and what they will be able to know, feel or do after participating.

**Bloom Word** – using a “Bloom word” in your learning outcome helps you to calibrate the type of learning you expect to the levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy which demonstrates a progression in the levels of learning participants experience. For example, the learning outcome describing what students will learn through participating in a one-shot service project will use a Bloom word toward the bottom of the taxonomy rather than toward the top for a learning outcome for students participating in a recurring service project. Using a Bloom word also helps to ensure that your learning outcome will be measurable.

**What** – the “what” describes the actual thing you expect students to know, feel or do after participating. In the example provided above, the “what” is some content that students received during Torero Days about the University mission statement.

The following acronym describes the characteristics of a well-written learning outcome. Once you feel that you have a good learning outcome written, check it against these characteristics to see if you can improve it in any way.

**SMART** (Drucker, 1954)

S **Specific** – clear and definite terms describing expected abilities, knowledge, values, attitudes, and performance

M **Measurable** – it is feasible to get the data, data are accurate and reliable, issue can be assessed more than one way

A **Aggressive but Attainable** – consider stretch targets to improve program

R **Results-oriented** – describe what standards are expected for students

T **Time-bound** – describe where you would like to be within a specified period of time

**Helpful Hints** (Henning, 2007)

- Use an iterative process to ensure the outcome is well written
- Review outcomes with stakeholders

**Words/Phrases to Avoid (Covert)**

- Appreciate
- Become aware of
- Become familiar with
- Know
- Learn
- Understand

Don’t include everything – only the most important outcomes, the ones you influence