

EPC Recommendations for Course Objectives

Learning objectives = what the learner will do or is able to do at the end of instruction that he or she could not prior to instructions.

Comment []: Conveys expectations to students. Guides instruction and evaluation

1. Learning objectives should be “learner centered”, not “teacher centered”;
Not: “To provide an overview of epidemiologic approaches to identifying causes of cancer.”

Comment []: This is what the instructor will do.

Better: “(Students will be able) to outline key epidemiologic approaches to identifying causes of cancer.”

Comment []: This is what the students will do.

2. Learning objectives should convey an *appropriate* level of expected performance:
 - Objectives conveying a lower level of expected performance: “to recognize (list, identify, describe, and define)...”
 - Objectives conveying a higher level of expected performance: “to calculate apply, analyze, synthesize, evaluate...”
 - At the end of a given course, is it more appropriate for students to be able “to list the steps in needs assessments” or to be able to “apply needs assessment techniques”?

3. Learning objectives should be stated in terms of *measurable learner behavior*.

Not: “To be *familiar with* primary/data sources used in measuring cancer incidence”.

Comment []: To be *familiar with* can mean many things to many people.

Better: “To *select* appropriate data sources to measure cancer incidence in a given population.”

Comment []: “*Selecting appropriate sources*” is a behavior that can be more readily measured (observed).

4. Learning objectives should be *directly linked* to student performance evaluation.
 - **Objectives:** “To integrate core public health concepts in the analysis of public health problems”.
 - Evaluation: “Students will be given a case of an actual public health problem to analyze in a 3 – 5 page paper in which they must identify issues **related to each of the core public health concepts** that are relevant to decision making in the case.”

5. Learning objectives should be *related demonstrably to the degree program(s) and track(s)* for which the course is intended.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Writing of goals and objectives may appear to be an onerous task; it is one that is important both in terms of accreditation and in terms of our own knowledge of what we are doing in our academic programs. It seems logical that the best way to chart our course is to know where we intend to go, how we intend to get there, and how to know when we have arrived. The effort involved in charting our course will, in fact, enable us to meet both the immediate needs related to accreditation but also the long-range needs of the School. For example, a particular course should provide certain knowledge, attitudes, and skills that will be provided regardless of who the instructor is. In essence, then, objectives become a sort of contract among the School, the faculty member, and the students.

Please take a few minutes to read the brief materials that follow in order to familiarize yourself with some basic points about objectives. Our goal is that meaningful objectives be prepared with a maximum of thought but a minimum of time commitment to the task.

REFERENCES

1. SJ Drumheller, Handbook of Curriculum Design for Individualized Instruction: A Systems Approach. Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Educational Technology Publications, 1971.
2. NE Gronlund, Stating Behavioral Objectives for Classroom Instruction. New York, NY, The MacMillan Company, 1970.
3. RF Mager, Preparing Instructional Objectives. Palo Alto, CA, Fearon Publishers, 1962.
4. WJ Popham, The Use of Instructional Objectives. Belmont, CA, Fearon Publishers, 1973.
5. GJ Posner and AN Rudnitsky, Course Design: A Guide to Curriculum Development for Teachers. 3rd Edition, White Plains, NY, Longman, Inc., 1986.