Emphasis on specifics, student engagement is the key

By Brent Roberts

It’s all about student learning!

2006: The culmination of years of collaborative effort of faculty members from across campus, a new general education program – rechristened Academic Foundations – was unveiled. The capstone of the project was a matrix of student learning goals (available online from the Academic Senate homepage: http://www.msubillings.edu/senate. Click on Academic Foundations Committee, then on Academic Foundations Document).

2007: In an effort to collect and aggregate data on student learning, an assessment pilot project (utilizing tools from eCollege) was rolled out, with a team of trainers working with instructors to incorporate appropriate learning outcomes and link key course assignments to Academic Foundations learning goals.

How can we tell if students are learning what we hope they are learning?

A grade in a course is an important aspect of assessment, but it is only a part of a hierarchy of learning outcomes, beginning with a broad general mission statement and focusing down to specific tasks.

The Academic Foundations matrix provides an array of broad learning goals. To really assess whether students are meeting these goals, more specific course-based learning outcomes are needed. For example, consider the following Academic Foundations goal:

Demonstrate ability to understand and interpret oral information. (AF I.4.b)

By design, this is a broad goal which can be applied in a number of disciplines and departments across campus.

Some possible outcomes for this goal:

1. Students will assess claims or arguments as a speaker or listener.
2. Students will listen actively and provide constructive feedback.

(Adapted from San Francisco State University, General Education Learning Outcomes, online at: http://online.stsu.edu/~meredith/senate/SFSU_GE_Objects.html)

As you can see from these examples, there are a few basic elements to a learning outcome:

1. Is it specific? The outcome for your course brings the broader Academic Foundations goal down to the local, achievable level, identifying the specifics of what a student must do to indicate mastery or competency.
2. Is it student focused? The purpose of the outcome is to help us understand how the student is changing or improving.

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eLearning task force begins work

By Christy Low
And Michael Barber

What is eLearning? What is online education? These are some of the questions the eLearning Task Force has been wrestling to define, to discover the learning and teaching environments required to facilitate faculty and students.

The Task Force has formed subcommittees to define and develop 1) Needs Assessment Survey and an 2) eLearning Organization for Teaching and Learning. A needs survey will be distributed to all faculty this semester. Information gathered from the survey will assist the eLearning Organization for Teaching and Learning subcommittee to recommend a design for development of the eLearning environment.

Topics that have been discussed in regard to the eLearning Organization involve:

1. Personnel
   A. (administrative, faculty, and student workers)
2. Definition of the purpose
   A. Laboratory of new research
   B. Mentoring of faculty
   C. Ongoing professional development
   D. Grant funding research
3. Development of a large web component that includes:
   A. FAQ’s
   B. Pedagogical issues
   C. Links to Best Practices
   D. Monthly feature of MSU-B faculty
   E. Updates from the Library
4. Assessment
   A. Adjunct faculty
   B. Course assessment
   C. Peer review
5. Online Orientation
   A. Students
   B. Faculty
6. Location
   A. COE 158
7. Assumptions
   A. State of the art technology
   B. Keeping current with technology
   C. Support and commitment from administration

The task force will continue to discuss the issues of budget and research.

Learning

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So the language of outcomes should normally be “Students will….” Avoid stating what the instructor or the course will do; instead, keep the spotlight on students and what they will do.

Does it point to meaningful verbs to describe student behaviors? Avoid statements such as “Students will know….” or “Students will understand….” It is difficult for students to demonstrate “knowledge” or “understanding.” Instead, identify verbs that describe what students will actually be doing, such as discuss, explain, analyze, compile, compare, design, etc.

As you can see, these elements could be applied in almost every area of the university, not limited to the classroom.

Department Goal:
A:st assist students in developing academic plans (MSUB Advising)

Outcomes:
1. Students will develop plans of study.
2. Students will work with faculty advisors to plan upper-division coursework.

As we identify succinct, measurable, student-centered outcomes, we will be better prepared to measure the true impact of our instruction and programs on the lives of MSUB students.

The CQI Library Collection

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