

Grades as Documentation of SLO Achievement: Constructing an Outcomes-Based Grading System

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Expected Learning Outcome

By the end of this presentation, you will be able to compare the usefulness of traditional vs. Outcomes-Based Grading in evaluating and documenting SLO achievement.

Session Overview

- **Current practices and rationale for change**
- **Definition, examples, and features**
- **Implementation**
- **Implications for institutional research and accountability**

How do you know...

- **That students have achieved expected student learning outcomes?**
- **What data do you collect?**
- **How do you demonstrate student achievement of learning outcomes to accreditors and stakeholders?**

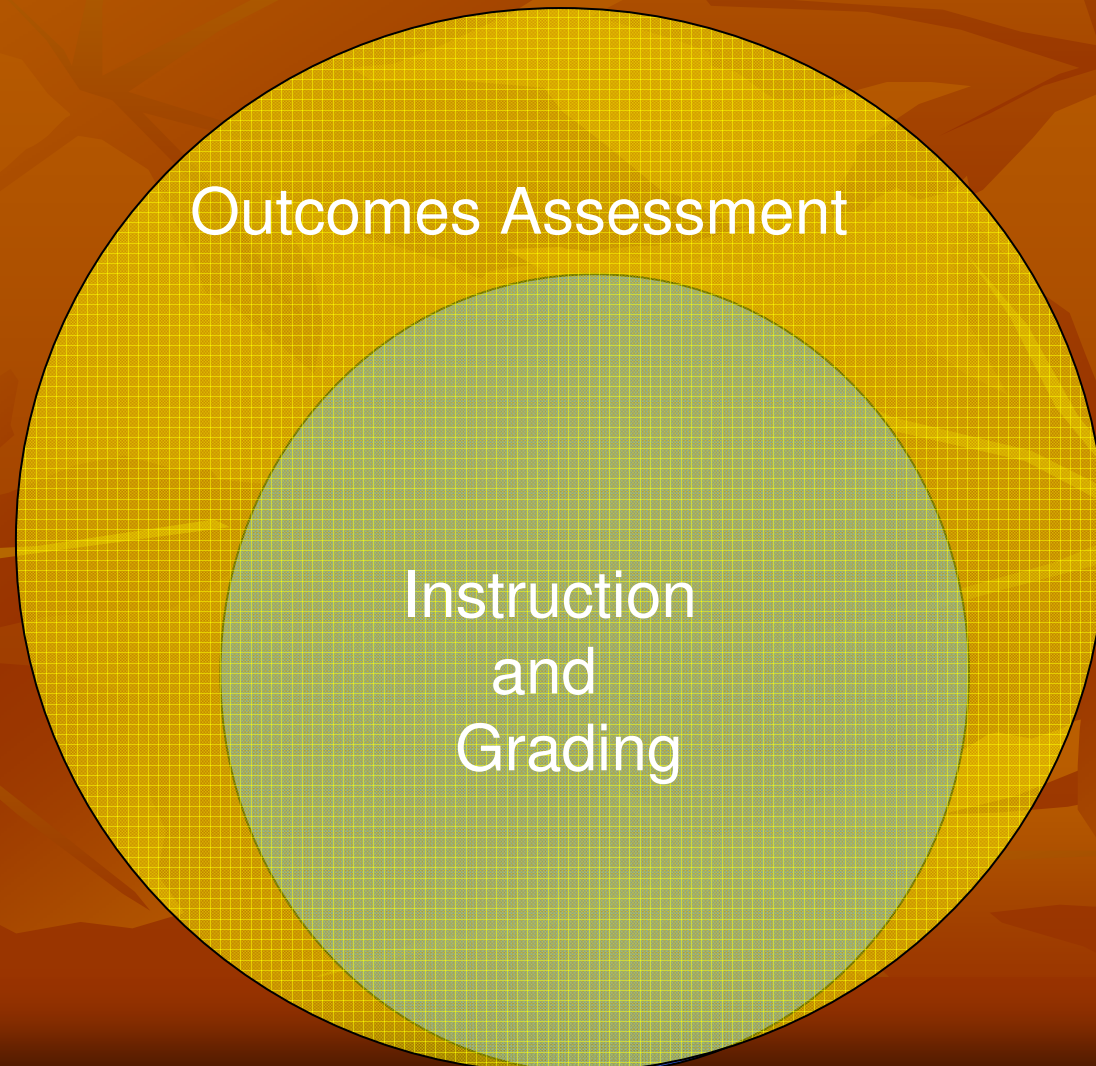
Current Practice

A Venn diagram with two overlapping circles. The left circle is blue and contains the text 'Instruction and Grading'. The right circle is yellow and contains the text 'Outcomes Assessment'. The overlapping area in the center is a lighter shade of blue and yellow.

Instruction
and
Grading

Outcomes
Assessment

Outcomes-Based Grading Practice



Grades and Outcomes' Assessment

- Most colleges have developed outcomes' assessment as an add-on to their conventional instructional and grading practices in order to meet accreditation standards.
- We see grades as an integral part of an outcomes-based approach to curriculum and instruction.

Why Outcomes-Based Grading?

- **With Outcomes-Based Grading, the relationship between SLOs and the final grade is clear and direct.**
- **Students direct their efforts towards what counts: if you want them to focus on SLOs, then grade them on mastery of SLOs.**
- **Increased transparency and accountability as institutions' course completion rates directly reflect student achievement of SLOs.**
- **Efficient use of limited resources when grades reflect outcomes achievement.**

More on Why: Efficient use of resources

- When instructors have to calculate grades and then also have to assess outcomes, they have to do twice the work, and the outcomes' assessment part may feel like busywork.
- When faculty and researchers have to devise means of collecting SLO data apart from regular instruction, they make extra work.
- When grades = level of mastery of SLOs, there's no more duplication of effort.

What is Outcomes-Based Grading?

The final grade is based on the level of ability consistently demonstrated* by the student to any observer of the SLOs by the end of the course.**

* “Consistently demonstrates” means multiple data points for triangulation of data.

** “Any observer” means that others than the instructor would come to the same conclusion.

Outcomes-Based Grading...

- Requires that faculty communicate expected learning outcomes to students, *and teach to those outcomes.*
- Builds student awareness of the indicators of their learning.
- Allows faculty to include procedural knowledge-related and metacognitive skills-related outcomes in the curriculum, teach to them, and grade on students' proficiency.
- Provides evidence of mastery of outcomes for IR purposes.

Comparing Traditional and Outcomes-Based Grading

Next, we'll look at a course with SLOs and traditional grading vs. SLOs and Outcomes-Based Grading.

SLOs for Applied Organizational Communications

- 1. Demonstrate effective verbal and written communication skills, as follows:**
 - 1.1 Write a clear, effective business report and compose clear, effective letters that meet specific business objectives.**
 - 1.2 Demonstrate effective interpersonal skills (listening, speaking, questioning, and sharing feedback) with diverse audiences in a variety of business settings.**
 - 1.3 Create, organize, and deliver effective oral presentations.**

- 2. Utilize critical thinking and problem-solving skills as follows:**
 - 2.1 Devise appropriate goals and strategies to develop and implement a basic business plan.**
 - 2.2 Assess organizational communication and devise strategies for improvement.**
 - 2.3 Devise strategies for group collaboration and employ decision-making and conflict resolution strategies to accomplish team goals.**

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SLOs for Applied Organizational Communications continued

- 3. Conduct primary and secondary research regarding the effects of globalization and organizational communication strategies.**
- 4. Use technology to enhance learning, performance, and organizational communication.**
- 5. Demonstrate responsibility and accountability for individual and team work products.**
- 6. Demonstrate professionalism at levels at or above college and workplace standards.**

Assessment of SLOs

- For each SLO, students have a rubric that describes level indicators.
- Students use rubrics to guide performance, improvement, and behavior.
- Faculty use rubrics for assessment and evaluation.

Traditional Grading Scale Communications Course

Requirement	Points
Attendance and participation	50
Homework	100
Exams (4 at 100 points)	400
Presentation	100
Final Exam	200
TOTAL	850

Applied Organizational Communications

Q: Using the traditional grading scale, what is the relationship between student learning outcomes and grades?

A: There is no explicit relationship between student learning outcomes and grades.

Outcomes-Based Grading Method for Communications Course

For each outcome or component, student achievement can be nonexistent (0 pts.), minimal (1 pt.), developing (2 pts.), adequate (3 pts.), good (4 pts.), and superior (5 pts.), using level indicators described in assessment rubrics and work students produce in the course.

Outcomes-Based Grading Scale for Communications Course

Points	Grade
44-50	A (superior or good on all outcomes)
37-43	B (good or at least adequate on all outcomes)
30-36	C (adequate all outcomes)
15-29	D (developing)
0-14	F (non-existent or minimal)

Features of Outcomes-Based Grading in Communications Course

- Final grade tied to the level of achievement the student documents for each outcome;
- Student has responsibility to provide evidence of achievement and to monitor his/her performance in a portfolio;
- Grading criteria are very clear; and
- Passing grade requires basic competence in *every* expected learning outcome.

Designing the Grading System

- **In conjunction with outcomes-based curriculum design:**
 - **Determine weight of each outcome.**
 - **Determine relationship between points and performance levels.**
 - **Determine cutoff for a passing grade, points needed for higher grades.**

Outcomes-Based Grading Models

- Model 1: Portfolios
 - Students collect evidence of outcomes' achievement, earning points for level of mastery of each outcome.
- Model 2: Instructor-developed outcomes/assignment matrix
 - Instructor maps outcomes with assignments and assessments that lead to the outcomes, assigns points to each.

Model 1: Portfolios

- Students know outcomes, indicators, performance levels.
- Students are responsible for collecting evidence, documenting mastery, and submitting a portfolio.
- Main advantages: makes students aware of and responsible for their learning; makes all class happenings potential learning experiences.
- Although this method gives students more power and responsibility, the instructor must design assignments to provide learning opportunities for each outcome.

Model 2: Outcome-Assignment Matrix

- Instructor maps out how assignments, homework, quizzes, tests, and other learning and assessment activities match the SLOs and assigns points to each.
 - Students see the relationship between outcomes, assessments, and grades.
 - This method is closer to traditional grading and maintains a higher level of instructor control.

Barriers to Implementing Outcomes-Based Grading

- **Faculty mental models that conflict with Outcomes-Based Grading.**
 - **Examples: extra credit, points for effort, grading on a curve, idea that grades reflect innate ability.**
- **Contentment with the status quo.**
- **Lack of time, resources for development, and collaboration.**
- **Lack of tolerance for the learning curve.**

Supports for Implementation

- A mid- to long-term view of the process.
- Recognition of the importance of monitoring, evaluation, revision.
- Motivation.
- Commitment on the part of the administration.
- Time for collaboration.
- Mentoring, coaching, and guidance.
- Access to resources, including professional development.

Benefits of Adopting Outcomes-Based Grading

- **Focuses attention on SLOs.**
- **Leads to more positive learning and evaluation experiences as students know exactly where they stand, and why.**
- **Increases the credibility and usefulness of grades as a measure of SLO achievement for accountability and accreditation.**
- **Allows researchers to aggregate data on grades to document achievement of SLOs by outcome, course, department, group of students, etc.**

Building Quality

- Colleges build quality through documentation of student performance (e.g., portfolios), using multiple data points, norming sessions to ensure inter-rater reliability, audit trails (i.e., documentation available to observers).
- All of these activities are already part of high-quality program review and self-study for accreditation.

Implications for Accreditation

Outcomes-Based Grading

- Provides consistency across students, sections, and quarters/semesters.
- Puts grading back on the “gold standard”—a passing grade means consistent satisfactory performance of outcomes.
- Makes data on course completion more meaningful and gives specificity to that meaning.
- Provides the basis for researchers to examine and draw conclusions about instructional effectiveness.
- Directs instructional improvement efforts.

Implications for Accountability

- **Outcomes-Based Grading closes the accountability loop—defining, teaching to, assessing, and grading on the achievement of student learning outcomes.**
- **Colleges that adopt Outcomes-Based Grading are directly and clearly accountable for the outcomes of student learning.**

Conclusion

We consider Outcomes-Based Grading an integral part of outcomes-based curriculum, instructional improvement and better student learning outcomes.

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