

# WRITING & ASSESSING LEARNING OUTCOMES

**Laura Martin, PhD**

*Coordinator for Institutional Assessment*

Office of Institutional Assessment

**Anne Zanzucchi, PhD**

*Faculty Development in Assessment Coordinator*

Center for Research on Teaching Excellence

# LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR TODAY:

- Describe the benefits of learning outcomes to student success
- Describe the role of learning outcomes in program, departmental, and institutional planning
- Craft specific, assessable (measurable) learning outcomes

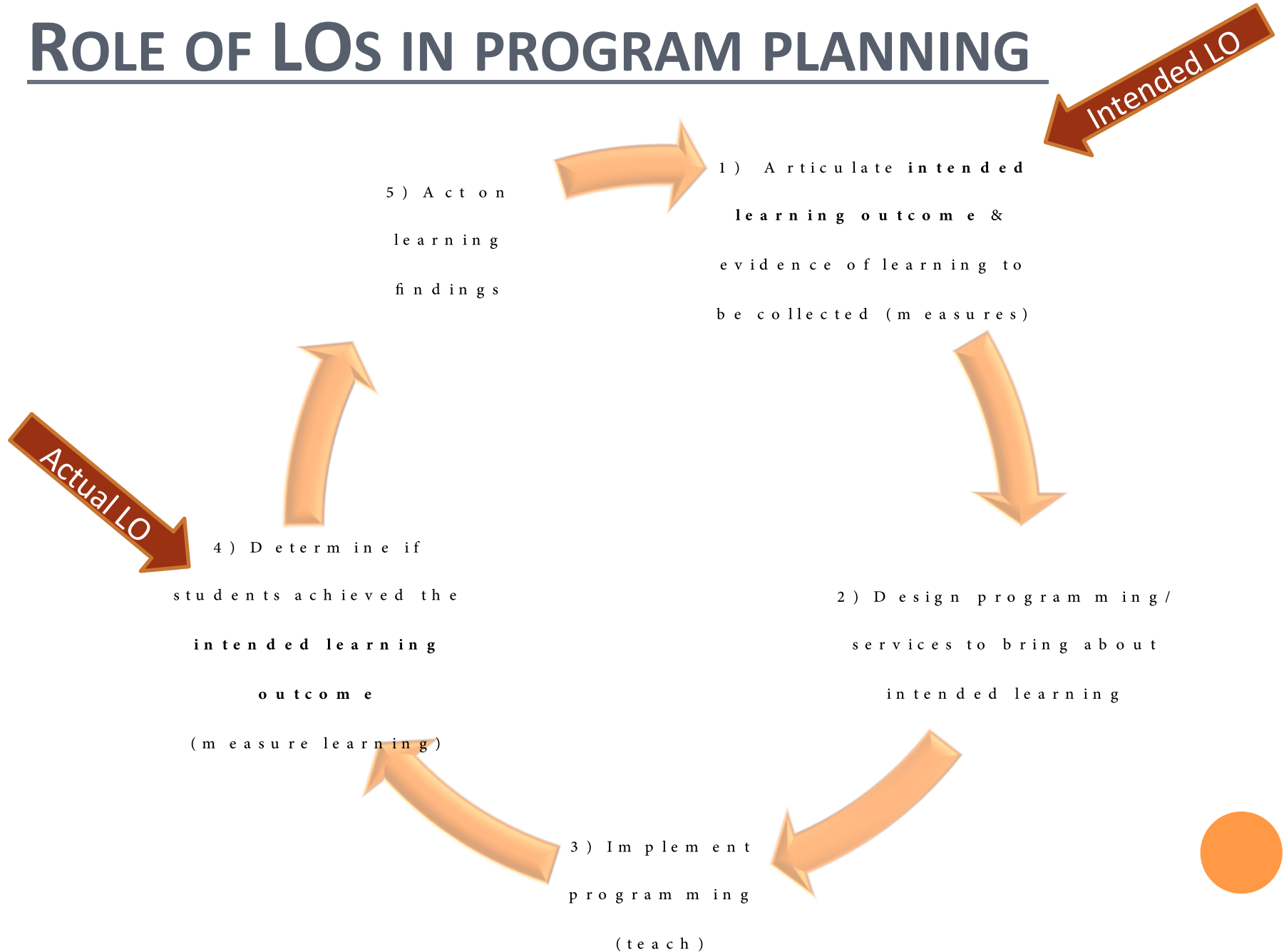


# WHAT IS A LEARNING OUTCOME?

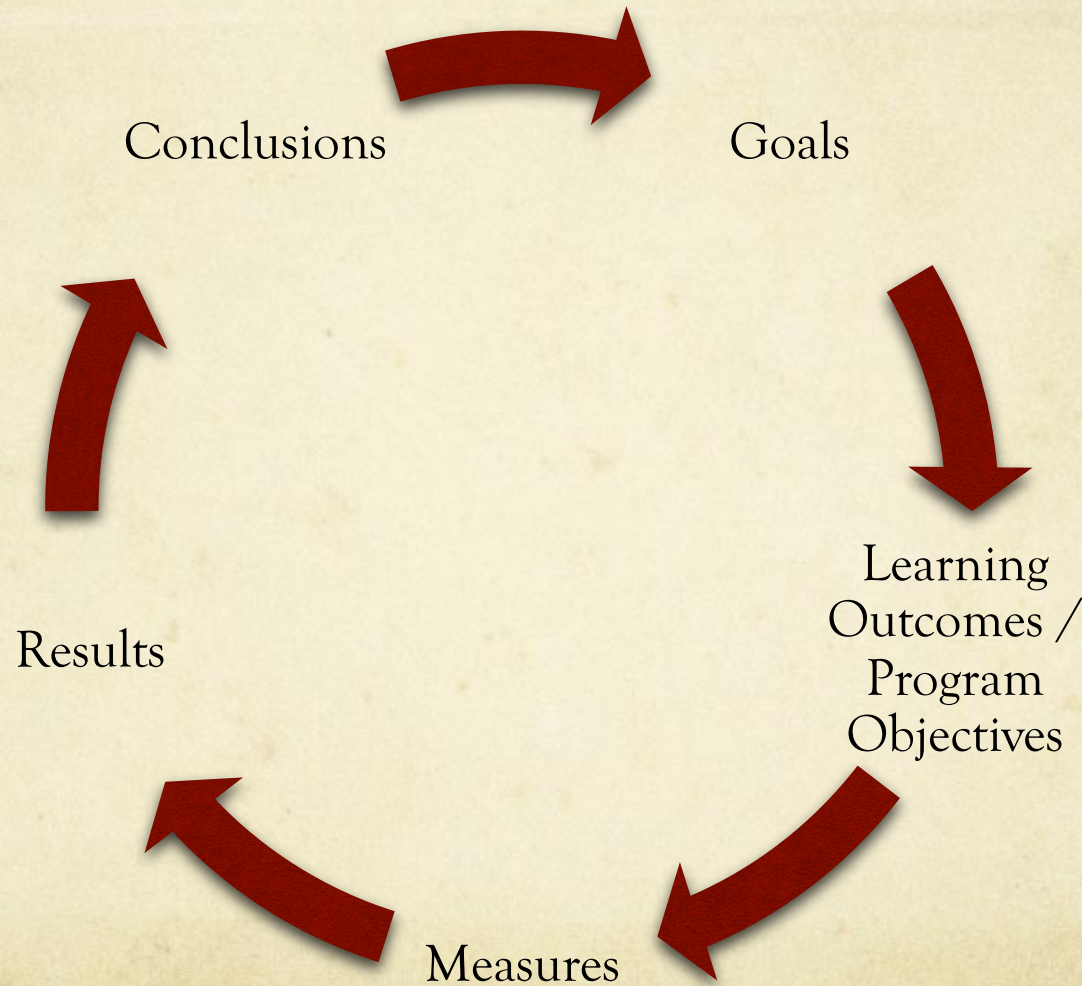
- A change in attitude, aptitude or behavior that a student can describe or demonstrate after participating in a program(s) or using a service(s) (CSU Sacramento)
- Term refers both to intended and actual, observed outcomes



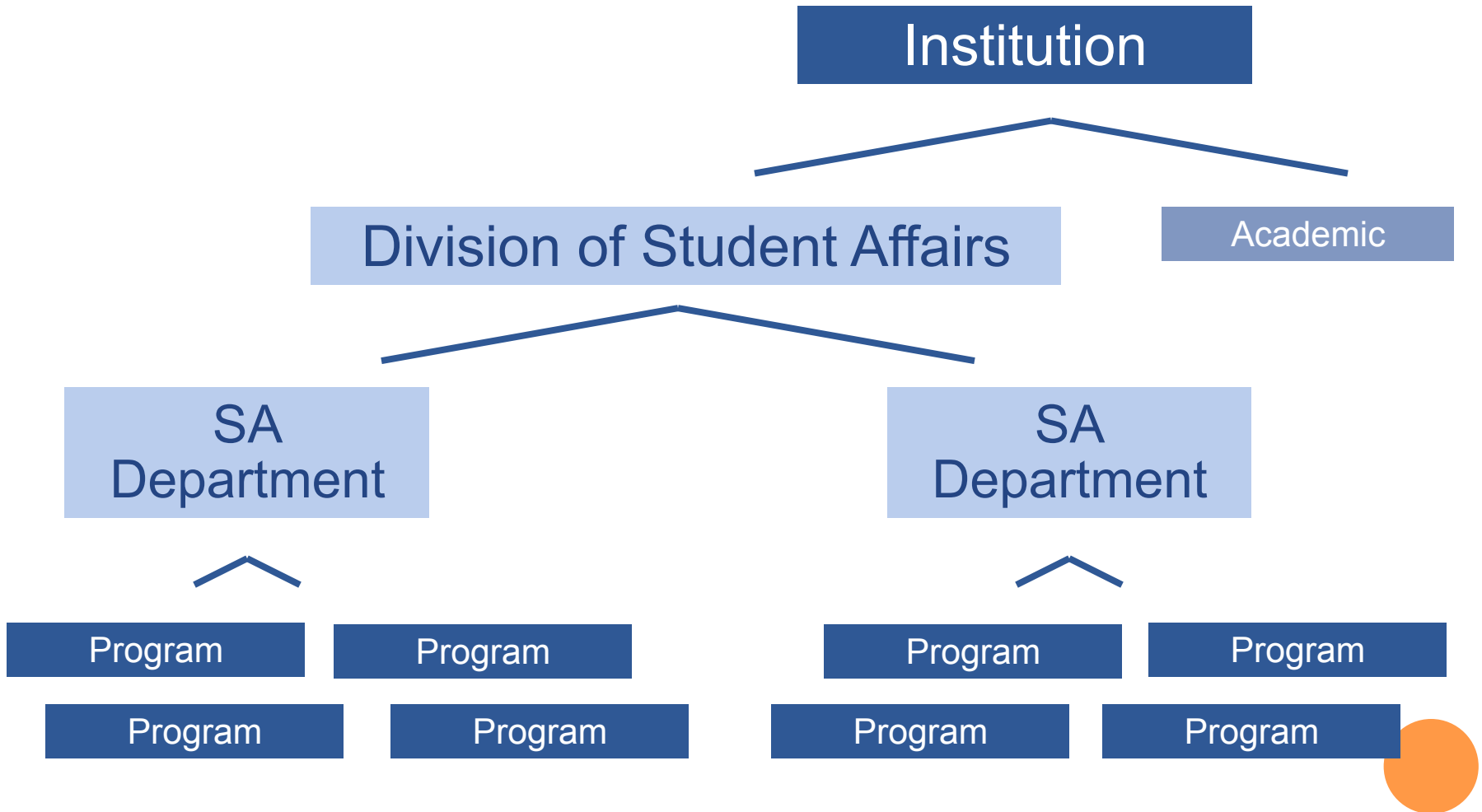
# ROLE OF LOs IN PROGRAM PLANNING



# The Assessment Planning Cycle in SA



# AT WHAT LEVELS ARE LOs DEVELOPED & ASSESSED?



# EXAMPLE OF HIERARCHICAL LO ALIGNMENT

**Institution:** Students will understand and value diverse perspectives in both the global and community contexts of modern society in order to work knowledgeably and effectively in an ethnically and culturally rich setting (Self and Society)

**Division:** Develop an understanding and appreciation of human differences

**Department – Housing and Residential Life:** Through informal and formal residential life experiences and programming, resident interest in and respect for new ideas and cultural and life style differences increases.

**Program – Cultural Expression:** 100% of participants in the cultural expression workshop will identify an example of cultural expression they have observed and describe a contribution it makes to the UC Merced community.



# ACTIVITY: AT WHAT LEVEL ARE YOU DEVELOPING & ASSESSING OUTCOMES?

- Review previous assessment work, at what level was student learning assessed?






# WHERE DO LOs COME FROM?

- 1) Derived from/support departments goals
- 2) Address worthwhile and shared learning priorities
- 3) LOs are specific examples of how a department goal is met.



# AN EXAMPLE: 3 L.O.S THAT MEET SAME DEPARTMENTAL GOAL

**Housing and Residential Life Goal:** Housing and Residence Life is committed to providing residential life experiences and programming that foster resident interest in and respect for new ideas and cultural and life style differences.

1. **Cultural Expression Program LO:** 100% of participants in the cultural expression workshop will identify an example of cultural expression they have observed and describe a contribution it makes to the UC Merced community.
  2. **Values Clarification Program LO:** 100% of participants in the Values Clarification Workshop will be able to describe three benefits to valuing and respecting cultural differences
  3. **Peer Pressure Program LO:** Given a typical scenario, 100% of participants in the Peer Pressure Workshop will identify two strategies they can use to support and promote acceptance and tolerance of difference.
- 

# RESOURCES FOR DEVELOPING LOs

- 1) Departmental goals, CAS standards, etc.
- 2) Program advertisements/flyers
- 3) Departmental memos, meeting minutes
- 4) Descriptions of programming on departmental websites



# WHAT MAKES A GOOD LEARNING OUTCOME?

1. Written from perspective “Students will be able to....”
2. Includes an *action* verb describing specifically what students will be able to do if they have learned
3. Describes how students will demonstrate their learning (i.e. is measurable)
4. Yield information that can be used to refine programming (i.e. actionable information)
5. Is understandable to students!



# EXAMPLE LEARNING OUTCOMES

**Original:** Participants will be able to appreciate the benefits of exercise

**Revised:** Participants will be able to explain how exercise affects stress



# EXAMPLE LEARNING OUTCOMES

**Original:** Participants will have more confidence in their abilities to address racial discrimination

**Revised:** Through role play, participants will demonstrate their ability to analyze and respond to arguments about racial discrimination



# ACTIVITY: REFINING LOs

**Original:** Participants will understand the nine reasons for conducting a needs assessment.

**With a partner, answer the following questions and, as necessary, develop a revised statement:**

1. Is the verb active, specifying what students can *do* if they have learned?
2. Can it be measured? Does it describe how students will demonstrate their learning?
3. Will it yield actionable information?
4. Is it understandable to students?



# ACTIVITY: REFINING LOs

**Original:** As a result of the time management workshop, students will arrive to class on time daily.

**With a partner, answer the following questions and, as necessary, develop a revised statement:**

1. Is the verb active, specifying what students can *do* if they have learned?
2. Can it be measured? Does it describe how students will demonstrate their learning?
3. Will it yield actionable information?
4. Is it understandable to students?






# WHAT KIND OF LEARNING EVIDENCE IS OFTEN MOST EASILY COLLECTED AND “ACTIONABLE”?

## Direct Evidence:

- Evidence of learning that is tangible, visible; actual student work or demonstrations of student ability.

Exs.

- Written or oral explanations, descriptions, identifications, etc.
  - Role plays
  - Lists
  - Project products
  - Etc.
- 

# WHAT IS INDIRECT EVIDENCE?

## Indirect Evidence:

- Proxy signs that students are learning, for example, student self-perceptions of abilities.

Exs.

- Questions that ask students to rate their own abilities
- Questions that ask students to rate gains in abilities or knowledge (ex. Relative to the start of this workshop, how well can you...)
- Satisfaction type questions on surveys



# WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP OF LOs TO MEASURES IN THE SA TEMPLATE?

- A refined LO will clarify the *methodology* for assessment because it indicates how students will demonstrate their learning. Examples....
  1. “...explain how exercise affects stress.”
  2. “...identify the most appropriate university resource for addressing their academic or personal concern or need.”
  3. “...list three reasons for...”



**WORKSHEET ACTIVITY:**  
**DEVELOPING AND REVISING YOUR  
OWN OUTCOMES**



# BENEFITS OF LEARNING OUTCOMES... FOR THE TEACHER AND DEPARTMENT

- 1) Framework for program design/development = content and activities
- 2) Reference point for “researching” student learning, yielding insights relevant to future offerings
- 3) Articulates intentions of programming/service, which provides opportunities for educators to
  - Discuss and improve educational offerings
  - Align educational offerings within and among departments (co-curricular and academic) and in relation to division and institutional goals for student learning

# BENEFITS OF LEARNING OUTCOMES... FOR THE TEACHER AND DEPARTMENT

- 4) Advertise value and impact of programming to build interest and buy-in of students, faculty, student affairs colleagues at UC Merced and beyond, alumni and potentially even donors!
  
- 5) Builds integrated picture of programming *within* department to support planning...
  - What are we doing collectively? Is it what we intend?
  - Are we investing our most precious resource (time) in ways that maximize our intended educational impact?



# BENEFITS OF LEARNING OUTCOMES... FOR STUDENTS

- 1) Explains to students *why* they should engage in programming or service
- 2) Supports student stewardship of their learning
  - Choosing to participate in light of personal goals and interests
  - Monitoring learning during program
- 3) Supports holistic integrated view of education, ex. connect classroom and co-curricular learning
- 4) Helps students to see that all experiences have educational value, enabling development as life long learners (an SA Divisional Outcome)

