

Learning & Teaching Update

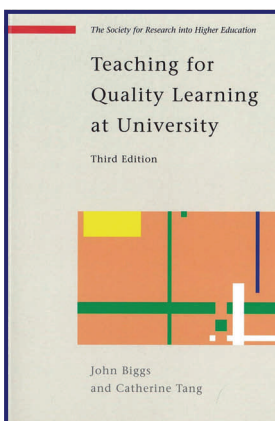
Aligning outcomes with assessment

At the end of 2009, the discipline moderation panel for Biblical Studies recommended that “all MIs ensure that there is constructive alignment between unit outcomes and assessment tasks and feedback. In general, feedback on assignments ought to be more formative.” In this newsletter, I want to pick up on aligning outcomes and assessment.



By this stage of the semester, we may be marking the first of the assignments. The following discussion may help you as you reflect on your assessment for this semester and as you plan future assessments.

Do our assessment tasks actually assess the outcomes we hope students will achieve in the unit? In Chapter 4 of a widely used and recommended text, [Teaching for Quality Learning at University](#), Biggs and Tang review outcomes-based teaching and learning. They suggest that when we constructively align teaching and assessment we need to consider four design stages:



Stage 1: Describe the intended learning outcome in the form of a verb (learning activity), its object (the content) and specify the context and a standard the students are to attain.

Stage 2: Create a learning environment using teaching/learning activities that address the chosen verb. Design teaching/learning activities that are likely to bring about the intended outcome.

Stage 3: Use assessment tasks that also contain that verb. This will enable you to judge if and how well students' performances meet the criteria. Your judgment will be enhanced if you use some rubrics.

Stage 4: Transform these judgments into standard grading criteria.

Outcomes are often called Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) in the literature but the SCD simply refers to “outcomes.” Outcomes are statements, written from the students' perspective, that indicate the level of understanding and performance students are expected to achieve as a result of the teaching and learning experience.

The SCD asks for three kinds of outcomes: knowledge, skills, and values. Although many of our outcomes statements use “understand” as a verb for knowledge, **much better verbs** include identify, locate, describe, summarise, list, give overview of, explain, and distinguish (see further

Ensure that there is constructive alignment between unit outcomes, assessment tasks, and feedback — 2009 Biblical Studies Moderation



April 12 Monday 10—11.30 CIS : Curriculum consolidation: Theology: all faculty welcome

April 15 Wednesday: submit Associate Teacher supervision reports to Neil Holm

April 23 Friday 2-3.30 CIS : Curriculum consolidation: Ethics: all faculty welcome

May 1 Saturday 11am: Great Hall Sydney Uni: SCD Graduation

May 17 Monday 10-4 Booth College: Professional Development Day – Research and Scholarship : all faculty welcome.

discussion below). Verbs for skills include analyse, critically evaluate, interrelate, and use. Verbs for values are much more difficult. Some of the best values statements that I have seen come from [Loyola Marymount University](#). It declares its mission to be *the encouragement of learning, the education of the whole person, and the service of faith and the promotion of justice*. LMU then breaks this down to several subsidiary statements that include

1. *Students will demonstrate transformative growth and integration of their intellectual, physical, social, cultural, emotional and spiritual selves, and through a critical, self-reflective process evaluate and articulate their beliefs, values, faith and culture, as well as understand those of others.*

Student Learning Outcomes

- Self-awareness: Students will be able to express how their beliefs, values, faith and culture shape their actions and attitudes
- Intercultural knowledge and competence: Students will be able to effectively and appropriately interact in a variety of cultural contexts
- Personal beliefs and faith: Students will be able to articulate how their personal belief system interconnects with various faith traditions
- Diversity: Students will demonstrate that they value the richness afforded by multiple perspectives
- Whole person: Students will articulate the growth and integration they experience of their intellectual, physical, social, cultural, emotional and spiritual selves



2. *Students will critically reflect on what they have learned to demonstrate reasoned judgment and respect for human dignity in working as ethical, compassionate leaders with and for others to build a more just world.*

Student Learning Outcomes

- Respect for others: Students will demonstrate respect for individual and group difference in their interactions with others
- Teamwork skills: Students will participate effectively in team problem-solving and decision-making situations
- Civic knowledge and engagement: Students will apply their knowledge and experiences to address problems of social justice
- Ethical reasoning and action: Students will be able to identify ethical issues and propose effective approaches to their resolution
- Leadership skills: Students will lead others with compassion to develop and carry out a shared vision
- Habit of service: Students will participate in activities that engage them in the service of human communities and the natural environment

When an institution breaks its mission statement down in these ways, we get a sense of how values fit into the curriculum. Clearly not every unit will have an outcome that covers all of these value positions. However,

these value statements provide a framework from which to develop values outcomes for particular units. Let's take the SCD unit in theology, [TH237 Grace and Salvation](#), as an example. An appropriate values outcome might be: "Students will articulate how their personal belief system interconnects with at least one of the concepts."



Len Smith, Principal, Emmaus College, has a keen interest in assessment. He values the ways in which rubrics can help align outcomes and assessment. He contributed a sample rubric to the [SCD Coursework Sandpit](#)

Here are some outcomes statements, written from the students' perspective, that indicate the level of understanding and performance they are expected to achieve as a result of the teaching and learning experience we provide:

- 1 *Explain in depth* why a particular course unit topic is important in ministry.
- 2 *Explain how* the component course unit topics interrelate.
- 3 *Reflect on* your field experience in terms of a working theory you have gained from the course unit.
- 4 *Evaluate* a situation that has gone wrong and *apply* a solution.

I noted above that the word "understanding" is limited. Each of these verbs addresses 'understanding' at a much more precise level: In *Chapter 5, Designing Intended Learning Outcomes*, Biggs and Tang elaborate on the important question of the level of the outcomes. They present two taxonomies of verbs that are classified in terms of their cognitive level. For the moment, let us stay with explain, reflect, evaluate and apply.

The first outcome, *explain in depth*, requires that the students choose a topic, say grace, and in their own words relate it to ministry.

The second, *explain how*, requires students to view the whole course and explain how the various topics of grace, justification, and sanctification, interrelate to form a workable conceptual framework.

Reflect on in the third outcome is at a higher cognitive level, requiring students to apply that framework they have constructed from the course to their field experience as reflective practice.

The fourth outcome, *evaluate and apply*, requires the students to spot a problem, evaluate it, and then suggest how it might be rectified in light of material taught in the course: this too is at a high cognitive level.

I hope these ideas will give you some feel for the issue. I strongly recommend the Biggs and Tang text. We have a copy in the SCD office if you would like to borrow a copy.

Good Practice Encourages

- Student-faculty contact
- Cooperation among students
- Active learning
- Prompt feedback
- Time on task
- High expectations
- Respect for diverse talents and ways of working (*Palloff & Pratt, p. 52*)

How do these principles influence the alignment of outcomes and assessment?

Puzzle to Ponder

The SCD [Weighting of Assessment Tasks](#) policy says that 9 credit point undergraduate units should have 4-5,000 words of assessment. You have set a 2,500 word essay (60%). One of your better students handed in an essay of 3,000 words. What do you do and why?

1. At 2,500 words, draw a line and mark up to that point only.
2. Hand it back to the student with instructions to rewrite, within the limit with no penalty.
3. As for (2) but with a penalty. (What would you suggest?)
4. Hand it back unmarked.
5. Mark it but deduct a some marks according to the excess.
6. Other

Would your decision have been any different for a student of lesser ability?

(Adapted from a set of six dilemmas by Biggs and Tang (pp. 165-168). They suggest working through the six and then re-visiting them when you have completed the chapter to see if your ideas have changed.)



A teaching and learning [video vignette](#) presented by Kassia Wosick-Correa, The University of California Irvine. Topics include: Learning Objectives, Course Activities, Assessment, Content Knowledge, Values, and Focus on Behaviour.

This issue of *Learning and Teaching Update* was prepared by [Neil Holm](#), Director (Coursework).

