September 19, 2014

TO: College of Arts and Sciences Faculty
FROM: Ian F. McNeely, Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education
RE: Course-level student learning outcomes

**REMINDER: All faculty are asked to include learning outcomes on their syllabi.**

1. **What are learning outcomes?**

   Learning outcomes are brief statements identifying the major skills, abilities, and concepts a student is expected to acquire from your course. The word “outcomes” can be used interchangeably with “goals” or “objectives” as long as the abilities in question are meaningfully evaluated using exams, papers, and other accepted means.

   The point is to make your expectations more transparent by articulating what may be only implicit in your course description, lesson topics, and assignments. Three to six short sentences or bullet points will suffice. Active verbs (evaluate, analyze, demonstrate, etc.) concretize expectations better than vague ones (appreciate, study, learn, etc.).

2. **Why am I being asked to do this?**

   First, our accreditors require it: as an institution, UO must “publish” learning outcomes for all courses and degree programs. It’s only appropriate that individual instructors write learning outcomes for their own courses. The most efficient means of “publication” is to include outcomes on syllabi. If asked, please be ready to supply yours.

   Second, it’s a useful exercise for us, as faculty, to sit down and articulate the outcomes we hope for and then to adjust the content and design of our courses if needed. This exercise can also make it clear how your teaching in your field helps students pursue the broader goals of a liberal education. We cannot take it for granted that students connect the dots.

3. **How should I go about writing these?**

   Consider adapting one or more learning outcomes from the department(s) or program(s) your course serves. Lists are posted at cas.uoregon.edu/learning-outcomes. Also consult colleagues who teach the same or similar courses, and focus on outcomes that you are all likely to share. The list for your own course is up to you.

4. **Is this the beginning of some kind of top-down “assessment” regime?**

   No. But like other universities, we are under mounting pressure to document, defend, and improve the value of an arts and sciences education. We must respond in a coordinated—not a centralized or top-down—fashion. More background is given at the website above.