Learning Objectives Video Script Draft

Hello, I'm Carol Subino Sullivan, Assistant Director of Faculty Teaching and Learning Initiatives at the Center for Teaching and Learning. In this video, I'm going to explain the importance of defining learning objectives in the course design process. I will also describe the characteristics of effective learning objectives. I will end by commenting on why investing in developing effective learning objectives is important part of the process of transitioning to remote teaching and learning.

Course learning objectives state what students can expect to have learned after completing the course. These are the things that you want students to remember years after they leave your course and are out in the world contributing to your field and society professionally. Course learning objectives should complete the phrase, "as a result of taking this course, students will be able to…"

Effective Learning Objectives are:

1. **Student-centered**
   i.e. focused on <u>what your students will learn</u> (instead of the content you/the course will cover)

2. **Action-oriented**
   i.e. focused on <u>the skills students will gain</u>, and what they will be able to do (instead of the things they will "know")
   - Use a verb at the beginning of your objective.
   - Consider what the appropriate cognitive learning level is for your students. For example, do your students need to recall facts, apply information to solve a problem, or design a product to address user needs? Each of these represents a different cognitive learning level (of increasing complexity). For some suggestions, consult the Bloom's Taxonomy list of verbs provided in the associated handouts.

3. **Measurable**
   i.e. it should be easy to identify how you would check whether a student has mastered the relevant skill

4. **Precise**
   i.e. it is clear what type of knowledge you are aiming for
   - <u>Avoid use of vague action verbs & prompts</u>, like "Understand X", "Obtain a working knowledge of X", and "Gain insight into X".
   - To clarify an objective, ask yourself: "What will a student do if s/he really *understands* or *appreciates* the point in question
   - But don't be so specific as to make an objective into an assessment or assignment. For example, unless you are teaching a writing course, "Write a paper," is too specific an objective. What is the broader learning objective that

students will achieve through writing that paper? A broader objective, for example, might be: Use evidence to construct a compelling argument. Having a student write a paper could be one way to measure their mastery of that objective.

Here are some examples of effective learning objectives from different disciplines:

- Solve problems using matrix techniques and algorithms.
- Locate and evaluate relevant scholarly and popular sources on a research topic using library resources
- Analyze how gender, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic class have shaped Americans' lives in specific contexts
- Solve a significant real world problem for an industrial sponsor using engineering design

You can see that each of these learning objectives demonstrates the characteristics of effective learning objectives that we just reviewed. Each identifies something that students will be able to do. Each is precise and measurable. An instructor would be able to easily develop assessments to measure each of these objectives.

Each course should have a limited number of course learning objectives. I suggest listing 3-8 objectives on your syllabus. However, from these course level objectives, you will derive many intermediate learning goals for all of the component skills that go into those objectives. While these should have the same characteristics of effective learning objectives, they are much smaller in scope so that you can focus on them in a single module of your course. These component learning goals build students up towards mastering the course learning objectives.

Defining the course learning objectives is the most important step of the backwards course design process.
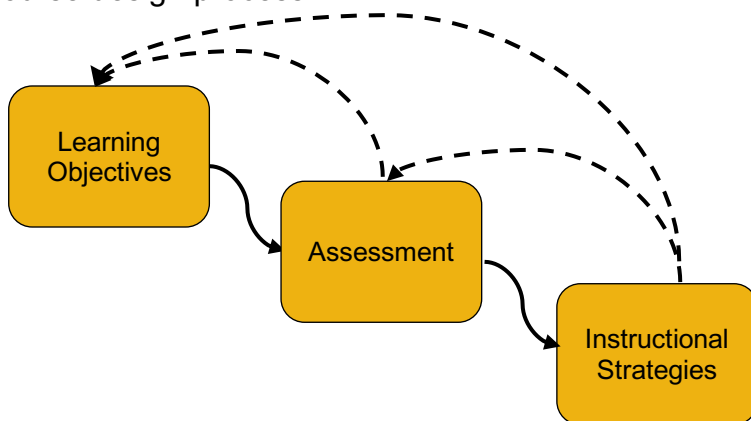
They are the true north of the compass that you use to align all other course elements. Because of this, it is worth investing the time up front to construct strong learning objectives. This is especially true as we are making major changes to our courses as

we transition them to remote teaching and learning experiences. As you consider what changes to make to your assessments and instructional strategies, check them against your course learning objectives. Will creating an alternative assessment instead of an exam still allow students to demonstrate mastery of a key learning objective? If the answer is yes, then you can be confident in your choices, even if that change is a radical departure from your usual approach to teaching or the traditions in your field. The clearer your learning objectives, the easier it will be for you to evaluate the changes.