

Outcomes of Undergraduate Education at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities

Until recently, an undergraduate education was characterized most often by its input characteristics. The combination of a student who demonstrated excellent academic achievement in high school and excellent performance on standardized tests and a curriculum that addressed both broad liberal education goals and the focus of a major field taught by an expert faculty were presumed to be the recipe for a successful graduate with a baccalaureate degree. The emphasis in undergraduate education has shifted in a dramatic way to focus on what students have learned and what they are able to do when they complete their bachelor's degrees. These outcome measures characterize the values that an institution has articulated across a number of important areas. The University of Minnesota has developed two sets of outcomes – one in the area of student learning and one in the area of personal and developmental characteristics. Along with our revised liberal education curriculum, these outcomes will frame our concept of an undergraduate education.

Student Learning Outcomes

Faculty, collegiate and central administrators, and staff at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, working together in the Council for Enhancing Student Learning since 2002, developed a set of student learning outcomes that define what students will be able to do when they have completed any undergraduate degree, regardless of major, at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities.

At the time of receiving a bachelor's degree, students:

- Can identify, define, and solve problems
- Can locate and critically evaluate information
- Have mastered a body of knowledge and a mode of inquiry
- Understand diverse philosophies and cultures within and across societies
- Can communicate effectively
- Understand the role of creativity, innovation, discovery, and expression across disciplines
- Have acquired skills for effective citizenship and life-long learning.

These student learning outcomes will help guide faculty across the University to develop curricula, plan individual courses, design syllabi, construct learning activities, and assess the student learning that occurs in every aspect of student experience - their classes, their undergraduate research experiences, their service-learning opportunities, their internships, and their learning abroad. These learning outcomes can be expanded at the departmental or unit level to reflect the ways in which the students achieve them within and across disciplines. In addition, they also should provide a framework for students and advisers in discussion of the goals of the undergraduate curriculum.

Personal/Developmental Outcomes

We also recognize that a student's undergraduate education comprises a wide range of experiences both inside and outside the classroom. Students need a set of skills that will allow them to function as citizens of the University and of the broader community. As part of the dialogue at the Council for Enhancing Student Learning, additional staff and faculty worked on a set of personal/developmental outcomes.

University of Minnesota undergraduates will demonstrate:

- Responsibility and Accountability by making appropriate decisions on behavior and accepting the consequences of their actions.
- Independence and Interdependence by knowing when to collaborate or seek help and when to act on their own
- Goal Orientation by managing their energy and attention to achieve specific outcomes
- Self-Confidence/Humility by knowing their personal strengths and talents and acknowledging their shortcomings
- Resilience by recovering and learning from setbacks or disappointments
- Appreciation of Differences by recognizing the value of interacting with individuals with backgrounds and/or perspectives different from their own
- Tolerance of Ambiguity by demonstrating the ability to perform in complicated environments where clear cut answers or standard operating procedures are absent

These outcomes reinforce the principle that learning takes place throughout the student's University experience. While allowing faculty and staff to be more intentional in advising students regarding co-curricular involvement and activities, the outcomes also give students a language for articulating the meaning of their experiences. In addition, faculty will be able to refer to these outcomes as they discuss expectations for student engagement and participation in the classroom. In particular, these outcomes can be assessed in the context of student employment, undergraduate research experiences, service-learning opportunities, their internships, and learning abroad, as well as a variety of curricular and co-curricular activities.

The Undergraduate Experience

Taken together, the student learning outcomes and the personal/developmental outcomes underscore the important partnership of students, faculty, and staff in supporting student learning in the broadest sense. The outcomes provide comprehensive goals that ensure University of Minnesota graduates are responsible and engaged citizens prepared to participate in and meet the challenges of a complex, diverse, and global society.

Both sets of outcomes have been presented to the Senate Committee on Educational Policy (SCEP). SCEP sent a resolution to the Faculty Senate, recommending that the Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) become official University policy and the SLOs have been discussed at one Faculty Senate meeting in February 2007. The Personal/Developmental Outcomes are on the SCEP agenda at the end of March. Both the Student Learning Outcomes and the Personal/Developmental Outcomes will be presented to the Faculty Senate for a vote in April 2007.