

## ASSESSMENT TERMINOLOGY DEFINED

Assessment literature is notoriously full of terminology (“mission”, “goals”, “objectives”, “outcomes”, etc.) but lacks consensus on the precise meaning of each of these terms. Part of the difficulty arises because there are changes in approaches to education with champions espousing the benefits of each point of view. This handout is designed to provide clarification of the hierarchical relationships among terms that frequently appear in assessment literature.

**Mission Statement:** Is a general concise statement outlining the purpose guiding the practices of our institution. WASC expects that student learning outcomes flow from the mission statement of the institution:

**Harvey Mudd College seeks to educate engineers, scientists, and mathematicians well versed in all of these areas and in the humanities and the social sciences so that they may assume leadership in their fields with a clear understanding of the impact of their work on society.**

**Educational Goals:** are broad general statements of what the College intends to accomplish. Goals describe broad learning outcomes and concepts (what we want students to learn) expressed in general terms. Goals provide a framework for determining more specific educational intentions of a program and should be consistent with the mission. HMC’s Educational Goals (SVCIC, 2008) are as follows:

1. **Exercise technical expertise developed through rigorous foundational work and an emphasis on problem solving in learning communities**
2. **Appreciate and employ different kinds of knowledge and expressive sophistication as the basis for critical analysis and synthesis and self-examination**
3. **Serve society by addressing the complex problems of the world, creatively, passionately and humanely**
4. **Flourish in a multi-cultural community and global environment**
5. **Lead examined and meaningful lives**

**Departmental Learning Outcomes:** further delineate what the department intends students to accomplish. They provide a framework for determining more specific learning outcomes of courses, programs and experiences, and should be consistent with the educational goals and mission of the institution. A single educational goal may have multiple subordinate learning outcomes from different departments.

Students should possess:

- **A thorough quantitative and conceptual understanding of the core areas of physics, including mechanics, electricity and magnetism, thermodynamics, statistical physics, and quantum mechanics as a level compatible with admission to graduate programs in physics at peer institutions.**
- **The ability to communicate scientific results effectively in written papers and presentations or posters**

**Objectives:** Objectives are brief, clear statements that describe the desired learning (the specific skills, values and attitudes a student should exhibit). Whereas departmental learning outcomes express intended outcomes in general terms ("effective teamwork") objectives express them in specific terms ("student is able to function in a team-based learning situation")

- **Students will choose and defend a design approach appropriate for a given situation**

**Outcomes:** Describe the significant and essential learning that students have achieved, and can reliably demonstrate at the end of a course or program. Learning outcomes identify what the learner will know and be able to do by the end of the course or program. Think of it as the essential and enduring knowledge abilities and attitudes that constitute the integrated learning needed by a graduate of the course or program. Good outcomes have 3 characteristics: they are meaningful, they are measurable, and they are manageable.

- **Students will be able to analyze the relationship between the language of satire to literary form by the close examination of a selected number of texts in a written essay.**

**WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES?**

Goals and objectives are similar in that they describe the intended purposes and expected results of teaching activities and establish the foundation for assessment. Goals are general aims or purposes.

Objectives are intended results or consequences of the curricula, program, or activity. Objectives are focused on specific types of performance that students are expected to demonstrate at the end of instruction. Objectives are often written more in terms of teaching intentions and indicate the subject and content that the instructor intends to cover.

Outcomes are achieved results or consequences of what was learned. Learning outcomes are more student centered and describe what it is that the learner should know, feel or be able to do. Learning outcomes provide students with a solid framework to guide studies and assess their growth and development.

**Examples of the Relationship Between Goals, Objectives and Outcomes**

Goal	Objective	Outcome
Understand the biochemical basis of drug design and development.	Demonstrate the application of molecular graphics to drug design.	Students will be able to apply the principles underpinning the use of molecular graphics in the design of drugs to illustrate general and specific cases through a computer-based presentation.
Use the scientific method to come to understand the enormous variety of electromagnetic phenomena in terms of a few relatively simple laws.	Tease out the laws of electromagnetism from everyday experience using specific examples of how electromagnetic phenomena manifest themselves.	Students will represent these electromagnetic phenomena and fields mathematically in specific situations.