Assessment Terminology
John Brown University

The following definitions of assessment terms are provided by the Assessment Committee to give the John Brown University campus a common language for discussing assessment. While it is acknowledged that alternate definitions for these terms abound, the intent here is to provide a common and consistent terminology for the JBU community, and any documents targeting the JBU community should use these terms as defined below. Since specialized accrediting bodies may define and use these terms differently, documents written for those organizations may need to translate this terminology appropriately.

Outcomes Pyramid
Mission, goals, objectives, and outcomes have a hierarchical relationship as demonstrated by the outcomes pyramid below. The complexity and level of specificity increase as one moves down the pyramid.

Mission and Values Statements
A mission statement is a concise statement of the guiding purpose of the university, college/division, department, or other institutional unit. Mission statements lower in the pyramid should flow from the higher missions. For example, the mission statement of an academic department should flow from its college’s or division’s mission, which should in turn flow from the university mission. Outcomes should support the unit’s mission.

Values represent the core priorities in the unit’s culture—the things that drive the faculty and staff members’ priorities.

Each institutional unit should have a mission statement. Mission statements should appear on the web site and in the course catalog. Values statements are optional.

Objectives
Objectives describe the process and means by which the outcomes will be achieved. Program and unit objectives provide the framework from which the specific outcomes are derived and should be consistent with the department’s or unit’s mission. Course objectives are more instructor-focused and describe what the instructor hopes to accomplish in the course.
Examples
- Unit Objective — Prepare students to use the library resources for research.
  - Unit Outcome — Have all new students attend a one-hour introduction to the library.

- Program Objective — Provide opportunities for faculty and staff to present original research.
  - Program Outcome — Publish journal of student work each year.
  - Program Outcome — Have each faculty member in the department present a paper at a regional or national conference at least once in a three year period.

- Course Objective — To demonstrate the application of molecular graphics to drug design.
  - Course Outcome — 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.

Both programs and units should have objectives specified.

Courses may have objectives specified.

Outcomes
Outcomes are the point at which the mission and objectives actually bear fruit. Program and curriculum design, content, delivery, and assessment are all based on the outcomes. Outcomes should be specific and measurable, and they should inform and guide the faculty, staff, and students.

Program or unit outcomes describe the specific desired results of the program’s or unit’s activities.

Student learning outcomes and course outcomes are student-centered and identify what students will know and be able to do by the end of the program or course. These outcome statements have the student as the subject and a measurable action verb that calls for skills, behavior, competencies, and knowledge to be demonstrated by students who complete the program or course successfully.

Effective student learning outcomes and course outcomes have three main components:
- an action word that identifies the performance to be demonstrated;
- a learning statement that specifies what learning will be demonstrated in the performance;
- a broad statement of the criterion or standard for acceptable performance.

Example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Word</th>
<th>Learning Statement</th>
<th>Criterion</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apply</td>
<td>the principles underpinning the use of molecular graphics in the design of drugs</td>
<td>to illustrate general and specific cases through a computer-based presentation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All programs should have both program outcomes and student learning outcomes specified. Student learning outcomes should appear on the web site and in the course catalog.

Units that don’t have academic programs should have unit outcomes specified.

All courses should have outcomes specified. Course outcomes should appear in the course syllabus.