CLO ‘Cheat Sheet’ from ASCC

Course Learning Objectives (CLOs) are clear, concise statements of what learners will be able to perform at the conclusion of instructional activities. In other words, they complete the sentence, “Upon completion of this course, a student will be able to…”

CLOs serve a number of pedagogical purposes for instructors (current and future), reviewers, and students. For example, clear CLOs will

- help instructors identify and provide relevant course material, design appropriate assessments aligned with course goals, communicate to students what is expected of them;
- help reviewers evaluate the role of the course within a program, the level of the course, and the appropriateness of modes, modalities, course content and assessments;
- help communicate to students the value they will receive from the course, what will be expected of them, and how their mastery of the content may be measured.

The list of CLO’s in a given course reflect the lower or upper division nature of a course and are measurable. Lower-division course CLOs are likely to be more introductory, emphasizing basic understanding and recognition of concepts (e.g., verbs such as list, describe, compare, discuss, select, solve). Upper-division CLOs will tend to emphasize the more advanced nature of the course, likely with more emphasis on application or evaluation of concepts (e.g., verbs such as create, evaluate, design, synthesize, justify).

CLOs should be measurable in that the verb(s) describing what the student will be able to do can be linked to an observable and assessable artifact or activity within the course (such as a performance, presentation, paper, discussion, product, construction, artwork, etc.)

As a guideline, a recommended number of CLOs is around five for a 3-semester-unit course, as a large numbers of CLOs may impede ability to fully assess or deliver all CLOs within the time constraints of the course. Courses less than 3 semester units will tend to have fewer CLOs; higher-unit courses may have more.

For assistance with writing good CLO’s for new course proposals, see Course Learning Objectives. (https://registrar.calpoly.edu/course-learning-objectives)

What ASCC looks for in CLOs

1. Beginning with an assessable verb (or two or more related verbs), and phrased to follow the unstated preface of “Upon completion of this course, a student will be able to…”
   a. For example:
      i. Construct a stable pedestrian bridge.
      ii. Compare and contrast major theoretical perspectives in the field of Geography.
      iii. Evaluate, select, and apply cost-effective methods for growing market-weight chickens. (A ‘nest’ of functionally-related verbs.)
2. Avoid verbs that are difficult to directly assess, or those that describe in-course activities rather than objectives. For example:
   a. “Understand” – This is a category within the revised Bloom’s taxonomy, but is nearly always assessed by an action verb that illustrates “understanding.” CLOs should start what students will be able to do (define, create, explain, discuss, solve, compare, ...) that is dependent on “understanding.”
   b. “Demonstrate” – Usually only appropriate if intended to be an ‘ability to teach’ objective. At the conclusion of the course, students should generally be able to do the thing being demonstrated, not just show how.
      i. For example, if the course is training mountaineering guides or instructors, a CLO could be “Demonstrate safe practices for climbing mountains.” But if the course is training mountaineers, the CLO would be something like “Apply safe practices to mountain travel.”
      ii. Or, rather than “Demonstrate the skills necessary to design user-friendly and cartographically-correct maps” the CLO would be “Design user-friendly and cartographically-correct maps.”
   c. “Develop” – sometimes OK, but often refers to what is happening during the course rather than after. For example:
      i. “Develop competence in the interpretation of contingency tables” is what’s happening in the class. “Interpret contingency tables” is the real objective.
      ii. Recent good example of appropriate use of “develop” (AGC 452): “Develop strategies to engage the public regarding shifts in consumer preferences and public perceptions of the agriculture industry.”
   d. “Recognize” - should generally be used in the context of identifying or selecting. Avoid using “recognize” as a synonym for explain. For example:
      i. “Recognize the importance of...” is difficult/impossible to assess. Explain, describe, or discuss would be more appropriate.
      ii. “Recognize the principle works of prominent 20th Century U.S. architects” would be appropriate.

3. Avoid any CLO that is specific to the activities done in the course. (In-course activities are not objectives, they are usually the content that either teach or assess the desired objectives). For example:
   a. “Complete nine introductory GIS lab activities” or “Write a term paper addressing GEOG 308 topics.”
      i. The CLO would be the skill/knowledge these course activities are intended to produce or assess.

4. Avoid double-barreled CLOs (multiple CLOs in one line). CLOs may relate to one another, but shouldn’t be combined into one CLO that includes multiple disparate objectives. For example:
a. “Describe recent advances in digital cartography and remote sensing, produce a map appropriate for general audiences, and orally present results of spatial analysis to local stakeholders” is more than one CLO.
   i. Divide into the three actual CLOs:
      1. Describe recent advances in digital cartography and remote sensing.
      2. Produce a map of XYZ appropriate for general audiences.
      3. Orally present results of spatial analysis to local stakeholders.