



COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES

Research Methods in Psychology

Author: Craig A. Wendorf, Ph.D.
Affiliation: University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point
Contact: cwendorf@uwsp.edu

Overview of Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes are descriptions of what students should be able to know and do following a particular course or program. Learning outcomes are useful in that they identify a set of goals for instructors to use in their teaching. These learning outcomes provide an essential set of building blocks for the assessment of students' performance. Most universities and professional organizations recommend that instructors identify a set of objectives for each course and assess the extent to which students meet these objectives.

Relevant Local and National Learning Outcomes

The American Psychological Association (APA, 2013) offers a list of student learning outcomes for all psychology curricula. With regards to research methods, the following outcomes are particularly relevant. Students completing this course should be able to:

- Demonstrate psychology information literacy (APA Outcome 2.4) – This includes several subordinate outcomes that involve finding and summarizing legitimate sources of information.
- Interpret, design, and conduct basic psychological research (APA Outcome 2.4) – This includes several subordinate outcomes that involve describing different types of research designs and their uses.
- Demonstrate effective writing for different purposes (APA Outcome 4.1) – This includes several subordinate outcomes that involve proper organization, structure, and grammar of written work.

The University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point (2017) specifies two learning outcomes that are particularly relevant to all Communication in the Major courses (which includes Research Methods in Psychology). Students completing this course should be able to:

- Apply discipline specific standards of oral and written communication to compose an articulate, grammatically correct, and organized presentation/piece of writing with properly documented and supported ideas, evidence, and information suitable to the topic, purpose, and audience. (UWSP GEP COMM Outcome 1)
- Critique their own and others' writing/oral presentations to provide effective and useful feedback to improve their communication. (UWSP GEP COMM Outcome 2)

Finally, the UWSP Department of Psychology adopted the following learning outcomes in order to meet the Communication in the Major outcomes outlined above:

- Find, read, and describe scholarly works (e.g., peer reviewed journal articles, book chapters, etc.) to identify relevant information and assess the quality of research evidence for a topic. (UWSP PSYC COMM Outcome 1)

- Write an original APA-style paper (as an individual or as a group) of at least one of the following types as relevant to the topic: literature review; empirical study proposal, report, or poster; or grant proposal. (UWSP PSYC COMM Outcome 2)
- Use peer review and revision for some aspect of the paper in order to improve its quality and clarity. (UWSP PSYC COMM Outcome 3)

Specific Learning Outcomes for My Research Methods Course

I have outlined four specific learning outcomes that are designed to encompass and combine the UWSP and APA learning outcomes described above. I believe that by fulfilling these learning outcomes, students will meet the spirit of both the UWSP and APA outcomes. Specifically, students completing this course will:

- Describe fundamental principles of research designs used by psychologists including their respective advantages and disadvantages.
- Find, read, and describe scholarly works (e.g., peer reviewed journal articles, book chapters, etc.) to identify relevant information and assess the quality of research evidence for a topic.
- Write an original empirical study proposal in APA-style that demonstrates the appropriate application of research design principles to address a psychological issue.
- Use peer review and revision for the empirical study proposal in order to improve its quality and clarity.

How the Learning Outcomes are Addressed and Assessed in My Course

The relevant learning outcomes are outlined on the first day of the course, are explicitly emphasized throughout the course, and form the cornerstone of the grading rubric used in the course (see Wendorf, 2017).

In Table 1 below (in a format adapted from Fink, 2003), I have outlined how my statistics course is designed around these learning outcomes. The table briefly describes the learning experiences and assessment techniques that are directly relevant to each outcome.

Overall, I encourage all of my students to be familiar with this information because it explains why and how the various assignments and exams in the course are important.

References

- American Psychological Association. (2013). *APA guidelines for the undergraduate psychology major (Version 2.0)*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from [www http://www.apa.org/ed/precollege/about/psymajor-guidelines.aspx](http://www.apa.org/ed/precollege/about/psymajor-guidelines.aspx)
- Fink, D.L. (2003). *Creating significant learning experiences: An integrated approach to designing college courses*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point. (2017). *GEP learning outcomes*. Retrieved from http://www.uwsp.edu/acadaff/GEP/GEP_Category_Learning_Outcomes.docx
- Wendorf, C. A. (2017). *Grading rubric and explanation: For all of my courses*. Retrieved from <https://cwendorf.github.io/teaching/Wendorf-GradingRubricExplanation.pdf>

Table 1: Explicit and Assessed Learning Outcomes for My Research Methods in Psychology Course

| Learning Outcomes What specific learning outcome is explicitly addressed in this learning experience? | Course/Unit/Experience Design What do students specifically do to address the learning outcome during this learning experience? | Assessment Context What is the assessment method and its context/setting for this learning experience? | Formal Feedback What formal feedback do students receive about their representation of learning in this experience? |
|--|---|---|--|
| Describe fundamental principles of research designs used by psychologists including their respective advantages and disadvantages. | In-class lectures and discussions emphasize the importance and relevance of research methods for psychology. Students complete out-of-class exercises targeted at applying the relevant principles. | The activities are graded to check for comprehension. Additionally, in-class multiple-choice and essay exams assess the extent to which students accurately use these concepts. | For written work, students receive a rubric that shows their level of performance. Written comments are also made on the activities and the exams. |
| Find, read, and describe scholarly works (e.g., peer reviewed journal articles, book chapters, etc.) to identify relevant information and assess the quality of research evidence for a topic. | Multiple in-class and out-of-class activities require students to examine scholarly work. Similarly, portions of the research proposal assignment require the evaluation of evidence. | The activities and research proposal are graded specifically to assess the extent to which students are analyzing the quality of evidence. | For written work, students receive a rubric that shows their level of performance. Written comments are also made on the activities and the exams. |
| Write an original empirical study proposal in APA-style that demonstrates the appropriate application of research design principles to address a psychological issue. | Students complete a series of out-of-class homework assignments that are designed to reflect the major components of a research proposal. | This series of homework assignments is graded to check students' performance on each of these learning outcomes. | For written work, students receive a rubric that shows their level of performance. Written comments are also made on the activities and the exams. |
| Use peer review and revision for the empirical study proposal in order to improve its quality and clarity. | Students are required to revise and update the research proposal assignments as the sequence progresses. Peer review is part of one of the revisions. | The quality of the peer review is also assessed by the instructor (prior to the peer review being delivered to the authors of the reviewed work). | For written work, students receive a rubric that shows their level of performance on these objectives. Written comments are also provided. |