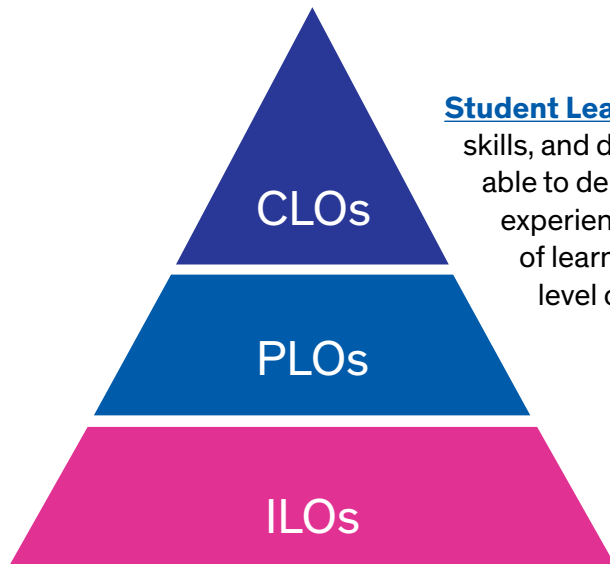




# Writing and Aligning Student Learning Outcomes

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**Student Learning Outcomes** are the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that students should be able to demonstrate as a result of their educational experience at MICA. There are three main levels of learning outcomes with differences in the level of granularity/specialization among them.

**Course/Activity Learning Outcomes (CLOs)** are specific take-aways from a course or activity that students are meant to apply in future settings.

**Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)** are the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are specific to a particular program/department. PLOs represent the big picture of a program/department by depicting broad aspects of desired student capabilities and reflecting the key distinguishing characteristics of the transition from student to professional/practitioner.

**Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs)** are the foundational knowledge, skills, and dispositions that characterize all of MICA's graduates. The ILOs are the fundamental toolkit that allows students to live out MICA's mission after graduation.

## Types of Learning Outcomes

Whether a learning outcome is cognitive, performative, or affective (knowledge, skill, or disposition) there are two ways an outcome can be articulated, as either an *absolute standard* or *value added achievement*.

### ABSOLUTE STANDARD EXAMPLE

Students will articulate how their values inform their creative practice.

### VALUE ADDED ACHIEVEMENT EXAMPLE

Students will improve in their ability to articulate how their values inform their creative practice.

While teaching is fundamentally about imparting new knowledge and skills and influencing attitudes or ways of thinking (which are *value added*), because PLOs are meant to articulate the characteristics of a professional/practitioner they are typically written as *absolute standards*. Similarly, ILOs are written as *absolute standards* while CLOs are often a mixture of *absolute standards* and *value added achievement*.

An advantage of articulating outcomes as *absolute standards* is that summative assessment need only occur at the point in time when a student should be able to demonstrate the outcome. To assess *value added achievement* on the other hand, requires at least two points of measurement (early in the course or program to establish a baseline and again late in the course or program to assess change/growth).

## Writing Learning Outcome Statements

Learning outcome statements are made up of three elements:



Students will articulate how their values inform their creative practice.

(WHO) (ACTION WORD) (LEARNING STATEMENT)

## Characteristics of Good Learning Outcomes

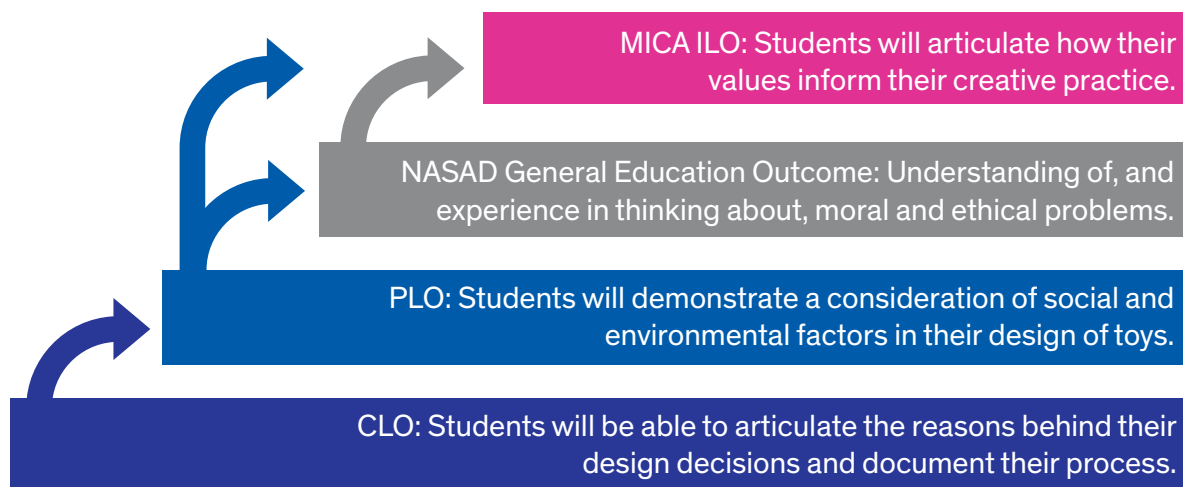
- **They are outcomes not activities.** Outcomes are what students will be able to do after they successfully complete the learning experience, not what they will do during the learning experience. If you find yourself writing an outcome that is actually an activity (e.g. “students will develop a body of creative work”) ask yourself, when a student does this activity, what are they demonstrating? The answer to that question is likely the learning statement that should be included in your outcome.
- **They are clear,** written in simple terms that everyone, including students, understands.
- **They are observable,** because if you can't see it, you can't assess it. Note: dispositional outcomes are often only observable through indirect evidence such as survey data; this is acceptable, however, indirect evidence is not adequate for the assessment of skill-based outcomes which should be directly observable.
- **They fit the scope of the learning activity.** Courses or short co-curricular learning experiences have more granular or specialized learning outcomes than an entire program.
- **They flow from programmatic/curricular goals.** They matter to you and your department/program and they prepare students for what comes after the course or program.

**If you are having a hard time identifying your learning outcomes,** brainstorm the “ideal” graduate of your program. Describe what the “ideal” graduate looks like once they become a professional in their field. How do they think and behave? What concepts, skills, and techniques will they be able to apply in their creative practice?

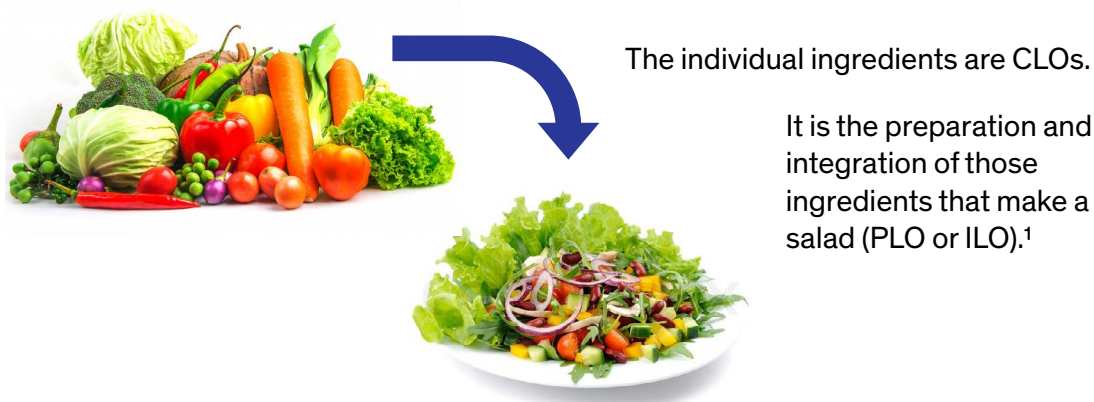
## Aligning Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes should align with but not duplicate one or more outcomes at the next highest level. CLOs should align with PLOs (including, where appropriate, General Education outcomes). PLOs should align with ILOs and, where appropriate, General Education outcomes.

Alignment identifies the conceptual relationship between the most granular outcomes (CLOs) and the “bigger picture” outcomes (PLOs and, by extension, ILOs). See the following example.



**If you are having a hard time aligning your learning outcomes,** consider a salad.



<sup>1</sup> Credit to Cathy Barrette, Director of Assessment, Wayne State University. [https://wayne.edu/assessment/files/course\\_vs\\_program\\_learning\\_outcomes.pptx](https://wayne.edu/assessment/files/course_vs_program_learning_outcomes.pptx)

## Curriculum/Activity Map

The alignment of CLO-to-PLO and PLO-to-ILO is typically represented in a **Curriculum/Activity Map**.

**The CLO-to-PLO curricular map** is not intended to identify every moment in a student's educational experience at MICA where they gain in achievement relative to a learning outcome. Instead, it is intended to identify courses (or activities in the co-curriculum) in which particular outcomes are most explicitly emphasized.

MAP	PLO1	PLO2	PLO3	PLO4
Course 101	I			I
Course 102		P		I
Course 103	P	D, E	I	
Course 104		D	D, E	

By generating, reviewing, and revising the CLO-to-PLO map, a program ensures that there are adequate learning opportunities to support the acquisition of the learning outcomes. The CLO-to-PLO map also guides a program to the course(s)/activities from which evidence of students learning can be obtained.

**The PLO-to-ILO curricular map** helps ensure that there are adequate learning opportunities to support the acquisition of learning outcomes. This map also guides the institution to programs/course(s) from which evidence of student learning can be obtained.

Map	ILO 1	ILO 2	ILO 3	ILO 4	ILO 5	ILO 6
PLO 1	X					
PLO 2						X
PLO 3		X				
PLO 4						
PLO 5				X		
PLO 6						

Any individual program will likely connect their PLOs to several of the ILOs. However, because ILOs are the collective expression of the learning environment, which includes the co-curriculum, any individual program is not expected to connect their PLOs to every ILO.

Related resource: [Understanding Student Learning Outcomes](#)