

Law School Teaching Innovations/Tips

Thurgood Marshall School of Law
Texas Southern University

Tip 4
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*A Monthly
Pedagogical
Newsletter for Faculty
to Exchange Ideas
About Teaching*

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Enhancing Student Learning: Critiquing Behavioral Objectives, Performance Goals, Conditions, and Standards

Editorial Note: *Law School Teaching Innovations/Tips No. 4* reports on a March 2005 workshop about enhancing student learning that was conducted for the faculty at the Thurgood Marshall School of Law by Professor Claudette Ligons from the Department of Curriculum and Instruction in the College of Education at Texas Southern University. *Law School Teaching Innovations/Tips No. 4* is divided into four parts: Part One reproduces the presenter's Introduction and Purpose for the workshop. Part Two gives the presenter's Outline of the Workshop's Topics – Basic Learning Principles, a Review of a Teaching/Learning Model, and the Components of a Behavioral Objective. Part Three presents a critique by Professor Ligons of Professor Holley's example of a performance goal with a related condition and performance standard for a Contracts course. (Professor Holley's example was published in *Law School Teaching Innovations/Tips No. 3, February 2005*, p. 3.) Part Four lists some on-line resource websites about behavioral objectives that were suggested by Professor Ligons for further reading.

I. Enhancing Student Learning: The Introduction and Purpose of the Workshop

**A Conversation with the Faculty of Thurgood Marshall
School of Law: Enhancing Student Learning**

Claudette Merrell Ligons, Ed.D.
Texas Southern University
March 16, 2005

Introduction

Engaging in continuous program improvement is challenging work. It is not an undertaking for the faint hearted. I commend you for these efforts. They are difficult, and the rewards are not always immediate. Your work in developing successful lawyers among the nation's underrepresented groups is laudable. The Houston community, the state, region, and nation benefit from your investments as legal educators.

As a law school faculty, your formal conversations on systematic instructional strategies place you at the leading edge of reform in the legal profession. I hope that you have calculated the cost and that you will make the short-term and long-term investments to significantly reform the teaching and learning environment in the Thurgood Marshall School of Law. Assessing your progress in relation to the goals set will help to insure that the reform markedly improves student learning and passage rates on the Texas Bar Examination.

For more information about the Center or to make submissions to *Law School Teaching Innovations/Tips* contact:

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Purpose

Today, as I join your conversation, we will build on some of the earlier discussions in *Law School Teaching Innovations/Tips*. These focused on (1) the SQ3R method, (2) classroom assessment techniques, and (3) writing objectives that reflect intended student competencies. Today's session will focus on student learning expectations that are communicated in the form of behavioral objectives.

II. Enhancing Student Learning – An Outline of the Workshop's Topics

In our session today, we will:

1. Examine four basic principles of learning that support students' mastery of the stated objectives.
2. Review a simple teaching/learning model as a conceptual framework for our conversation.
3. Explain how instructors and students benefit from the use of behavioral objectives.
4. Identify the components of a behavioral objective.
6. Recognize a behaviorally stated objective.

After a Pre-Assessment "Think-Pair-Share" Session, the following Basic Learning Principles will be discussed from a learner-centered point of view:

- Success is enhanced by building on students' prior knowledge.
- Much learning occurs through social interaction.
- Learners must view the content as meaningful, purposeful, and relevant.
- Student success is increased through the use of numerous instructional strategies.

Next, three-person faculty cooperative teams will explore the principle assigned. And, we will have a large-group debriefing of the small-group discussion in order to synthesize the small-group discussions.

Next, we will review the following Teaching/Learning Model:



Finally, we will examine the following Components of a Behavioral Objective:

1. **Behavior** – what students will do.
2. **Condition** – performance restrictions, defines the circumstances.
3. **Criterion** – standards of performance.
4. **Content** – subject matter to be mastered.

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III.A Critique by Professor Ligons of Professor Holley's example of a performance goal with a related condition and performance standard for a Contracts course. (See *Law School Teaching Innovation/Tips No. 3*, February, 2005, pg 3.)

Professor Holley's Example

Performance Goal: *After reading course materials and participating in class discussion* a student in Contracts will be able to analyze the facts of a new client's case, [and first determine that the issue concerns whether a contract exists. The student will next evaluate the facts to determine if and when an "offer" was made. Finally, the student will evaluate the facts to determine if, when, and which of four alternative legally significant events occurred next – a revocation, a rejection, a counteroffer, or a request to reopen negotiations.]

A Critique by Professor Ligons

The underlined area, above, represents the *performance goal*. It communicates what a student will know and be able to do as a result of instruction. The bracketed area [and negotiations.] seems to reflect what a student would do in an analysis of the facts that are associated with a case.

A performance goal is most efficiently communicated when it is simple, brief and written with the student in mind. Ideally, the student will understand the performance goal with no explanation from the professor.

Professor Holley's Example

Condition: The next case in the casebook or a case provided by the professor provides facts which require the conclusion that an offer was made, and facts which provide a basis for the student to employ analytic and synthesis skills to determine whether the next legally significant event was a revocation, rejection, counteroffer, or a request to reopen negotiations.

A Critique by Professor Ligons

The italicized information (*After reading course materials and participating in class discussion*) in Professor Holley's performance goal is the *condition*. It indicates the circumstances under which the student will demonstrate the expected performance.

The information in Professor Holley's condition statement seems to suggest that the professor provided course material and a case to build a knowledge base for analyzing a client's case. It seems the intent was to offer guided practice that would prepare students to model the kind of analytical and synthesis skills they would need to meet the performance goal.

Professor Holley's Example

Standard: When the professor asks students to identify the next legally significant event, three fourths or more of the students can correctly identify the next legally significant event, and can state the rules and the facts upon which they based their conclusion.

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A Critique by Professor Ligon

The standard should indicate what criteria will be used to measure students' behavior in relation to the performance goal. The standard set is two pronged. It implies that students must conduct the analysis of a client's case without error. Also, there is an explicit expectation that 75% of the students will perform at this level.

The statement "three fourths or more of the students can correctly identify the next legally significant event, and can state the rules and the facts upon which they based their conclusion" appears to be a step in the case analysis process. This statement does not focus on criteria for measuring the performance goal to analyze the facts of a case. Rather, it seems to focus on one of the essential steps in the case analysis process.

A Conclusion by Professor Ligon

In closing, I commend my colleagues in the Thurgood Marshall School of Law for their leading-edge interest in pedagogy. I especially appreciate that Professor Holley was willing to be so transparent as a learner. He published his example of a performance goal in *Law School Teaching Innovation/Tips No. 3, February, 2005*. Then, he asked me to critique it. That is a demonstration of real courageousness.

Perfecting our teaching effectiveness is a continuous process. Sometimes, communicating our learning expectations to students is not easy. However, it is essential to support their academic success. Again, I applaud my colleagues in the School of Law and encourage them to persist in these vital efforts. The payoffs are well worth the investments.

IV. Some On-Line Resource Websites about Behavioral Objectives

<http://www.oucom.OhiOU.CdU/fd/obiectivesforcnchtm>

A comprehensive set of instructional resources

<http://ww.adrima.cOm/ObiectiveS²ht1~>

A rationale for behavioral objectives

<http://www.roundWOrldmedia.cO1~/cvc/module³/notes³.html>

Constructivism – A learner-centered approach