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### ACUE Certificate in Effective College Instruction Reflections

Zachary A. Powell

California State University - San Bernardino, zachary.powell@csusb.edu

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## **Combined Reflection for 1A, 1B, 1C: Powerful Learning Outcomes and the Alignment of Teaching Assessments and Methods**

Zachary A. Powell

To complete the reflection assignment for the combined modules 1A, 1B, 1C I decided to revise a course I have taught in the past and plan to teach in the future. The course in question (Theories of Crimes & Delinquency) serves as a pre-requisite for entrance into the main major. Many students fail the course and retake it several times. I wanted to revisit my approach and design of the course learning objectives, teaching methods, and assessments to improve student outcomes.

During the revision process for this course I selected two learning objectives to revise. The Learning Objectives section of my syllabus states “upon completion of the course...” and itemizes learning goals. The first learning objective “identify the assumptions of each theory” was revised to “students will be able to identify and apply the assumptions of criminological theories.” The first change was made to make the learning objective student-centered; the second change was made to diversify the cognitive levels of the learning outcomes. Students are now required to remember the assumptions of a theory and apply it. I did not edit the learning objective further as it already contains observable and actionable metrics. The learning objective is admittedly vague but I left it in its current form as students should be able to identify and apply the assumptions of each theory learned in the course.

For the second learning objective, I revised “understand the policy implications of a theory” to “Students will discuss and determine the policy implications of a theory”. These changes were made to make the learning objective student-centered and adjust the cognitive levels of the learning outcome. In the revised format, students are now analyzing and applying policy implications of a theory in the course.

As stated before this course serves as a pre-requisite into the main major. Our major is fairly large and we have five sections of the course offered at any given time. To ensure consistency across all sections (and to ensure a level of rigor), all sections of the course are

required to assign a research paper. Prior to editing the learning objectives (and starting the module), I was a little unsure as to how I would align assessments with learning outcomes. I now see that the assigned paper is useful to assess student understanding of criminological theories, requires analysis, and an application of a theory. As such, I am confident the main assessment tool of the course (a research paper) aligns with learning outcomes of the course.

After editing the learning outcomes I examined the teaching methods effective for achieving different learning outcomes. My typical teaching style relies on a combination of lecture, group work, and directed discussion. Based on the Nilson chart, I see that most of my teaching methods ensure students will remember and understand the course material. The directed discussions I tend to lean on can also help students apply and analyze the meaning of the theories. However, students may benefit more from the course if I incorporated writing exercises in course sessions. Moreover, given the reliance on a research paper for student assessment writing exercises can only improve student outcomes on the paper. I may also include student-peer feedback as a way to incorporate an evaluative component in the course. However, I will need to alter a learning outcome to ensure my teaching methods are consistent with stated expectations.

If I am honest, I dreaded this module assignment. For one reason or another, I find the idea of writing learning outcomes particularly loathsome. After completing the module, I still find the idea of writing learning outcomes to be dreadful. Despite my dread, I found that I rather enjoyed aligning assessments and teaching methods to my learning outcomes. As I worked on alignment, I found that I can now justify assessments and teaching methods to my students (more so than in the past). I suspect this may diminish some grumbling whenever the issue of a research paper comes up in the future.

I only worked on two learning outcomes related to this course. As I move forward, I plan to edit the rest of my learning outcomes and appropriately outline my assessment tools. I also intend to document my teaching methods and develop an explanation for my techniques to future students. For purposes of retention and promotion, I intend to document my changes and outline the purpose and intent of my practice.