This history of the development of the Outcomes Statement was written as part of my dissertation project. Although a brief history of the OS was included in <u>The Outcomes Book</u>, the history below is more detailed.

As in the writing of most histories, the subject position of the author makes for an version of the history to which others may object. I made a sincere effort to make this as unbiased as possible. If you use this document for your own research, please cite it appropriately.

In the dissertation, the section below immediately follows a history of the development of the NCTE/IRA Standards for the English Language Arts and is situated in a discussion of the overall standards movement that began after the Nation at Risk report.

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History of the Outcomes Statement for First-year Composition

The Council of Writing Program Administrators Outcomes Statement (OS) has a history very different from that of the NCTE/IRA Standards. The OS undoubtedly grew out of the national concern for standards and assessment that began with the *Nation at Risk* report, and its beginnings on the WPA-L discussion list were parallel to the discussions about the newly released NCTE/IRA Standards for the Language Arts. However, its genesis was not specifically concerned with national or state standard mandates. Instead of resulting from those mandates or from a damning government or private think-tank report, the initial impetus for the WPA OS was a question and subsequent discussion on the WPA-sponsored discussion list. WPA-L list archives provide a rich source for re-telling this history.[i]

On March 13, 1996, Gordon Grant (University of Charleston (West Virginia)) asked list members:

I have hesitated to ask this question because the theory of outcome based

education that generates it is so suspect, but I'm running out of options...

Does anybody have a pithy and effective list of objectives for their writing (and maybe speaking!) programs? Something that might even work with faculty and administrators outside of composition studies?

Some background: my school has decided the future is in an outcomes based curriculum and one of our committees is trying to write objectives for writing and speaking (communications in general). The members of this committee -- and I'm not on it -- either refuse or are unable to acknowledge that a body of scholarship guides our work, and they are relying on their own prejudices and memory of their own current-traditional classroom experiences. Perhaps enough evidence from other schools can jar them into seeing a different horizon.

To this request, assessment guru Ed White replied:

This is a particularly important topic for anyone involved with giving credit for comp by exam--including those responsible for CLEP and AP at the national level. I don't think we have attended much as a profession to this matter, which may be why we often see those exams (and our own) as not really credible. Is it an impossible dream to imagine this group coming out with at least a draft set of objectives that might really work and be usable, for instance, distinguishing comp 1 from comp 2 or from "advanced" comp? We may not have professional consensus on this, though, or even consensus that we SHOULD have consensus.

How would we go about trying? Chuck, is this a matter for WPA (the org) to play with?

Only two hours separated Grant's message and White's reply. Very quickly thereafter, Roni Keane emphasized the need for a discussion for a professional consensus on this issue:

> *I think that it would be useful for us as a profession to have some kind of*
> *consensus on this matter. It would be useful for people like myself who are the*
> *only ones in their departments who are trained in the field and who, because*
> *they're new, have no voting rights (actually, only tenured faculty have a vote at*
> *departmental meetings in my school). At least we would have some "authority" to*
> *invoke when we find ourselves under seige.*
>
> *Perhaps, this discussion could be a start.*

While several list contributors were cautious about this kind of project, discussion supporting the need for it was stronger than the concerns about it. In the days following the initial interchange, two threads of discussion developed: 1) what the ends of the project might be called; and 2) what the content of the project might be.

Discussions about what to call these results began almost as soon as the topic was breached and reflect the previously articulated concern in educational communities with naming, subdividing, and defining. On March 13, Irv Peckham was the first to introduce this issue:

> *Does anyone know of another discipline that has reached a concrete consensus on*
> *the objectives of introductory courses? This comes close to a wish for national*
> *standards. I know of course that standards & objectives are different, but . . .*

Liz Hamp-Lyons contributed a message that was, she admitted, full of "*mixed metaphors*" concerning what the end-products of this project might be named and ended

by calling it a "*statement of expectations.*" In her message, Hamp-Lyons noted how outcomes are equated with results or consequences, and that results and consequences can easily be transformed into standards. Peckham's response the next day (March 14) articulated the concerns that many on the list would echo throughout the development of the OS, *"I think liz's post exemplifies how the desire for outcomes can quickly swerve into the more politically expedient creation of standards (the more countable, the better)."* To avoid this turn, Joan Livingston-Webber suggested talking "*generally and abstractly about objectives without dictating content.*" The originator of the conversation, Gordon Grant, commented again on March 14, saying that he would like "*some sort of description of what first year comp classes should accomplish, even if a set of outcome statements is an unlikely goal*" and commented that he liked Hamp-Lyons use of the word "*expectations.*"

As illustrated by the previous paragraph, contributors to the Outcomes discussions were pointedly concerned about what to call the project's results and illustrate the slippage in definitions and usage that concerns both Orrill and Cross earlier in this chapter. On March 16, in response to messages that he claimed used "standards" and "objectives" and "outcomes" rather indiscriminately, Peckham weighed in , "*I would just want to make sure that we are involved _only_ in constructing outcomes (objectives? goals?) and not standards. . . . . In constructing coherent outcomes (I really prefer goals), I think we should at the outset keep our eyes on our audiences as well as on our purposes (practicing what some of us at least preach*)." Mark Wiley quickly replied that he understood why Peckham preferred goals and added that, "*In practice it seems though that standards become outcomes in the way they are articulated.*"

According to the various definitions laid out earlier, the results that the Outomes

discussions were leading to might be called Content Standards, but that term does add

more fixity to the work than the Outcomes Group wanted. Additionally, the subdivisions

of the term standards were (and are still) not widely publicized and understood. Finally,

the idea of standards was, in the late 1990's, closely tied to the federal government's work

to establish fixed subject-area standards—standards that were politically motivated. The

Outcomes Group's vigilant avoidance of the term "standards" is understandable given

these circumstances.

Although standards was not in the Group's preferred vocabulary, the decision to

call this project the Outcomes Statement might be called a "careful accident." The

archives do not indicate any conversations that would qualify as a decision-making

moment, but by the time the discussion group was planning their first face-to-face

meeting, the subject line of the thread had become "program outcome statements" and the

final planning messages were labeled "Outcomes Meeting." Notes taken at the first

informal meeting of the Outcomes project at CCCC in Milwaukee (1996) indicate that

the term "outcomes" was being used exclusively to name the results this group would

eventually create.

The second thread of discussion that developed concerned content. On the second

day of the online discussion, March 14, Ed White commented that he was "encouraged"

by the interest in such a project and suggested three "outcomes" as starting points:

> *One outcome (among many) for comp 1: Students will be able to include an*
>
> *accurate summary of written or graphic material in their writing. A second for*
>
> *comp 1: Students will demonstrate that they are aware of the difference between*

asserting ideas and demonstrating ideas in their writing. One outcome (among

many) for comp 2: Students will be able to use source material as evidence for

(not substitutes for) their own ideas, and will demonstrate that they know how to

relate quoted material to what they have to say.

White continues this message saying that such outcomes are unlikely to *"force*

curriculum or mandate texts or stimulate axe murders" and ends by encouraging the

group to come up with a list.

In reply to White's starting point message, Joan Hawthorne commented that the

first outcome had *"a lot of slop"* which led her to ask White if that was intended or not.

White replied, "*I think the goals have to be stated in such a way that different places can*

implement them in their own ways." Bill Condon replied on March 15 that " *There will*

have to be a lot of slop in any of these outcomes, if they are to extend from campus to

campus." Discussion throughout that day focused on the possibilites of outcomes and

what kinds of outcomes might be workable at many institutional levels. Despite a good

deal of controversy, opinions like that of Irv Peckham, "*Still . . . if the WPA group could*

agree and document outcomes or purposes of firstyear writing programs, I can see how

such a statement (like the ncte statement on grading [was it ncte?]) could be a powerful

political tool—" and Mark Wiley, "*I think we need to say something definitive and be*

much more aggressive about getting our views out to the public" carried the day. By

March 16, Ed White was encouraged enough by the discussion to ask, "*Is there anyone*

on the list who is willing to start putting together the casual statements of goals that have

emerged here into something that could become a real list we could refine? " Although

he didn't directly offer to be a volunteer, Bill Condon's March 17 message added more

structure to the project. He commented that if the "*preamble leaves local faculty to define*

the terms, we might be onto something" and then added that the Outcomes should be

written for first year composition only and puts in a "*plug*" for what he calls his "*my own*

sacred triumvirate: Analysis, Inquiry, Argumentation."

On the same day, Mark Wiley suggested that perhaps those interested might

propose a panel or workshop for the next (1997) College Composition and

Communication Conference (CCCC). Several contributors agreed to this plan, and Ed

White offered to put it together. Bill Condon suggested that some participants might

want to put together a panel or workshop for the summer WPA conference as well.   An

informal meeting at the 1996 Milwaukee CCCC was scheduled, and several WPA-L list

members agreed to attend. In just seven days, a request for "*a pithy and effective list of*

objectives for their writing (and maybe speaking!) programs" became the Outcomes

Statement project.

At the informal Milwaukee CCCC meeting in 1996, Peter Sands took notes and

recorded Bill Condon's list of issues that "seemed to be recurring on our conversations"

Should we have an Outcomes Statement?

What should outcomes look like (local context versus national standards)?

Power problems . . . the pushing and shoving between admin. and writing faculty,

or writing faculty across the curriculum

Outcomes as an agenda-setter for course design and training of faculty

The notion of the value of collective action in defining outcomes.

The first of these questions was answered in the positive; the second was a topic that

concerned the authors of the OS throughout its development. The issue of "power

problems" was also a constant one throughout the development of the OS. The need for a professional statement that had the imprimatur of a professional group drove much of the activity concerning the OS. And finally, as my research illustrates, the OS has become, a powerful "agenda-setter" in program development at colleges and universities across the US illustrating the value of "collective action."

Although discussion continued on the WPA-L list and on the Outcomes list (started in Feb. 1997),[ii] the face-to-face meeting in Milwaukee gave rise to a series of several wide-audience discussions on the Outcomes. The first of these was at CCCC in Phoenix, Arizona in March 1997 where a group of thirteen leaders orchestrated a "forum" to discuss the draft Outcomes that had been authored via the online discussion lists. In a synopsis of that discussion, Mark Wiley wrote that he had "simplified" the material that resulted form the discussion into "four primary outcomes" including:

    1. Rhetorical Knowledge -- students develop a repertoire of organizational strategies and discourse schemes, especially argumentative strategies and schemes.

    2. Genre Knowledge -- students develop knowledge of appropriate genre conventions, both local and global.

    3. Writing-Reading Connections -- Students learn to use writing and reading as tools for learning, thinking, and communicating.

    4. Processes -- Students conduct inquiry through various writing processes (this also includes revising, editing, and collaborating.

Following the CCCC forum, the online community went into high gear once again. Between the March 1997 CCCC and the WPA Conference, discussion on the

Outcomes List turned, once again, to the naming/definition issue. In April 1997, Peckham raised the issue again, commenting that he "*hopes that outcomes lead away from banking models*" and posits that "*objective and standards. . . are more likely villians.*" In response, J. L. McClure objects to Peckham's claims saying "*'objectives' are what this group is meaning by 'outcomes.*'" McClure ends her message with this succinct list of definitions:

> *objectives = what we want students to learn/know/be able to do/etc.*
>
> *outcomes = what students in fact have learned/know/can do/ etc.*
>
> *standards = the degree or level of competency of objectives/outcomes*[iii]

Peckham then wonders about McClure's definitions saying, "*If that's what they actually 'mean,' I'm with you,*" but recalls "*behavioral objectives*" from other educational projects and points out that behavioral objectives had to do with scoring-based achievement. Although my copies of the Outcomes list discussion do not provide more conversation about this issue, before the WPA conference, Kathleen Yancey comments that "*I much prefer outcomes to standards, so thanks for this change. It may be that we get to standards, but we have to figure out what we are doing before we can determine if we are doing it well.*" Neither the WPA-L list nor the Outcomes List indicates any further discussion of this issue, so it appears that by June 1997, the official name of the project, Outcomes Statement for First-year Composition was firmly established.

By the summer 1997 WPA conference, the OS included a two-paragraph introduction and the four main points that Wiley had listed after the Phoenix forum—with more elaborate details. The online draft of this iteration of the Statement includes a

disclaimer of sorts that indicates both the voluntary nature of the group authoring the Outcomes and a concern with audience.

> *This draft is not an official document of any organization. It has been prepared strictly for discussion by writing program administrators attending the1997 conference of WPA. Any attribution or republication of any other sort would be a serious misrepresentation of the purposes and views of the drafters and of any organizations with which the drafters may be affiliated. The somewhat technical language is aimed at the specific and narrow intended audience for this draft.*
>
> ("WPA Outcomes Statement—Draft")

The audience for the draft above was participants at the 1997 Writing Program Administrators conference. Considerations of audience were a concern throughout the development of the OS as illustrated by the following Outcomes list exchange that took place previous to the 1997 conference. McClure noted that the draft being prepared for the conference has "*a lot of jargon—'rhetoric,' genre,' 'discourse conventions,' 'voice,' and heuristic,'—that we all understand but that I think is not appropriate for other audeinces (students, administrators, legislators, public)*." Barry Maid echoed this concern, commenting that "*Who are we writing this to? Ourselves? Other teachers? Students? Parents? Admins? Board Members? Legislators? All of the above*?" and continued by voicing his concern with "*the nature of the language I see in the draft*." Maid suggested that the group consider writing the OS in "*educated 'lay language' not the language of professional rhetoricians*." Linda Bergmann responded to this comment by referencing the public reaction to the NCTE/IRA Standards which the public accused of being "*fuzzy, jargon-ridden, etc*." even though she thought they were "*remarkably*

clear." She went on to argue that the OS should be written in the "*language of the 'general public'*" so that the OS is not "*vulnerable to distortion and misrepresentation*." Rita Malenczyk even suggests the possibility of having "*multiple drafts addressed to different* **audiences.**"

In his chapter on audience in the Outcomes book, *Talking about Outcomes: Debate and Consensus in the Wake of the Outcomes Statement,* [iv] Irv Peckham poses the question of audience in the terms of Lloyd Bitzer's "rhetorical situation." Peckham asks "what was the exigence, and how did we hope to answer it? And who are we?" As the previous excerpts from Outcomes list discussions illustrate, the answers to this question were not reached easily, but they were reached. The *"penultimate"* draft of the OS Peckham says, "is written largely in our professional language—not impenetrable to non-compositionists but not friendly either." The published draft of the OS does state ". . . we expect the main audience for this document to be well-prepared college writing teachers and college writing program administrators. We have chosen to use their professional language." Whether or not this choice of language has been a problematic issue for those communicating with an audience beyond the discipline is explored in Chapter 5.

Decisions about issues like naming and audience were considered on the discussion list and at various conferences. A version of the OS was discussed at the 1997 Pedagogy of the Oppressed Conference, and a new version was the topic of a workshop at the 1998 CCCC. The introduction to this version was abbreviated from the two-paragraph one found in previous drafts, and the body of the document had been substantially revised. The four main outcomes had been revised to include 1) Rhetorical Knowledge; 2) Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing; 3) Processes; and 4) Knowledge

of Conventions. Each of these four main outcomes included much more detail than previous drafts. For example:

Rhetorical Knowledge

By the end of first year composition, students should

- recognize and write to a specified audience

- focus on a purpose

- adopt appropriate voice, tone, and level of formality

- recognize differences in discourse situations, responding appropriately to those different situations

- use discourse conventions appropriate to the purpose of the texts they write

- acquire the ability to treat the same data in multiple formats

- have a sense of what genres are

- know that different genres are appropriate to different kinds of rhetorical situations

- write within a range of genres.

Faculty can build on this preparation by helping students learn

- the main features of the writing in their fields

- the main uses of the writing in their fields

- the expectations of readers of writing in their fields

Those concerned with the lack of a sufficient introduction in this draft joined in online discussions which led to a detailed, three-paragraph introduction, one quite close to the introduction included in the penultimate draft.

During the early summer of 1998, discussion of the OS on WPA-L was animated. Steven Jamar complained that the project was "*not an outcomes statement grounded in reality. It is a delusional statement of wishes and hopes. I would much prefer an outcomes statement which is modest and acheivable than one which is so pie-in-the-sky as to be immediately dismissed and ignored as a feel-good ideal and idyllic target.*" Others voiced enthusiasm for the project, including Kelly Lowe who expressed hope for the practical use of the OS: "*I am hoping that this new goals/outcomes statement makes my position a little more intellectually secure.*" Other contributors to the discussion made long, substantive comments about the state of the OS draft at that point, while others were still concerned about the advisability of having a statement like the OS. Gail Corso was concerned about the OS as a "*red flag*" for the "*bulls*" who would like to have easy assessment of first-year composition. Her concerns were countered by those who believed that the OS was just the kind of document that was needed to prevent easy assessment. Ed White commented that a good OS is a good defense against "*reductionist and simple-minded*" assessment of first-year composition.

At the summer 1998 WPA Conference, details of the Statement were still being considered, but the draft OS had already been put into use at several institutions and the success of those efforts was part of the discussion. Feedback from those who had used the OS was positive; one participant claimed that "*Administrators are going to LOVE it,*"

and publication of the OS was discussed. At this point, the OS itself was near its published draft state, but there was still some degree of controversy about whether or not a "technology plank" should be included in the OS.

The technology plank[v] was undoubtedly the most hotly debated issue throughout the development of the OS as excerpts from the WPA-L September 1998 discussion illustrate. Arguing for it were people like Duane Roen who stated that "*By including at least a general statement about technology in documents such as the Outcomes Statements, it makes it easier for folks like me to use such documents when making the argument for access to certain kinds of resources*."   Dean Ward said that "*Computers confront writers with a large set of decisions that they must make about visuals: visual features such as fonts, white space, headers and footers, as well as graphics such as charts and graphs, illustrations, even (in some electronic texts) animation,*" and continued saying that somewhere in the OS there should be more mention of technology. Others, like Edward Kearns, argued against the plank claiming that including a "medium" was getting too technical, "*We do not (at the level of higher ed.compositon) teach handwriting, keyboarding, or even reading per se; we're not expected to teach people how to operate ball point pens or sharpen their number 2 pencils.*" Others opposing the technology plank were worried that including it would make the OS too blatantly political.

At the 1999 Computers and Writing Conference, an Outcomes panel (of which I was a member) discussed the pros and cons of the technology plank. Barry Maid argued that including a specific plank on technology "misrepresents technology" as an add-on rather than something "implicit to the work." Keith Rhodes maintained that the "motive"

for a technology plank was too "openly coercive" and political. Countering those

arguments, I claimed that the OS was an inherently political document and that

technology affects how students perform. Emily Golson argued that teachers and

program administrators needed the plank as one of the tools to convince administrators

that technology in composition was necessary. In his recollection of the C&W session,

Keith Rhodes commented that audience discussion leaned toward "spreading specific

reference to (or at least inclusion of) technology across all the sections of the statement

rather than including a technology plank" ("1999 Computers and Writing Conference").

Those advocating the inclusion of a technology plank did not prevail and in the published

OS, technology is mentioned only in the seventh item of the "Processes" section:

Students should use a variety of technologies to address a range of audiences."

In 1999, the Outcomes Group sought to have the OS published in *Writing

Program Administration,* the journal of the Council of Writing Program Administrators.

This was the first attempt in the OS history to solidify a draft and make that draft a matter

of public record. At least six regular OS contributors were on the Executive Board of the

WPA; consequently agreement of the Board and the journal editors to publish the OS was

uncontroversial. What was termed "the penultimate draft" of the Outcomes Statement

was published in the Fall/Winter 1999 issue under the title "WPA Outcomes Statement

for First-Year Composition," and sub-titled "A Modest Proposal." Interestingly,

although the OS was not officially adopted by the Council of Writing Program

Administrators until April 2000, the first publication of the OS was titled as though it had

the imprimatur of the WPA. The introduction of the article states that impetus of the OS

was three-fold, including 1) a desire to "determine what it is that we do teach in first-year

composition," 2) investigate the possibility for a "common programme to be defined," and 3) "articulate this programme, if it existed." (59).

Included with the OS were four "Responses" penned by some of the most active members of the OS project. These responses praise the development of the OS, but each also voices trepidation. Clyde Moneyhun wishes that the OS "had more to say about teaching writing to heighten social and political awareness among students, about writing as a civic act" (63). He also articulates concern that the OS might get into the hands of those who do not understand its "jargon" and how to interpret it (64). Kathleen Blake Yancey addresses the same concern, but has a somewhat different take on it. She claims that in the history of composition "reform documents," most have not been "used against us" (68), and that although there is always the possibility of the OS being used that way, the value of the OS to the profession is far more important than the chance that it might be misused. Mark Wiley calls the OS a "political document" that both liberals and conservatives may find too general and is concerned that it's "middle-of-the-roadness" might make it unappealing in a variety of ways (66-67). Wiley's response ends with a series of "hopes" for the OS—that it be a "'living" document, one subject to continual inquiry, debate, and revision" (67). Keith Rhodes' calls his response to the OS "ambivalent enthusiasm" because he viewed the project's results as "rather mundane." He claims that the project was much less controversial than many involved in the project had anticipated. The first-year course, he says, "had more inter-institutional coherence than common opinion suggested, at least in terms of the imagined and desired results" (65). What Yancey characterizes as a possibly "revolutionary moment," (69) Rhodes calls an "ordinary" one (66).

Following the decision by the Council of Writing Program Administrators to

adopt the OS, the Outcomes Group decided that the next goal would be publication of the

OS in a more general English journal. To facilitate their publishing goals, the Outcomes

Group realized the need for a small group to spearhead these efforts. The Steering

Committee of the Outcomes Group was formed, including Susanmarie Harrington, Rita

Malencyzk, Irv Peckham, Keith Rhodes, and Kathleen Blake Yancey.   The Steering

committee pursued publication efforts, and in January 2001 the OS appeared in *College*

English. In a personal message, Jeanne Gunner, *College English* editor, said that she

decided to publish the OS as a "community service to *CE* readers, the majority of whom

would not have access to the statement in the WPA journal." The introduction to this

publication, written by Kathleen Blake Yancey, provides a brief history of the OS project

and five reasons why those outside of composition might want to know more about the

OS:

> First-year composition is ubiquitous
>
> The OS, as supported by the WPA and published in *College English*, has
>
> "historical value"
>
> The OS can help those who are planning curriculum to think more "systemically"
>
> The OS will be used "to inform composition programs"
>
> The OS can be used "politically" (322).

Yancey addresses the OS' lack of attention to concerns like assessment, accreditation,

and accountability, claiming that the purpose of the Outcomes Group, "was curricular,"

and that the focus was "on expectations," not how to reach or measure those expectations

(323).   That Yancey would characterize the OS focus as "on expectations" harkens back

to the initial discussion of the OS in March 1996 when Liz Hamp-Lyons, musing about

what the document the group was thinking about creating, suggested that it might be

called a "statement of expectations." As discussions in Chapter 5 will indicate, the OS

has actually resulted in one document that is officially called "Expectations for Entering

College Writers."

[i] The WPA-L archives are available at http://lists.asu.edu/archives/wpa-l.html. Unless otherwise noted, the messages in this section were taken from those archives.

[ii] The Outcomes list was hosted by the University of Arkansas (courtesy of Barry Maid) and was not archived. My access to the discussion of the list are courtesy of Tim McGee who archived portions of the discussion himself and provided me with copies.

[iii] Once again, these definitions are illustrate the confusion that surrounds standards. McClure's standards sound like performance standards, and her objectives sound like content standards.

[iv] A draft of the Outcomes book, *Talking about Outcomes: Debate and Consensus in the Wake of the Outcomes Statement,* is currently being reviewed by Utah State University Press. I have access to the chapters via the editors of the book and permissions of all authors.

[v] One draft of the Technology Plank is archived at the OS web site:
By the end of first-year composition, students should
- have a critical understanding of the developing relationship between technology and writing
- be familiar with the fundamental strategies of writing, revising, and editing with a word processor program
- be familiar with research strategies using electronic databases
- have some familiarity with web-based research and the developing importance of this kind of research
- be acquainted with the different rhetorical strategies involved in writing traditional and hyper-text prose. (http://www.mwsc.edu/orgs/outcomes/tech.html)