Course description vs. course objectives vs. course student learning outcomes (SLOs)

The difference between these three concepts is frequently a cause for confusion. For the context of the curriculum approval process at USF, these are the basic definitions (note that in other contexts, the terminology might be different):

<u>Course description</u>: A VERY brief description of the course content, typically as short as 1-2 sentences
<u>Course objectives</u>: A more detailed description of what will happen in the course, including topics to be covered. The format of the section is flexible.
<u>Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)</u>: Specific statements of measureable skills that the students will have acquired by the end of the class. It's useful for this section to start with something like, "By the end of the course, the students will be able to…" and then a list of what they will be able to do at the end of the course. I've provided useful verbs to use for these and examples from previous submission on other handouts.

Main issues to look for in course review

1. Are all of the fields completed? Items like budget number, if the course is repeatable, FtoF or online, etc. are often left off. This shouldn't be an issue, as the online system won't let you submit without submitting all fields.

2. If the course is not 100% online or FtoF, it needs to be clear what part is done in which modality. Depending on the percentage, the students pay the tech fee of $50/credit hour. I haven't yet seen a good justification for both modalities (when questioned, faculty typically pick one or the other), although I'm sure it's possible to provide a logical answer.

3. Is the course repeatable? If so, how are the different iterations different? I've seen many submissions of faculty not specifying, and then we realize they didn't know what "repeatable" meant, or they checked it by mistake.

4. How are the objectives and learning outcomes? This is what many faculty have trouble with, although I've seen a marked improvement over the past year. I've not seen a nice example of how to differentiate the two (and I think they are really similar), so I'll provide my take: 1. Objectives = what will be covered in the course, which is sort of like the course description with more details about topics. 2. Learning outcomes = <u>specific</u> and <u>measurable</u> skills that the students will learn by the end of the course. The learning outcomes often start with the phrase "By the end of the course, the students will be able to…" and should include cognition-based action verbs (analyze, organize, synthesize, formulate, identify, evaluate, demonstrate, calculate, develop, etc.). I've provided some examples, and there are more on the graduate course webpage. I've also provided a handout created by those in charge of the Global Citizen's Project with sample verbs to use, depending on the SLO.

5. Sample references or other explanations of readings listed? Not all courses will have a textbook, but at the graduate level, readings should definitely be involved.

I've included below some sample comments of courses I've recently reviewed. You can click on the link to take you to the course if you want to see what the comments are referring to.

COURSE ADDENDUM

Some Courses are processing with OGS and the Chair. To view current list in review and status – go to:
http://www.grad.usf.edu/programs/grad_course_status-tampa.php

In Review

Pending Tampa Graduate Council Review - 82	Comments
ACG 5505 - Tampa - **Analytics in Accounting**	Elective Overall, the course looks good. However, it states that it is repeatable twice, but there is only one set of materials listed. Either differentiate how the course would be different the two times, or take off the option for it to be repeated.
ADV 5996 - Tampa - **Return on Advertising Investment**	Elective The learning outcomes are more like a course description. These should indicate specific and measureable outcomes that the student will have by the end of the course: The student will be able to… Everything else looks good.
CCJ 6705 - Tampa - **Research Methods in Criminology**	This course was only requesting a change of credit hours – approved.
CHM 6755 - Tampa - **Methods of Instruction in Higher Ed Chemistry**	Elective I wish that every discipline would include a "how to teach" course. Approved
CHM 6756 - Tampa - **Classroom Assessment Practices in Chemistry**	Elective Approved – Great learning outcomes – These can be used as models.
CRW 6025 - Tampa - **Special Topics in Creative Writing**	Elective Doesn't answer the "is the course repeatable" question. "MFA or PhD required" – Any PhD? The learning outcomes are more like a course description. These should indicate specific and measureable outcomes that the student will have by the end of the course: The student will be able to… These need to be re-written. A textbook and sample readings need to be provided. As the instructor has taught this 3 times before, it shouldn't be difficult. This course needs a lot of work. Should we direct him to a proposal by Scott Lewis (Chem)?
DIE 6127 - Tampa - **Principles of Leadership and Management of Food and Nutrition**	Required; Cat Copy received "Dietetic Intern" for pre-requisite – Is there a course number that goes along with this? Otherwise – approve!
DIE 6248 - Tampa - **Advanced Clinical Nutrition**	Required; Cat Copy received "Dietetic Intern" for pre-requisite – Is there a course number that goes along with this? Otherwise – approve!
EDA 7206 - Tampa - **Appreciative Inquiry and Organizing in Public Education**	Required; Cat Copy received Approved!

EDA 7215 - Tampa - **Educational Politics and the Engagement of Communities**	Required; Cat Copy received Approved!
EDG 7224 - Tampa - **Critical Pedagogy in Teacher Education**	Elective Overall, the course looks good. However, it states that it is repeatable twice, but there is only one set of materials listed. Either differentiate how the course would be different the two times, or take off the option for it to be repeated.
EEL 5139 - Tampa - **Wireless Circuits/Systems Lab**	Elective "permit" question not answered. Face-to-face and online (separate sections) – Can two modalities be submitted simultaneously? How will quality of the two different modalities be ensured? Learning outcomes - These should indicate specific and measureable outcomes that the student will have by the end of the course using active verbs to start: The student will be able to… The ideas behind these are good, though; they just need to be re-worded. Materials – there are no references or assigned materials at all?
EEL 6228 - Tampa - **MEMS I/Chem Bio Sensors**	Elective Learning outcomes - These should indicate specific and measureable outcomes that the student will have by the end of the course using active verbs to start: The student will be able to… The ideas behind these are good, though; they just need to be re-worded.
EEL 6229 - Tampa - **MEMS II**	Elective Learning outcomes - These should indicate specific and measureable outcomes that the student will have by the end of the course using active verbs to start: The student will be able to… As of now, that section is more like a course description.
EEL 6262 - Tampa - **Industrial Power Distribution**	Elective "course online" question not answered. All of section 3 – justification – is blank. Sections E,F, and G are blank.
EEL 6289 - Tampa - **Sustainable Energy**	Elective Budget account number blank Learning outcomes are vague. Are there any specific skills or types of information that the students will acquire as a result of this course?
EEL 6430 - Tampa - **MMIC Design**	Elective Budget account number blank Learning outcomes - These should indicate specific and measureable outcomes that the student will have by the end of the course using active verbs to start: The student will be able to…?
EEL 6630 - Tampa - **Digital Control Systems**	Elective Budget account number blank
EEL 6654 - - **Control Systems Engineering**	Elective There is almost no information for this course – almost all fields are blank. The submission needs to be re-done.
EEL 6728 - Tampa - **Intro to VHDL**	Elective There is almost no information for this course – almost all fields are blank. The submission needs to be re-done.
~~EEL 6822~~ - Tampa - ~~Biomedical~~	Elective

Systems and Pattern Recognition	No make-up work policy Only 2 learning outcomes – Is enough?
ENV 6337 - Tampa - **Environmental Site Assessment**	Elective Approved
ENV 6518 - Tampa - **Environmental Field Sampling**	Elective Approved
ENV 6617 - Tampa - **Green Engineering for Sustainability**	Elective The objectives and learning outcomes are both very good, but the categories are switched. Can we just switch them ourselves – i.e. make the objectives the learning outcomes and vice versa? I don't think there is a need to send it back to the program to do this, although we should inform them.
EVS 6920 - Tampa - **Environmental Research Interdisciplinary Colloquium**	Elective It states that is can be repeated 3 times. The way that it was written, I see how this would be possible, but there are no specifics about the different iterations of the courses. The proposal states that it has been taught three or more times already – do we need to ask for topic examples of the different times it was taught?
FLE 6639 - Tampa - **Second Language Reading and Literacy**	Required The revisions improved this course substantially. The proposal states that 30% of the course is online, but it's not clear what part will be online. In fact, there is even 10% for attendance that states students should attend all classes. After fixing this issue (I would recommend making it 100% FtoF), the course can be approved.
FLE 7700 - Tampa - **Applications of Technology in Second Language Acquisition**	Required Approved
GMS 6773 - Tampa - **Stem Cells and Brain Repair**	Elective It states that is can be repeated 1 time. The way that it was written, I see how this would be possible, but there are no specifics about the different iterations of the courses. The proposal states that it has been taught three or more times already – do we need to ask for topic examples of the different times it was taught? (This is the same comment as above)
HIM 6322 - Tampa - **Leadership for Health Professionals**	Elective It states that is can be repeated 1 time. The way that it was written, I see how this would be possible, but there are no specifics about the different iterations of the courses. The proposal states that it has been taught three or more times already – do we need to ask for topic examples of the different times it was taught? (This is the same comment as above)
HUN 5265 - Tampa - **Methods of Nutritional Assessment**	Required It says that it is 1 credit hour. I'm just verifying that this isn't a typo. If this is correct – approved.