

Developing Program Goals

Program goals should flow from the mission of the program. The goals begin to operationalize the fulfillment of the mission. From the website of Western Washington University (<http://pandora.cii.wwu.edu/resources/outcomes/goals.asp>) the following questions serve to guide the process for developing learning goals of a program:

1. How do program goals relate to the program mission?
2. How does this program fit into a student's overall development?
3. What general categories of knowledge and abilities will distinguish your graduates?
4. For each principle of the mission, what are the key competency categories graduates of the program should know or be able to do?

Goals are broad statements about the types of learning fostered within the program. Goals and outcomes should focus on the learner, not the instructor or instruction. They can set absolute standards (e. g., "Students become critical thinkers.") or value-added standards (e. g., "Students become better critical thinkers.") (Allen, 2006, pp. 35-36).

The process for developing learning goals for a program can "begin with the end." In other words,

1. What will our students learn in our program?
2. What are our expectations?
3. How would we describe our students if they have learned what we want them to learn?
4. What should our students be able to demonstrate?

Another useful approach is to examine what students currently are doing in the program and work back to the goals from that perspective. For example, if all students in a program must engage in a service learning project in a capstone course, ask why are the students being required to do so. The answer to the "Why" question is a learning goal. It could be "We want students to become servant leaders" or "Student will engage in civic responsibility". This process of asking "why" for the primary learning activities in a program results in learning goals.

Allen, M. J. (2006). *Assessing general education programs*. Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing Company, Inc.