

CHAPTER 2: SHAPING DEPARTMENT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

A department's instructional goals and objectives serve as the foundation for assessment planning. This chapter provides guidelines for shaping statements of department goals and objectives. Tips for writing goals and objectives in addition to suggestions for involving faculty in the process are included.

Topics Presented

- Definitions of goals, objectives, and measures
- Characteristics of good objectives
- Types of objectives
- Writing objectives

Definitions

Goals are statements about the general aims or purposes of education. They are the broad, long-range intended outcomes of a program, department, college or university. Goals are used primarily in policymaking and general program planning.

Objectives are brief, clear statements that describe the desired learning outcomes of instruction. Attention is focused on the specific types of performances that students are expected to demonstrate at the end of instruction.

Although both goals and objectives use the language of results, the characteristic that distinguishes them is the level of specificity. Goals express intended outcomes in general terms written in broad, global language. Objectives express intended results in terms of specific student behaviors.

Measures are elements used to determine progress toward an objective. The **baseline measure** indicates where a department is currently performing. The **target measure** is where the department wishes to perform in a specific period of time.

General Information

Characteristics of a Good Objective

A good objective is department specific and:

- consists of action verbs specifying definite, observable behaviors.
- uses simple language.
- describes student rather than teacher behaviors.
- describes a learning outcome rather than a learning process.
- focuses on end-of-instruction behaviors rather than subject matter coverage.
- is limited to a single outcome.
- consists of one or more measure.
- links to a goal.
- is realistic and attainable.
- is clear to those outside the discipline.
- can be validated by department colleagues.

Types of Objectives

Objectives can be classified into cognitive, affective, or skill/performance dimensions.

Cognitive objectives are descriptions of thinking skills. **Subject matter objectives**, a subset of cognitive objectives, are specific to knowledge of subject matter.

Affective objectives refer to attitudinal, personal, and social dimensions of outcomes. **Skill** objectives such as writing, computer use, speaking, and physical are distinctive from cognitive (knowledge) objectives. Skills are the means by which knowledge is acquired.

Writing Objectives

An objective consists of **two essential components**. First, each objective must state a **behavior**, the specific action that serves as evidence that the objective has been

achieved. The objective should contain an active verb to describe the observable behavior. The second essential component is the **object**, the focus of the learning. It is the content, concept, skill, or attitude that is the focal point of the objective.

Four **optional components** can be used to clarify the specifics of an objective. The **target group** is the subgroup to whom the objective applies (i.e. graduating seniors). **Conditions** give information about situations in which the student will be required to demonstrate the behavior. They are the how, when, or where of the objective.

Performance criteria state minimum level of performance. The **performance stability** element gives information about how often the student behavior must be observed to be a true indication that the behavior is a stable part of the student's achievement.

Objectives and Outcomes

Objectives are **intended** results or consequences of instruction, curricula, programs, or activities. They specify what is expected and describe what should be assessed. Outcomes are **achieved** results or consequences of what was learned, evidence that learning took place. They are behaviors and products generated by students after instruction and are the objects of assessment.

Relationship Between Objectives and Assessment

"One must know what is to be assessed before one knows how to assess it" (Erwin, 1991, p. 35). A statement of objectives should precede assessment. Goals and objectives should drive the assessment methods and instruments, not the other way around.

Frequently Asked Questions

What types of learning outcomes can be included in objectives?

A number of authors have classified the types of learning outcomes. Bloom (1956) classified cognitive skills into six categories – knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Any of these or other classifications or categories are useful when establishing goals and objectives.

What is the difference between mastery and developmental objectives?

Mastery objectives are typically concerned with *minimum* performance essentials, those learning tasks that must be mastered by all students for success at the next level of instruction. These objectives tend to be limited enough in scope that all, or nearly all, intended outcomes can be specified.

Developmental objectives are concerned with *more complex* learning outcomes, those learning tasks toward which students can be expected to show varying degrees of progress. Developmental objectives are often written in a two-step process in which a general objective is stated along with a sample of specific learning outcomes.

Topics Reviewed

- Goals express intended outcomes in general terms.
- Objectives express intended outcomes in specific terms. They specify what is expected and describe what should be assessed. There are four types of objectives:
 - Cognitive describe thinking skills.
 - Subject matter objectives are specific to a certain topic.
 - Affective refer to the attitudinal, personal, and social dimensions of outcomes.
 - Skill objectives are behavioral or physical skills used to acquire knowledge.
- The behavior and the object are two essential components to an objective.
- Outcomes are behaviors and products generated by students after instruction and are the objects of assessment.
- Goals and objectives should drive assessment methods and instruments, not the other way around.

Sources of Additional Information

- Banta, T. W. (1993). *Making a difference: Outcomes of a decade of assessment in higher education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Banta, T. W. (2002). *Building a scholarship of assessment*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Bloom, B. S. (1956). *Taxonomy of educational objectives: The classification of educational goals. Handbook I: Cognitive domain*. White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Edwards, A., & Knight, P. (Eds.). (1995). *Assessing competence in higher education*. London: Kogan Page Limited.
- Erwin, T. D. (1991). *Assessing student learning and development*. Chapter 3. "Establishing objectives for outcomes assessment," pp. 35-51. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Freeman, R., & Lewis, R. (1998). *Planning and implementing assessment*. London: Kogan Page Limited.
- Nichols, J. O. (1995). *Assessment case studies: Common issues in implementation with various campus approaches to resolution*. Bronx, NY: Agathon Press.
- Palomba, C. A., & Banta, T. W. (1999). *Assessment essentials: Planning, implementing, and improving assessment in higher education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Palomba, C. A., & Banta, T. W. (2001). *Assessing student competence in accredited disciplines: Pioneering approaches to assessment in higher education*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing LLC.
- Stark, J. S., & Thomas, A. (1994). *Assessment program evaluation*. Needham Heights, MA: Simon & Schuster Custom Publishing.
- Upcraft, M. L., & Schuh, J. H. (1996). *Assessment in student affairs: A guide for practitioners*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Wholey, J. S., Hatry, H. P., & Newcomer, K. E. (Ed.). (1994). *Handbook of practical program evaluation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.