

## Purpose Statement and Goals

As explained in the attachment to my previous email, curriculum in an institution of higher education can be considered to consist of a number of levels: college, academic program, course, lesson/learning experience. In designing an assessment plan, it is important that the level at which the curriculum is being assessed is specified. I also explained that, while the assessment plan must be specific to the level of the curriculum it is assessing, the assessment process is consistent across the levels.

The assessment process consists of the following steps:

1. Identification of purpose and goals
2. Identification of student learning objectives/outcomes
3. Identification of the student learning activities that lead to the achievement of the objectives/outcomes
4. Determination of the assessment methods for measuring the level of achievement of the objectives/outcomes
5. Identification of the expected levels of performance for each assessment method
6. Implementation of the learning and assessment activities
7. Gathering of data
8. Analysis and interpretation of the evidence
9. Identification of strengths and areas for improvement
10. Identification and implementation of changes for improvement
11. Reiteration of the assessment process

Let's examine the first step - identification of purpose and goals. Each component within the curriculum exists for some purpose. By having a purpose statement, we make that purpose explicit to others and begin to identify what is important to include in our assessment plan. Without a clear idea of what our target is, it will be difficult to determine how close to the mark we are performing.

The purpose statement should describe what the academic program is, what it does, and for whom it does it. It should summarize any specific educational approach or philosophy and any important values. It should also clearly establish its relationship with both the department's and College's mission statements. A student or stakeholder reading the statement should be able to identify how the program contributes to the education and careers of students and how it supports the department's and College's missions.

Program goals can be included either as part of the purpose statement or separately. The purpose of having goal statements is to clearly communicate the direction and aspirations of the program for faculty, students, and stakeholders. Commonly, programs specify their goals in relation to its major functions such as instruction, student learning, research, and service. Program goal statements provide impetus for

planning and continuous improvement efforts. Primary among program goals should be those pertaining to student learning.

It can be difficult to arrive at a clear distinction between goals, objectives and outcomes as various authors use the terms differently. Written well, all three should describe some well-defined end result. In my mind, goals represent what the program is striving to achieve in the long-term, and tend to be written using broader and more inclusive language than objectives or outcomes. They state what the program wants to accomplish or become over time. Goals are used for planning, decision-making, resource allocation and priority setting.