How to Write Program Goals

Goals of the Program

Program Goals are general statements of what the program intends to accomplish. Program Goals are broad statements of the kinds of learning we hope students will achieve – they describe learning outcomes and concepts (what you want students to learn) in general terms (e.g., clear communication, problem-solving skills, etc.) Program Goals are statements of long range intended outcomes of the program and the curriculum. They describe the knowledge, skills, and values expected of graduates and should be consistent with the mission of the program and the mission of the institution.

Program Goals flow from the mission and provide the framework for determining the more specific educational learning objectives and outcomes of a program. Goals describe overarching expectations such as *"Students will develop effective written communication skills."* or *"Students will understand the methods of science."*

The main function of the Program Goals statement is to form a bridge between the lofty language of the Mission Statement and the concrete-specific nuts and bolts of program objectives. The Program Goals statement becomes a blueprint for implementing the mission by answering the following questions:
- How do program goals relate to the program mission?
- How does this program fit into a student's overall development?
- What general categories of knowledge and abilities will distinguish your graduates?
- For each principle of the mission, what are the key competency categories graduates of the program should know or be able to do?

Possible Approaches for Generating Goals

"Ideal graduate":
- Describe the "perfect student" in your program in terms of his/her knowledge, abilities, values, and attitudes. Which of these characteristics can be directly attributed to the program experience?
- Describe the "ideal student" at various phases in your program, focusing on the abilities, knowledge, values, and attitudes that this student has either acquired or has had supported as a result of your program. Then answer
    o What does the student know? (cognitive)
    o What can the student do? (performance/skills)
    o What does the student care about? (affective)
- Think what an ideal unit or program would look like and how its services and operations (refer to your mission) would need to be conducted to reach that vision – think of how you would improve, minimize, maximize, provide, etc. Then state these ideas as goals.
- List the skills and achievements expected of graduates of the program. Describe the program alumni in terms of their achievements, such as career accomplishments, lifestyles, and community involvement. Use these to identify overarching goals.

Existing material review
- Review current material which may shed light on program goals; e.g., catalog descriptions, program review reports, mission and vision statements, accrediting agency documents, etc. List five to seven of the most important goals identified in the sources listed above. Prioritize the list of important goals in terms of their importance to your program and their contribution to a student's knowledge, abilities, attitudes, and values.

Course goals inventory
- Review course syllabi, assignments, tests, and any additional materials and categorize the instructional materials into (i) recall or recognition of factual information, (ii) application and comprehension, or (iii) critical thinking and problem solving. From this inventory, determine the goals which are taught and use them as a starting point for determining program goals.

Review other programs' goals
- Often broad overarching goal statements are quite similar from program to program and from institution to institution. Looking at what is in use elsewhere can reaffirm or serve as a starting point for brainstorming.

Note: a single goal may have many specific subordinate learning objectives.

<u>Structure of a Goal Statement</u>

"To (action verb) (object) (modifiers)"

Examples:
to graduate students who are prepared for industry
to adequately prepare students for graduate school

<u>Example of Program Mission, Goals, and Outcomes</u>

University Mission:
Broad exposure to the liberal arts . . .for students to develop their powers of written and spoken expression ...
Program Goal:
The study of English enables students to improve their writing skills, their articulation ...
English Composition Course Goal:
Students will learn to acknowledge and adjust to a variety of writing contexts.
Learning Outcome:
The student will demonstrate through discussion an awareness that audiences differ and that readers' needs/expectations must be taken into account as one writes

Checklist for Goals
- Are they consistent with your mission?
- Are your goals aligned with your values?
- Do your goals describe desired performance?