Goals & Objectives

Shared Experiences: The Benefits of Goals Outcomes and Learning Objectives

***What are the benefits of establishing goals and learning objectives***

Chris Cratsley: The biggest benefit to establishing goals and learning objectives really just comes at the individual course level Its something that we as we think about the best way to design a course increasingly were understanding that we need to begin with what it is that we want to achieve in this course What is it we want our students to learn in the course And so in that sense learning goals and objectives are absolutely critical because without them how do we even know how to design a course

Laura Saunders: I think the biggest benefit is you know where youre going right For me its been really eye-opening and I think its been really good that any time something comes up whether its a new course proposal or its discussions about assignments that we want to cut across different courses or things like that we can go back out our learning outcomes and say ok how does this meet the learning outcomes How does it support the learning outcomes or if it doesnt Is it something that really fits And so it gives us a real blueprint or map about where we want to go I think its also helpful because we can communicate these now to the students and I think it gives the students some perspective about in a more concrete way what are they going to get out of this program Were in a professional program so theyre working towards employment and thats you know obviously what they have most specifically on their minds but with these program learning outcomes we can really say to them These are the things that youre achieving by the time you are done

Richard Voos: If you dont know where youre going any road will get you there If were not clear what we want our students to be able to know or do or the habits of mind we want them to adopt then what are we doing

***How has the assessment of goals or learning objectives helped you to make decisions about your institution program or course***

Chris Cratsley: As we look at the assessment of learning outcomes and we begin to gather data on those learning outcomes what were able to do is hopefully say something about what our students know and are able to do at some point in their curriculum And we can start to think about what might we want to do differently If theres something about that learning that isnt quite where wed like it to be And I would say theres always probably always something about that learning that isnt where we want it to be theres always we always want to move forward we always want to do better job in some way of getting students prepared with the knowledge and skills that they need In that sense what we really can do when we have assessment data that says something about our students at some point in their curriculum is that we can go back and we can look at that curriculum and ask How did it support or fail to support these particular learning outcomes and goals that we have

Regina Doherty: So assessing those learning objectives sort of forces me as faculty and as then sort of in that curricular role coordinating multiple courses say Well we said the course would do this and are we assessing that Or are we assessing something different because thats something really thats something that we think they should know So how does it belong and really how does it live in the course in a meaningful way At the program level it helps us ensure that everything has a place and space and so that if Sue no longer teaches this course and Mary comes in to teach it then we still know its achieved and that its not Sues assignment but its the assignment thats linked to the learning objectives of the course and so it allows the curriculum to maintain consistency if the learning objectives dont change

Laura Saunders: For my courses I would say one of the things Ive done is really Ive gone back and revised a lot of my assignments Over time Ive started to see how a paper doesnt always achieve the objectives of the class So for instance I teach a class on teaching And theres really no need for them for those students to write an in-depth paper in a course like that because the focus of the course is really about how do you write a lesson plan how do you deliver a lesson plan how do you get up and speak in front of a class So Ive really refocused that class to include assignments that really speak to those outcomes So kind of just rethinking how every piece of my course works towards the outcomes that were trying to achieve at the end Thats been a big part of it When we had our retreat this January one of the things that we did was look to see how are specific courses leading towards certain outcomes We have one outcome where we expect students to be able to critically analyze and apply research And what we were doing as part of the retreat is really looking at especially our core courses and looking to see do we actually teach these skills Do we have assignments that work towards those skills Are we assessing those skills in these assignments And so weve really been able to start thinking about again how every piece sort of leads towards the specific outcome

Richard Voos: Theres really two sides One is how are we organized how are our faculty organized to think about undergraduate general education and its connection through the majors right and not just in the core courses but what happens in those to develop students skills in those six essential capabilities through their major and how are we using a capstone that is happening in the major to help us assess our students skills across those six at the time of close to their graduation where they should be at the top of their skill level in those areas

***Tell us a story of how the use of goals and learning objectives has positively impacted student learning***

Chris Cratsley: When we were working with our sociology department one of the things that we were able to do is to ask them to reflect very carefully on for the purposes of their five-year review their program self-study reflect very carefully on what it was that students had learned No they had learning outcomes that they had set for their program and they but theres a couple different things that they hadnt thought through maybe as much as they would have liked to And this could be any program that can struggle with these same kinds of potential issues And so what they recognized through the process of starting to look at student data In their case they had student grades and individual courses that they thought might be indicative of reaching a particular learning outcome they had student grades on individual assignments that they thought might be indicative of students achieving a particular learning outcome And so we pulled all that together worked with them to pull all that together to summarize it and say you know what do you think are students really achieving these learning outcomes And what we found was that for some of the learning outcomes that they had in particular things like the ways in which students were able to recognize the application of sociological theories to actual real-world instances That that needed to be strengthened They needed to think about a way a course in their curriculum could actually ask students to approach applying the sociological theory to a real-world real-life situation Because they had that expectation of students that they were going to go out in the world and in some way use this content that they developed and these theories use them in real-world situations but they didnt have you know and internship they didnt have and experience even just course-based where students were really applying that in a real-world setting And so they wanted to build on that and improve that and I think that without that reflection without a reflection on the learning outcome that they themselves had set But sometimes we set them and we set them aside and what we need to do it set them and come back to them And when we do we start to remember sometimes whats really important to us for our students and how we can better achieve those goals

Richard Voos: For the first time we have had explicit literacy goals for those students and explicit instruction and what we are learning is that there is a long way to go that theres a great gap in students understanding students understanding of sources use of sources of paraphrasing of citation – all of the aspects of information literacy but having that explicit goal changes the conversation from from weve caught you cheating weve caught you plagiarizing you have not lived up to our standards of academic integrity to a conversation about learning

Regina Doherty: Course objectives sort of guide some of the activities and one of the activities that we do is some mind-mapping and some students love it and some students hate it And after that activity we talk about how its one of the ways that they can reflect on who they are as thinkers and learners and thats one of the objectives of the course is to understand their own thinking style and it helps them to be more aware of why I would force them to do that This is so hard for me! I know its so hard for you but its really easy for her and you have to understand that people think differently and they reason differently and a learning activity doesnt have to be something that you like but it should be something that you learn from

***Why are defining goals and learning objectives an important investment to your institution program or course***

Chris Cratsley: At the end of the day this is what were all here for Were all here for student learning And if we dont know really know what were here for I mean we think we know yeah students are going to learn something But if we dont really know what it is were here for what and we dont really share a vision of what it is that were here for and what students to accomplish then I think that were kind of lost

Tracy Brudvig: Well it helps me from a faculty perspective make sure that were meeting the standards that are set by the accreditation commission It helps students know about expectations helps organize their own learning and studying and it gives me as a faculty member feedback as far as effectiveness from a teaching perspective and I think it gives students feedback from the perspective of a learner

Laura Saunders: I think that its important because as a faculty we have to know what it is that were trying to accomplish And we run the risk of getting really mired in our own sort of small narrow aspects of the field so it gets us all on the same page and I think it helps us to work towards the same goals As I mentioned before too I think it helps us to standardize things a little bit

Regina Doherty: It helps you orient to what youre there to do If you dont set a goal or a learning objective you can get lost in the content without remembering what you want to student to gain from the content So theres so much content that without the goals to sort of drive the learning and its a way to help the student know this is what Im getting out of this course this is what this course is supposed to be about And it can help guide faculty organizing their assessment measures for that content I dont know how you can do it without it