Guidance: Target Setting

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) should answer the question: what should students know and be able to do upon successful completion of the program? As a result, deciding the degree to which students are expected to achieve the SLO is important.

Setting your target can seem like a daunting task. We want all students to be successful, however what success looks like can vary across programs or even outcomes. While setting a target may seem arbitrary, program faculty must agree on what the minimum level of acceptable student performance is. So how do we set our targets appropriately?

1. Consider what your target says about the degree of expectations for your program. Setting a target of "60% of students will earn 'meets expectations' or higher on the rubric" indicates that your program is satisfied with 40% of students *not* meeting expectations. Ask: what percentage of students should meet or exceed expectations to *successfully complete* the program?

2. Look at the historic data for your program. What percentage of students typically meet the expectations outlined? If your students are consistently meeting your predetermined target, it is likely time to revisit and make a data-driven increase to it. If your target was set at 80% of students meeting the expectations and 83% of your students have met the target on average over the past 3 years, then an 85% target may be appropriate. Similarly, if 100% of students are meeting expectations, it may be time to increase the target percentage of students who will exceed expectations.

3. Consider what other similarly situated programs in your discipline are accomplishing. Are other programs in the region or of similar ranking expecting 90% of their students to meet a goal? Benchmarking across programs can be very useful to see what is expected of graduates of other institutions.

A few rules of thumb. Consistently over-achieving on your target means it is probably not correctly set for your program. Consistently under-achieving on your target means there are likely curricular and process-oriented actions that should be undergone to recalibrate. Assessment is about findings data-driven ways to continuously improve.

For help setting targets aligned with your program's student learning outcomes and historic data, please contact Tara Rose (trose@lsu.edu) with questions.