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Syllabus Development: Crafting Learning Goals

While the language of learning goals and objectives may feel foreign, what good goals strive for is familiar: the skills, knowledge, understanding, and dispositions that we want our students to cultivate. When your syllabi articulate clearly those goals, students are better able to recognize and strive to attain them. We often think of goals in terms of knowledge, conceptual understanding, and critical thinking and other skills; you may also want to consider helping students to develop qualities like independence and curiosity or habits of mind, such as metacognition – learning about their own learning – by explicitly stating them in your course goals. Your course objectives are the narrower and more concrete measures that will help your students reach the larger goals.

Complete this sentence stem: **"By the end of the course, I want my students to be able to…"**

Some Categories (& Examples) to Consider[1]

Identify or Describe Content, Vocabulary, and Concepts
- Identify key economic terms.
- Describe important concepts, principles, and theories of psychology.
- Be able to state physics concepts in students' own words, and discuss what the students don't know.

Conduct Research or Solve Problems in the Discipline
- Analyze the feasibility of marketing a consumer item in a foreign country.
- Synthesize information from various sources to arrive at intervention tactics for a client.

Make Ethical Choices
- Follow the ethical practices of the discipline in human and animal research, use of sources, and collaboration.

Expand Worldview; Consider Big Questions
- Exit with a sense of wonder (for a physics course).
- Develop creativity by making unusual connections, looking at something in a fresh way, noticing unusual relationships or aspects of the topic…

Develop Qualities and Habits of Mind
- Habitually question statistical data for their reliability and validity.
- Develop appreciation for unfamiliar works of art.
- Appreciate the pig.

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[1] Adapted from Barbara E. Walvoord and Viginia Johnson Anderson. _Effective Grading_. 2nd ed. (2010), pg. 8.

Sample Learning Goals & Objectives

Classics 346: *Cicero* at College of New Rochelle (Ann R. Raia) [2]

Students will demonstrate:

- facility in reading Latin aloud in the original, both prepared and at sight, and the ability to translate it into contemporary English;
- mastery of the foundational vocabulary, and syntax of Cicero's philosophical and rhetorical Latin;
- familiarity with the history, culture, mores, and physical layout of Republican Rome during its last chaotic years, as portrayed by a passionate defender of republican values;
- understanding of Cicero's humanism and his influence on Western thought;
- ability to access and use on-line resources to explore the language and culture of ancient Rome.

Economics 242: *Economics of Local Environmental Programs* at Bryn Mawr College (David R. Ross)

Learning objectives:

- Mastery of the elementary principles and analytical tools of economics as applied to explaining and mitigating environmental harms.
- Confidence in being able to discuss a broad range of environmental challenges faced by local communities
- The ability to communicate orally or in writing in clear, coherent and persuasive language appropriate to purpose, occasion and audience with others inside and outside the academy; with a particular focus on writing to:
    - Summarize research/fact finding
    - Apply the analytical tools of economics
    - Persuade through economic arguments
    - Reflect on and evaluate progress in meeting other learning goals
- Mutually beneficial collaborative exchange: use each of the following to support the other learning goals of the course and the goals of partners:
    - Small group interactions
    - Class discussion
    - Interviewing
- Brief presentations to inform or persuade an individual or group
- Demonstrated success in enhancing one's own and the learning of others.

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[2] This and the following example are from Swarthmore College, Assessment Resources web page.

Good learning goal statements have some elements in common:

1. They **focus on the end** (what the student will be able to do), **<u>not</u> the means** (what is taught);
2. They are neither too broad nor too specific (clarify "fuzzy terms");
3. They use **action words** when possible: *define, argue, solve, create* – which are more helpful than *know, understand, be exposed to*.