

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

Missouri Valley College

Academic Program Mission, Goals, and Assessment

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What is an academic program mission statement?

An academic program mission describes the overall purpose of the program. It may include a brief history and philosophy of the program, the type of students to be served, the contributions to the community, or other aspects of the program deemed important and/or unique.

How does an academic program mission statement relate to the Missouri Valley College mission?

An academic program mission statement should be consistent with and grounded in the Missouri Valley College mission and goals. This ensures that the program supports what the institution values and that the program will foster institutional support.

What is the purpose of an academic program mission statement?

An academic program mission statement guides planning and operation. A mission statement is also the starting point for an assessment program. Once a meaningful mission statement is developed by a consensus of faculty, goals and learning outcomes can be determined. In turn, once the learning outcomes are defined, methods can then be used to assess whether students have achieved the expected learning outcomes. Information from this assessment can be used for program modification and improvement. A mission statement, in short, is essential in determining key indicators of program success and using these indicators to further improve the program.

Is there a standard format for an academic program mission statement?

Mission statements can take on a wide range of formats and modes of expression to reflect the preferences of the program faculty and what they intend to convey. The primary goal is to provide the program with a clear statement of purpose. Therefore, a long and detailed mission is not recommended.

What is the process for developing or reviewing an academic program mission statement?

One way to start is to look at mission statements in similar programs across the country. Bring examples to a meeting of program faculty for discussion. Identify areas of agreement. If a statement is not formally developed at this meeting, a smaller group can create a working draft to circulate by e-mail with the larger group. Strive to come to a consensus in a week or two.

What are academic program goals?

Academic program goals are general purposes of the program and its curriculum. Select goals that most directly reflect what is most important for the program to achieve. Effective program goals are broadly stated, meaningful, achievable, and assessable. Program goals should be consistent with the program mission and the Missouri Valley College mission. Aim for three to eight program goals. Too many goals become unmanageable and may make the assessment process difficult. If you have more than eight goals, look for ways to group some goals together into one broader goal.

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What are student learning outcomes?

Program-level student learning outcomes describe what faculty deem important for students in the major to know, think, do, or value upon completion of the program. In other words, if program goals were met, think of what demonstrable skills and characteristics students would possess.

Use action words in stating student learning outcomes, and avoid verbs that are unclear and are subject to different interpretations. Some sample action verbs are: create, apply, design, utilize, demonstrate, explain, assess, critique, and compute. (Refer to Bloom's Taxonomy action verbs for more examples.) On the other hand, avoid vague verbs such as understand, learn, know, and appreciate. Keep in mind that student learning outcomes should be brief, clear, realistic, and measurable in some way to facilitate the assessment process.

In general, program goals focus on intentions and what the faculty members do while student learning outcomes focus on results and what students will learn. Most program goals can be easily translated into learning outcomes. (Exceptions to this are program goals that focus on aspects of service, research, or faculty.) For example, the program goal: "Ensure students have a solid grounding in music theory and history" can be converted to the student learning outcome: "Students will interpret and describe music through theoretical and historical approaches."

It is important to share the learning outcomes with the students in the program. This will encourage students to be more engaged in the learning process and with the direction of their education.

Note: It is acceptable for a program to state program goals in the form of student learning outcomes. In this case, program goals and student learning outcomes are the same.

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How does the program focus on student learning outcomes?

A course map or matrix can be used to show how courses in a program cover or emphasize different learning outcomes. A course map is a table with learning outcomes on one axis and courses in the major on the other. The cells of the table indicate the courses that cover the respective learning outcomes.

Program learning outcomes ↓	Course 1	Course 2	Course 3	Course 4
Outcome 1	X		X	X
Outcome 2		X	X	
Outcome 3		X	X	X

For example, in the table above, Outcome 1 is introduced in Course 1, then practiced and reinforced in Courses 3 and 4. Students will likely have greater success in achieving learning outcomes if they are given many and varied opportunities to develop their skills.

How are student learning outcomes being met?

After faculty deliberation, choose two (or more) learning outcomes deemed most important to be assessed. (It is not necessary to assess *everything*.) An assessment tool (or tools) is then chosen to assess student achievement in each of these learning outcomes. Information from these assessments helps provide the evidence necessary to determine if the program is successfully meeting its goals. Assessment methods should be feasible, manageable, and as simple as possible. Otherwise, the assessment process is difficult to sustain. If possible, several assessment tools are recommended rather than reliance on a single tool. Multiple measures will likely provide a more complete picture of student learning.

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What assessment tools are best to use?

There is a wide variety of assessment tools, but they can generally be classified into two categories, direct and indirect. Direct measures of assessment are those in which products of student work or demonstrations of student learning are evaluated. Examples include capstone experience, standardized tests, portfolio evaluation, and essay questions. Indirect measures of assessment are based on *perception* of achievement of learning outcomes rather than demonstration. Examples include alumni, employer, and student surveys, exit interviews of graduates and focus groups, and graduate follow-up studies.

Program faculty should choose assessment methods that are deemed most feasible, efficient, cost effective, and appropriate for the learning outcomes in their major. It will also be necessary to determine when assessment will take place, who is responsible, and how it will be carried out.

What is done with assessment results?

View assessment as an opportunity to improve the quality and effectiveness of the program to better serve the students. Faculty review and discuss assessment results, look for patterns, and determine if results are consistent or inconsistent. Identify areas in the program that are achieving program goals and areas that may warrant change for improvement. Once the assessment findings have been reviewed, faculty discuss recommendations for change or improvement and formulate a plan of action. The plan for improving the program is then implemented.

What is “closing the loop”?

The process of using assessment information for decision-making and planning for improvement is called “closing the loop.” The “loop” refers to the cyclic nature of the assessment process. Assessment is used in a repeating cycle for the purpose of continuously improving the program.

What documentation is required?

Each academic program will submit an annual Assessment and Planning Report with the following components:

- I. Mission
- II. Goals
- III. Student learning outcomes
- IV. Course map
- V. Assessment tools
- VI. Summary of findings
- VII. Level of achievement of goals
- VIII. Faculty/Student/Program information
- IX. Analysis/Interpretation
- X. Action plan

Yearly assessment records are used to document and support decisions for changes as well as to provide evidence of program improvement.