**ESS Strategic Planning – *Department Goals Guidance***

**Department goals are descriptive outcome statements specifying what a department will accomplish, and how, in fulfilling its mission.**

At the department level, goals describe ongoing or *cumulative* outcomes – not outcomes for individuals, but overall outcomes of programs and services for the *population* your department serves.

**A strong set of department goals should expand on the department’s mission statement and clearly answer the following questions:**

* What are our desired outcomes?
  + If we are making our desired impact, what measurable outcomes do we expect to see?
* How will we achieve those outcomes?
  + Which programs and/or services do we expect will produce these outcomes?

Department goals may also further define who we are working with, especially those goals specific to programs and services designated for specific student populations.

**Department Goal Formula: What + How = Goal**

Format: *“To achieve what by doing how.”*

... or if you have further defined who you are working with:

*“To achieve what for who(m) by doing how,”* or *“To achieve what by doing how with whom.”*

Example: “To increase awareness of campus and community resources for students living off-campus through strategic communication efforts.”

Each department goal should be *actionable* and *connect to a specific outcome*, and should satisfy the criteria of the “SMART” goal format:

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**Goals vs. Learning Outcomes**

When we refer to “**goals**” with regard to planning and assessment work in the ESS division, we are referring to *standing* goals, which describe the *ongoing* outcomes we seek to achieve through our work. At the department level, goals describe *cumulative* outcomes – not outcomes for individuals, but the overall outcomes of our programs and services for the population we serve. These *goals are “big picture” and typically assessed using cumulative measures, such as outcomes and service data, or aggregated survey results*.

Example: “Increase experiential opportunities and professional connections by engaging students in volunteering, internships, and employer events.” This statement describes the cumulative outcomes of increased experiential opportunities and professional connections for students, a measure relative to the population being served – thus, the statement functions well as a goal. (Further, it’s a SMART [specific, measureable, attainable, reasonable, tangible] goal!)

In the process of developing goals, you will reflect on the outcomes your team seeks to achieve, and might identify some outcomes at the *individual* level. These are critical outcomes which are important to consider and measure, but we refer to these outcomes as “**learning outcomes**.” Whereas goals describe cumulative outcomes, *learning outcomes describe what a student (or other stakeholder) will know or be able to do as a result of our programs and services*.

Example: “To increase self-awareness, passion, and self-efficacy through developmental conversations in counseling appointments and utilizing appropriate assessment tools.” This statement describes the individual outcomes of increased self-awareness, passion, and self-efficacy – measures relative to each individual being served, and thus the statement may function better as a learning outcome.

But what about outcomes that seem to be (or could be) both individual and cumulative? For instance, the example learning outcome above is initially measured at the individual level (i.e. does *each student* report increased self-awareness?), but can also be measured at the cumulative level (i.e. what *percent of students overall* of students report increased self-awareness?). Here are some factors to consider when trying to distinguish between goals and learning outcomes:

* Remember, goals are big picture, and thus describe an “end” outcome. **If your statement describes a component or means to an end, it may function better as a learning outcome**. (In this way, learning outcomes assessed at the individual level can “feed up” as measures of a larger cumulative outcome.)

*Consider:* Are self-awareness, passion, and self-efficacy the “end” outcomes, or perhaps measures of a broader outcome (“personal career readiness,” for instance)?

* Typically, learning outcomes are associated with a single program or service. **If your statement describes an outcome resulting from multiple programs or services, it may function better as a goal**. (Goals can be cumulative in terms of the level of the outcome [individual/population], the measures associated with the outcome [single/multiple], and/or the activities producing the outcome [single/multiple].)

*Consider:* Are developmental conversations and utilizing appropriate assessment tools distinct services, or perhaps part of the same general service (“career counseling,” for instance).

* Generally speaking, the distinguishing factors between goals and learning outcomes are scope and term. **Goals are broader and more long-term, and learning outcomes are more focused and more short-term**. In this way, goals are “higher-order,” and may describe the cumulative impact of multiple learning outcomes. Conversely, learning outcomes can serve to further define the specifics of a broader goal. A draft outcomes statement may end up somewhere between a goal and a learning outcome, and may need to be refined in one direction or the other to be most useful for your planning purposes!