Linking Seminar Learning Goals to PhD Program Goals in Your Syllabus

Introduction

Learning goals that are clearly stated in the learner's terms must be included in every syllabus for every doctoral seminar taught in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. This practice helps students get a clear picture of what is expected of them in the seminar, keep on track with their learning, and at the end of the seminar, evaluate the sufficiency and quality of instruction aimed toward those goals. At the same time, well-articulated learning goals can help faculty frame the work they do as teachers around student learning rather than content coverage.

With respect to assessment, the inclusion of learning goals in seminar syllabi is one way to help both students and faculty see the coherence of a program's curriculum. That is, when syllabi draw explicit connections between seminar learning goals and program learning goals, both students and faculty are able to see how the learning in that particular seminar relates to the overall learning for a given degree. Unfortunately, this latter relationship has often been missing in students' experience at universities: all too often, students see their various seminars as discrete entities with little or no relationship to each other or to a coherent set of learning goals. The inclusion of learning goals for the seminar, program learning goals for the degree, and a statement relating the two can do much to help students see this important relationship.

Procedure

Step 1: Articulate learning goals for your seminar.

Learning goals should be articulated in terms of what students should be able to do by the end of your seminar. For support and suggestions about articulating learning goals, refer to this link, articulating clear learning goals.

Here is an example of a statement of learning goals:

By the end of this seminar, students will be able to develop an Excel spreadsheet to analyze a data set related to a business problem. Based on their analysis, they will be able to recommend a sound solution to the problem in clear, concise writing.

Once articulated, include these learning goals directly in your syllabus, preferably early in the document to highlight their importance.

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1 http://kelley.iu.edu/ICWEB/Assurance/CourseGoals/LinkingLearningOutcomes/page25113.html
Step 2: Identify which program goals are addressed by which seminar learning goals

Refer to the official graduate program learning goals posted on our website. These goals will become an appendix in your syllabus to which you will refer as you relate your learning goals to the program's learning goals.

Now, have another look at your seminar learning goals and determine which of the program's learning goals are addressed by select seminar learning goals. Bear in mind, some of your learning goals may not link to any of the program's learning goals, and that is expected and acceptable.

Optional Step 3: Append your learning goals with a parenthetical reference to a corresponding Program Learning Goal. It is not necessary or expected that every learning goal links to a program-wide learning goal.

Be sure to explain to students what the parenthetical reference is and where they can reference the program learning goals, i.e., in the appendix.

Here's what the above example might look like:

By the end of this seminar, students should be able to develop an Excel spreadsheet to analyze a data set related to a business problem. Based on their analysis, they should be able to recommend a sound solution to the problem in clear, concise writing. (This learning goal supports learning goals 1 and 3 of the Graduate Program. A complete listing of learning goals for the Graduate Program may be found in the Appendix to this syllabus).

Important last note

Just as it is not expected or necessary that each learning goal map to a program learning goal, it is not expected or even recommended that all program learning goals be addressed by a seminar’s learning goals. Typically, one or two learning goals at the most will be supported by the seminar’s learning goals.