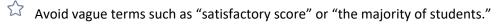# A Quick Guide for Setting Benchmarks

Benchmarks, sometimes referred to as "targets" or "standards," define how an academic program determines the success of a class or cohort. Each student learning outcome statement should have an established benchmark indicating an acceptable or ideal level of student achievement.

Guidelines

Be Specific

- ☆ Define success clearly by stating an **ideal percentage** of students obtaining a **specific score, rating, or grade.**
- ☆ Avoid vague terms such as "satisfactory score" or "the majority of students."
- ☆ Use language that a new faculty member or department chair would understand.
- ☆ Include details such as courses, assignment names, and scoring methods.

Stay Aligned

- ☆ Benchmarks should align **directly** with your data source. If an exam or assignment is used for assessment, the benchmark should correspond to a score or rating on the exam or assignment under review.
- ☆ Each data source included in your PLOAP should have a corresponding benchmark.

Balance Rigor and Reality

- ☆ Avoid setting benchmarks at 100%.
- ☆ Do not set benchmarks at the minimum value such as "graduate students earning a B or better."

Be Informed

- ☆ Do some external research - appropriate disciplinary associations, web search for examples, colleagues, peer programs, or external (certification or licensure examinations) standards.
- ☆ Involve others in the standards-setting process; work with faculty, students, and employers.
- ☆ Use samples of student work to inform your discussion. Implement assessment on a small scale, and gather work samples to help determine exemplary to inadequate work.

FAQs

What happens if we don't meet a benchmark? Meeting or exceeding a benchmark can be important to a program; however, the Office of EEA emphasizes that the use of results for improvement is the most critical component in the assessment process. This is not to say that benchmarks are arbitrary, just that what you learn from comparing actual to benchmark findings can be extremely valuable.

Can we change a benchmark? Yes. Benchmarking is a continuous process so once you have set your initial standards and targets, you should be ready to adjust or modify them based on your implementation.