

Guidelines for Learning Goals in the Major

Context

As curriculum committees in departments/programs discuss and review their majors, the Provost's Advisory Committee on the Assessment of Student Learning would like to offer some guidelines for articulating learning goals in the major.

Departments/programs that have identified goals for their majors this academic year will be able to include these in the University Bulletin 2010-2011 under the **Objectives** section of that unit. By the end of academic year 2011, all majors and minors should have learning goals ready to be listed in the Bulletin.

Conceptual Models

To offer some consistency while displaying departments' and programs' 'personality' or uniqueness, the committee recommends the following:

1) Some *Narrative* about the field. This could provide context on the discipline, outline the central questions that the major addresses, describe 'tracks' within the major and connections to other disciplines. Some text about learning goals for non-majors, if these differ, would be helpful for students. This section could also acknowledge that there are different approaches to conceptualizing learning goals in the major.

2) A series of sections with these subheadings from the University Learning Goals: *Knowledge, Core Skills, Social Justice*, provides a common framework that will be helpful to students who are contemplating and ultimately selecting majors. It also mirrors students' progression through a major: first they come to understand key disciplinary elements, then they acquire skills, and finally they begin to think about how they can apply what they've learned in the world. This division also separates what students are expected to understand (cognitive) from what skills they are expected to acquire (behavioral). The Social Justice section emphasizes the broader aspects of a Brandeis education, and departments could indicate here how the major equips students to affect society.

Reflection about how the major's goals connect to specific components of the University Learning Goals is also encouraged; this may be incorporated in the narrative or delineated as unique learning goals. No one major can encompass all of these goals; therefore, focus on the goals that are most applicable.

3) Departments may also want to include a section, *Upon Graduation*, that demonstrates how studying the major prepares students for productive lives, whether in research or careers.

Not all departments may want to have such a complete description of learning goals. A shorter model may simply have two subheadings: Knowledge and Core Skills, with some connections to the University Learning Goals.

If departments are seeking feedback about their draft learning goals, the Assessment Committee would be willing to offer advice and feedback. If you're interested, please contact Michael Whelan (mwhelan@brandeis.edu) or 6-2177.