



# Office for Institutional Assessment Clemson University “S.M.A.R.T.” Objectives

## Goals vs. Objectives

Understanding the differences between a goal and an objective can be confusing. Goals are broad, brief statements of intent that provide focus or vision for planning. Goals are warm and fuzzy. They are non-specific, non-measurable, and usually cannot be definitively attained. For example, a goal might be:

*“Clemson University graduates will excel in a globally competitive economy.”*

## Objectives:

Objectives are meant to be realistic targets for the department, program or project. Objectives are written in an active tense and use strong verbs like *“plan,” “write,” “conduct,” “produce,”* etc. rather than learn, understand, or feel. They will always answer the following question:

*WHO is going to do WHAT, WHEN, WHY (what will be demonstrated or achieved),  
and TO WHAT STANDARD?*

Some of the most common errors in writing objectives include writing an objective like an activity, writing an objective like a vision; or writing too many objectives.

## **“S.M.A.R.T.” Objectives:**

S.M.A.R.T. Objectives refers to an acronym built around the five leading measures of a strong program:

**Specific**     ***What exactly are we going to do, with or for whom?***

The program states a specific outcome, or a *precise* objective to be accomplished. The outcome is stated in numbers, percentages, frequency, reach, scientific outcome, etc.

**Measurable**     ***Is it measurable & can WE measure it?***

This means that the objective can be measured and the measurement source is identified. All activities should be measurable at some level.

**Achievable**     ***Can we get it done in the proposed timeframe/in this environment/within our budget constraints?***

The objective or expectation of what will be accomplished must be realistic given the internal and external environments in which you are operating, time period, resources allocated, etc.

**Relevant**     ***Will this objective lead to the desired results?***

This means that the outcome or results of the program directly supports the goals, objectives and priorities of the department and University.

**Time-Framed**     ***When will be accomplish this objective?***

This means stating clearly when the objective will be achieved—in most cases, this refers to the specific assessment cycle (i.e., FY 2010).

**NOTE:** In our uses of the WEAVEonline system, “S.M.A.R.T.” objectives are synonymous with “Achievement Targets.” If you establish a high-quality “S.M.A.R.T.” objective, you may also use it for the Achievement Target within your development of assessment Measures.

## **Types of Objectives:**

There are three main types of objectives that may be used in developing a program/project plan: process, impact, and outcome.

**Process Objectives** Process objectives help you be more accountable by setting specific numbers/types of activities to be completed by specific dates. Process objectives tell what you are doing and how you will do it. They describe participants, interactions and activities.

**Example: By June 30 2010, the Office for Institutional Assessment will train at least 150 Clemson University department and/or program staff in WEAVEonline assessment management system functions.**

**Impact Objectives** Impact objectives tell how you will change attitudes, knowledge or behavior in the short term and describe the degree to which you expect this change.

**Example: At the end of academic year 2010-2011, Senior scores will be at least 5% higher than Freshmen scores on critical thinking measures associated with the Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress (MAPP) examination.**

**Outcome Objectives** Outcome objectives tell what the long-term implications of your program will be by describing the expected outcome for the University. (Outcome objectives are less easily measurable because many different elements may influence what is being measured.)

**Example: By 2015, Clemson University will attain at least a 95% Freshman-to-sophomore retention rate.**