Chapter Two: The Assessment Team and Setting Program Goals

Following the framework provided in Chapter One, in this chapter, we define the terminology used in this document. Program Goals are identified and a process for development and selection of goals offered. The chapter will end with a section on linking Program Goals to Expected Program Outcomes.

The Assessment Team

Before beginning, an essential step is to decide who or what group will be involved in outcomes assessment for the physical therapy education program. Clearly, all faculty and administrators ultimately will be involved, but decisions must be made regarding who will lead assessment efforts and who has ultimate responsibility to ensure that outcomes assessment is performed. In addition, there should be authority for following through on decisions made. In many cases, programs designate an Assessment Team of faculty and staff members, who report and have authority through the dean of academic affairs. Several roles may exist on an Assessment Team: faculty (assistant, associate, and full professor), academic advisors, career counselors and others from student services, and administrators.

Overview of Terminology

To maximize understanding of the information that follows, a common language was adopted for use in Outcomes Assessment in Physical Therapy Education. Based on CGUOA discussions, the following language was agreed upon for the various components of outcomes assessment described in this document. The components are meant to be hierarchical, such that, starting at the lowest level, the target and threshold relate to a specific indicator, which relates to a specific Expected Outcome, which relates to a specific Program Goal.

Overarching Program Goals (Chapter 2)
   Expected Outcomes for Program, Faculty, and Graduates/Students (Chapter 2)
   Indicators (Chapter 3)
   Targets and/or Thresholds (Chapter 3)

What Are Program Goals?

The first step in outcomes assessment is writing overarching Program Goals. This section will address what goals are, how to write Program Goals, how to select relevant Program Goals, and how Expected Outcomes are developed to assess goal achievement. Huba and Freed (2000) envision the relationship of learning outcomes for an institution, a particular academic program, courses that comprise that program, units within courses, and finally lessons with units (Figure 2). Although specific to learning outcomes, this illustration helps frame how the outcomes or Program Goals of an academic program—the physical therapy education program—are related to academic structures both broader than and included within the program.
Overarching Program Goals are broad statements that reflect the desired results that physical therapy education program faculty and students strive to achieve. Goals are realistic and achievable statements expressing what the program must achieve to accomplish its mission (CAPTE). As such, Program Goals should be grounded in both the program’s and institution’s mission and values to ensure that assessment becomes the process of improving what key stakeholders (primarily faculty and administrators) have decided is important for the institution and program (AAHE, n.d.). This description of Program Goals is consistent with CAPTE’s 2006 Evaluative Criteria for Accreditation of Education Programs for the Preparation of Physical Therapists (“P-2. The program has goals that are based on its stated mission”) and with CAPTE’s 2002 Evaluative Criteria for Accreditation of Education Programs for the Preparation of Physical Therapist Assistants (“1.2.2. The goals and objectives of the physical therapist assistant program support the program’s mission and philosophy and are consistent with the mission and philosophy of the institution”). A program’s mission is a statement of beliefs that guides planning and operation, describes why the entity exists, and includes the unique features of the entity (Haessig & Potin, 2002, p. 10).

Aligning a physical therapy education program’s mission and goals with the institutional mission frames outcomes assessment within the context of what the institution values. This linkage fosters institutional support for outcomes assessment and any resulting quality improvement in physical therapy education programs. This association is illustrated in the next section and throughout Outcomes Assessment in Physical Therapy Education. (Haessig & Potin, 2002, p. 7). To facilitate this process, the broader overarching Program Goal statements should be expressed in quantifiable and assessable outcome measures.
Writing Program Goals

Basing Program Goals on the program and institutional mission statements ensures that goals are relevant and meaningful. It is considered good practice for goals to reflect outcomes that encompass all physical therapy education program activities, which can usually be divided into three categories: student/graduate, faculty, and program. The following section provides a guide to writing Program Goals.

- Gather and review the following:
  - Program and institutional mission statements and goals,
  - Professional documents that describe expected skills and abilities of the graduate (Evaluative Criteria, Normative Model, National Physical Therapy Examination blueprint, minimal skills documents, Professionalism Core Values).
  - Previous assessment data, where applicable.
- Brainstorm about what the physical therapy education program wants to accomplish.
  - Brainstorming is typically done with all core faculty or a subgroup of the core faculty, as well as with any other individuals the program wishes to include.
  - The identification of what the program wants to accomplish should reflect not just the curricular goals, but also the goals of the program and faculty.
- Draft broad statements describing what the physical therapy education program wants to accomplish.
  (When the cycle restarts again, these broad statements may indicate a new focus or initiative for the program.)
- Refine the broad statements into realistic, achievable, and measurable Program Goals.
- Obtain approvals as appropriate for your institution.

Refer to Appendix B for examples of Program Goals.

Selecting Relevant Program Goals

At this point, the Assessment Team should have a list of potential overarching Program Goals, from which it will select those that most directly reflect, at that time, what is most important for the physical therapy education program to achieve and assess. Selecting a manageable number of Program Goals for the assessment process will enhance the physical therapy education program’s ability to complete the assessment process in a timely and useful manner. To maximize manageability, select no more than three to five Program Goals for assessment and no more than three to five Expected Program Outcomes.

The following guidelines may be useful in identifying overarching Program Goals on which to focus in the Assessment Plan.

- Goals should link to the institution’s strategic plan and reflect how the physical therapist education program fits within the context of the institution’s mission, ie, core curriculum.
- Consider identifying Program Goals that focus on program improvement.
- Determine if any institutional or accrediting agency mandates must be included.
- Look for opportunities to group goals together as broader statements.
- Consider the needs of external stakeholders (eg, clinicians, health care system).

Linking Program Goals to Expected Program Outcomes

The next step in outcomes assessment is to write Expected Program Outcomes based on Program Goals. As defined by CAPTE, Expected Program Outcomes are predictable and demonstrable results of program, faculty, and student activities directed toward achievement of the stated Program Goals. Outcomes make goals quantifiable and assessable (Haessig & Potin, 2002, p. 7). Expected Program Outcomes can be categorized as student/graduate, faculty, or program outcomes. Expected Program Outcomes may also relate to more than one goal (see Appendix B for examples).
Some suggestions on how to write Expected Program Outcome statements include:

- For Expected Program Outcomes reflecting student/graduate outcomes, it may be helpful to begin with the phrase: “Upon completion of the program, students/graduates will be ....” Refrain from writing student/graduate program outcome statements that reflect what the instruction will be or what faculty will do. (Walvoord, 2004, p. 53)

- Faculty Expected Program Outcomes may begin with the following phrase: “Faculty of the physical therapy education program will....”

- Program-level Expected Program Outcomes may begin with the following phrase: “The physical therapy education program will....”

An example of a Program Goal that will be used throughout this document is: “Graduates will demonstrate the skills necessary for the entry-level practice of physical therapy.” An Expected Program Outcome that comes from this Program Goal is: “Students/graduates will communicate with various constituents in a manner that reflects their level of knowledge, considers health literacy, is sensitive to cultural issues, and demonstrates respect.”

**Summary**

This chapter has focused on developing strong Program Goals and Expected Program Outcomes that illustrate a strong link between the program and university mission and outcomes. It has also provided a foundation for and will facilitate the building and implementation of an equally strong Assessment Plan by physical therapy education programs.