



MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY ASSESSMENT

Benchmarking Student Learning and Development in Student Affairs

Marquette University
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Be The Difference.

“Again this year, the majority of our students are ranked ‘competent’ or ‘proficient’ for each learning outcome, which we are happy to see.”

“Overall, we are satisfied with our results.”

“Outcomes are good, but could be better.”

What **IS** the desired state?

What percentage of students in your program should perform at what level and against what (or whose) standards for you to be satisfied that your program is doing what you intend?

On what basis do you decide, “This is good enough”.

Benchmarking is a multi-step process:

1. Choose the type of benchmark.
2. Set standards for performance.
3. Set **targets** for collective performance.

Local benchmarks: Are our students meeting our own standards?

“We expect that at least **85%** of our students will agree or strongly agree that they are able to respectfully engage in conversations about diversity.”

The standard is “agree or strongly agree.”

The target is **85%**

Local benchmarks:

- How do you decide what should be the standard and target?
- Can you defend your standard and target?
- Are student self-reports reliable?
- How do you aggregate several survey or rubric items to arrive at a single target number?

External benchmarks: Are our students meeting the standards set by someone else?

Peer benchmarks: How do our students compare with peers in other colleges or universities?

“We used the national average for private, doctoral institutions as a benchmark. Any student who scored 3.54 or below did not meet our goal; any student who scored between 3.55 – 4.55 met our goal, and any student who scored above 4.29 exceeded our goal.”

[We expect **80%** of our students to meet or exceed the goal.]

External benchmarks:

- Is relevant data available for appropriate peers?
- Where do you set your standard? Is the peer average an appropriate mark?
- What is the target?

Value-added benchmarks: Are our students improving?

“The mean score on the original resume was 17, and the mean score on the resume after feedback and revision was 21 (out of a possible 24 points).”

“Our target this year was to simply **see improvement.**”

Value-added benchmarks:

- Is this type of benchmark relevant? Useful?
- Are you sure any change is the result of your program (and not something else?)
- Are your instruments precise enough for pre-post comparisons?
- What is the target gain?

Trend benchmarks: Is our program improving?

“Results from the past three years indicate that, on average, 60-78% of participants agree that the program contributed to increased awareness in themselves and the ability to make positive changes in themselves and their relationships.”

[Our target is to increase agreement to **75 – 80%** over five years.]

Trend benchmarks:

- Is your assessment data available and comparable from one year to the next?
- What is the purpose of doing a trend?
- What are the targets? Do you expect change?

1. How would you rate your current level of competence in the following areas:

	Expert	Advanced	Competent	Developing	Beginning
Listening skills					
Teamwork skills					
Working with difficult people					
Acting professionally					
Prioritizing tasks					
Using decision making skills					
Managing crisis situations					
Resolving conflict					
Communicating effectively(written)					
Communicating effectively(verbally)					
Treating others with respect					
Making ethical decisions					
Leadership skills					
Appreciation for diversity					

Defining Standards for Local Benchmarks:

- Which response represents a student who minimally benefitted from our program?
(We'll call that 'met')
- Which response represents a student who benefitted the most from our program? (We'll call that 'exceeds')
- All others are 'not met'.

Set targets for collective performance

- Do you expect every student to meet your minimum standard?
- “All participants will report that their understanding of Ignatian spirituality increased at least moderately.”
- 50% of participants will report that their understanding of Ignatian spirituality increased ‘a great deal.’

Some final advice:

- Express targets as percentages rather than means.
- If you set your criteria for success based on current data, you may be satisfied with what is, rather than what should be.
- Set “stretch” targets. “Doing good” is not good enough, especially if targets are easily attained.
- View target setting as an iterative process.

Look at your own program assessment report:

- What type of benchmark are you using? Is there a better one?
- Have you set a standard? Are you happy with it? If not, what standard could you set?
- Have you set a target? How would you set one?

For more information on Setting Benchmarks:

Suskie, L. (2009). *Assessing student learning: A common sense guide*. Second Edition. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass (see Chapter 15).

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