Personal Goal Setting

Setting SMART goals allows you to identify the process for getting where you would like to go, much like identifying where you want to go on a trip and then planning the route for getting there.

When you decide you want to go somewhere on spring break you check with your friends, you read travel information, you surf the web, and check out the many available opportunities. Setting goals during and after your college career is much like planning for spring break, but the stakes are much higher.

Consider your goals for after graduation as the location you are heading toward, and the things you need to do to get there as the journey. If you put some thought into the journey you will have a better chance of ending your college career at the destination of your choice.

In order to set strong, useful goals, it is helpful to consider the “SMART” acronym, which stands for Specific, Measurable, Action-Oriented, Realistic, and Timed.

Specific: Goals should be straightforward and emphasize what you want to accomplish. Being specific will assist you in focusing your efforts and defining what you will need to do to accomplish the goal.

Measurable: If you can’t measure it, you can’t manage it. Use a calendar (planner or an app on your phone) to track what you are doing to achieve your goal. This will show the progress you have made and help provide motivation to keep working toward success. Make sure your goal has a way of being tracked or monitored.

Action-Oriented: If there is an action list to be completed to reach this goal, you have the steps to get to the end. Make sure the actions draw from the two previous characteristics, i.e. actions need to be specific and measurable so there is no question about what you need to do.

Realistic: Make sure the goal you are setting is possible; consider time, people, resources, and unknown barriers. For example, if your G.P.A. in high school was 1.5 getting a 4.0 your first semester of college may be difficult. Allow yourself the chance to succeed, shoot for a 2.0 and go from there.

Timed: Set a timeframe for the goal: for next week, in three months, by the end of the semester. Putting an end point on your goal gives you a clear target to work toward. Time must be measurable and realistic.

“People with goals succeed because they know where they are going. It's as simple as that.”

~Earl Nightingale
Steps to Success:

Step One: Identify the destination, and then begin to plan your journey. Once you have set a goal it is important to take the necessary steps that will help allow for your goal to be accomplished.

Step Two: Develop your knowledge and skills related to the goal. It is okay to admit you do not know everything. Take some time to research any additional information or resources that could be utilized to help reach your goal.

Step Three: Plan your journey. By planning steps to help you reach your goal, you are much more likely to succeed in reaching it. Plan for bumps in the road and delays. Do not let these discourage you, just keep working for what you set out for in the beginning.

Short Term Vs. Long Term Goals

Short Term: Goals that are current, typically to be accomplished within the semester or year.

It is helpful to keep a written record of your accomplishments and how these accomplishments are moving you toward achieving your goals. Updating your list of accomplishments frequently can be motivating as it will demonstrate the progress you have made. It should also serve as a resource for you to return to when making a resume or preparing for an upcoming job interview. If you rely solely on your memory you may easily forget about an important accomplishment to share.

Long Term: These goals have a longer timeline, typically post-graduation or post-grad school. To reach long term goals it is important to set short term goals along the way to reach the goal.

• What you have already done to help you reach your goal? For example, if becoming fluent in Spanish is your long range goal, then having taken Spanish in high school is something you have already done to help you reach this goal.

• What do you need to do to reach your goal? This might include incorporating a trip to Spain or spending a semester studying abroad into your plans.

Both of these questions can be answered quickly, but if they are going to be useful, they need to be thought through and require some research. Once you acknowledge what you have already accomplished and what else needs to be accomplished, make note of both. It is important to see what you have already done, but also important to see what else needs to be done so you can reach your long term goal.