As a means of encouraging faculty discussion of how we might make the assessment of student learning more useful to us in both curricular and resource planning, I conducted a modest study of the learning goals that faculty, departments, and programs have articulated over the last decade. The first step toward meaningful assessment is to create a set of goals that articulate what, specifically, we want students to learn in our courses, our departments, and comprehensively over their time at Kenyon. These are the goals that assessment projects are designed to measure. Without clearly articulated learning goals, assessment is an empty process. This report shows that individual Kenyon faculty and departments have long had a fairly clear sense of their learning goals, although they have not always been clearly articulated. In addition, those goals line up with the college’s stated general education goals; that is, the college’s general education goals are also goals in many Kenyon classes. However, the report also shows that some important general education goals do not appear in the learning goals of departments and individual courses as frequently as we might like. Whether this is because they are not taught in many classes, because they are appropriately taught in specialized courses relevant to only a few departments, or because we have simply neglected to mention them is less clear and might provide a basis for a faculty discussion. It is worth noting that faculty reporting of learning goals has remained consistent over the last decade.

**Historical Background and Sources**

In 1999, as part of the self-study for the last reaccreditation visit, the Self-Study Steering Committee developed a survey to identify the goals that Kenyon faculty emphasize in their courses. Twenty-one goals were listed on the questionnaire and faculty were asked to indicate for each course they taught which goals were emphasized in the course. Of those, they were also asked to identify the five most important goals in each class. One hundred and five faculty completed the form for a 70% response rate, reporting on goals for 517 different classes.

The graph below shows the twenty-one goals selected by the Steering Committee and the number of classes for which faculty reported the goal and the number of classes for which they indicated that it was one of the five most important goals in the class.
Figure 1: Results of 2000 Learning Goals Study

Examples of Goal Statements from 1999 survey:

1. Students develop the ability to think critically.
2. Students learn how to synthesize information.
3. Students are able to analyze texts closely.
4. Students demonstrate appropriate research skills.

The study demonstrated that Kenyon faculty focus primarily on discipline specific goals. However, many of Kenyon’s stated general education goals were also stressed throughout the curriculum. The survey also showed that general education goals are stressed just as much in advanced courses and seminars as they are in introductory courses. Students’ ability to think critically and to synthesize and integrate information and ideas appeared for more than 75% of the courses, while writing was stressed as a goal in two-thirds. Students’ ability to draw logical inferences and the process of creative thinking or problem solving are also emphasized in a majority of courses, and students’ ability to analyze texts closely, speaking, and research skills are stressed in close to one-half of all courses. Goals stressed in about 40% of Kenyon classes in 2000 include “understanding a society” and collaborative experiences or skills. The expansion of multicultural curricula throughout the 1990s was indicated in the finding that about 38% of courses emphasize multicultural themes.
In general the congruence between Kenyon’s Mission statement and the goals emphasized by faculty throughout the curriculum was striking. However, in 2000, the Self-Study Steering Committee felt that some of the results were less encouraging. Only about 30% of Kenyon courses emphasize quantitative reasoning and only about 30% emphasize “values or ethical choices.” Several other goals appear in only 10-20% of courses. These include study of texts in a foreign language, artistic creativity, and laboratory and studio experiences. The Steering Committee recommended that the faculty place greater stress on quantitative reasoning, foreign languages, laboratory courses in the sciences and studio courses in the fine arts.

But in another view, the problem the Steering Committee identified is not as great as they suggest. After all, many of the goals that were less frequently cited by the faculty correspond to courses that are taught in specific departments and rarely across the curriculum. That is, laboratory courses are taught exclusively in the sciences, studio courses exclusively in the fine arts, and language classes exclusively in either MLL or Classics. For this reason, we would not expect to find these listed as goals in a large percentage of our courses. [Query what percentage of Kenyon classes are quantitative, in another language, laboratory or studio. I suspect they are a small, specialized group of classes and that perhaps those experiences need to be regrouped to reflect that (i.e. primary and secondary goals)] Perhaps we should be more concerned that less than half of the courses had teaching research or speaking skills or emphasize “values or ethical choices,” goals which perhaps ought to be more widely shared.

How do things stand a decade later in 2009? To answer this question, I looked at two sources. The first set consisted of the goals set out in departmental mission statements, which I found either by consulting department assessment plans or, when they were missing, by consulting the departmental web site (N=24). Second I examined the goals listed by faculty who filled out the individual faculty reports for the General Education Assessment Report for 2007-08 (N=29). These samples differ from the 1999 survey in that they collected information from many fewer individuals and, rather than offering a set of goals from which individuals could choose, I abstracted goals from what departments and individual faculty said about their aims and objectives.

Examining departmental mission statements, I was able to discern about 15 different goals articulated by departments. Although phrased differently (I tried to stick to the language that departments used to articulate their goals), these contain some overlap with the 21 goals used in the 1999 survey.

Examples of Learning Goals:

1. Students learn to forge connections.
2. Students learn to communicate effectively in speech and writing.
3. Students learn how to collaborate with other students.
Figure 2 shows the frequency with which these goals were mentioned in departmental mission statements.

The four most frequently mentioned goals in this sample are analytic thinking, forging connections, effective communication, and cultural diversity. While the goals that departments articulate for themselves differ somewhat in language from those articulated by the Steering Committee, there are important areas of overlap, especially in skills that might be labeled critical thinking, in writing and, in cultural diversity (corresponding to multicultural themes). Once again among the goals that were less frequently cited were, as expected, quantitative analysis, performance, and experimental research.

The final set of data I examined were the individual GEAR reports for 2007-08, which I mapped against the college’s General Education goals, which include the following:

A. Students learn to **acquire knowledge and understanding** of arts, humanities, natural sciences, and society.
B. Students learn to **acquire information** from a variety of sources and **evaluate its quality**.
C. Students learn to **formulate ideas rigorously** and to **communicate them effectively**, orally and in writing.
D. Students learn to **assess arguments**.
E. Students learn **quantitative skills** and to **analyze data**.
F. Students learn to **work creatively**.
G. Students learn to **work collaboratively**.
H. Students learn to understand a wide diversity of cultures.

Figure 3 shows the frequency with which these goals were cited by individuals in their GEAR reports.

![Learning Goals by Class](image)

**Figure 3: Results of Individual GEAR Sheets**

In this sample, knowledge of the discipline (arts, humanities, natural sciences, and society) and formulating ideas effectively in speech and writing were the most frequently cited learning goals. Critical thinking skills, in the form of assessing arguments, was also cited frequently. Once again, quantitative skills ranked lower.

Taken together, we might draw four conclusions from the data.

1. Faculty have become more adept over the last decade at articulating the goals that they have for student learning.
2. Faculty goals for student learning have remained remarkably consistent over the last decade.
3. Goals for student learning are consistent at the course level, the departmental level, and the institutional level.
4. Some of our stated learning goals perhaps could benefit from more institutional attention. In particularly, we might pay more attention to students’ acquisition of research skills; moral, ethical, and citizenship values; collaboration skills; and creativity. Are these goals we do not universally
share; do we not teach to these goals and measure our students’ accomplishments by them, or do we forget to articulate them?