

Goal Setting

Goal setting is one of the cornerstones of personal and academic success. A goal is something toward which you work. It is something that you want to attain. A goal provides you with a direction for your energies. Goals can vary from being admitted to university; being admitted to the program of your choice; graduating in the top 10% of your class; being admitted to the professional school of your choice; or landing a good career-related job once you graduate. Often the most important goal is simply not to give up on a task. Goals are useful and can be applied to all areas of your life. Set goals and work toward them but enjoy the process of attaining your goals along the way.

Types of Goals

- **Academic Goals.** These are goals that you want to accomplish while at university, i.e. getting an 'A' on a term paper, graduating in the top 10% of your class, or completing an assignment two days before it is due.
- **Personal/Social Goals.** These goals might include such things as spending more time with your family, undertaking a fitness program, or joining a student club.
- **Work/Career Goals.** These goals are the ones that you want to achieve at work or accomplish in your career such as gaining the position of your choice, working for a specific firm, or gaining admission to the professional school of your choice.
- **Financial Goals.** Financial goals focus on how you use money and how money influences your other goals. You may need to earn money to purchase an item, you may have financial needs for the school year, or you may have a long-term goal of paying back your OSAP.

Setting goals for yourself has several benefits, one of which is improved academic performance:

- **Enhanced Attention and Focus.** Having a goal can keep you focused on what it is that you have to do and to minimize distractions from outside.
- **Increased Motivation and Effort.** You can measure your success against your goals. If you are not achieving the grade that you need for a specific course, by reassessing your progress you will know that you have to increase your motivation and effort in order to reach that goal.
- **Reduced Anxiety and Increasing Confidence.** Reaching a goal can make you feel more confident in your abilities and increase your belief in yourself. Your confidence helps you to feel more relaxed and less anxious, thus helping you to continue on your progress toward reaching subsequent goals.

Setting Goals

You need to decide what you want to achieve and then define that as your goal. When setting goals it is important to **be specific**. Your goals should be **measurable** so that you can assess your progress. It is harder to determine your success if your goal is "to do well" in first year economics than if your goal was to "get an A" in first year economics. Your goals should be **challenging but realistic**. If you can never reach your goals you will become discouraged and want to give up. It is reaching goals that keep you motivated to set higher goals for yourself.

It is very helpful to **write out your goals** and put them someplace visible, such as your bulletin board over your desk. Then, when you are feeling overwhelmed by the amount of reading that you have to do or if you are struggling with an assignment, looking up at your goals will help you to refocus and be motivated again toward meeting those goals. If you only have your goals listed in your head it can be too easy for you to forget them or to modify them based on how you are feeling. For example, if you are feeling discouraged you could be tempted to reduce that goal from an 'A' in economics to a 'B'. By writing the goal on paper you can be more committed to it. Be careful not to have too many goals as you can become overwhelmed.

Obtain support for your goals from your family and friends. Choose people who will support your efforts and encourage you toward meeting those goals. It is always helpful to have a cheering section!

Self-Assessment Exercise

1. State a program-related goal that you have for yourself this year (be specific, such as gaining admission into a co-op program; getting a career-related volunteer position; achieving an A average).

2. Identify what you need to do in order to meet that goal (i.e., attend the *Volunteer and Internship Fair*, boost your GPA; take required courses for that program to see if you enjoy that discipline).

3. Identify possible obstacles to meeting your goal (i.e., working too many hours at a part-time job).

4. What strategies could you use to overcome those obstacles (i.e., apply for financial assistance so that you can reduce the hours you have to work).

5. Evaluate, on an on-going basis, your progress toward reaching this goal.