Tips for Setting Benchmarks and Performance Targets

Definitions
BENCHMARK. A benchmark focuses on individual students and their desired level of competency. This could be the passing score on a test or an assignment, or the description of the competent level on a rubric.

PERFORMANCE TARGET. A performance target focuses on all the students in the program and is the percent of students that meet or exceed the benchmark. Performance targets should be described in terms of percentage at (or above) the benchmark. They should not be described in terms of averages.

Examples
1. 95% of students (TARGET) score satisfactory (BENCHMARK) on the rubric.
2. 90% of students (TARGET) score 75 on the test (BENCHMARK).
3. 100% of students score at least advanced beginner and 85% of students score at least competent on the rubric. (This is based on a five point scale: novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient, and expert.)

Setting Benchmarks
The benchmark describes what is considered to be an acceptable performance for an individual student. Approaches to and considerations for developing benchmarks include:

- Use a local benchmark based on the collective experience of your faculty. For instance, you could consider performance on the key measure of successful students from previous years.
- Use an external standard such as a passing score on a test or self-assessment instrument mandated or suggested by your professional organization. Professional organizations may also provide guidance for descriptions of satisfactory performance that can be used to develop the levels of a rubric.
- Use a value-added benchmark which articulates the desired level of growth for students (e.g., improvement between pre and post testing). The level of growth can be based on historical, experiential, external, or other data.

Setting Performance Targets
The performance target describes what is considered acceptable performance for the program, as measured by all students; it is your definition of success for the program. Approaches to and considerations for setting performance targets include:

- Consult your professional organizations to see if they have set program-level targets.
- Discuss with faculty from other universities regarding program-level achievement standards. These universities could be NJCU peer-institutions or aspirational-institutions.
- Consult the program-level performance on the measure for students in previous years. For instance, use the performance of last year’s class on the capstone measure as a guide. (This information may be available to some department only in future academic years, after a few cycles of the One Goal, One Measure per Year process.)
- Consider how important the skill/ability is to graduates’ initial success. Critical skills/abilities may have higher targets, with some as high as 100%.
  - For instance, a nursing program would not want to graduate individuals that did not know how to determine proper dosages, so 100% may be appropriate as a performance target for this skill. Conversely, although oral presentation skills are important, they may also develop over time for some individuals, so 100% may be too stringent for a program.
- Consider using multi-level targets for some skills/abilities.
  - For instance, on a five-point rubric (novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient, and expert), you may set the target as: 100% advanced beginner or better and 90% competent or better.