**Benchmarks** – set expectations for student performance on assessment instruments and are used by the program to determine actions to be taken in courses or curriculum. Benchmarks pair with assessment to create the data for informed decision making. While assessment instruments provide raw data, benchmarks set expectations. In other words, assessment answers the question “How much do our students know?” while benchmarks answer the question “Is that enough for the program to be successful?”

Description requirements:

1. Departments need to determine the level of student achievement on assessments by answering the question, “what score indicates the program has done its job successfully?” This means setting a value for individual student performance on the assessment instrument, for example, “a score of 80% on an exam” or “a rating of exemplary on a presentation.”
2. Departments then need to answer the question, “how many students need to reach the desired level for the program to be successful?” This means setting a value for the performance of students as a group, for example, “95% of students will receive this score.”
3. Set a benchmark for every assessment instrument. If three instruments are used for a single outcome, then three benchmarks need to be set.
4. If assessment takes place in multiple courses, be sure to label the courses in the benchmark.

Examples:

1. 95% of the students will receive at least a 70% on the exam.
2. 80% of students will receive a score of 4 or higher from the “sources and evidence” section of the rubric.
3. 95% of students will pass their jury with a grade of C, with a minimum of 90% earning a B or better.
4. 90% of students will correctly answer 5 or more of the 7 multiple choice questions on the final exam in REC 101. 75% of students will correctly answer 12 or more of the 15 multiple choice questions on the mid-term exam in REC 102.

**GENERAL GUIDELINES**

* *Benchmarks are set by the faculty.* The department and its instructors are responsible for determining the definition for student and program success.
* *Set a benchmark that is meaningful.* If the benchmark is set too low on a critical outcome, deficiencies in essential student knowledge and skills will be masked. If the benchmark is set too high, the department may spend extra time and effort in an area with less need.
* *Benchmarks can be changed as part of the assessment cycle.* If a benchmark states that 80% of students will reach a certain level, but over 95% of students reach this level every time, then a higher benchmark may be needed.
* *Multiple values can be set in a single benchmark.* For example, “90% of students will score 3 or higher on the project, with at least 75% receiving a score of 5 or higher.”
* *Results from previous years can be used to set benchmarks.* Programs can use any criteria for setting a benchmark, including data from assessment results in previous years.