**Goal-setting education as a weekly focus with a personal health and wellness course**

By Chad A. Spangler, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor, Health Promotion

Montana State University - Northern

# Background/Motivation:

Each semester I teach a course titled “Personal Health and Wellness.” Twenty to thirty students consistently register for the course and they are required to study content within several health and wellness topics such as psychological health, physical fitness, nutrition, drug abuse, tobacco use, heart disease, infectious disease, and sexual health. The course objectives are consistent with the Montana Health Education Standards, including objective 6: *to demonstrate the ability to use goal-setting skills to enhance their health*.

In an effort to address objective 6 of the Montana Health Education standards and teach in a culturally responsive way, I recently integrated a series of goal –setting activities into my Personal Health and Wellness course. The goal of this novel integration was to teach students how to effectively use goal-setting to improve an aspect of their life. Consistent with goal theory, I expected that if they experienced success with a thoughtful and appropriate goal, students would have improved levels of hope and self-efficacy.

# Tharp Standards:

This open educational resource (OER) meets standard III of Tharp’s Seven Standards of Effective Pedagogy for Culturally Responsive Instruction: *Connect teaching and curriculum to experiences and skills of students’ home and community*. The goal-setting activities begin with simple goal-setting instruction that allows students to deduce that they already know how to set goals and that they’ve already set and achieved goals in their lives. After the initial lesson, students are led through activities that help them establish a personally meaningful goal. Once the goal is set and approved, the remaining activities are designed to solicit community and family involvement, to provide variety of classroom activity styles, and to provide frequent feedback to the instructor so that he/she can learn about students’ struggles and offer informed support.

One of the main pathways for achieving the aforementioned Tharp Standard is through the accountability partner assignment within the initial goal-setting activity. This task is assigned early, within the “Personal Goal Setting” worksheet. The students’ choice for their accountability partners may be a critical aspect and must not be overlooked. It does seem important to spend ample time facilitating the students’ best choice for an accountability partner. This OER draws from the theory of planned behavior and suggests that the best accountability partner:

* Holds a very positive attitude/opinion relative to what you’re trying to do (they will see your goal as a very good thing to do), and
* has familiarity with what you’re trying to do (they have experience with the same or similar goals), and
* sees or communicates with you on a regular basis (they see you or are in contact with you, at least once a week), and
* is someone who’s opinion matters to you (this person matters in your life – parents, siblings, best friends, etc.).

# Materials:

Integrating goal-setting activities into my course required a series of worksheets that I developed independently. I designed the worksheets to reinforce S.M.A.R.T. goal-setting and promote engagement with the students’ local communities. I also found it helpful to use a projector and power point slides to present the initial lesson on goal-setting. The goal setting slides are included with this document as a power point file.

# Learning Objectives:

After completing the goal-setting activity series, students will be able to

* Identify a personal example in which they set and pursued a goal
* Define “S.M.A.R.T. goal”
* List at least 3 strategies for goal-setting success
* Demonstrate their ability to use goal-setting skills to enhance their health (Montana Health Education Standard 6).

# Activity description and sequence:

At the beginning of the course, and prior to initiating the goal-setting activity, students are required to complete a self-assessment of their personal wellness. The results are intended to provide students with an awareness of opportunities for growth and improvement. As the goal-setting activity sequence is introduced, students are encouraged to consider an aspect of their wellness in which they have both opportunity and personal meaning. The goal-setting activity sequence was delivered over a 12 – week period. The first two weeks required longer lesson periods – 3, 50 minute classes. The last 10 weeks required 20-30 minute segments that were offered each Friday. Students were given points for completion of the goal-setting worksheets and the goal-setting activities accounted for 25% of their grade in the course. The sequence and description of the activities is presented in the following table:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Week | Activity | Description |
| Week 1 | Goal-Setting Lesson (50 min.) | Using a power-point presentation and instructional conversation, students are taught that they have set goals before, what S.M.A.R.T goals are, and the value of setting S.M.A.R.T goals. Students are assigned homework: think about an aspect of wellness that has personal/cultural importance to you and write a SMART goal. |
| Week 1 | Friday Goal-setting activity (50 min.) | Instructor reviews the meaning of a SMART goal and evaluates each students’ goal using the SMART goal standards. Instructor facilitates the completion of the “Personal Goal Setting Worksheet.”  |
| Week 2 | Friday Goal-setting activity (50 min.) | Students present their SMART goal and turn in their “Personal Goal Setting Worksheet.” The worksheet will be returned and students may have to make revisions before the next activity. This first activity is critical.  |
| Week 3 | Friday Goal-setting activity (20-30 min.) | Instructor briefly discusses the value of anticipating barriers along the pursuit of a goal. Students complete the “Planning for Change Worksheet.” |
| Week 4 | Friday Goal-setting activity | Instructor puts students into small groups based on their goals and briefly discusses the importance of realizing that the pros of your goal outweigh the cons, or risks of your goal. Students work together to complete the “Decisional Balance Worksheet.” |
| Week 5 | Friday Goal-setting activity | Students complete the “Goal Progress Worksheets.” They are encouraged to share experiences thus far with the class. Students turn in the worksheet. |
| Week 6 | Friday Goal-setting activity | Students start the “Using Health Services Worksheet.” Instructor facilitates ideas for this worksheet as students struggle a little. Students turn in the worksheet on Monday. |
| Week 7 | Friday Goal-setting activity | Students start the “Persuasive Essay Worksheet.” Students turn in the worksheet at the end of class or the following Monday. |
| Week 8 | Friday Goal-setting activity | Students complete the “Goal Progress Worksheets” for a second time. They are encouraged to share experiences thus far with the class. |
| Week 9 | Friday Goal-setting activity  | Students are placed into small groups based on their goals and instructed to take turns sharing experiences related to their pursuit of a goal. No worksheet – just opportunity to share with a small group. |
| Week 10 | Friday Goal-setting activity | Students complete and hand in the “Goal Results Worksheet.” Students are asked to share their experience with the class as they are comfortable.  |

# Review and Revision:

One important observation thus far is that many students chose parents or siblings as accountability partners, which brought the family into the educational process. One student, for example, set a goal to visit her community fitness center at least 3 days each week, for 10 weeks. This student, who lives on a reservation nearby, felt that her mother would be the best accountability partner for her. During a subsequent goal-setting activity, I learned that her mother was not only helping her stay accountable, but that her mother was going to the fitness center with the student. As she told me about her mom, I could tell that the student was excited about the connection she was making with her mother and her goal. Weeks later, I learned that the same student’s grandmother also began attending the fitness center with her. This experience may be the epitome of connecting curriculum to experiences of the students’ home and community.

Another finding worth mention is that the lesson related to the “Using Health Services” worksheet has a lot of potential for connecting students to their community, but it must be carefully assigned. In my first experience with this task, I instructed students to brainstorm and complete the worksheet outside of class. When I reviewed the students’ work, I was a little disappointed in the lack of depth. Most students really didn’t explore their community or campus with much genuine interest. Based on that, I believe that intention of the activity remains valid, but the worksheet and instructions require revision. Specifically, I plan to consider introducing the activity earlier in the series and require interaction with a community resource in the form of an interview or consultation.

Overall, the goal setting series has proven to be worthwhile. At the time of this documentation, students are at week 7 and have provided the following feedback via an anonymous, 5-point Likert scale survey:

* 70% found the goal-setting exercises to be useful so far
* 70% feel better prepared to set and pursue goals in other aspects of life
* 60% believe that the worksheets and activities kept them on track with their goal
* 60% took the goal-setting seriously
* 60% expect to meet the goal they set
* 70% feel good about the progress they’ve made so far

Appendices:

The following documents are included:

1. Personal Goal Setting Worksheet
2. Planning for Change Worksheet
3. Decisional Balance Worksheet
4. Using Health Services Worksheet
5. Persuasive Essay Worksheet
6. Goal Progress Worksheet
7. Goal Results Worksheet
8. Outline for SMART Goal Introduction:



**Outline for initial Goal-Setting Lecture**

1. Goal-Setting Introduction
	1. Self-reflection: *everyone take a couple minutes and recall something you accomplished in recent days, weeks, or months*. Show students that this is something they already know how to do. We’re merely going to improve upon it and provide them more tools for success.
2. Describe the different types of goals – encourage students to label some goals they’ve achieved
	1. Objective
	2. Subjective
	3. Outcome
	4. Performance
	5. Process
3. Introduce some basic principles of goal setting
4. Explain SMART Goals
	1. S – Specific
		1. Example of a specific goal: To earn a 90% or better on my next exam
		2. Example of a non-specific goal: To do well on my next exam
	2. M – Measurable
		1. Importance – it allows you to track progress
		2. Example of a measurable goal: To run a mile in 5 minutes and 30 seconds
		3. Example of a non-measurable goal: To run well for a ways
	3. A – Attainable
		1. Importance – it improves the likelihood of success.
		2. Caution – don’t make your goal too easy. That can result in low motivation or focus. The key is challenging and realistic.
	4. R – Relevant
		1. This may be the most important of all.
		2. Achievement of a goal is largely dependent on how important it is to you
		3. Consider your values and beliefs, and understand why you want to do this.
	5. T – Time-bound
		1. Make sure you give yourself a deadline.
		2. When will you complete your goal?
	6. Example of a SMART goal: I will lose 3.5 pounds within 14 days of today.
5. Reinforce and Explain the importance of the Accountability Partner
	1. Recruiting your accountability partner
	2. Qualities of the best accountability partner
6. Common Problems in Goal – Setting
	1. Failing to set goals – many people just fail to set goals frequently enough
	2. Failing to include other people – accountability and support are critical….and impossible if you don’t include others in your goal setting.
	3. Failing to set specific goals – You won’t effectively track a non-specific goal
	4. Setting too many goals too soon
	5. Failing to recognize individual differences – Remember that YOUR goals must be relevant to YOU. Don’t set other peoples’ goals and expect to meet them. We’re all different.
	6. Not providing follow-up and evaluation