

# Defining the Problem

Before designing solutions or interventions, you need to establish a clear understanding of the scope and type of problem facing your institution and students. To define your problem clearly, your institution will follow the following three steps:

## STEP 1 BEGIN BY THINKING ABOUT THE FOLLOWING:



What can you observe that tells you what is and is not happening in a process?



Who are the students that are experiencing this problem?



What outcomes of interest are students not achieving?



Why does this problem matter to your institution and students?



How can your institution measure the scale of this problem?

## STEP 2 CONSIDER HOW THE PROBLEM MEETS THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA:



Be clear about which people and what parts of the process are included.



Do **NOT** speculate about the cause of the problem or its solution.



Describe a problem that is measurable and, if possible, state its scale.

## STEP 3 CRAFT A CLEAR PROBLEM STATEMENT THAT DOES THE FOLLOWING:

Describes a challenge that you can investigate through behavioral diagnosis

Sets aside any assumptions or conclusions about what is causing the problem

Contains a description, or quantification, of an outcome of interest

### Clear Problem Statement:

*Only 24 percent of students attend summer courses.*

- ✓ Is specific about the stage in the process (summer)
- ✓ Measures and quantifies the scope (24 percent)
- ✓ Is clear about who is encountering the problem (students)



### Ineffective Problem Statement:

*Students don't attend summer courses because they do not value their education.*

- ✗ Does not quantify the scope of the problem
- ✗ Attributes reasons or speculates as to causes of the problem (is not a neutral description)

