



# Co-Curricular Assessment

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HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION

# What is meant by co-curricular?

- ❖ Co-curricula are activities and learning experiences, both formal and informal, that complement and align to the University Mission Statement and the academic curriculum.



# Why co-curricular assessment?

“to promote the improvement of programs and services to enhance the quality of student learning and development.”

From the mission statement of the  
Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education

*To do so...*

“focus on the student as a whole person, the concept that the total environment is educational...”

Laura Dean, President, Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education



# HLC Accreditation Criteria

- ❖ 3.E. The institution fulfills the claims it makes for an enriched educational environment.
  - ❖ 1. Co-curricular programs are suited to the institution's mission and contribute to the educational experience of its students.
  
- ❖ 4.B. The institution demonstrates a commitment to educational achievement and improvement through ongoing assessment of student learning.
  - ❖ 2. The institution assesses achievement of the learning outcomes that it claims for its curricular and co-curricular programs.

# Start with Two Assumptions

1. Learning can occur both inside and outside the classroom
2. Every interaction a student has on campus can potentially be a learning experience related to institutional, general education, or co-curricular outcomes



# Traditional Approaches to Assessment of Learning

- ❖ Ask Institutional Research about graduation, retention, GPAs, and the like
- ❖ Ask faculty about their teaching and the learning it produces
- ❖ Ask faculty how they know they're producing learning



# Shifting Perspectives

What happens if we substitute the word “learned” for the word “taught”?

What are the implications of “Where are learning outcomes *learned* and assessed”?

- ❖ Emphasis on student demonstration, not topic-covering
- ❖ Ability to do or apply supersedes testing what students know

# Teaching vs Learning





# Learning Outside the Classroom

- ❖ When attention is on learning:
  - ❖ Responsibility for learning can be understood as shared
- ❖ Site of learning becomes less specific, and boundaries become more flexible
- ❖ ALL Interactions and activities can be conceived as learning experiences (that doesn't mean you have to assess all)!

# *After Learning Reconsidered*

- ❖ Responsibility for “learning” exists outside the classroom as well as in
- ❖ Responsibility for “learning” doesn’t always take the same form; some entities on campus produce it, some facilitate it, some support it
- ❖ Responsibility for assessing learning exists outside the classroom as well

# Some Post-LR Examples of Learning

- ❖ Civic Responsibility
  - ❖ AA: Service learning
  - ❖ SA: Student government, student judicial boards
- ❖ Respect for Other Cultures
  - ❖ AA: Language courses, Anthropology, Sociology
  - ❖ SA: International experiences, culture days, residence halls

# Thinking It Through

- ❖ Define outcomes
- ❖ Determine appropriate role in their development
- ❖ Determine measures of effectiveness
- ❖ Map or otherwise plan student experiences
- ❖ Assess outcome achievement
- ❖ Analyze assessment data
- ❖ Plan improvements
- ❖ Assess impact of changes



# Co-curricular Learning Outcomes

- ❖ Must be intentional
- ❖ Must be carefully planned and designed
- ❖ Must be coordinated
- ❖ Must be carefully implemented
- ❖ Must be part of the structure of a student's experience
- ❖ Must be assessed



# The Old Assessment

Efficiency model:

- ❖ Numbers of students served
- ❖ Numbers of students retained
- ❖ Numbers of students graduated
- ❖ Time to graduation
- ❖ Level of satisfaction with services



# The Newer Assessment

## Effectiveness Models: Indirect

- ❖ Based on satisfaction surveys, post-service surveys, and other indirect indicators, like NSSE and CCSSE
- ❖ Often rely on student self-reporting
- ❖ Tend to skew positively on outcomes, if not always on the processes that led to them



# The New Assessment

## Effectiveness Models: Direct

- ❖ Focus on student performance as a result of—or even within—a planned, structured co-curricular activity
- ❖ Can be based on observation or objective measures
- ❖ Require carefully designed and consistent measuring practices



# Standardized Instruments: Questions about Evidence

- Is it relevant to the area's stated mission and function?
- Does it measure what we want it to measure?
- Does it deal in some way with outcomes?
- Is the information derived useful?
- Can the information be used to improve either function or learning?



# Surveys and Questionnaires: Indirect Evidence

- Traditional, indirect source of information on effectiveness
- Limitations:
- Self-reporting
- Unvalidated opinion (self-reported data)
- Response rates
- Opportunistic data
- Skewed samples

# Surveys and Questionnaires:

Making them tools to assess learning:

- Use learning outcomes as basis for at least some questions
- Validate by cross-referencing outcomes with different populations (employers, alumni, graduate, current students)
- Emphasize the learning outcomes in design and analysis of products, activities and services



# Developing Direct Measures of Effectiveness

## Intentional Planning:

- Determine areas of responsibility: what office/function might be a logical place to contribute to particular learning outcomes?
- Plan the outcome-based *purpose* of the activity
- Design non-passive activities (watching a film *plus* discussion; International Days as more than food, costumes, and dance)
- Design outcome-focused opportunities for processing

# Institution-wide Assessment

- ❖ Assessments done across campus should ideally use the same rubrics or measures—but all who use it should have the same understanding of its elements
- ❖ When using the same tools is not possible, it is essential that there be a way to extract information that is usable at the institutional level while still serving the needs of the functional area



# Significant Questions to Ponder as You Plan

- ❖ What action/activity/experience are you assessing?
- ❖ What *specific* outcome is it meant to develop?
- ❖ How are you assessing that development?
- ❖ What *specific* information about that outcome's development do you want to know?
- ❖ What will you do with the information you gather?



# Assessment for Continuous Improvement

- ❖ Be wary of one-shot assessment: Results are usually insufficient for planning improvement.
- ❖ Be intentional: Tie assessments to intended outcomes.
- ❖ Be consistent: Assess “what students are learning” rather than “what students are doing.”

# Other Considerations

- ❖ Adequate level of support from division leaders
- ❖ Alignment of learning outcomes with institutional mission
- ❖ Focus on both cognitive and affective domains
- ❖ Continuous professional development
- ❖ Go beyond thrown-together surveys
  - ❖ (Green, Jones, and Aloj, “An Exploration of High-quality Student Affairs Learning Outcomes Assessment Practices” [NASPA *Journal*, 45.1])



# Common Challenges

- ❖ Limited experience with writing student learning outcomes
- ❖ Lack of alignment with institutional learning goals
- ❖ Mistaken belief of needing to assess every student on every activity in every program
- ❖ Creating unnecessary new measures with failure to capitalize on existing data (death by survey)

# Lessons Learned: Pittsburg State University

- ❖ Need for **training** and **ongoing support**
- ❖ Start with “low-hanging fruit”
- ❖ Use of teams
- ❖ Use of mentors
- ❖ Cohort model
- ❖ Use of peer educators
- ❖ Collaboration across units

Olson, Smith, Murray, & Eckstein, “The Internal Assessment Academy: A Tool for Continual Improvement in Co-curricular Areas.”

[NASPA Leadership Exchange, Fall 2012]

# Questions?



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