

DEVELOPING LEARNING OUTCOMES
AS PART OF ASSESSMENT IN STUDENT
AFFAIRS

John H. Schuh

*Distinguished Professor of Educational
Leadership and Policy Studies*

Iowa State University

WHY ASSESSMENT IN STUDENT AFFAIRS?

- Survival
- Quality
- Affordability
- Planning
- Decision making
- Policy Development
- Politics
- Accreditation
- Improvement

BASIC DEFINITIONS

- Assessment: *Any effort to gather, analyze and interpret evidence that describes institutional, departmental, divisional or agency effectiveness.*
- Evaluation: *Any effort to use assessment evidence to improve institutional effectiveness, solve a problem, help make a decision or establish a policy*
- Research: *Any effort to gather evidence that guides theory by testing hypotheses*

PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE FOR ASSESSMENT

1. Assessment begins with educational values.
2. Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of organizational outcomes as multidimensional, integrated and revealed in performance over time.
3. Assessment works best when it has clear, explicitly stated goals.
4. Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also and equally to the processes that lead to them.

PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE FOR ASSESSMENT

5. Assessment works best when it is ongoing, not episodic.
6. Assessment is most effective when representatives across student affairs and the institution are involved.
7. Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about.
8. Assessment should be part of a large set of conditions that promote change.
9. Through assessment, institutional agents meet responsibilities to students, the institution and the public.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER IN THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

1. What is your situation?
2. What is the purpose of the assessment?
3. What data are needed?
4. What is the best assessment method?
5. Whom should we study?
6. How should the data be collected?

QUESTIONS TO PONDER IN THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

7. What instrument(s) should be used?
8. How should the data be recorded?
9. How should the data be analyzed?
10. How should the data be reported?
11. How should the data be used in the evaluation process?

APPLYING KARL WEICK'S CONCEPT OF SMALL WINS TO BEGINNING ASSESSMENT

It seems useful to consider the possibility that social problems [assessment studies] seldom get solved [are undertaken] because people define these problems in ways that overwhelm their ability to do anything about them [conduct them].

A SMALL WIN IS A CONCRETE, COMPLETE, IMPLEMENTED OUTCOME OF MODERATE IMPORTANCE. BY ITSELF A SMALL WIN MAY SEEM UNIMPORTANT. A SERIES OF WINS AT SMALL BUT SIGNIFICANT TASKS, HOWEVER, REVEALS A PATTERN THAT MAY ATTRACT ALLIES, DETER OPPONENTS, AND LOWER RESISTANCE TO SUBSEQUENT PROPOSALS (ASSESSMENT PROJECTS).

(WEICK, K. E. [1984]. SMALL WINS. AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGIST, 39, 1, 40-49.)

THUS INSTEAD OF SINGULAR, LARGE, SPECIALLY DESIGNED AND CAMPUSWIDE PROGRAMS TO ACHIEVE A PARTICULAR INSTITUTIONAL GOAL, EFFORTS MIGHT MORE PROFITABLY FOCUS ON WAYS TO EMBED THE PURSUIT OF THAT GOAL IN ALL INSTITUTIONAL ACTIVITIES...RATHER THAN SEEKING LARGE LEVERS TO PULL IN ORDER TO PROMOTE CHANGE ON A LARGE SCALE, IT MAY WELL BE MORE EFFECTIVE TO PULL MORE LEVERS MORE OFTEN.

PASCARELLA, E. T., & TERENCEZINI, P. T. (1991). HOW COLLEGE AFFECTS STUDENTS. SAN FRANCISCO: JOSSEY-BASS. (P. 655)

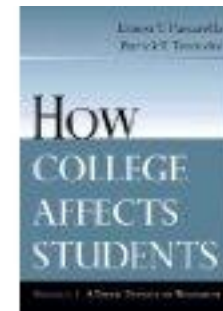
HOW TO GET STARTED

- **Pick an issue your supervisor is interested in**
- **Start small and simple**
- **Be willing to devote extra time**
- **Choose a non-controversial topic**
- **Keep costs to a minimum**
- **Involve your supervisor in the study**
- **Pick a study that will make you look good**

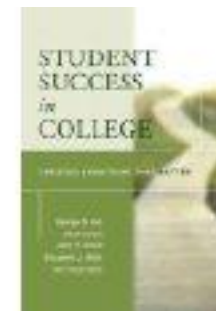
SOURCES FOR IDENTIFYING LEARNING OUTCOMES

- The research literature on student learning

- *How College Affects Students*



- *Student Success in College*



SOURCES FOR IDENTIFYING LEARNING OUTCOMES

■ Research journals

- *Journal of College Student Development*
- *Review of Higher Education*
- *Research in Higher Education*
- *Journal of Higher Education*

SOURCES FOR IDENTIFYING LEARNING OUTCOMES

- The CAS Standards (6th edition)



<http://www.cas.edu/>

SOURCES FOR IDENTIFYING LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Promising practices
 - University of Nevada, Reno
 - http://www.unr.edu/search/?cref=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.unr.edu%2Fcontent%2Fcse%2Fcse.xml&cof=FORID%3A11&search_type=web&q=Student+Affairs&sa=Search#988
 - Oregon State University
 - <http://oregonstate.edu/studentaffairs/assessment/departm.html>
 - Weber State University
 - <http://www.weber.edu/StudentAffairs/com/SLOTF/guidelines.html>
 - UT-Brownsville
 - http://blue.utb.edu/sa/ora/learning_outcomes/priority_learning.htm

OUTCOMES CAN BE

- ◉ What you think you know about experiences (students who participate in learning communities are more likely to persist)
- ◉ What you'd like to find out about what students learned by participating in a learning experience. In a focus group of learning community participants you ask, "What did you learn by participating in a learning community?"

OUTCOMES CAN BE

- Direct

- Participation in a specific program results in learning.
 - A student becomes more physically fit by swimming three times per week.

- Indirect

- Participation in a specific experience indirectly leads to a learning outcome.
 - A student develops a fitness plan with a consultant that results in weight reduction and lower cholesterol levels.

WHAT ARE LEARNING OUTCOMES?

- ◉ Learning outcomes are statements that specify what learners will know or be able to do as a result of a learning activity.

Source: <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/assess/Step2.html>

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Learning outcomes examine skills that students or other stakeholders develop through their experiences.

- Source:

<http://www.studentvoice.com/app/Views/Home/Default.aspx>

(Student Voice)

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Learning outcomes are statements that indicate what a participants will know, think, or be able to do as a result of an event, activity, program, experience, etc.

Source: Student Voice

EFFECTIVE LEARNING OUTCOMES

- ⦿ Are student focused
 - ⦿ Focus on learning from an activity rather than participating in the activity
 - ⦿ Reflect the organization's mission and values
 - ⦿ Align at the program/unit/divisional level
-
- ⦿ Source: Student Voice

EFFECTIVE LEARNING OUTCOMES

- ⦿ Focus on skills and abilities and can be based on professional standards
- ⦿ Are general enough to capture important learning, but clear enough to be measurable
- ⦿ Focus on aspects of learning that will develop and endure

CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD LEARNING OUTCOMES

- The specified action by the learning must be meaningful. How does the outcome support the department's mission or goals?
- The specific action by the learners must be measurable. What is needed to foster the achievement of the goal? Is the outcome realistic?
- The outcome should speak to the goals and purposes of the unit and the division. How will you know if the outcome has been achieved?
- Source: Student Voice and USC

PERSONAL GOALS ARE NOT LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Personal goal: able to participate in activities at least three days per week
- Learning outcome: able to develop a personal exercise program consistent with professional guidelines

- Personal goal: able to receive a satisfactory mark on a difficult writing assignment
- Learning outcome: able to apply APA format to papers and assignments

- Source: University of Rhode Island
- http://www.uri.edu/student_affairs/assessmentresources.html

EXPECTATIONS ARE NOT NECESSARILY LEARNING OUTCOMES

- ◉ Expectation: will dress appropriately
- ◉ Learning outcome: able to describe the significance of professional appearance at work
- ◉ Expectation: will turn in assignments by the scheduled due date
- ◉ Learning Outcome: will be able to explain the importance of meeting professional deadlines
- ◉ Source: URI

FIXING LEARNING OUTCOMES

- ◉ Ask two questions:
 - Can it be measured?
 - Is learning being demonstrated?
- ◉ Participants will understand the nine reasons for conducting a needs assessment.
(Outcome is hard to measure)
- ◉ Participants will be able to list nine reasons for conducting a needs assessment.
- ◉ Source: URI

FIXING LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Student worker will arrive on time daily.
(Easily measured, but learning is not necessarily demonstrated)
- Student worker will be able to explain the necessity of maintaining office hours as posted.

- Source: URI

COMMON MISTAKES

- The learning outcomes don't follow unit, divisional or institutional goals.
- Learning outcomes include words that are hard or impossible to measure (show understanding, develop awareness, possess a level of comfort, appreciate, become aware of, know about)
- The learning outcomes include too many skills in one statement.
- The learning outcomes are not specific enough (communications skills).

- Source: URI

COMMON MISTAKES

- ⦿ Learning outcomes include everything possible a student could learn by participating in the activity
- ⦿ The statement is not actually a learning outcome (The student will use the services of XXX office).
- ⦿ The learning outcome measures satisfaction rather than learning.
- ⦿ You have too many learning outcomes.

- ⦿ Source: URI