Fall 2015

Co-curricular Learning Outcomes Student Affairs

UNO Office of Academic and Student Affairs
University of Nebraska at Omaha

Co-curricular Learning Outcomes Working Group White Paper

Fall 2015
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Introduction

This white paper is the culmination of a series of meetings held over the summer of 2015 by the Co-Curricular Learning Outcomes working group to establish a framework that supports student success through the development of skills and competencies related to intentional outcomes. All of the learning outcomes are closely aligned with national and professional recommendations in this area, as well as with the mission, vision and values of UNO.

Rationale

The overriding concern of the working group was to focus on student learning and development as a part of the broader university experience at UNO. While not seeking to supplant the broader pedagogical and curricular based objectives of the classroom experience, this process is intentionally focused on co-curricular efforts and programming that enhace the classroom experience through the development of complimentary skills and competencies for the student.

It is a nod to the strategic plan of "whole person learning" that by design seeks to extend the learning process across the entire spectrum of the academic enterprise, and at the same time, acknowledge that learning takes place both inside and outside of the classroom. In this way these skills and competencies become part of the larger trajectory of values and ethics that the university hopes to inculcate in all students. With an institution in transition, as UNO presently is, it is important to take stock and intentionally map the course, journey and completion of the entirety of what constitutes a "program of study" complete with benchmarks and an accurate assessment of outcomes.

In a very instrumental sense, it also responds to the growing clamor of employers needs from recent college graduates – the presence of skills and competencies that are essential for success in jobs and society after graduation. Additionally, the process of obtaining and honing of such skills and competencies requires that we make intentional the unintentional; not leaving this type of learning to chance. In this way we can view co-curricular learning as a type of learning that is developed and takes place over time.

When stacked on top of the dynamic changes being brought about by demographic shifts, a transition to a top flight metropolitan/urban university and deeper social transformations these changes by their nature disrupt the *status quo ante* and create

the opportunity to mount meaningful responses. This is a liminal and important moment in the life cycle of the higher education in this country.

As it relates specifically to UNO, in order the institution to be successful in the 21st century it must ensure that its entire enterprise must be all of the following:

- Intentional
- Focused
- Integrative and collaborative
- Responsive
- Engaged, and
- Explicit about *campus culture* in regard to experiences and expectations of students, faculty and staff,

To the last point, campus culture is inherently a process that takes place both inside and outside of the formal classroom setting and it defined as "a blend of member's thoughts, narratives, relics, actions, and reactions." (Brian Mumby, The Political Function of Narratives in Organizations, 1997)

In this manner we are attempting to capture that which occurs outside of the classroom or laboratory but is inextricably tied to the development of the whole person and at the same time allows them with the means to articulate those experiences and narratives in a meaningful and intentional manner. In this way we can bolster student knowledge and understanding of what "life" skills mean in relation to their personal development writ large. It also gives students exposure to expectations that they will encounter after completing their respective programs of study.

Moreover, to effectively communicate the process and outcomes there has to be a complimentary process of documenting learning, with outcomes that are easily measured and produces data and analysis that allows for clear decision-making regarding the efficacy of co-curricular learning that allows for constant improvement.

Foundation

The basis for consideration and reference to best-practices and national association standards were drawn from the following sources:
- NACE
- ACPA/NASPA – " Learning Reconsidered"
- Peer and national best practices including:
  - IUPUI
  - Texas A&M
  - Northwestern University
  - UNC Greensville

Recommended Co-curricular Learning Outcomes

- **Communication Skills**

  The ability of students to express and interpret concrete and abstract information in a variety of ways to effectively convey ideas.

  - Communication Skills are demonstrated by the abilities to:
    - Listen attentively to others and respond appropriately.
    - Adapt your style to the occasion, task, and audience.
    - Articulate ideas in various formats including oral, written, nonverbal, visual, and electronic.

- **Civic and Social Responsibility**

  The ability of students to recognize and identify civic, social, and empathic values along with skills that empower individuals to make meaningful contributions with local and global communities.

  - Civic and Social Responsibility is demonstrated by the abilities to:
    - Identify and address the needs of the community collaboratively to facilitate positive social change.
    - Understanding that serving one's community is essential in creating and maintaining a thriving community.
    - Analyze and understand the complex interconnections between local and global communities.

- **Creative and Critical Thinking**

  The ability of students to engage in a process of disciplined thinking that interprets and informs idea generation, beliefs, and actions.

  - Critical and creative thinking is demonstrated by the abilities to:
    - Use complex information from a variety of sources including personal experiences and observation (i.e. information, concepts, ideas) to draw logical conclusions and form a decision or opinion.
    - Demonstrate ability to use systems thinking to recognize patterns and effectively manage ambiguous ideas, experiences and situations.
    - Generate innovations through experimentation with novel ideas, forms, and methods

- **Intercultural Competency**

  The ability of students to integrate and celebrate human differences through interaction, scholarship, and active participation to achieve a more inclusive and equitable community.

  - Intercultural competency is demonstrated by the ability to:
    - Understand that there is an inequitable distribution of social power within society, resulting in advantages for some and disadvantages for others.
    - Suspends judgment and values interactions with individuals different than oneself.
    - Recognize and analyze the interconnections between individuals and society as well as how individual actions have an impact on others.

- **Self-Awareness**

  The ability of students to articulate one's values, beliefs, strengths, challenges, and personal responsibility for their decisions and actions.

  - Self-awareness is demonstrated by the ability to:
    - Realistically appraise and understand one's self to engage in more authentic and productive behavior.
    - Act in alignment with one's own values to contribute to one's life-long growth and learning.
    - Respond resiliently to adversity and life challenges in a flexible and healthy manner.

- **Interpersonal Skills**

  The ability of students to identify, navigate, and sustain complex relationships with other individuals and entities across society.

  - Interpersonal skills are demonstrated by the ability to:
    - Actively consider others to build connections, establish values, or accomplish shared goals.
    - Utilizing others' ideas, strengths, knowledge, and abilities to foster an inclusive environment.
    - Develop and sustain healthy and meaningful relationships with others.

- **Leadership**

  The ability of students to engage in responsible leadership that allows all individuals to inspire and promote change collectively towards a shared vision or goal.

  - Leadership is demonstrated by the ability to:
    - Recognize their strengths and those of others to work towards a shared vision.
    - Navigate and affect change from anywhere within an organization.
    - Empower others through a collaborative process and distribution of responsibility.

- **Sustainability**

  The ability of students to apply concepts of sustainability by engaging in the challenges and solutions of one's social, economic, and environmental impact on the planet.

  - Sustainability is demonstrated by the ability to:
    - Gain, process, and act upon knowledge regarding the effects of individual, community, national, and international level choices on ecosystems and people.
    - Utilize knowledge of the dimensions of sustainability to understand the consequences of individual and group actions.
    - Utilize knowledge of the dimensions of sustainability to change their daily habits and consumer mentality.

Vetting, Measurement and Assessment

The recommendations of the working group will be vetted through a series of meetings with various university stakeholders that will take place over the course of the next couple of months including:

- The UNO Division of Student Affairs leadership team
- The UNO Academic Affairs General Education Committee
- The UNO Assessment and Accreditation team members

The comments, critiques and suggestions from these groups will be incorporated into the following instruments and processes over the next academic year:
- A final white paper of findings and recommendations on co-curricular learning outcomes (CLOs).
- Assessment mapping of CLOs by co-curricular program, event, or activity

- The establishment of rubrics and resources for the evaluation of the CLOs
- Annual assessment plans – understanding that we cannot evaluate every program simultaneously we will establish a calendar of specific co-curricular programs, events, and activities that will be assessed.
- The creation and continual updating of a web portal and platforms for external reporting of assessment and evaluation of co-curricular activities and learning outcomes.

Conclusion

There are overarching considerations as we take the next steps in articulating co-curricular learning outcomes for students.

1. This adds significance to learning that occurs in the campus community environment insofar as there experiences are nested in low anxiety and active engagement settings.
2. In defining co-curricular learning outcomes, we are intentionally weaving them into the broader vision, values and goals of the institution.
3. In articulating the co-curricular learning outcomes we establish a relationship and channel to university-wide assessment and accreditation processes that are simultaneously linked to professional association standards in student affairs and engagement domains.
4. The defining and articulation of co-curricular learning outcomes enables the university to respond to federal and state-level standards for learning in higher education, and
5. Employers in industry, government and the public sector specifically find what they are looking for in the 21st century workforce in graduates of institutions of higher learning.

Co-curricular learning takes place across the entire landscape of organizations, units, and communities of the institution. That we can clearly and unambiguously define and communicate these outcomes allows students, faculty, staff, administrators, and the community to better understand the breadth and depth of student learning, inside and outside of the classroom at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.