Putting Learning Reconsidered Into Practice: Developing and Assessing Student Learning Outcomes

Learning Reconsidered Institute
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Learning, assessment, and the changing mandate of Student Affairs

- Responding to a revised, broader understanding of learning that integrates development
- Mapping and supporting learning inside and outside classrooms
- Engagement of students in active, transformative learning
- Leadership in making the whole campus a learning community and in enhancing student experience and student success
- Identifying and ameliorating barriers to learning
- Developing, implementing, and assessing student learning outcomes
What are learning outcomes?

- **Learning outcomes** define the goals of learning experiences (activities, courses, majors, curricula, engagement with post-secondary education)

- What any student should be able to **do, know, or value** as a result of engaging in that learning experience

- Not the same as **satisfaction** with education, professors, facilities, activities, or experiences; not the same as **outputs**, such as grades, GPA, retention rate, graduation rate

- Outcomes define **impact** -- how the student has changed.

- The **achievement of learning outcomes** (student success) measures institutional effectiveness.
Outcomes-based thinking shifts and shares our attention

**Process**
- Planning activities and things to “do”
- “What are we going to do?”
- Counting and asking

**Outcome**
- How the student will change as a result of what we do
- “How will students be different; how will they learn, change, grow?”
- Documenting change; showing results
Learning how to develop and assess student learning outcomes

- New language and concepts
- Collaborative work process
- Comfort with critique, data, and feedback
- Reframing of assessment thinking from process and procedural metrics
- Realignment of concepts from assessing *students* to assessing *institutional effectiveness*
- Departure from *testing* paradigm
- Cross-fertilization
Learning to develop, implement, and assess student learning outcomes

Curricular  Asset-based  Mistakes OK  Iterative
Collaborative  Practice  Parsimonious
Capacity-building: content

Purposes
Capacity-building: content

- Concepts
- Learning
- Outcomes
- Metrics
- Assessment
- Reporting
- Planning
Capacity-building: content

- Linkages
- Look up
- Look down
- Look around
- Reporting
- Planning
- Assessment
- Metrics
- Learning
- Outcomes
- Concepts
- Purposes
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- Look up
- Look down
- Look around
Capacity-building: content

- Planning
- Linkages
  - Mission
  - Context
  - Colleagues
- Reporting
- Assessment
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Capacity-building: content
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- Mission
- Context
- Colleagues

Priorities

Review programs, services, activities

Don't paint learning outcomes on programs, review programs, services, activities.
Capacity-building: content
Capacity-building: content

[Diagram showing concepts related to capacity-building, including Planning, Concepts, Learning, Outcomes, Metrics, Assessment, Reporting, Linkages, Mission, Context, Priorities, Don't paint learning outcomes on programs, Review, SLOs, Assessment Plans, Organization, Sources, Domains, Sub-domains]
Capacity-building: content
Capacity-building: content
Capacity-building: process

Commitment
Capacity-building: process

Commitment

Organizational Structure
Capacity-building: process

Leadership linkages

Organizational

Commitment
Capacity-building: process

- Commitment
- Organizational Structure
- Leadership
- Expectations
Capacity-building: process

- Commitment
- Organizational Structure
- Leadership
- Expectations
- Professional development
Capacity-building: process

- Commitment
- Organizational Structure
- Leadership
- Linkages
- Expectations
- Professional Development
- Collaborative Feedback
Capacity-building: process

- Commitment
- Organizational Structure
- Leadership
- Expectations
- Professional Development
- Collaborative Feedback
- Office hours
Capacity-building: process

- Commitment
- Organizational Structure
- Leadership Linkages
- Expectations
- Professional Development
- Collaborative Office Hours
- Digital Support
Capacity-building: process
Capacity-building: process

Commitment
Organizational Structure
Leadership Linkages
Expectations
Professional Development
Collaborative Feedback
Office Hours
Digital Support
Reporting
Reading & Resources
Culture change: language, mind-set, internal relationships, transparency, approach, style

- Feedback
- Outcomes
- Evidence-based
- Assess everything
- Different words
- Systematic
- Data

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Culture change: language, mind-set, internal relationships, transparency, approach, style

Culture of Evidence/Assessment with Commitment to Improvement
Building staff capacity at Georgia State

- New language and concepts
- Common format
- Consistent structure
- Skill-building with repetition
- Stretch and support
- Continuous feedback
- Cross-fertilization
What do educators find difficult about writing student learning outcomes?
What are learning outcomes?

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- Not the same as satisfaction with education, professors, facilities, activities, or experiences; not the same as outputs, such as grades, GPA, retention rate, graduation rate.

- Outcomes define **impact** -- how the student has changed.

- The achievement of learning outcomes (student success) measures institutional effectiveness.
Learning outcomes have context

- Look up: institutional mission, vision, values

- Look down: where are you, why are you there, who are you serving, what are they here for

- Look around: see how your work “fits”
Learning outcomes have multiple levels

- Institutional, or university: overall learning goals for the entire university experience [cognitive maturity, empowered citizenship, global competency...]

- Divisional: learning goals derived from the Student Affairs curriculum [integrated identity, personal maturity, mature relationships, humanitarianism...]

- Departmental: learning goals for specific groups of programs, services, or activities [knowledge of another culture’s language and customs...]

- Program: learning goal of a specific program or activity [ability to identify cultural etiquette in a particular situation]
Institutional-level outcomes from Learning Reconsidered

- Cognitive complexity
- Knowledge acquisition, integration, and application
- Humanitarianism
- Civic engagement
- Inter- and intra-personal competence
- Practical competence
- Persistence and academic achievement
Guidelines for departmental learning outcomes

• Very specific

• Practical

• Measurable

• Meaningful

• Consistent

• Sensible

• Credible
What would make a student learning outcome impractical?
Assessment planning

• Determine with as much precision and accuracy as possible exactly what is being assessed

• What group of students?

• What new capacity is sought?

• How will achievement of that capacity be demonstrated?

• What range of achievement satisfies the desired outcome?

• What external requirements, guidelines, or standards apply?
Format for writing a student learning outcome

**First year students**
- participate in activity
- engage with program
- complete course
- 8 counseling sessions

**Graduating seniors**
- Students participate in activity
- engage with program
- complete course
- 8 counseling sessions

**Students**
- identify
- list
- describe
- summarize
- discuss
- explain

**intended elements**
- at least 3 out of 4
- 70% accuracy
- more/fewer than all

**as demonstrated by**
- interview
- observed behavior
- journaling
- blog
- portfolio
- post-survey

**[as required by]**
- external standards
Practice!
Beyond the basics

- **Embed theory** in student learning outcomes

- **Steering cognitive complexity** to fit particular groups of students

- **Curricular approach** with student learning outcomes assigned differently for each year of matriculation

- Sophisticated approaches to **reducing assessment burden**

- **Horizontally integrated learning outcomes** help link programs, services, and activities