

Sharing Learning Outcomes

Thank you for joining the Student Life Studies assessment podcast. Our goal is to educate people about assessment resources and topics, so they can more easily incorporate assessment into their daily lives. Feel free to contact Student Life Studies by calling 979-862-5624, emailing sls@tamu.edu, or coming by 222 John J. Koldus Building. Let's get on with the podcast.

I have a question for you, especially if you advise student leaders, plan student activities and events, or supervise student employees: Have you told the students what the learning outcomes are for their experiences? Let me back up for a minute. Do you even have learning outcomes for these experiences? If not, then it's time for you to establish learning outcomes—what students will know or be able to do after their experience. Not every experience is a learning experience, but much of what we do in student affairs is about learning, growth, and development. So, if you have not already established learning outcomes, you might want to do that before listening to the rest of the podcast, but this may also give you ideas about how to do it.

Assuming you have learning outcomes, how do you share those with students? Are they hidden away only to be reviewed when you have to finish your assessment plan report? Do you have them at the top of your student meeting agenda? Do you review them with students every month or two? An interesting project at Bridgewater State University, the Transparency Project, examined what students, faculty, and administrators knew about program learning outcomes. They found that students did not always know what they were expected to learn in their program, but students really did want to know. Although that project focused on academic programs, I think the same ideas apply to the co-curricular.

I firmly believe that students want to be involved and engaged in their own co-curricular learning. I also believe that we should remember to keep students at the center of what we are doing. Today's students have a lot of choice about how to spend their time outside the classroom. They want to make informed decisions about where to spend that valuable time and energy. Therefore, they need

to know what's expected of them and what they are going to get out of the experience. You might be thinking that students don't want to learn in the co-curricular, that they are escaping from classroom learning. That might be true for a small number of students, but I see students wanting to integrate their curricular and co-curricular and wanting to spend time doing something that is meaningful to them.

You don't have to be overly academic as to call them learning outcomes, either. You could call them career skills, competencies, job skills, professional development, etc. I think it's really great when an advisor or supervisor takes the opportunity to sit down with students to develop learning outcomes and a learning plan together. Students will be more committed to something they have a hand in creating. As an example, you know that the president of an organization will develop verbal communication, critical thinking, and collaboration skills. Do the students who are interested in running for that position know that and what that might entail? Have you sat down with the newly elected president to talk about what they want to gain from the experience, how they might develop those skills, and how they know they will have accomplished that to an acceptable level? Hmmm, that actually sounds like a simple assessment cycle.

In theory, sharing learning outcomes sounds like a great idea. Here's what it could look like in practice. For student employees, you can add learning outcomes to your job descriptions, so students have an idea of what they will be doing and learning on the job. When you have staff training, you can create and promote the learning outcomes for the sessions. If you have one on one meetings with student staff, you can revisit the learning outcomes and talk about their development. When you have performance evaluations, you can also talk about their progress. As students leave positions and you conduct exit interviews, it is helpful to have them reflect on the learning outcomes and other things they learned from their experiences.

For student leaders, the learning outcomes could be incorporated into the position descriptions, so students interested in those positions know what they might gain. For top student leaders, advisors

could take the time with individual students to do some pre-assessment of skills and knowledge, then brainstorm what students might want to learn and do during the year. This is a great time to talk about how this position relates to their major or career choice. Students could then develop a learning plan to get more specific about their engagement in learning and demonstration of skills over time. The advisor and student could also make a plan to determine how well the student has developed by the end of the experience. That could be using a rubric, reflection, or some other assessment method.

For student participation experiences, you may not have the luxury of individual interaction, so the communication may be more one way. When I look at websites for a variety of programs, I rarely see the learning outcomes listed, but I know that the program has created and assessed them. I don't think it would be too hard to put those outcomes on a website or other promotional material to give students an accurate idea of what they will learn. Have you ever gone to a workshop, or even a movie, where it turned out not to be what you thought it was going to be? I bet you thought, "There's 90 minutes I won't get back." You don't want that to be the sentiment of your participants. At the beginning of an experience, you could review the learning outcomes and then revisit them at the end to wrap up the experience. And, if you are doing some sort of assessment, be sure to include the learning outcomes in your data collection. Sharing your learning outcomes isn't rocket science, and it will pay off in the long run through your transparency and focus on the students.

Thanks for listening to today's podcast. Please let us know if this was helpful or if you have additional questions. You can contact us by calling 979-862-5624, emailing sls@tamu.edu, or coming by 222 John J. Koldus Building. Check out our website at studentlifestudies.tamu.edu for more resources and information. We hope to hear from you.