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Outcomes to Objectives: Learning About Quality Assessment

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Outcomes to Objectives: Learning About Quality Assessment

Recently assessment has become an important component of student affairs and higher education to assist in determining the effect and impact of programs and educational initiatives. To embrace this trend, the Office of Housing and Residence Life at Ball State University (IN) created learning outcomes for students living in residence halls. Through reflective questioning, discussion, and assessment, the Residence Life program strives to further the development and learning experience of students. The learning outcomes were:

Students will:

- express thoughts in a clear, concise and respectful manner.
- incorporate a variety of viewpoints into their understanding of the world.
- respect their environment and the individuals within it.
- establish healthy interdependence.
- constructively demonstrate their societal rights and responsibilities.
- explore their values.

After the outcomes were created, areas of emphasis were identified to assist students in having a set of skills to strive for within the learning objectives. Skills like time management, self-assessment, and confrontation are necessary for students who

Lessons to Share (cont.)

2. Pilot the survey and gather feedback. Identify technical issues, collect feedback from students, and make needed changes.

3. Miss the deadline. Be prepared to miss the posted deadline, but also be prepared to notify all potential respondents that the survey timeline has been altered.

4. Know your department's concurrent processes. Anticipate housing processes that might interfere with the survey, such as ones that will impact occupancy and thus response rates. Ask all staff to name the major processes in the department that will occur around the time of the survey. Asking staff to let you (the survey administrator) know about something that might impact the survey is too vague. Instead, you should determine the impact of any and all concurrent processes within the department, rather than get blindsided.

5. Prepare for the worst. If a virus or something beyond your control impacts the survey, be honest with students and staff, and be prepared to reward those who may have to work harder to obtain the desired response rate.

6. Use existing department practices/resources to your advantage. For us that means, if we want our web pages to be seen as an excellent sources of information and we know that staff use them, then we need to make sure we use them and have the URL easily accessible on those pages as well as plastered on flyers, on buttons, and in emails.

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are living in residence hall communities. With these identified skill areas, residence hall staff can intentionally work with students in these areas to help them develop within the learning outcomes.

Developmental levels also were determined to aid in measuring the progress in learning by residents. For example, development in the skill of confrontation is described in the following sequence:

Level 1: Establish ability to identify problem and how it relates to self and own priorities.

Level 2: Explore and evaluate various options and manners in which to confront situation.

Level 3: Evaluate and plan confrontation method using assessment of multifaceted options.

Level 4: Master effectively confronting individuals while maintaining mutual respect and the relationship among the individuals involved. Assess degree of effectiveness of confrontation.

By putting these three components together—learning outcomes, areas of skill emphasis, and developmental levels—the Cardinal Living and Learning Community (CLLC) model was created. Residence hall staff use the CLLC to focus on building intentional relationships with students instead of “canned programming.”

Transitioning from Outcomes to Objectives

In fall 2001, Housing and Residence Life formed the Assessment Committee. One of its primary functions was to measure our Learning Outcomes. When the committee began educating themselves, they started researching the fundamentals of assessment and how the department upheld these principles. The following excerpt from the “Assessment Workbook,” created by Ball State University's Office of Academic Assessment and Institutional Research in 1992, caused concern:

Q) What are the differences between objectives and outcomes?

A) Objectives are intended results or consequences of instruction, curricula, programs, or activities. Outcomes are achieved results or consequences of what was learned—evidence that some learning took place. Objectives specify what is expected and describe what should be assessed; outcomes are behaviors and products generated by students after instruction and are the objects of assessment.

Based on this distinction between “objectives” and “outcomes,” the committee believed that the department's use of the “Learning Outcomes” model was probably misnamed. The committee suggested that the department start referring to this model as “Learning Objectives.” As stated in the Aug. 7, 2001 edition of NASPA's *Netresults*, “A first step towards the development of a Student Affairs assessment model...is to provide conceptual clarity about what Student Affairs ‘does’ and what it seeks to ‘accomplish.’” The article further describes the need for Student Affairs professionals to appear credible in functional collaborations within the university setting. The current “Learning Outcomes” model did not refer to the product developed within the Office of Housing and Residence Life. Instead, it embodied what was *hoped* students would take away after living in the Ball State residence halls and apartments. The “Outcomes” more closely resembled
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Collaboration: Lessons From Bridging the Student Affairs and Academic Affairs Divide

Everyone seems to be talking about how Student Affairs professionals and Academic Affairs professionals can best collaborate to enhance research, institutional effectiveness and student learning. On the Ball State University (IN) campus, the collaborative efforts between the Office of Housing and Residence Life (HRL) and the Office of Academic Assessment and Institutional Research (AAIR) have been largely successful. The lessons learned might be beneficial for other professionals as they work to "bridge the student affairs and academic affairs divide." The following is a chronological perspective from the three key individuals involved in the collaborative efforts and how they initiated working together, what the challenges were, and what the benefits were to this joint adventure

The Beginning

HRL Graduate Student: As a new graduate student, I was asked to consider where I wanted to focus my time and energies for a four-week lab assignment. At one of the first housing and residence life (HRL) staff meetings of the semester, the Senior Analyst from AAIR made a presentation to a group of student affairs graduate students about a survey project that would involve residence hall students. When the Senior Analyst began talking, I found it absolutely fascinating and I suddenly realized I wanted to learn more about what an office of assessment and

institutional research was about. I contacted the director of the office and asked if I could be a lab student in their area, but was told someone else had also called earlier requesting to be a lab student and they could only use one of us. I was disappointed, but decided to be a little persistent so I asked if I could volunteer my time or do a short lab during the next semester. Later that day, they called me back and said they had found enough work for me to do and that I could do my lab in their office. I learned that sometimes beginning to build those bridges takes sincere interest, initiative, and a little bit of persistence!

AAIR Senior Analyst: When the graduate students from HRL first approached our office about a lab internship, concerns were raised about prior intern experiences. The initial reaction was, "We have had interns before..." I had to work hard to convince AAIR staff that either this experience would be different or that it would be worth the effort. Most offices have a history that includes negative situations. Collaboration depends on moving beyond that history and creating new relationships. For us, it meant beginning these relationships with relatively new folks who were motivated to work together and learn from each other. If any of us had brought negative attitudes to the process, it might never have begun. For me, the lesson was not to let history limit what happens now.

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Outcomes to Objectives (cont.)

goals, or "Objectives." The department was developing ways to assess what were called outcomes, when outcomes are what should have been reported *after* assessment had taken place.

Although this might have seemed to be a minor miscue, correcting it had the potential to set the tone within the department on how serious they were about assessment. The Office of Housing and Residence Life agreed with the findings and soon made the official switch to "Learning Objectives."

Assessment of Learning Objectives

The Office of Housing and Residence Life conducts some independent data collection and collaborates with the Office of Institutional Research on two larger scale assessments. During the first month of each semester, the aforementioned offices collaborate on administering two quantitative assessment tools, including one for freshmen and the other for transfer students. The students self-report their current status of development in each area based upon statements provided. Residence hall director teams use the data to identify individual needs and areas of growth for hall community members.

Within the Office of Housing and Residence Life, residence hall director teams gather and report qualitative information for each of the learning objectives. Each month, they report examples of growth for each learning objective that was observed on an individual or community level within their residence hall. This information is then shared with all residence hall directors to provide additional ways to offer learning opportunities with students and hall staff. Residence hall directors conducted student interviews with 10 residents of their halls. The directors asked each resident the same 10-15 questions, and the data were analyzed

in the summer to assess learning and development. Finally, two focus groups are conducted for each learning objective with a random sample of participants from across campus. The data are compiled and reviewed by the assessment committee to provide the Office of Housing and Residence Life with suggestions for further implementation.

With the development of the Learning Objectives and the CLLC model, the Office of Housing and Residence Life professionals and paraprofessional staff are intentional in their approach to student interactions and the residence hall experience. Though different methods are used to gather this information, the assessments conducted continue to provide beneficial information regarding individual development and learning within the hall community. The Learning Objectives are established, while the approaches to helping students develop in the areas through learning opportunities are adapted and created for individuals and the collective residence hall community.

References

- Assessment Workbook*, Office of Academic Assessment and Institutional Research, Ball State University, 1992.
 Why Assessment is Important to Student Affairs, James Anderson, NASPA's *Netresults*, 8/7/2001.

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