Bueller? Bueller? A Model for Assessing Student Learning Outside the Classroom
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Increasing pressure for student affairs professionals to evaluate and articulate “the contributions of the profession and those in it…not simply through their own eyes, but through objective measures and through the eyes of their colleagues within the colleges and universities in which they work and the eyes of the external constituencies they ultimately serve” (Bresciani, p. 3, 2012, Learning is not a Sprint, bold added).
• Why do we have a Wellness Center on campus?

• If a budget crunch comes, what aspect of the mission of the Wellness Center should be protected?

• Can we produce credible evidence that the Wellness Center supports the institution’s learning and development mission?

• In what ways can the Wellness Center do a better job of promoting student learning and development?
In your more cynical moments, what questions have you asked about your campus’s co-curricular or student affairs programs?
Definitional Issues

• Extracurricular activities: “those activities and events sponsored by the school which occur outside the formal school curriculum.”
  – May include sports, music (K-12), drama, debate, student government, clubs, assemblies, etc.

• The term itself is controversial because it suggests a negative view of these activities as “unconnected to the academic curriculum”

Alternative Terminology

• Third curriculum
• Informal curriculum
• Co-curricular activities (Berk, 1992)
  – This is the term used by HLC (North Central)
• But generally there is a lack of agreement on clear definitions
Lack of Agreement on Terminology

- *How College Affects Students*: does not use “co-curricular,” uses “Social and Extracurricular Effort-Involvement”
- *Learning Reconsidered*: uses “learning” instead of co-curricular
- *Assessment in Student Affairs* (Upcraft and Schuh, 1996): provide no definition and highlight the importance of assessment in all student services (including admissions, registration, etc.)

From:
How do we decide if a program is “co-curricular”?

• Does it make sense to ask the bursar (aka customer account services) to assess student learning and development?

• Certainly we want the bursar to provide good service, and we want students to know when to pay, what to pay, and how to pay…but assessing learning?
Asking a program / department that has very little or no role in student learning / development to assess student learning / development leads to frustration and results in a very poor cost / benefit ratio.

Should be assessing *operational effectiveness*, but not student learning.
Defining Characteristics

- **Intentionality**
  - Is your program designed to promote student learning / development or give students the opportunity to apply their learning in new situations?

- **Claims**
  - Do you (or your institution) make claims that your program does these things (promote learning / development) or contributes to the enriched educational environment?

- **Outside the classroom**
  - Is the program outside the formal classroom (i.e., it’s not a class activity)?

- If you meet these, you are running a “co-curricular” program
- You should be assessing student learning / development
Division of Student Affairs at NDSU

• Embraced a Learning Agenda for the whole division
  – Lead
  – Serve
  – Execute tasks to completion
  – Negotiate and Resolve conflict
  – Function collaboratively
  – Participate as committed citizens of the community

• As a result, departments in the division (and major activities) are asked to assess student learning and development since it is a critical aspect of the mission
Developing a Model
Lifecycle of a program, activity, or service

Where are we?

Where do we want to be?

Should we do something?

What should we do?

Are we doing things right?

Are we doing the right things?
Lifecyle of a program, activity, or service

Where are we?
Where do we want to be?
Should we do something?
What should we do?
Are we doing the right things?
Are we doing things right?

Planning
Needs Assessment / Prior Assessment Cycles
Pilot projects
Literature / conferences
Operational Effectiveness Assessment
Assessment of Student Learning / Development
Major Activity / Program / Service

Operational Effectiveness

Are we doing things right?

Student Learning / Development Outcomes

Are we doing the right things?
Aside: What is a “major” activity?

• Department structure doesn’t always make sense
  – Residence Life: hundreds of employees, thousands of students, very broad assessment program with wide-ranging learning outcomes
  – Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention Programs: 1-person office, very focused set of goals

• Left it up to departments to define
  – All programs should be doing some kind of assessment – the key here is who should be reporting to the division level
Operational Effectiveness

- Facility usage
- Satisfaction
- Cost efficiencies
- Level of participation

Student Learning and Development

- What students are expected to know, be able to do, or dispositions as a result of the program / activity / service
Operational Effectiveness

• Institutional data (visits, participation, card swipes, etc.)
• Surveys
• Secret shopper
• Self-report
• Observer feedback
• Fidelity studies

Student Learning and Development

• Rubrics
• Minute papers
• Performance assessment
• Surveys
• Portfolios
• Reflection papers
• Interviews
Reporting

• Important to establish why you want reports
  – Who is the audience?
  – How will reports be used?
  – What do you want to capture?

• At NDSU:
  – Reports are made publicly available, but written primarily for use within the Division / Institution
  – Pull some aspects out for translation into more friendly formats
  – As a campus interested in retention, so that was included as a component of the report
Timing Reports

• What time of year should reports be due?
• What cycle is used by your institution for budgeting, staff training, program development, etc.?

• At NDSU:
  – Reports are due in late fall
  – Cycle is August 1 – July 31 (essentially academic year)
Integrated Reporting

• Ideally, assessment reports would be submitted along with annual reports or other division-required reports
  – Otherwise, directors can feel like they are doing nothing but reporting (and reporting some of the same information multiple times!)

• Technology can provide a big payoff if you are doing integrated reporting (have to weigh the cost / benefit if using technology only for assessment reporting)
Templates

http://www.ndsu.edu/vpsa/assessment/resources_for_assessment/

Examples:
http://www.ndsu.edu/vpsa/assessment/student_learning_and_persistence/
Engaging Staff and Reporting Results
Engaging Staff

• Do not underestimate the importance of leadership for assessment at the division level
• Keep the perceived burden of assessment low
• Attack the perception that staff may feel they don’t know what to do
  – Staff development and support!
  – Include opportunity to report operational effectiveness then build on that (OE familiar to many staff already)
• Be clear about who should be doing this work
  – Assessment Coordinators in departments
  – Include in job descriptions
  – Division-wide assessment committee to coordinate templates, reporting, etc. and to communicate about assessment
Staff members are dedicated to quality in their programs.

Build your assessment program as a tool to support quality, to build credibility for programs, and as a way to communicate to variety of audiences, and you’ll have them breaking down your door to participate!

(Or, at least slightly more interested.)
Using Results

• Assessment is not an end in itself
  – The goal of assessment is not to do more assessment
  – but to improve your program, celebrate successes, and communicate that evidence to others

• Remember to celebrate successes!

• Include assessment as part of a systematic program development and implementation cycle
  Develop program -> Implement -> Reflect -> Modify / end / implement again

• Develop structures for systematically using results (such as department assessment committees)
Final Tips

• Assessment should be fun!
• Think “systems and structures”
• Build on what staff already know and are doing
• Have a purpose for reporting and be sure it will give you what you need for various audiences (accreditors, students, your division, etc.)
“In view of the widespread image of the extracurriculum as worthwhile but expendable, research [assessment] documenting its value is especially crucial for its continued survival and development, particularly in an era in which the quality of American formal education has been judged to require time-consuming and costly reforms” (Berk, 1992, pp. 1036-1037).
Discussion

• What challenges is your institution facing regarding assessment of co-curricular programs?
• How can we better connect the work of co-curricular programs to the curriculum?
• What do you hope to learn from engaging in assessment of co-curricular programs?