

South Dakota State University
Overview of Co-Curricular Assessment

As SDSU works toward a stronger culture of inquiry around student learning, a need exists to expand assessment efforts to include co-curricular activities and units. It is critical that the university community recognize and act on the understanding that the responsibility for student learning is shared across campus. Learning is not restricted to the classroom with many valued outcomes being met as a result of experiences outside the classroom.

The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) has recognized the importance of co-curricular activities and units in the student learning process. It is an expectation of HLC that co-curricular activities be of high quality and well staffed. Co-curricular activities are also now being recognized in academic program accreditation standards. Therefore, assessment of these activities and units is an important addition in order to determine effectiveness of such activities and units and for continuous quality improvement. Selected examples of HLC Criteria for Accreditation that address co-curricular areas are outlined below.

Criterion Three: Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources, and Support.

3.C.6. Staff members providing student support services, such as tutoring, financial aid advising, academic advising, and co-curricular activities, are appropriately qualified, trained, and supported in their professional development.

3.E.1. Co-curricular programs are suited to the institution's mission and contribute to the educational experience of its students.

Criterion Four: Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement.

4.B.2. The institution assesses achievement of the learning outcomes that it claims for its curricular and co-curricular programs.

4.B.3. The institution uses the information gained from assessment to improve student learning.

4.B.4. The institution's processes and methodologies to assess student learning reflect good practices, including the substantial participation of faculty and other instructional staff members.

At South Dakota State University, co-curricular activities promote, encourage and support student learning and success. In partnership with academic curricula, such activities educate the whole student, preparing each student as a life-long learner, an engaged professional, and a citizen of the world. Co-curricular activities typically occur outside of the formal classroom.

Several methods of assessing the effectiveness of co-curricular units and activities are available. Traditionally, co-curricular assessment has primarily focused on participation data (such as number of attendees at events). The current focus in co-curricular assessment is to examine the impact of co-curricular participation on student learning. This can include direct evidence such as rubrics to evaluate student performance, pre and post questions, and portfolios. Indirect evidence including surveys, interviews, and focus groups are also options to collect data on student learning.

Examples of tools that are commonly used in co-curricular assessment include:

- Participation data
- Surveys (locally developed and national surveys)
- Portfolios
- Reflective writings
- Student self-assessment
- Interviews and focus groups
- Rubrics (such as the AAC&U Value Rubrics)
- Co-curricular transcripts

The first step in developing an assessment plan that focuses on student learning is to develop student learning outcomes. To assist units in writing student learning outcomes, example outcome statements are provided in this document. The outcomes have been developed using Learning Reconsidered 2 and the CAS Standards as references.^{1,2} The outcomes are divided into six domains based on the CAS Standards.² For each domain, a definition, the dimensions of the outcome domain (from the CAS Standards), example student learning outcomes, and suggested assessment methods are provided. Units can use this information as a guide when developing unit specific student learning outcomes. The example outcomes can be used as provided or can be adapted to the specific unit; in addition, new outcomes not included in this document can be written as appropriate. Most units will have 3-6 student learning outcomes. It is not expected that units will have learning outcomes from each domain.

References

1. Keeling R.P. (Ed). (2006). Learning reconsidered 2: A practical guide to implementing a campus-wide focus on the student experience. Washington, DC: National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA).
2. Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS). CAS Learning and Development Outcomes. Available from URL: <http://www.cas.edu/learningoutcomes>. Accessed May 5, 2016.

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Co-curricular domain 1. Knowledge acquisition, construction, integration, and application

Through participation in co-curricular activities, SDSU students expand their knowledge, not only in their own discipline but in a range of disciplines and experiences. Students integrate knowledge from their co-curricular activities, coursework, and personal experiences to develop innovative ideas and solutions and apply their knowledge and experiences to new situations.

Domain dimensions:

- Understanding knowledge from a range of disciplines
- Connecting knowledge to other knowledge, ideas, and experiences
- Constructing knowledge
- Relating knowledge to daily life

Example student learning outcomes:

- Students will:
 - Formulate questions based on recognized personal information/knowledge gaps or on reexamination of existing, possibly conflicting information
 - Maintain an open mind and a critical stance
 - Evaluate ideas based on personal experience and knowledge
 - Synthesize ideas gathered from multiple sources
 - Organize information in personally meaningful ways
 - Draw reasonable conclusions based on the analysis and interpretation of information
 - Seek assistance from appropriate experts when needed

Suggested assessment methods: Value Rubrics, surveys, interviews, focus groups, portfolios

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Co-curricular domain 2. Cognitive complexity

Throughout their education, SDSU students gain skills in critical, creative, and reflective thinking. Co-curricular activities support student development in cognitive complexity through problem solving, creativity, and exposure to multiple perspectives.

Domain dimensions:

- Critical thinking
- Reflective thinking
- Effective reasoning
- Creativity

Example student learning outcomes:

- Students will:
 - Analyze and integrate multiple sources of information when reaching a decision or forming an opinion
 - Recall and apply previously learned information and personal experiences in new situations
 - Apply a structured process when problem solving or decision making
 - Re-evaluate beliefs and opinions based on new information
 - Utilize creative thinking in developing new or innovative solutions and approaches to problems
 - Develop and evaluate alternatives before reaching a decision

Suggested assessment methods: Value Rubrics, critical thinking assessment tools, reflective writings, portfolios

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Co-curricular domain 3. Intrapersonal development

Through participation in co-curricular activities, students gain the ability to be aware of their emotions, establish identity, clarify personal values, act with integrity, and make personal choices that promote individual growth and development.

Domain dimensions:

- Realistic self-appraisal, self-understanding, and self-respect
- Identity development
- Commitment to ethics and integrity
- Spiritual awareness

Example student learning outcomes:

- Students will:
 - Demonstrate the use of strategies to manage emotions in a socially acceptable manner
 - Discover and embrace knowledge about themselves and integrate aspects of their identity into a cohesive whole
 - Articulate personal values and beliefs in developing a self-identity
 - Apply personal values to decision-making
 - Critique and learn from previous experiences
 - Act with honesty and integrity
 - Express personal values and beliefs with civility and respect

Suggested assessment methods: Reflective writings, self-assessment, surveys, interviews, focus groups

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Co-curricular domain 4. Interpersonal competence

Students develop skills to be successful in an interconnected world. Co-curricular activities promote interpersonal competence through leadership opportunities and teamwork. Students also gain skills developing mutually beneficial relationships with others and navigating complex social and organizational environments.

Domain dimensions:

- Meaningful relationships
- Interdependence
- Collaboration
- Effective leadership

Example student learning outcomes:

- Meaningful relationships
Students will:
 - Develop healthy, meaningful relationships with others
 - Navigate complex social environments
 - Articulate the value of their personal relationships
- Interdependence
Students will:
 - Articulate the value of being part of a larger group
 - Identify how their actions affect their society as a whole
 - Explain the importance of civic responsibility
 - Seek assistance from campus or community resources as needed
- Collaboration
Students will:
 - Work effectively with others to complete a project
 - Demonstrate compromise to accomplish a greater good
 - Build mutually beneficial relationships with others
- Effective leadership
Students will:
 - Articulate their own personal leadership style
 - Demonstrate multiple strategies to motivate others
 - Manage conflict to achieve shared goals
 - Respond to and effectively navigate change

Suggested assessment methods: Value Rubrics, surveys, co-curricular transcript, portfolios, participation data, reflective writings, self-assessment

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Co-curricular domain 5. Humanitarianism and civic engagement

Students recognize the uniqueness of individuals as well as the importance of their community as a whole. Co-curricular activities and programs allow students to engage with others in community service, leadership, and teamwork.

Domain dimensions:

- Understanding and appreciation of cultural and human differences
- Global perspective
- Social responsibility
- Sense of civic engagement

Example student learning outcomes:

- Students will:
 - Gain an appreciation for community enrichment through action
 - Articulate the relationship between academic curricula and civic engagement
 - Develop skills in collaboration and leadership
 - Recognize the ideological, intellectual, and/or physical contribution of others
 - Understand and appreciate cultural and human differences
 - Demonstrates effective stewardship of human, economic, and environmental resources*
 - Understands and analyzes the interconnectedness of societies worldwide*

Suggested assessment methods: Value Rubrics, surveys, participation data, co-curricular transcripts, reflective writings

*These student learning outcome statements are from: Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS). CAS Learning and Development Outcomes. Available from URL: <http://www.cas.edu/learningoutcomes>. Accessed May 5, 2016.

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Co-curricular domain 6. Practical competence

Through co-curricular involvement, students gain important life skills that help them succeed personally and professionally.

Domain dimensions:

- Pursuing goals
- Communicating effectively
- Technological competence
- Managing personal affairs
- Managing career development
- Demonstrating professionalism
- Maintaining health and wellness
- Living a purposeful and satisfying life

Example student learning outcomes:

- Students will:
 - Communicate effectively verbally and in writing by selecting proper content, tone, and demeanor for the situation
 - Demonstrate effective use of technology for personal and professional activities, including electronic communication and information resources
 - Develop and actively pursue personal, academic, and professional goals
 - Seek guidance and assistance as needed to achieve academic success, maintain good academic standing and progress toward a degree
 - Manage personal affairs by demonstrating empathy towards others, caring for one's self, and seeking assistance as needed
 - Manage career development by fully utilizing available career and professional services, participating in internships and other training opportunities, and properly preparing for interviews and employment
 - Demonstrate professionalism toward peers, faculty, staff, employers, and other members of the University community by demonstrating proper social etiquette, effective communication, and restraint
 - Maintain health and wellness by being comfortable with one's self, utilizing health services, and engaging in wellness activities
 - Demonstrate resolve when facing situations requiring perseverance or alternative strategies

Suggested assessment methods: Value Rubrics, surveys, participation data, student success data, job/internship placement data, interviews, focus groups, portfolios