

Understanding the 'facts' and 'figures' about our students and their learning...

http://oregonstate.edu/admin/student_affairs/research/perspective.html

Greater Expectations

The following article is based upon two statements recently issued by the Association of American Colleges and Universities. The full text of these statements is available on line at www.aacu.org. The full references are located in the "For Further Reading" section of this newsletter.

For several years now, the issue of accountability in education has been discussed at all levels of government. The higher education version of "no child left behind" has been proposed by several state legislatures with the use of standardized measures to determine the outcomes of higher education in those states. Yet, as most educators know, using a recall and response test (like multiple choice) is really only good for assessing basic facts and reactive answers. They do not measure higher order thinking, problem-solving skills, or evidence-based reasoning. In essence, they do not measure those attributes thought to represent a college-educated person.

So, why is this idea continuing to gain favor? One reason is that many colleges and universities have not articulated specifically what skills and abilities their graduates will possess upon graduation. Like OSU,

they can talk about how many classes students have taken, what their grades are in those classes, and how many credits they have accrued. Like OSU, they do not however have a language to talk about nor evidence to show in terms of what their graduates have learned as a result of the curriculum.

In a few months OSU will begin an earnest discussion to frame and articulate the learning outcomes to which we intend for all students to achieve, regardless of major. Additionally there will be a discussion of the structure which will allow us to document our contributions to those outcomes.

One thing we know is that at any university, including OSU, there are hundreds of programs that reflect distinct communities of practice, research, and knowledge. Being able to show students' best work in the discipline and measuring

that work against the standards of the discipline is one way in which to demonstrate accountability and also to be able to roll outcomes into a big picture story. For example, let's say that excellent writing is determined to be one of the learning outcomes of a college education at OSU. What is deemed excellent writing in economics may look very different than excellent writing in history or public health or engineering or business. One standard test of writing would therefore not be truly representative of an OSU student's "excellent writing" ability. Yet, aggregating data from the distinctive fields around writing could begin to tell the larger story of the writing learned and practiced by our graduates.

About seven months ago at the Student Learning and Assessment Symposium, six OSU faculty members engaged in a brief discussion around what our students should know upon graduation regardless of major. Each person had a different set of ideas about what was

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important. In "Our Students Best Work (2004, p. 5-6), the Association of American Colleges and Universities proposes the following key learning outcomes for higher education institutions.

- "Strong analytical, communication, quantitative, and information skills. . ."

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University Assessment Council Launched

The University Assessment Council has been convened! The first event was a kick-off reception where members connected around a new theme and shared individual perspectives regarding assessment at Oregon State.

This was followed by an opportunity to meet with Dr. Barbara Walvoord from the University of Notre Dame and to attend a workshop she presented in Salem. Dr. Walvoord is a leading expert and author in the field of assessment and has an approach

especially suited to the needs and concerns of faculty. One person stated, "she is one of the most grounded, sensible authorities on assessment and assessment strategies that I've encountered. She makes the process eminently do-able."

The response to her visit was overwhelmingly positive.

To aide in clarifying the parameters of the Council,

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Financial Aid—Working to Help Students Succeed

Bridges are a combination of style and function unique in the engineering world. Moreover, they are an interesting symbol of what it means to work in the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships. The primary role of the Financial Aid Office is to build a bridge between the goals of OSU and the goals of a family and student. Fortunately, most of the time, the span between the University's goals and the family and student goals are reached. Financial Aid staff play an active role in keeping federal and state aid focused on access and protecting the best interests of a diverse student population.

In order to improve the opportunities for families and students to participate in spanning the divide between their resources and the costs of financing a college education, the staff in the Financial Aid Office participates in over 90 events during the year. This translates into contact with over 6,200 different folks who are interested in trying to learn more about how to finance their or their student's college education. Most of these contacts are in workshops and outreach programs conducted around the state. This is in addition to the help that prospective students receive from other members of the Enrollment Management team or the many individual appointments held at the OSU Financial Aid Office.



The Financial Aid bridge is unique, since typically, no one type of bridge will fit every situation. The bridges that the Financial Aid staff work to develop with a student or family often take on a unique character in order to meet the diverse needs of each student. Over the course of a year, the staff in the Financial Aid

Office receive Federal Student Aid data from over 23,000 students and families. They manage the allocation of over \$132,000,000 and work with hundreds of different loans, grants, employment, and scholarship programs available to OSU students.

People in Financial Aid know that if a student cannot bridge the gap in resources needed to finance their education then they will not reach their educational goals and OSU will not reach its goals either. To paraphrase a well-known President, "it's about the students, stupid." Thus, within the confines of all the rules and stipulations about aid, the focus remains on students.

For several years using various assessment methods, the Financial Aid staff have used assessment methods to examine services, processes, and interactions. As a result, they have increased their ability to assist students and families in bridging the gap, and have improved services by:

- Making more information available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week via web services;
- Increasing outreach and the number of workshops designed to meet the varying needs of diverse students;
- Staying up to date on regional and national legislation that could help or hinder students' access to aid and communicating that to OSU policy-makers;
- Training office personnel in better customer service and streamlining access to advisors;
- Collaborating with Business Services to decrease the amount of confusion experienced by students around the disbursement of their aid; and,
- Working with OSU and state policy-makers to increase available aid such as the creation of the OSU work study program.

While the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships can do little about the costs of higher education, they do work to help shape a positive educational experience for students. The staff in the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships are committed to the ongoing examination and improvement of services, and to meeting the challenges that come with tailoring services to the diverse needs of students.

For further information about ways in which the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships is improving service to students and families, contact Kate Peterson, Director of the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships at kate.peterson@oregonstate.edu.



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- "Deep understanding of and hands-on experience with the inquiry practices of disciplines that explore the natural, social, and cultural realms. . ."
- "Intercultural knowledge and collaborative problem-solving skills. . ."
- "A proactive sense of responsibility for individual, civic, and social choices. . ."
- Habits of mind that foster integrative thinking and the ability to transfer skills and knowledge from one setting to another. . ."

Thus, the initial challenge is for OSU faculty to agree on the key learning that a student must take from OSU upon graduation, regardless of major. These outcomes will likely be general in nature so that they can be molded, designed, and assessed in the context of the discipline. Thus, this is a strategy for accountability that is driven by the faculty and is one of curricular design and delivery of the intended outcomes based in the discipline rather than a one-size-fits-all test or assessment measure.

University Assessment Council

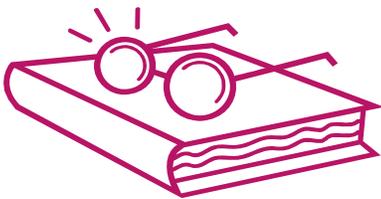
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the following quote is from the formal charge:

The purpose of the University Assessment Council is to encourage leadership and develop a structure for establishing an enduring campus-wide culture of assessment with the intention that all faculty will participate to assure a compelling learning experience for students at OSU. This will be a learning group as well as a group dedicated to action and change.

The group will be working to shape the structure, prioritize efforts, establish timelines, develop a common language, and promote collaboration in the area of assessment of student learning. One of their unique tasks will be to establish a set of common learning outcomes for all OSU graduates.

For more information about the work of the University Assessment Council, contact Dr. Mina McDaniel, Director of Academic Programs and Academic Assessment at 541-737-8009 or email at Mina.McDaniel@oregonstate.edu.



For Further Reading

Association of American Colleges and Universities. (2004). *Our students' best work: A framework for accountability worthy of our mission*. Washington, D. C.: AAC & U.

Greater Expectations National Panel. (2002). *Greater expectations: A new vision for learning as a nation goes to college*. Washington, D. C.: AAC & U.

So Many Outcomes—So Little Time

How to Focus Your Assessment

Prepared by Molly Engle, Assessment Specialist, Office of Academic Programs and Academic Assessment

You have designed your program?

You have written your learning outcomes? (...only you have 47 of them)

And you are thinking, "How will I ever assess all that?"

Answer: Don't.

Focus your outcomes, instead.

"How," you ask, "do I do that?"

Answer: By developing a logic model.

What is a logic model?

A logic model is a way to map your program for planning purposes as well as for assessment/evaluation purposes. It helps clarify your program and what you can expect to happen as a result of implementing your program. It helps you see your program in the bigger picture.

Logic models are a carefully laid out map of a program showing the whole and the various parts. It is a series of logically defensible *if-then* statements. One of the best reasons for using logic models (and there are many variations) is that: "Logic models are a tool to facilitate ownership of community programs, maximize their sustainability, and get results."

The map is made up of at least four components (sometimes more):

- ◆ Situation
- ◆ Inputs
- ◆ Outputs
- ◆ Outcomes

The **situation** is the context in which the program will be held, it is the justification for the program, it is often the needs assessment conducted to establish the program.

Inputs are the resources necessary to carry out the program. They include time, money, personnel, materials and supplies, venue, transportation, etc.

Outputs are typically divided into the sub categories—activities and participants—and are a place where COUNTING serves as the form of evaluation (e.g., the number of people you reached, the number of workshops you conducted, the number of brochures you created, the number of anything.) Outputs are necessary and they are NOT sufficient to measure the effectiveness of a program.

Outcomes show the difference in people's lives that the program is making. There are three levels of outcomes—short term, medium term, and long term. **Short-term** outcomes are changes in knowledge, awareness, attitudes, skills, opinions, aspirations, and motivations. They are often called "knowledge" outcomes. **Medium term** outcomes are changes in behaviors practice, decisions, policies, and social action. They are often called "action" outcomes. The third type, **Long-term outcomes** are changes in social, civic, economic, and environmental conditions. They are often called "condition" outcomes.

How do I use this model?

A logic model is a tool for program planning. By listing outcomes, what you expect to happen with your program, you can create a series of if/then statements about what activities you will do and what audience you will reach. Once you list your activities and audience, you can list what resources and how much of them you will need to do those activities and reach those audiences. It is important to be as specific as possible when

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listing resources in order to insure that you truly have the resources to deliver the outcomes you are proposing.

Below is a blank work sheet of a logic model modified from one used by the University of Wisconsin Extension Service (<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/lmcourse/>).

Program Title					
Situation Statement					
Inputs	Outputs		Outcomes		
	Activities	Participation	Short Term	Medium Term	Long Term

Logic Model Worksheet

Although the ideal approach is to develop a logic model as you develop your program, sometimes you need to model your program after it has already been developed.

The same ideas apply: Identify the situation; the resources needed, the outputs, the outcomes. The difference is in the questions we ask ourselves. Instead of asking, "If I want this to happen, then I need to do what activity for it to happen?" (See the if then?) "If I want to do this activity, then what audience is appropriate?" "If I target this audience, then what resources do I need to create an appropriate program for that audience?"

For a program already in existence, start by asking, "Why?" First start by asking, "What is it that we do?" Then ask, "What activities are we engaged in?" Next list all activities. Then ask, "Why?" We continue asking "Why?" until the entire program and its logic are fully depicted and the logic model is complete. Sometimes in the process of building a logic model for an existing program, you discover gaps in your logic, implementation that won't work, inadequate resources, confusion about the program expectations among stakeholders, or a situational barrier that wasn't anticipated or considered.

Engaging in logic model creation helps clarify and improve programs. And doing so helps you focus your outcomes from 47 learning outcomes to two or three expected program outcomes. That doesn't mean eliminating learning outcomes, it only means you have a way to focus so that you examine those that are most important to the program.

For more information on logic models see:

<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/lmcourse>

<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/progdev/indes.html>

<http://www.unitedway.org>

McLaughlin, J. A., & Jordan, G. B. (1999). Logic Models: A Tool for Telling Your Program's Performance Story. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 22(1), p. 65-72.

The next issue of the OSU Perspective will be published Fall Term, 2005. The submission deadline is September 30, 2005.

OSU Perspective: What is it?

The **OSU Perspective** was developed to provide assessment and other information about our students and programs. We have also from time to time published articles designed to provide to the readership opportunities for further education about assessment. We hope that by making this information available to OSU faculty and staff, we can stimulate conversation that helps keep students and student learning at our core.

The **Perspective** is published quarterly both in print and on the web:
http://oregonstate.edu/student_affairs/research/perspective.html

Ideas and suggestions for subsequent **OSU Perspective** publications are welcomed.

Please contact Rebecca Sanderson, Ph.D., Student Affairs Research and Evaluation Office, 102 Buxton Hall, 541-737-8738, or email: rebecca.sanderson@oregonstate.edu.

Editorial assistance provided by Jodi Nelson, Office of the Vice Provost for Student Affairs. Masthead design by Katie Sciarrino.