



The Culture of Learning Initiative

A Focus on Student Learning Outcomes

University of West Florida
Recreation & Sports Services

Introduction

NEW BEGINNINGS: In 2004, the University of West Florida's Division of Student Affairs embraced a campus-wide focus of assessing student transformative learning. In doing so, the holistic perspective of "the whole student" was accepted and every activity with which students were engaged in became important in assessing student learning. UWF vowed to ensure students gained an understanding of and commitment to becoming engaged, lifelong learners and more effective citizens.



Recreation and Sports Services (RSS) volunteered to participate in the initial implementation of Student Learning Outcomes (SLO's) as a new means of assessing student learning.

MOVING FORWARD: In the spring of 2005, a committee comprised of students and professional staff developed Recreation's first set of Student Learning Outcomes. The initial set of measures included 11 student learning outcomes utilizing 24 different rubrics. After a couple of semesters of interesting but meaningless data collection, program administrators reexamined the impact of student learning as a consequence of engagement among the 160 student employees. Recreation needed to be transparent about what was to be assessed and innovative in the way assessments were administered. The following measures were

developed in conjunction with the Culture of Learning Initiative implementation in 2007.

Recreation's SLO's

LEARNED THROUGH RECREATION: The Learned through Recreation SLO measured whether students were able to describe four skills they had learned that were vital to future work as compared to the 2008 National Association of Colleges and Employers annual survey of "Skills Employers are Seeking". Sixty-five percent of students could identify four skills they had learned while working for UWF RSS that are vital to future work in spring 2008. This is



compared to 58% in the fall 2007 semester. The 7% increase from fall 2007 to spring 2008

verified that the Culture of Learning Initiative was successful.

COMMUNICATION: The Communication SLO measured the ability of students to effectively demonstrate proper communication techniques. UWF Recreation's expectation was that most students would score a 70% or higher on the Queendom.com communication test. In the 2008 spring semester, 77.92% of students scored a 70% or higher on the Communication measure, compared

with 75.2% in the 2007 fall semester. This was a 2.72% increase.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION: The Conflict Resolution SLO measured students' ability to identify and handle conflict in the workplace. This particular SLO was ultimately developed to help students answer the standard conflict resolution interview question. In both the fall 2007 and spring 2008 semesters, all UWF recreation student employees failed to correctly identify all six steps of Recreation's conflict resolution model. While this data was disheartening, it pushed the Recreation staff to collaborate with departments in Academic Affairs such as the Communication Arts department to come up with a new conflict resolution model. Recreation is now working with a simpler model and putting together more workshops and trainings for its student staff.

HEALTHY BEHAVIORS: A recreation employee should logically set an example for patrons by practicing healthy behaviors. Therefore, the Healthy Behaviors measure is intended



to assess that student employees are learning healthy behavior skills. Student employees filled out Microfit Fitness Profiles, which determined perceived and actual health based on answers to questions about exercise, diet, sleeping patterns, alcohol and tobacco consumption, and amount of stress. Although healthy behavior skills results were lower in both semesters than Recreation expected, the data showed a 21% improvement from spring 2007 to the spring 2008 semester.

SAFETY SKILLS: All student employees are required to pass a Risk Management Quiz in order to standardize a level of prevention and response to an emergency situation. However, the student learning outcome indicates how well students are prepared from staff training to pass the quiz without remediation. Recreation's expectation was that 90%

of student employees would pass the Risk Management Quiz on the first attempt. Eighty-four percent of students passed the Risk Management Quiz on the first attempt in spring 2008 compared to 75% in fall 2007. Although the expectation of 90% of student employees passing on the first attempt was not realized, the increase was attributed to implementing new employee risk management workshops to better prepare novice staff.

SERVICE LEARNING: Volunteerism has personal benefits and also assists with job placement, so UWF Recreation not only wanted to demonstrate its value for service, but also wanted a better idea of what level of volunteerism the students were at. Students were asked to log their volunteer hours each semester through UWF Volunteer Services. Recreation predicted that 75% of student employees would log 20 or more hours per semester. However, data showed that in the fall 2007 semester, 1.75% of students logged 20 or more hours and in the spring 2009 semester, 1.9% of students logged 20 or more hours. After comparing the results with overall UWF student community service hours, the Recreation department discovered that 2% of students on campus register 20 or more service hours a semester. Recreation staff changed the SLO to reflect campus trends and also held workshops that demonstrated how to log volunteer hours and the importance of community service.

The Importance of SLO's

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED: Each student learning outcome ties to UWF's mission "To empower each individual we serve with knowledge and opportunity to contribute responsibly and creatively to a complex world." Student learning and development is Recreation's first and foremost priority. Empowering students with the knowledge needed to work in the department transfers to students' everyday lives and carries into their



future careers. By focusing learning outcomes on the values of the department and centering them on the institution's mission, the department is creating a culture of learning that permeates not just the department, but throughout the campus community.

The Culture of Learning Initiative

A REALIZATION: The Culture of Learning Initiative came to fruition after assessing several semesters of useless data. After seeing lower results than expected, UWF Recreation realized they needed to focus more energy on the *teaching* component of student learning outcomes rather than on the *assessment* component. This adjustment includes becoming transparent about student learning outcomes. By creating learning partnerships with students as well as teaching partnerships with faculty, staff, and even other institutions, Recreation's program administrators have a newfound respect for the power of teamwork. For example, Recreation now uses a conflict resolution model originated in and presented by the Communication Arts department. Career Services and Volunteer Services also present workshops that correlate with the Learned through Recreation and Service Learning measures.



SHARING IS FUN: Implementing the Culture of Learning Initiative has resulted in a greater understanding of student learning and development. Now, RSS not only effectively utilizes the campus resources (faculty, staff, and students) to provide diverse learning opportunities; they analyze and collaborate with other institutions on the cutting edge of measuring learning outcomes. UWF Recreation is also helping their institution by conducting workshops to help other departments as well as presenting on the state, regional, and national levels; sharing their lesson-learning with

others who struggle to develop student learning outcomes.

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE STUDENTS: UWF RSS is proud of the Culture of Learning Initiative and has already begun to see improvements in the data coming back from student learning outcome measures, and anticipate significant future improvement. More importantly, though, the student employees are not only aware of what they should be learning while working for RSS; they also know that the department cares about what they are learning and that Recreation administration is trying to provide them a great work environment and the best learning opportunities possible.

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For more information on UWF Student Learning Outcomes, visit:

<http://uwf.edu/recreation/internal>

