

Student Pulse

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THIS EDITION of the *Student Pulse* recounts exciting ways in which the Division of Student Affairs at the University of Georgia is utilizing its curriculum, the Student Affairs Learning and Development Objectives—or SALDOs for short—to support the academic mission of the institution. Dr. Rodney Bennett and Kyle Tschepikow discuss the key role SALDOs will play as UGA seeks reaffirmation of accreditation in 2010 from the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Writing with Student Affairs practitioners in mind, Bryan Rush describes how the Office of Judicial Programs used the SALDOs to identify and create learning and development outcomes for students who participate in its programs and services. Leslie Atchley discusses the role the Assessment Team and SALDOs play in creating a culture of assessment within the Division of Student Affairs, introduces this year’s members of the Assessment Team, and highlights one member’s assessment project. Closing this edition, Kyle Tschepikow takes a practical look at writing learning and development outcomes. He delineates basic concepts surrounding assessment outcomes and illustrates a straightforward approach to writing them that is grounded in current scholarship. Special thanks to Katy Janousek and Bryan Rush for sharing their work with our readers.

How SALDOs Contribute to SACS Reaffirmation of Accreditation

By **DR. RODNEY BENNETT**
and **KYLE TSCHAPIKOW**

Introduction

Every ten years, the University of Georgia seeks reaffirmation—formerly identified as reaccreditation—from the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS Commission). The SACS Commission is the regional body that accredits degree-granting institutions of higher education in the Southern states. The SACS Commission will be reviewing the University of Georgia for reaffirmation in 2010. During the upcoming review, the Division of Student Affairs will utilize the newly crafted Student Affairs Learning and Development Objectives (SALDOs) to play a key role in demonstrating to the Commission the Division’s and ultimately the University’s commitment to student learning and development.

What Is the Purpose of Regional Accreditation?

In general, accreditation processes serve many purposes. They foster excellence, encourage improve-

ment, and ensure the public and other external constituents that a program is accomplishing its defined goals (Lubinescu, Ratcliff, & Gaffney, 2001). The SACS Commission suggests additional purposes more specific to regional accreditation. For example, the Commission believes its own accreditation process provides “an assessment of an institution’s effectiveness in the fulfillment of its mission” (2008, p. 2) and “the basis on which colleges and universities can be assured that accredited institutions have complied with a common set of requirements and standards” (2004, p. 1). Most importantly, the Commission believes the process of accreditation promotes best practices in higher education. Ultimately, participation in regional accreditation is voluntary, meaning the University can function without being reaffirmed. However, reaffirmation is imperative for the University to maintain the public’s confidence in its educational services, its reputation of distinction, and certain federal funding.

SACS Requirements and Standards

The “common set of requirements and standards” with which the University must demonstrate compliance in 2010 to be reaffirmed by the SACS Commission are comprehensive, explicit, and flexible. The Commission divides the standards and requirements into four sections: “Principles of Integrity,” “Core Requirements,”

“Comprehensive Standards,” and “Federal Requirements.” These various sections address areas ranging from undergraduate program requirements to terminal degrees of faculty to student rights and records. Most importantly for this article, however, are the requirements that address the assessment of student learning and development.

In its description of the fundamental characteristics of accreditation, the Commission asserts unequivocally that accreditation “requires an institutional commitment to student learning and achievement” (2008, p. 3). This notion is plainly articulated in requirement 2.10 under the “Core Requirements.” It asks if “the institution provides student support programs, services, and activities consistent with its mission that *promote student learning and enhance the development of its students*” (2008, p. 18; emphasis added).

“The SALDOs serve as a framework in which departments in the Division can develop and assess specific outcomes and use assessment results to improve practice.”

Dr. Thomas Burke, Associate Vice President for Student Affairs at the University of Georgia, has reviewed institutions for reaffirmation as an evaluator for the SACS Commission. He believes that a compelling way for the Commission to determine whether or not an institution is compliant with standard 2.10 is to determine whether the institution has stated student learning and development outcomes consistent with its mission. Standard 3.3.1, under “Comprehensive Standards,” speaks directly to this idea. It requires functional areas, such as student affairs, to not only identify learning and development outcomes but also assess them and use assessment results to improve practice. Dr. Burke further states that the Commission’s standards and requirements are not prescriptive; institutions and functional areas have flexibility to design learning and development outcomes as well as a framework for assessing them in a way that reflects their individual missions, needs, and resources. In the Division of Student Affairs, we are

contributing to the reaffirmation process by using our unique learning and development curriculum, the SALDOs, and our assessment process as evidence of our Division’s compliance with Standards 2.10 and 3.3.1.

The Role of SALDOs in Reaffirmation

The SALDOs represent eight essential knowledge and skill areas the Division seeks to impart to students through its intentionally structured programs and services. The SALDOs include: leadership, intercultural competence, cognitive development, interpersonal skills, self-esteem, collaboration, healthy behavior, and social responsibility. As described in a previous edition of the Student Pulse, the SALDOs curriculum was created as a way to (1) systematically and intentionally attend to the learning and development of students, (2) support the general education curriculum of the Uni-

versity, and (3) provide a framework for departments and professionals to show clearly how the work of the Division supports the academic mission of our institution (Atchley, 2008).

The SALDOs’ contribution to the reaffirmation process is immeasurable. They serve as a framework through which departments in the Division can develop and assess specific outcomes and use assessment results to improve practice. In this way, the SALDOs promote best practices. They also provide a common language through which the Division can articulate its commitment to promote student learning and development—an element of requirement 2.10—and its commitment to assessing outcomes and improving practice—an element of standard 3.3.1.

This year, as the Vice President for Student Affairs, I am encouraging each department to assess outcomes in two SALDOs domains and *to report the assessment results in a uniform manner at the end of the academic year*. Each functional area may choose to develop new

outcomes to assess or assess existing outcomes, based on its respective mission and strategic goals. Through this process, each functional area will be able to articulate its unique contribution to the Division’s mission to enhance the learning environment for students, while at the same time providing evidence of the various ways we support the institution’s reaffirmation.

“Contributing to the University’s reaffirmation process in 2010 is another example of the way this flexible learning and development curriculum benefits students, the Division, and ultimately the University.”

The SALDOs reach far beyond requirement 2.10 and standard 3.3.1. As mentioned above, the SALDOs were designed to assist the Division in its mission to improve the learning and development of students at the University of Georgia. It is noteworthy, however, that the SALDOs model also aligns with what the SACS Commission considers to be best practice for institutions of higher education. As will be demonstrated throughout this publication, the SALDOs can be utilized in many ways. Contributing to the University’s reaffirmation process in 2010 is another example of the way this flexible learning and development curriculum benefits students, the Division, and ultimately the University.

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What Are They Learning? Using SALDOs to Evaluate Current Practices in the Office of Judicial Programs

By BRYAN RUSH

Introduction

In recent months, the Office of Judicial Programs (OJP) began the exercise of creating a comprehensive learning curriculum for students who take part in its services and programs. The purpose of this article is to provide a road map for how one office engaged in the process of identifying and creating learning and development outcomes for students. Although the process we utilized is idiosyncratic to an extent, I believe it is in large part generalizable and therefore has the potential to benefit other functional areas in the Division of Student Affairs interested in developing outcomes but uncertain of how to begin.

“We concluded that student learning and development were among the principles that are core to the OJP and that we wanted to identify specific learning and development outcomes in our current practice.”

Our Process

At a retreat held last summer, the OJP discussed its strategic plan, mission, and goals. In doing so, we identified several values and guiding principles for our work. We concluded that student learning and development were among the principles core to the OJP and that we wanted to identify specific learning and development outcomes in our current practice. After the retreat, the staff reviewed various resources in search of a theoretical framework and literary support to guide our investigation. Among the resources consulted, we found the Student Affairs Learning and Development Objectives (SALDOs) to be extremely

relevant and helpful. Consequently, we decided to use SALDOs as a guiding framework in our endeavor to identify learning and development outcomes present in our current practice.

The process of defining and establishing outcomes included many steps. First, we evaluated current practices within the OJP. Staff members, student workers, and the executive council of University Judiciary completed a brainstorming exercise in which they considered existing outcomes in their work in terms of the SALDOs framework. I provided each participant with a hard copy of a memo describing the history of and philosophy behind the SALDOs, as well as the rationale for their use within the OJP. Participants also received a handout for each SALDO that included a broad description, examples of achievement, and space to jot down ways in which the OJP’s current practices, policies, and programs helped students realize the objective. Participants received an email with an attachment so they could submit their responses electronically. The process took two weeks and allowed participants to work at their own pace. As with any exercise of this type, some individuals

provided more examples and more depth in their responses than others, but overall the exercise yielded sufficient, rich qualitative data.

Upon analysis of the responses, several themes emerged that related to specific programs, services, and job tasks in the OJP. University Judiciary, for example, is one program in the OJP. Many outcomes that emerged from the brainstorming exercise related to this student organization. In regards to the Leadership SALDO, a participant wrote, “University Judiciary council members are required to articulate a personal leadership philosophy during their tenure on council.” On the handout for the Self-Esteem SALDO, someone

shared, “It is often the case that the decision that is being delivered is not a popular one. Justices have to have confidence in themselves, their training, and the process.” Participants also shared outcomes related to administrative meetings, formal hearings, the Judicial Outreach Team, sanctions, and student workers.

After the analysis phase was complete, I met with each staff member to discuss the findings and how they might be used in crafting measurable learning and development outcomes for the OJP. Currently, staff members are in the process of writing measurable outcomes for their respective areas. For example, the advisor for University Judiciary may suggest: “Students serving on the council for University Judiciary will demonstrate a personal leadership philosophy by sharing their philosophies at a training retreat in the fall.” This outcome is lucid, measurable, and derives from a participant’s response to the abovementioned exercise. Once the staff establish outcomes for their respective areas, they will use the OJP’s strategic plan in tandem with the SALDOs framework to identify additional outcomes relevant to their functional areas. In the future, the OJP will assess these outcomes and use assessment results to improve and sustain its programs.

“The process we utilized was user-friendly and not cumbersome to the busy professionals in the OJP.”

The OJP has plans to create additional outcomes for student workers and students who go through the judicial process. The intentionality behind this exercise will ensure student workers are developing transferable skills that augment their curricular learning and further prepare them for postgraduate life. Additionally, the OJP wants students who go through the judicial process to receive not only handouts describing their sanctions but pertinent, intentional learning and development outcomes as well. To cite an example of another positive outgrowth of this process, outcomes used in the judicial process will also shape the training curriculum for future members of University Judiciary.

“The SALDOs provided an excellent framework through which we were able to view the work already being done in the Office of Judicial Programs and how it benefits students on campus.”

Conclusion

This process has allowed the Office of Judicial Programs to share how its work contributes to the learning and development of students and supports both the Division’s and the University’s missions. Additionally, the staff’s work on the project holds the promise of enhancing the outreach efforts of University Judiciary and other programs and services offered by our office. The process utilized was user-friendly and not cumbersome to the busy professionals in the OJP. Staff members and students alike were able to participate regardless of their previous experience working with assessment, and all who participated gained the added benefit of learning how to write clear, measurable learning and development outcomes. The SALDOs provided an excellent framework through which we were able to view the work already being done in the Office of Judicial Programs and how it benefits students on campus. The SALDOs also provided an appropriate jumping-off point for establishing new learning and development outcomes to guide our work in the future.

About the Author

Bryan Rush is a Coordinator for Judicial Programs at UGA. He is also a doctoral candidate in the College Student Affairs Administration program. He received a B.A. in History from Erskine College and an M.Ed. in College Student Affairs Administration from The University of Georgia. His research interests include the history of higher education, campus life at small colleges, and supervision. He previously served in the Office of Admissions at Erskine College and in Housing and Residence Life at Virginia Tech.

Creating a Culture of Assessment: The Role of the A-Team

By LESLIE ATCHLEY

One of the principal objectives of the Department of Student Affairs Assessment (DSAA) is to create a Division-wide culture of assessment by facilitating intentional and effective assessment projects within the departments. To accomplish this, DSAA focuses on educating and empowering members of the Division to become knowledgeable and skilled assessment practitioners. The Student Affairs Learning and Development Objectives (SALDOs) provide a comprehensive framework through which departmental assessment projects are aligned to a master Division of Student Affairs assessment plan. DSAA's educational efforts center on teaching staff to utilize SALDOs in writing learning outcomes, designing programs, assessing those programs, and using results to improve practice.

The Assessment Team, currently in its third year of existence, is at the core of DSAA's educational programming with an especially critical role to play in infusing SALDOs throughout the Division. The A-Team, as the group is known for short, consists of one or two representatives from each department in the Division who take a twenty-hour, ten-week course during the fall semester

in assessment foundations and skills. The sessions are taught by DSAA staff. At the end of the course, each representative has developed a comprehensive assessment project plan to be implemented the following spring semester. The A-Team representatives assist their departments through their projects and also become assessment advocates and resources for their colleagues who are pursuing assessment initiatives.

The A-Team is a primary means through which SALDOs are integrated into daily practice in the Division. Early in the A-Team curriculum, members meet with their Directors to discuss the departmental mission statement, current priorities, and strategic goals. The A-Team member and his or her Director determine which of the Learning and Development Objectives are most relevant to the specific programs and services they have chosen to assess.

THE MEMBERS OF THE 2008-2009 ASSESSMENT TEAM ARE AS FOLLOWS:

Rick Gray, Campus Life
Zoe Minor, Disability Resource Center
Wes Fugate, Greek Life
Lamar Bryant, Greek Life
Jessica Wells, Intercultural Affairs
Keith Wenrich, Recreational Sports
Katy Janousek, University Health Center
Scott Nelson, University Housing
Jamie Riley, University Housing
Yvette Leverett, University Testing Services

A-Team members then create and assess outcomes that align with the Division of Student Affairs mission; the departmental, unit, or program mission and strategic goals; and the prioritized SALDOs. SALDOs offer common concepts and language that are used to develop the program outcomes and objectives as well as the assessment instruments used to measure accomplishment. The visual aid below offers an excerpt from one of this year's projects to demonstrate the alignment. The project is designed by Katy Janousek, the Sexual Health Coordinator for the University Health Center. Her project relates specifically to the Healthy Behavior SALDO.

“The Assessment Team, currently in its third year of existence, is at the core of DSAA’s educational programming with an especially critical role to play in infusing SALDOs throughout the Division.”

Sexual Health Program

Relevant Component of Division of Student Affairs Mission:

“facilitating *physical and emotional development* [of students]”



Program Mission:

“The mission of the Sexual Health Program is to provide accurate information and reliable resources in order to *empower UGA students to make informed decisions regarding their sexual well-being.*”



Departmental Strategic Goal:

“One of the strategic goals for the University Health Center is to identify, categorize, and prioritize *new and innovative technology* to provide students with services or to *provide key health messages.*”



Related SALDO:

“Utilizing web technology to *enhance personal wellness* and to *understand consequences of behavioral decisions* aligns with the *Healthy Behavior SALDO.*”



Assessment Project Outcomes:

- “Female students will identify two reasons why it is *important to have an annual gynecological exam* by listing reasons on an online questionnaire.”
- “Female students will *increase their comfort level* surrounding an annual gynecological exam as measured by an online questionnaire.”
- “*Visits to the Women’s Clinic web site* will increase 20% from January to May as measured by web site hits compiled by the University Health Center’s Web Developer.”

As noted previously in this edition of the Student Pulse, the success of the A-Team projects is especially crucial this year. The project reports will be used to demonstrate evidence-based practice in the Division as we prepare for UGA’s reaffirmation of accreditation in 2010. The SALDOs-based projects provide a cohesive statement of the values that guide our practice, which will allow the Division to more effectively tell its story of enhancing the learning environment for our students.

The Assessment Team members play an essential part in infusing SALDOs into the daily work of the Division of Student Affairs. Their projects serve as models of strong assessment practice, and they will serve as assessment educators to their colleagues to facilitate greater understanding and successful use of the SALDOs as the basis for program design and assessment.

About the Author

Leslie Atchley currently works as Assistant Director of Assessment and Staff Development for the Department of Student Affairs Assessment. She holds a B.A. in English from the University of Virginia and an M.Ed. in College Student Affairs Administration from the University of Georgia. She formerly served as Graduate Advisor to the Student Government Association at UGA. Her professional interests include assessment and evaluation, student governance, staff development, and accreditation.

Coming to Terms with Writing Outcomes

By KYLE TSCHEPIKOW

Introduction

Implicit throughout this edition of the *Student Pulse* is the importance of writing measurable learning and development outcomes for assessment. As Bresciani notes, articulating measurable learning and development outcomes may be one of the more difficult components of assessment (2001). This part of the assessment process, however, is quite manageable with the right tools in hand. This article seeks to provide some of those tools by delineating basic concepts surrounding assessment outcomes and illustrating a straightforward approach to writing outcomes that is grounded in current scholarship.

Understanding the Basic Concepts

It is helpful to begin by defining what an outcome is and how it is different from a mission, objective, or strategy—terms often inappropriately interchanged. Davis Barham and Dean (2008) define these concepts and provide examples of each:

- **Mission:** A mission clarifies an organization’s purpose or why it should be doing what it does (Bryson, 2004).

Example: The principal purpose of the Division is to enhance undergraduate education. The various offices in this area work with students, administrators, and faculty in order to coordinate and integrate the academic and non-academic lives of the students so that their educational experience is the best that it can be.

- **Objective:** An objective is the intended effect of a service or intervention, defined in broad terms. It is facilitator or input centered.

Example: An objective of the Pathways to Success Program is to help students increase their academic achievement. (Here, academic achievement is a broad term.)

- **Outcome:** An outcome is the desired effect of a service or intervention, but it is much more specific than an objective. It is participant or output centered.

Example: As a result of participating in the Pathways to Success Program, students will increase their first year GPA by .3 points. (Compared to the similar objective statement above, grade point average is more specific than academic achievement.)

- **Strategy:** A strategy is a means to achieving an outcome.

Example: In order for students to increase their GPA by .3 points, they will participate in weekly study groups with trained facilitators in the gateway courses.

“An outcome is the desired effect of a service or intervention, but it is much more specific than an objective. It is participant or output centered.”

The reader may note the symbiotic relationship among the concepts. For example, an outcome derives from an objective while dictating action through a strategy. This interrelatedness ensures an alignment between the lofty philosophical vision of a department or division—represented by its mission statement—and action that occurs on the ground level. In addition, the level of specificity increases as one moves from mission through objective and outcome to strategy. As a derivative of an outcome, a strategy finally translates a mission into action steps. These characteristics are portrayed in the diagram below, adopted from Henning and Busby (2007).

Hierarchy



Learning and Development Outcomes Further Defined

This model and the definitions previously described suggest that objectives must be established in order to develop outcomes. This is not necessarily the case. Although research suggests utilizing objectives is best practice, practitioners who lack established objectives can still define good learning and development outcomes by aligning them with their mission statement, annual priorities, and strategic goals and ensuring that they are “SMART.” Developed by Krist (2006), the acronym “SMART” represents five key principles embodied in a well-defined outcome:

- **Specific:** Clear and definite terms describing expected abilities, knowledge, values, attitudes, and performance.
- **Measurable:** It is feasible to get the data, data are accurate and reliable, and the data can be assessed more than one way.
- **Aggressive but Attainable:** The outcome is realistic and has the potential to move the program or functional unit forward.
- **Results-oriented:** Describes the standards that are expected of students or the functional area being assessed.
- **Time-bound:** Describes a specific time period for accomplishing the outcome.

Designed to guide the creation of outcomes, the “SMART” principles serve as criteria to ensure outcomes measure what they are designed to measure. In addition to these principles, it is important to consider whether one intends to measure a student’s learning or development. Learning outcomes measure cognitive growth, such as improved thinking skills, while development outcomes measure affective dimensions, such as attitudinal change (Bresciani, 2001). Examples of learning and development outcomes follow:

Learning Outcome

Students participating in the Philosophy 101 course will demonstrate an increase in critical thinking skills, as exhibited by an improvement in scores on the Standardized Critical Thinking pre-test/post-test instrument.

Here, the focus of the outcome is cognitive growth, not affective growth, and it is specific, measurable, attainable, results-oriented, and time-bound.

Development Outcome

Students participating in the Alternative Spring Break Program will demonstrate an increased awareness of civic responsibility, as shown through a personal essay completed after the program.

Here, the focuses of the outcome are attitudes and values, affective dimensions, and the outcome is congruent with the “SMART” principles.

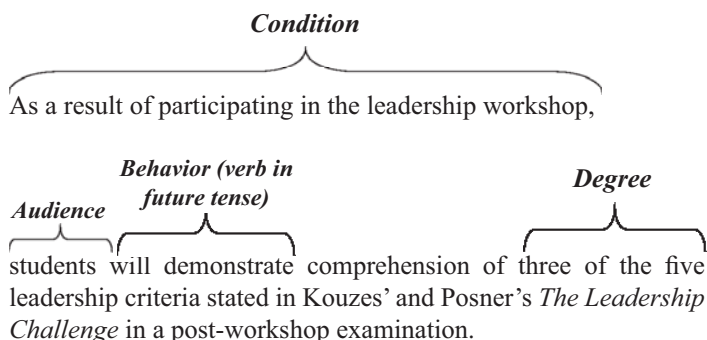
Practical Formula for Writing Outcomes

Having defined some key concepts and principles of learning and development outcomes, let us turn now to a practical formula for writing them. Whether an outcome is intended to measure learning or development, it should comprise four components: condition, audience, behavior, and degree of achievement (Heinich, Molenda, Russell, & Smaldino, 2002). The *condition* specifies the situation in which an expected behavior will occur, e.g., in a one-on-one interview, an oral presentation, or written essay. The *audience* specifies the learner, e.g., a student. The *behavior* specifies the measurable action the audience must exhibit and is normally a verb in future tense. The *degree of achievement* specifies the minimum acceptable performance standard in terms of quantity,

quality, or time, e.g., three of five performance measures. In diagrammatic form, the components appear sequentially as follows:

Condition Audience Behavior Degree of Achievement

The sample learning outcome below is used to further illustrate this formula.



Conclusion

For further information about writing learning and development outcomes, the reader may consult the references below. In addition, the Department of Student Affairs Assessment provides support to the Division of Student Affairs concerning all aspects of assessment. The department's website can be accessed at <http://www.uga.edu/studentaffairs/assess/>. Leslie Atchley, Assistant Director of Assessment and Staff Development, is available to arrange one-on-one consultations as well. She can be reached at lca@uga.edu.

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STUDENT PULSE MISSION

The Student Pulse serves to introduce the University community to the assessment being conducted on college students at UGA and to emerging research in the field of Student Affairs. In addition, this publication serves to increase the Division's exposure to, knowledge of, and experience with assessment principles.

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DSAA on the Web

<http://www.uga.edu/studentaffairs/assess>

The DSAA Website serves as a resource for educators who would like to learn more about assessment.

The site offers a variety of information about DSAA, including:

- a list of selected projects
- reports from selected projects
- consulting services and processes
- Assessment Team 2007 curriculum
- examples such as IRB forms

You can also access general assessment and research information, including:

- a glossary of assessment terminology
- a list of available research grant and funding sources
- links to other assessment-related organizations

If you have any questions about DSAA or the website, contact us at (706) 542-3564 or osaamail@uga.edu



The screenshot shows the homepage of the Office of Student Affairs Assessment. At the top right, it says "OFFICE OF Student Affairs Assessment" and "Division of Student Affairs • University of Georgia" next to a logo. Below this is a navigation menu with items like "ABOUT OSAA", "RESEARCH PROJECTS", "CONSULTING INFO", "ASSESSMENT TEAM", "ANNUAL PROCESSES", "STUDENT PULSE", and "RESOURCES". The main content area features a "Welcome!" section, a "Contact Us" section with the address "University of Georgia, Student Affairs Assessment, 201 Holmes/Hunter Academic Bldg, Athens, GA 30602", and phone/fax numbers. There is also a "Did You Know?" sidebar with a statistic: "95% of students surveyed say they are aware of the resources and services at the University Health Center".



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