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**Identifying Projects that Deliver Outcomes and
Provide a Means of Assessment:
A Concept Mapping Checklist**
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Once staff members of a program have undergone the rigors of articulating the outcomes or end results of their programs, they often are stumped with how to evaluate those outcomes. As you may be aware, surveys often come to mind as the means of assessing program or student learning outcomes. While surveys have their value, there are often many other ways to evaluate program end results. Such evaluation methods are typically embedded in the project delivery. This article will assist you in identifying project-embedded assessment methods for your programs.

What is Project-Embedded Assessment?

Project-embedded assessment is borrowed from the concept of “course-embedded assessment”. Course-embedded assessment (Ewell, 1991; Wright, 1997) is simply using the means of teaching and examining the learning that occurs in the classroom and using it to evaluate whether or not the intended outcomes of the course have been met. Peter Ewell (2003) calls these embedded project methods “naturally occurring assessment techniques”. Palomba and Banta (1999) call these direct methods of assessment.

Whichever term you choose, the point of course-embedded and project-embedded assessment methods is that they not only help you deliver the outcome or intended end result of your program, but they are also a great way to provide you with information on how to improve that which you are trying to influence. Many ideas for project-embedded assessment can be found in and adapted from the classroom as well as from the implementation of your own workshops, programs, and projects.

How do You Identify Project-Embedded Assessment Methods?

There are certain steps you can follow to help you identify your project-embedded assessment techniques. The following Concept Mapping Checklist was inspired by *Eric Hansen, Assistant Director for Marketing, Assessment, and Public Relations in University Housing and Dining Services at Oregon State University*. While working with Eric on his comprehensive assessment plan, *Rebecca Sanderson, Director of Assessment for Student Affairs at Oregon State University*, and I were explaining to Eric how many of the methods for evaluating outcomes lie within how the outcomes are delivered. Eric

summarized his learning of what I was trying to explain to him in a series of steps. Those summarized steps inspired me to become more articulate and to “write the steps” down.

Thus, the following steps attempt to summarize how to breakdown the delivery of outcomes in order to identify project-embedded assessment methods. In other words, once you have drafted the intended end results of your program, you then examine the program to see how you are delivering the outcomes. The way in which you deliver or implement the outcomes clues you into the means in which you can use the projects to evaluate your outcomes. Following certain may make this process more clear.

The Steps

Select a program you need to evaluate and follow the following steps.

Step #1 – Articulate your program outcomes. After answering the questions about whether your program and student learning and development outcomes are meaningful and manageable (refer to this article - - <http://www.naspa.org/membership/mem/nr/article.cfm?id=996> - - for those questions) the next key question on which to focus is “how will I be able to identify whether my outcomes have been met?”

Be sure to follow the rest of the steps using one outcome at a time. It does not matter whether it is a program outcome or a learning or development outcome. (See <http://www.naspa.org/membership/mem/nr/article.cfm?id=475> for the difference in types of outcomes)

Step #2 – Describe the end result of the outcome by using active verbs (e.g., demonstrate, articulate, illustrate, conduct, apply). While much of this step is incorporated in the writing of the outcome, much more of it is used when identifying the means of evaluation. In other words, you won’t know what to evaluate, let alone how to program or deliver the outcome, if you don’t know what meeting the outcome looks like.

Examples:

1. What does problem solving look like?
2. What does student responsibility look like?
3. How will I know if the student is able to make ethical decisions?
4. How would I identify leadership skills?

The answers to these questions typically formulate the criteria for which you will be using to identify whether the outcome has been met. These criteria can be found in the naturally occurring assessment techniques (e.g. project-embedded assessment methods such as essays, observed behavior, student interactions, debates) or they can be used to design a means to evaluate (Ewell, 2003) (e.g., surveys) the intended learning or development.

Step #3 – Describe how your program is delivering the outcome. How do you know that the intended end result of your program will be met if you don’t know that the

outcome is being delivered? This is key and this is where a lot of the improvement in assessment occurs. Many programs realize that they have articulated outcomes for which they have no activity, program, or workshop that is delivering the learning for that outcome.

If you are not sure that your program is delivering the activity, workshop, or program to meet a particular outcome, you can diagram it. See step #4.

Step #4 – Diagram or map which activity program, project, or workshop is delivering or is producing each intended outcome. Once you have identified how you are delivering each outcome, you can list out the activities and literally map them to the outcomes, which they are delivering.

If you are unsure which activities are delivering your outcomes, then you can list your activities, programs, and workshops along a horizontal line. Next, list your program and learning and developmental outcomes along a vertical line. Finally, place a check in the box that corresponds with the activity, program, or workshop that delivers or implements each outcome.

An Example Project Concept Mapping Chart

	Activity/Project/Workshop 1	Activity/Project/Workshop 2	Activity/Project/Workshop 3	Etc.
Outcome 1				
Outcome 2				
Outcome 3				
Etc.				

Step #5 – Determine if the activities, workshops, and/or projects, are useful and appropriate in achieving your stated outcome. If the projects you already have in place are not carrying out your outcome, then you have plenty of opportunities for improving your program even before you begin to evaluate its effectiveness by changing what you do in your program. If the activities, workshops, and projects are appropriate and logical, you can move to the next step.

Step#6 – Identify the embedded artifact or naturally occurring assessment technique in the delivery of the outcome. In examining the activity, is there an embedded artifact that can directly measure the stated outcome? Here is where the process begins to come alive, as you see how you are delivering the outcome, you begin to see how you can also evaluate the outcome using the criteria you articulated or documented in step #2.

In delivering the outcome, you can ask yourself how you know the students have learned that which you expected them to learn, developed in the manner you intended, or that the program accomplished that which you planned. Doing this provides you with an opportunity to identify means of evaluation that are already naturally occurring, such as examining the quality of activities students have planned in the student union, of advising sessions students have administered as Para-professionals, of resumes students have filed in your office, and of debates students are presenting to Faculty Senates. The list goes on and on.

If you can identify one of these naturally occurring assessment techniques, then list that within the box or on another sheet of paper. Remember that identifying these direct methods of assessment or naturally occurring assessment techniques is very similar to thinking about classroom assignments that students are asked to complete in order for the professor to determine whether what was expected to have been learned was actually learned.

If you only have a one-hour workshop in which to deliver your program outcome, then it seems obvious that there is very little room to use a naturally occurring assessment technique. However, you can still use the project (e.g., the one hour workshop) as the means of evaluation. Thus, a quick survey, which identifies the 4-5 or so, learning outcomes for the workshop with a 5-point Likert scale may do the trick. Simply ask the students attending the workshop to rate the degree to which they agree that a particular learning outcome was met by the workshop.

Now, just finish the steps of assessment by closing the assessment loop.

Step #7 – Deliver the outcome and implement the method of evaluation.

Step #8 – Collect the evidence that the outcome has been met or not been met.

Step #9 – Analyze the data and reflect on its meaning.

Step #10 – Make decisions or recommendations to influence the end result/outcome and refine your assessment plan.

Step#11 – Plan a time to follow-up on assessing the decision made about the outcome.

After completing these steps, you should be well on your way to identifying meaningful and cost-effective course-embedded assessment projects, as well as having identified many ways in which to improve your program and its intended results. For more information about course-embedded assessment techniques that can be adopted for project-embedded assessment, see Angelo and Cross (1993) *Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers, Second Edition*.

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