

# Learning Outcome Reflections from the University of North Dakota Student Wellness Center

## Introduction

At first glance, the learning outcomes outlined in *Learning Reconsidered*<sup>1</sup> can seem a bit overwhelming. It's easy to get lost in the language and give up thinking that all programs must be re-designed to fit the "newest rage." In reality, learning outcomes are already built into programs and operations. Through defining and identifying the outcomes, a true assessment becomes apparent which, if applied, can position an organization to move to the next level of development.

The following will outline a reflection of the process implemented by the University of North Dakota Student Wellness Center's executive team. Our intention is to aid other University's recreation and wellness centers in establishing learning outcomes.

## Establishing a Language

In a scholarly setting, the language from *Learning Reconsidered* is quite appropriate to discuss learning. To a student or staff member who has never read the publication, it can serve as a large barrier of communication. To allow for maximum collaboration in writing learning outcomes, the UND Student Wellness Center established a common language that all partners could "wrap their brains around."

The first term that was defined was *learning outcome*. As simple as that may seem, it was probably the biggest hurdle. Learning outcomes are statements that specify what learners will know or be able to do as a result of a learning activity. Outcomes are usually expressed as knowledge, skills, or attitudes. The outcomes are easily identified as they relate to the topic and subject matter of the class.

The term learning outcome applied to the education happening outside of the classroom opens up an innumerable list of topics and subjects. While the topic list could go on forever, the common thread is that they are all "life skills" that will set the participant or employee up for success in life. Translated, "life skill" has become an easier term of learning outcome.

From that establishment, staff and students made a list of terms that they either wanted or thought they were learning based upon their experiences at the Student Wellness Center that would apply to life during or after college. Questions were asked such as, "What will a student learn from being an official that they can take with them in their professional position as a chemical engineer?" In the program perspective, "What will the group exercise participant learn from taking a class two times per week for a half an hour?"

Within our student employee positions, it was important to consider, our daily operations to assist in determining what students are learning. For example, the Guest Experience Associate at the Wellness Center completes a written shift report at the end of his or her shift. He or she initials all routine procedures and writes any comments regarding the shift. He or she then emails

---

<sup>1</sup> *Learning Reconsidered*, 2004.

it to his or her supervisor. This process may appear to be a basic function for operation, but in completing that shift report, the student is practicing writing skills, utilizing a crucial computer application used for communication and proving accountability to his or her actions through completing the report on time and initialization.

The collaborated terms served as our “transferable skills” list. Some of the terms included accountability, responsibility, healthy habits and confidence. The list was condensed and categorized by similar terms. Then the terms were compared to the established Learning Reconsidered list to determine if these terms matched in definition. The comparison was extremely close. This process allowed for customization to the organization. One category that was not as emphasized as our organization would have liked was communication, therefore resulting in a stand-alone outcome not directly comparable to the publication.

The solid seven topics provided a great outline for learning, but further clarification was sought. The transferable skills list was referenced to provide continued explanation under each heading. Three to four statements were written to explain in further detail the desired skills that employers often times refer to as the “soft skills.” This collection of statements serves as a guide to not only the program coordinator as to the desired skills that employers want, but also to the student as a roadmap for preparation. It is no secret that many young professionals enter the job market with up-to-date information and knowledge of the field and technical skills, but lack the ability to communicate or balance time. Our role is to build knowledge, skills and talents that will assist them. Our need is to measure our ability to do so. The key to establishing a realistic set of learning outcomes is making it simple for any student to understand and thus succeed, if so motivated

### **Assessment**

While assessment of learning is pretty straight-forward in the classroom through testing, papers and presentations, the process of proving competencies in the area of soft skills is more difficult. A supervisor’s perceptions of a student’s self-confidence can be much different than the student’s reality of his or her self-confidence. At this point the University of North Dakota’s assessment strategies involve pre and post testing of student employees in relation to the established statements.

Once the student has been selected for a position, he or she completes an orientation with a pre-test that relates to the learning outcomes. Each statement under the learning outcome topics has a corresponding question. The initial results should tell us where the incoming group of employees’ strengths and weaknesses lie. This becomes an individual benchmark. In addition, this information will shape the curriculum chosen for professional development opportunities provided to students.

At the completion of one year, the student will complete the same assessment tool. The results of the assessment will provide for feedback on an individual level as well as an aggregate level. The results after one year will tell us where the students have improved according to their self-perceptions provide the data to support current practices within our student development program.

### **Implementing YOUR Learning Outcomes**

The learning outcomes that were written for the UND Student Wellness Center were intended for the UND Student Wellness Center. While the outcomes are fairly universal and based upon the fundamentals outlined in Learning Reconsidered, they are designed to accomplish and carryout unique goals to the UND Student Wellness Center. The mission, vision and values all serve as the backbone to every program and operation of the organization, and the established learning outcomes are no exception. When establishing the outcomes for another organization, keep the foundations in mind. Moving an organization forward involves creative and critical thinking in relations to current and future operations. Peter M. Sendge said, “Practicing a discipline is different from emulating “a model.” All too often, new management innovations are described in terms of the “best practices” of so called leading firms. While interesting, I believe such descriptions can often do more harm than good, leading to piecemeal copying and playing catch-up.”<sup>2</sup> Ensure the learning outcomes are unique to the organization. Success in education is based upon a common vision, dedication and commitment to innovation.

Prepared by Kayla Effertz, Coordinator of First Impressions  
Submitted by Dr. Laurie Betting, Assistant Vice President for Wellness

---

<sup>2</sup> Gardner, John W. (1990). The Nature of Leadership. In the Jossey-Bass Reader on Educational Leadership (1<sup>st</sup> ed., pp.20-21).