Out of Class Reflection and Summary of Learning

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The main event from my assistantship this semester in the Parent & Family Programs Office at the University of California, San Diego was Family Weekend. The artifact that best represents my learning and work for this semester is an assessment summary I compiled. This summary came from a survey I edited and prepped that was distributed to over 2,200 Family Weekend attendees. In the process of working on this summary, I was able to meet or work towards meeting the following program learning outcomes (PLOs): “articulate the theoretical foundation of student affairs in postsecondary education” (PLO #8), “engage in meaningful outcomes-based assessment of collaboratively designed… programs and initiatives,” (PLO #7) “apply research to practice in an area of specialization within student affairs in postsecondary education,” (PLO #9) and “communicate ideas and concepts effectively in written… word” (PLO #10) (ARPE, 2010, para. 3). Additionally, this artifact led me to distinguish my goals from my expectations (i.e. what I am aspire to be as a professional as opposed to what should be a standard expectation of a student affairs professional).

Family Weekend is a program supported on campus because there is research to support its benefits. The motto from the Office of Parent & Family Programs at UC San Diego is as follows: “when parents are informed, students benefit” (UC San Diego, n.d., para. 2). Providing space on campus for family members to engage with their students provides opportunity for families’ increased connection to the university. In particular, students may also feel a greater sense of mattering and belonging with support from their family. According to Coburn and Woodward (2001), effective components of parent engagement include informing parents of the college transition process (i.e. what to expect as their students are moving into a new stage in their lives and families they a different role), equipping them with tools to support their students,
“defining the relationship between parents and the institution” (p. 33), and connecting parents to the institution (perhaps though campus traditions and rituals).

The results of the survey demonstrated that over half of the respondents felt better connected with the institution and almost three quarter of respondents felt that the weekend brought them to a better understanding of their student’s life.

As I have learned from the assessment course this semester, there is a difference between assessment and evaluation in that evaluation predates assessment. Assessment takes the process a step further; when the results of evaluations are shared, communities can make informed decisions in advancing and improving programs (Schuh & Upcraft, 1999 as cited in Bresciani, 2009). I was lucky enough to not only be a part of the evaluation process, but also the assessment process. My supervisor shared the information and highlights to various individuals (staff, faculty, deans, & provosts) and departments across campus in debriefing, brainstorming, and planning for next year’s event.

While compiling the summary, I recognized the diverse audience and stakeholders of the information and made sure to use common language in order to “communicate ideas and concepts effectively in written… word” (PLO #10) (ARPE, 2010, para. 3). Though I have had multiple opportunities to meet PLO #10, this opportunity in particular stood out to me because the stakes were higher. During a meeting, I observed a provost just continuously looking at the data about the colleges and I remember feeling a bit panicked (“Did he find a mathematical error? Are my pie charts off? Does he think the information is skewed?”). It occurred to me later that the provost was looking at the data closely not because he was questioning it, but more so because the information was communicated in his language (i.e. numbers and data). An epiphany occurred, and I realized how much assessment can contribute to bridging the gap
between student affairs and academic affairs. Overall, I would say this artifact was one that helped me work towards “engag[ing] in meaningful outcomes-based assessment of collaboratively designed… programs and initiatives” (ARPE, 2010, para. 3). If I could do things differently (or again) to fill more of the outcomes piece, I would have: (1) identified and stated more explicitly particular goals and learning outcomes pre-Family Weekend, (2) directly focused evaluation questions to how they measure the learning outcomes (many of the questions on the survey focused on customer satisfaction as opposed to learning), and (3) then see how the program learning outcomes were met or not met.

In terms of professional and personal goals, the Family Weekend summary did not directly contribute to meeting the goals I identified after my first year. However, compiling this summary did lead me to reflect on my future practice as a student affairs professional. The benefits from the assessment being used in meaningful ways outweighed the cost of the time it took to disseminate the survey and summarize the data. This serves as a great reminder since I understand that time (and knowledge) is usually a barrier for assessment. Hopefully, the more experience I have in conducting assessment and summarizing data, the time it takes to complete the work decreases. I do not see integrating assessment in my work as necessarily a professional or personal goal, but more of something that is standard, a norm, and absolutely crucial in serving students. The Merriam-Webster online dictionary (n.d.) defines a goal as the “the terminal point of a race” and “the end toward which effort is directed” (para. 4-6). As long as programs are present, assessment never has a terminal or end point. Thus, it will continue to be ongoing for me.
References


