

YOUNG PROFESSIONALS NAVIGATE
THE WORLD OF STUDENT AFFAIRS

BREAKING THE SECOND-GENERATION
GLASS CEILING

STUDENT AFFAIRS IN THE GLOBAL
HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

Leadership Exchange

SOLUTIONS FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS MANAGEMENT

VOLUME FIFTEEN • ISSUE ONE • SPRING 2017



FROM
CAMPUS **TO**
CAREER

**COCURRICULAR
LEARNING
FOCUSES ON
SKILLS
TO MEET EMPLOYER
EXPECTATIONS**



NASPA

Student Affairs Administrators
in Higher Education

OPERATIONALIZING A PROCESS FOR COCURRICULAR LEARNING: A CASE STUDY

BY JEFF KING

What if it were possible to institutionalize an initiative that would:

- Help students develop important beyond-disciplinary skills that employers demand;
- Equip graduates with the skills and tools to demonstrate beyond-disciplinary skills when they are hired, saving employers the time and expense of doing so;
- Promote student engagement through high-impact practices in the curriculum and the cocurriculum;
- Shrink the achievement and retention gaps between the general student body and students from underrepresented, low socioeconomic status, and first-generation populations;
- Provide training to staff and faculty on how to design activities, assignments, and environments likely to prompt important beyond-disciplinary and perspective-expanding learning (transformative learning [TL]), and assess students' achievement of such learning, using quality rubrics;
- Measure the institution's progress throughout this undertaking; and
- Support all of the above with tools, infrastructure, processes, and tracking?

The University of Central Oklahoma's (UCO) Student Transformative Learning Record (STLR) initiative is one such initiative that can be adapted to different institutional missions. It is platform-agnostic, replicable, and scalable.

For many years, UCO had TL in its mission statement with TL's six central tenets as goals for student development. UCO's operational definition of TL is that it 1) develops students' beyond-disciplinary skills, and 2) expands students' perspectives of their relationships with self, others, community, and environment. TL happens in both the cocurriculum and the curriculum. Its central tenets are: disciplinary knowledge; global and cultural competency; health and wellness; leadership; research, creative, and scholarly activity; and service-learning and civic engagement.

Dedicated UCO staff and faculty have been promoting TL and helping students develop within the central tenets for many years. But as with any institutional initiative, some efforts were isolated, many were spotty and not iterative, and a few were sometimes lip-service or check-the-box efforts.

AN INSTITUTIONWIDE SOLUTION

In February 2012 UCO began designing a process to operationalize TL across the institution. The design work was arduous: The plan had to be well-developed, plausible, and innovative—UCO was pitching the initiative for a Title III Strengthening Institutions Program federal grant. The commitment to the initiative is even more important. In fact, no grant funding was in place when UCO started its “boots on the ground” work with STLR in 2014.



COMPONENTS OF THE STLR DESIGN

- A way to use the learning management system (LMS) as the repository for STLR data, even cocurricular-related STLR data.
- An LMS-associated e-portfolio as the mechanism for students to tangibly display their STLR-developed beyond-disciplinary skills.
- Rubrics for each of the five beyond-disciplinary central tenets. The Association of American Colleges and Universities' Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) rubrics were adapted/adopted to fit TL at UCO.
- Staff/faculty training in how to design activities and environments in which students develop and demonstrate levels of achievement in the tenets as specified in the rubrics.
- Card-swipe process that automatically assigns the lowest tenet achievement rating when students attend STLR-associated student affairs or academic affairs events. Card-swipe implementation solves the problem of large student to staff/faculty ratios at such events and allows off-campus tracking.
- Badging system for students to track progress in tenet achievement with a mobile student dashboard to access STLR achievement information.
- Marketing plans and materials to communicate the STLR value-added to students, staff, faculty, parents, employers, alumni, and the immediate and extended communities.
- Employer involvement through the STLR Employer Advisory Board, which has provided invaluable input and feedback to the STLR process, the evidence it produces, and the presentations made during employment interviews.



- Comprehensive student record (CSR) that marries STLR achievement to the academic transcript in a registrar-validated record that exists electronically (which can include links to student STLR e-portfolios) and in hard copy. The STLR achievement portion of the CSR is student-customizable: The CSR/STLR team believes it is important for students to highlight and prioritize their beyond-disciplinary learning; however, everything on the CSR is UCO-validated by assessment as recorded in the STLR system.
- STLR Guidebook with full disclosure, transparency, and details about all things STLR, including step-by-step design, launch, and implementation guidance.

The university did receive a Title III grant, and the U.S. Department of Education has charged it with making STLR adaptable at any institution. While the grant helped UCO move more quickly in rolling out STLR, all STLR costs will be institutionalized at grant's end with proceeds from improved retention. A one percent fall-to-fall, across-campus improvement in retention recoups around \$1.3 million in tuition and fees, and UCO is already seeing STLR increase retention.

STLR is a competency-based education (CBE) cocurricular learning initiative that also lives within the curriculum because faculty link tenets to course content. This means UCO is well positioned to launch a CBE-based curricular program/major/degree because faculty have been trained in the key elements: rubric development and use, authentic assessment, defined and demonstrable outcomes, a badging system, and more. Whether or not STLR becomes a backbone for such a programmatic initiative, it has proven its cocurricular mettle, and student affairs leadership and staff have all played indispensable and stellar roles in this accomplishment. **LE**

Jeff King is the executive director of the Center for Excellence in Transformative Teaching at the University of Central Oklahoma. For more information about STLR, visit uco.edu/stlr.

career development support appropriate to their end goals. Many students arrive on campus without clear career goals. On some campuses, career exploration support is limited and offered on a self-service basis. Many students visit career services when they are ready to graduate without ever making the connection between their studies and career opportunities associated with the field.

The task of student affairs is to share the importance of career-focused support with partners in the faculty ranks and other peers in the academy. Collectively and collaboratively, we must ensure that all services and activities are intentionally designed to facilitate students' progressive advancement toward college completion and positive post-college outcomes. Student affairs professionals are the credible and qualified messengers who must convince students, faculty, employers, and peers of the value of building connections, communities, and a stronger network to promote student success.

COALITION BUILDING

Case making is not enough. Coalition building involves embedding career-focused professional development within student experiences to give students the opportunity to access resources that support post-graduation success.

Enrolling, retaining, and graduating students are common goals for both student affairs and academic affairs. The integration of student supports does not always exist. Institutions miss an important opportunity to advance the success of students when the critical skills sets that students need are not amplified in and out of the classroom. A culture of collaboration must be fostered at multiple levels to achieve success. Responding to the expectations of students and employers can be valuable in developing the culture of collaboration that produces successful career outcomes for all stakeholders.

A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO STUDENT CAREER DEVELOPMENT

One challenge of establishing a program of value is that campus contexts are not homogeneous. What works at one place may not in another. A strategic approach to cocurricular learning produces evidence that demonstrates programmatic effectiveness. Four key elements allow for unity in application without lock-step uniformity, recognizing the uniqueness of each campus and its cultural context.

COHORT DEVELOPMENT

One of the first steps in a career development-focused cocurricular strategy is a cohort segmentation plan. To effectively serve students, VPSAs cannot take a passive posture and wait for students to find their options. Student affairs staff must proactively recruit students through their natural affinity identifications. Effective student engagement may occur if you look for students based on:

- Program of study
- Progress milestones (which could be based on years of attendance or credit accumulation)