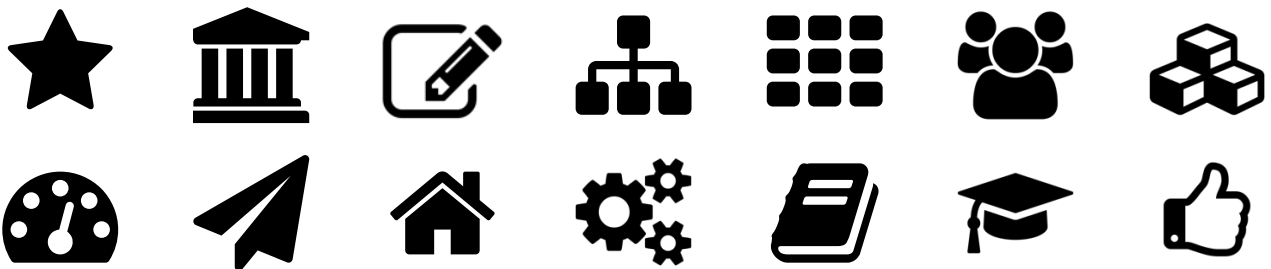


4<sup>th</sup> Edition C

# Developing a Co-Curricular Learning Model

Residential Curriculum and Curricular Approaches  
in Student Affairs and Residence Life Work



By Dr. Paul Gordon Brown

## Dr. Paul Gordon Brown

Dr. Paul Gordon Brown is the Director of Curriculum, Training, and Research at Roompack. With nearly 20 years of experience in residence life and student affairs, Paul brings knowledge and expertise to all of Roompack's educational and consultative experiences.

Paul has served on the faculty of ACPA's Institute on the Curricular Approach (formerly the Residential Curriculum Institute) for over 10 years, was a faculty member of ACUHO-I's Professional Standards Institute and STARS College, and has served in various leadership roles across a number of higher education professional associations. An experienced presenter, Paul has accepted and given over 100 refereed presentations at international and regional conferences and he has visited over 100 college and university campuses speaking and providing workshops on curricular approaches, students, and technology.

Paul holds a PhD in Higher Education from Boston College, a Master of Science degree in College Student Personnel from Western Illinois University, and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Philosophy from the State University of New York College at Geneseo.

## Sponsored by Roompack



Roompack is a software company that designs and creates solutions for residential life and education departments. Roompack's software is used by administrators (resident directors, resident assistants, etc.) and students alike to communicate, collaborate, and accomplish tasks more efficiently. Integrating with campus housing management systems, the Roompack software can be leveraged to enhance student learning and the student experience.

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to the faculty of the Institute on the Curricular Approach for their knowledge and contributions, many of which have informed this book. Thank you to Quan Phan for contributing the artwork found throughout.

The residential curriculum model, currently referenced as the curricular approach, was born out of original work created at the University of Delaware and cultivated as an in-person professional development event/Institute by ACPA. Over the years, ACPA Institute faculty have continued to develop and refine the curricular approach and its components for the institute. As a result, the intellectual property rights for the residential curriculum model, curricular approach, and related Institutes belongs to ACPA and to the University of Delaware. It is expected that individuals and institutions not reproduce or re-purpose any content from the Institute in whole or in part, whether for profit or not, without the advance, express written permission of ACPA-College Student Educators International. If additional permissions are needed for intellectual property, ACPA will consult with the University of Delaware and/or Institute faculty as appropriate. For questions or permissions, please contact Tricia Fechter Gates, Deputy Executive Director at [pfechter@acpa.nche.edu](mailto:pfechter@acpa.nche.edu).

# The Curricular Approach Process

We do a **dig** to come to a common understanding of our institution, our students, and our work. It forms the basis of our curriculum.

We write an **educational priority**, to define the ultimate objective of our curriculum.

We break the educational priority down into **learning goal statements** to define what students need to learn to achieve the educational priority.

Learning goal statements have **narratives** which provide context for why the goal was chosen, what is meant by the words we chose, and what theoretical frameworks we may have used.

We further break down the learning goals into **learning outcomes** to be more specific about what students need to learn in order to achieve the learning goal.

**Rubrics** accompany each learning outcome to help us understand the stages a student will go through in reaching that learning outcome.

We then use the rubrics to **sequence** our curriculum. Looking at a calendar we build in progressive strategies, events, and initiatives so that we construct a journey for our students to ultimately reach our outcomes, goals, and educational priority.

For each strategy, event, and initiative, we develop **facilitation guides** which outline which of our curriculum's learning outcomes will be addressed and how those activities will be carried out.

Facilitation Guides include **strategy-level outcomes** and **strategy-level assessment** that allows us to revise and improve the facilitation guides year-over-year.

**Overall assessment** of the curriculum informs our **review process**, an on-going process where we make iterative changes to our educational priority, goals, narratives, outcomes, and rubrics to improve them over time and respond to changes in our student population and at our institution.

# A Formal Rationale for a Curricular Approach

The curricular approach to out-of-classroom learning emerged and matured as a method for developing intentional learning environments in student affairs divisions and departments within the past two decades. Curricular approaches are built off of defined learning outcomes and integrated assessments that more squarely focus the work of student affairs educators on student learning (Blimling, 2015; Kerr & Tweedy, 2006; Kerr, Tweedy, Edwards, & Kimmel, 2017). These curricula represent holistic learning plans that are designed to enhance and follow a student's developmental journey through college. Designed with the student at the center, curricular approaches hold the promise of better assessment, continuous improvement, and ultimately improved student outcomes and retention.

Curricular approaches are grounded in the principles set forth in the Student Learning Imperative (1994), Learning Reconsidered (2004), and Learning Reconsidered 2 (2006). These documents center student learning as a primary mission of student affairs divisions, departments, and higher education institutions. The concepts behind the curricular approach rest on a collection of research and literature on contemporary college learning outcomes (ex. CAS and NACE Competencies, AAC&U Essential Learning Outcomes, etc.), student development theory (most often the work of Marcia Baxter-Magolda (2004) on self-authorship and creating learning partnerships), and the work of K-12 educators on learning objective and lesson plan development. Through this work, an approach was developed that enables institutions to be more intentional in their efforts and in their design of experiences for and with students.

What is now known as the curricular approach (or residential curriculum) began in a residence life department at the University of Delaware. In 2006, Kerr and Tweedy published "Beyond Seat Time and Student Satisfaction: A Curricular Approach to Residential Education" in *About Campus*, asserting institutions and professionals needed to shift how they measured success. This was followed up with an article in 2017, "Shifting to curricular approaches to learning beyond the classroom" (Kerr, et al., 2017), and codified in the book, *The curricular approach to student affairs: A revolutionary shift for learning beyond the classroom* (Kerr et al., 2020). Although the curricular approach started in residence life, its applicability has since been broadened to the entirety of student affairs work.

To share learning and strategies for this paradigm shift, ACPA hosted the inaugural Residential Curriculum Institute (RCI) in 2007, bringing together institutions from across the United States of America and Canada. The institute, renamed the Institute on the Curricular Approach (ICA), continues to occur yearly through ACPA. Higher education and student affairs professionals attend to learn how to begin implementing a curricular approach and to improve it effectively over time.

Although curricular approaches to learning beyond the classroom began nearly two decades years ago, research on their impact and how students experience it is still developing. Existing research on the curricular process focuses on organizational impact (Lichterman, 2016), implementation challenges and successes (Kropf, 2020), and the experiences of the staff (Pernotto, 2021). Other authors conducted studies addressing the impact of the curricular approach on students—including how a curricular approach impacts students' personal development, community engagement, cultural exploration, and institutional commitment (Sanders, 2018), how students make meaning of the collegiate experience (Scheibler, 2021), and the impact on outcomes for students with underrepresented identities (Williams et al., 2021).

Outcomes achieved through a curricular approach are tied to the outcomes set forth by the institutions themselves. Success in achieving these outcomes are defined on a campus-by-campus basis. As an example, one campus' residence life department showcasing at the Institute on the Curricular Approach reported that students participating in their curriculum indicated feeling a greater sense of belonging (ACPA, 2017). Furthermore, this institution shared data reflecting that students "felt more welcomed, enjoyed their floors more, felt more included on the floor, felt more challenged to think broadly about an issue, and were more likely to have worked to increase their understanding of diversity" (ACPA, 2017). As the practitioner noted, these are all factors that have been identified as increasing the likelihood of student retention (ACPA, 2017). These types of findings are frequently echoed by exemplar institutions that showcase at the Institute on the Curricular Approach. Other














benefits institutions mention include decreased student conduct issues, lesser strain on institutional budgets, and staff reporting a more proactive stance when responding to student issues. Depending on the structure of one's curriculum and its leaning objectives, an institution may find these or additional benefits.

Some of the biggest strengths of utilizing a curricular approach is that it centers student learning, defines student learning, encourages intentional design in experiences that promote student learning, measures student learning with data, and then utilizes this data for continuous improvement. This "double loop assessment" process (Kennedy, 2016), is a departure from traditional student affairs practice which typically relies on one-off engagement opportunities (typically programs) that are developed as standalone departmental offerings. Curricular approaches utilize a backwards design method whereby a student's potential learning journey is defined first, before opportunities are sequenced and scaffolded to help them in outcome achievement. This aids institutions in ways that are not possible when efforts are ad-hoc or learning objectives are ill-defined.

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# Introduction

I began my journey with curricular approaches in 2007 when working at American University in Washington, DC. My supervisor attended ACPA's first Residential Curriculum Institute (RCI) in 2007 and could not stop talking about what he had learned. Wanting to learn more, I attended my first Institute in 2010, presenting as a Showcase Institution and joined the faculty of the Institute starting in 2012.

The Institute and the curricular approach have evolved significantly in the past decades. Although its roots are in residence life, the curricular approach has since expanded to a model that can be applied to any student affairs or out-of-classroom learning environment. The name of ACPA's Institute, now called the Institute on the Curricular Approach (ICA), has also evolved over time. I, and many other current and former faculty members of the Institute, now frequently consult and conduct campus workshops on the approach and help teach others how they can implement it in their own work.

Although there have been elements of a curricular approach throughout student affairs history, the modern curricular approach initially arose from Kerr and Tweedy (2006), who documented their initial development of the approach in *About Campus* magazine. Collaborating with ACPA and its Commission on Housing and Residence Life and its Commission on Assessment, the Institute was developed shortly thereafter. Since that first Institute, a learning community of dedicated adherents and Institute faculty members have contributed to and honed the approach over time. Keith Edwards and Kathleen Gardner have contributed through their refinement of an Institute plenary that has helped orient thousands of professionals to the approach. Kerr, Tweedy, Edwards, and Kimmel (2017) also followed up on their original *About Campus* article outlining the "ten essential elements" of a curricular approach and documenting lessons learned over the past decade. Dr. Hilary Lichterman (2016) has also done some of the first formal research on the topic.

Although there are certainly leaders in developing this approach, it is also one that was developed in community. It is the collective work of these individuals, with whom I have learned and grown alongside, that has informed much of the text contained here. These individuals, as a collective, deserve much of the credit.

## RCI/ICA Faculty and Planning Teams

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*(Apologies to any left off this list! I tried to do my best with the records I had.)*

I began blogging about residential curriculum and the curricular approach back in 2012 when I was still working towards my PhD. After graduation, I was hired by Roomcompact in 2016, in large part because of my work on curriculum. This position has given me the time and freedom to help develop more content and presentations



dedicated to the topic. Since I began, I have published nearly 100 pieces of content and presented on curriculum and given curriculum workshops at over 50 conferences and institutions. The following book is a collection of much of this content. It remains freely available on the Roomcompact Blog, which you can find online at: [www.curricularapproach.com](http://www.curricularapproach.com)

Our hope for this compendium is that it can serve as a reference point for departments and divisions developing a curricular approach to their work. Curricular approaches borrow from the frameworks developed in K-16 classrooms and, as such, those hoping to learn more should look to this body of research. The blog articles contained here borrow from those traditions and blend in some of the scholarship and learning that has been done specifically as it relates to this approach in the college student affairs setting. Although some of it is grounded in residence life practice, it is equally flexible and applicable to all of student affairs. For this reason, the terms *residential curriculum* and *curricular approach* are used largely interchangeably in this text.

If you're looking to learn more about curricular approaches, ACPA's Institute on the Curricular Approach remains the premier and only destination for training in this model. Roomcompact is a proud sponsor of the Institute and is its official software partner. We will continue to provide freely available resources to all through our blog and in the curriculum workshops, consultations, and other services we provide to schools. Please feel free to reach out and inquire if you want to know more.



**Paul Gordon Brown, PhD**

April, 2020 (updated to Edition 4C in November, 2023)

**ACPA's Institute on the Curricular Approach**

(formerly the Residential Curriculum Institute)

Find out more at: <http://www.myacpa.org/events/ica>

# Your Role As An Educator

Student Affairs focuses on student learning. As articulated in our founding documents, as reflected in the curricula of our graduate preparation programs, and as represented in our professional associations and conferences, college student learning is the core of our work. And yet, sometimes our roles may not reflect this.

*“From the first Student Personnel Point of View (American Council on Education, 1937) to Learning Reconsidered 2 (Keeling, 2006), the lineage of authors of the student affairs foundational documents articulated going beyond providing services for students. The thought leaders of the profession wanted to impart an ethic of care (Gilligan, 1977) onto students within a postsecondary community. As our understanding of students’ experiences of vulnerability, exclusion, and danger. When students share these stories, these experiences with us, our response is not: “Wait. Let me write a learning outcome related to your experience.” Most often our response is grounded in care, affection, and problem-solving that extends the work of student learning in those moments.”*  
(ACPA, 2018)

When embarking on a journey of curriculum development, or an enhanced focus on learning objectives and assessment, it is important to reflect on your own role as an educator, whether you fulfill this role, and what helps or hinders you in its pursuit. As you seek to develop more intentional learning efforts on your campus, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do you view yourself as an educator?
- Are you an educator?
- Are you viewed as an educator by others?
- What are the challenges to fully realizing your role as an educator?

Individuals and institutions each have their own unique set of circumstances. Because of this, the curriculum development process will necessarily look different at different institutions. As you embark on this journey, take the time to reflect and gain a deep understanding of your campus culture and context, as well as where you fit into this individually. Remember that curriculum development is as much a process as it is a product.



## **Curriculum Reminders**

**Curricular approaches are focused on learning.**

One thing curricular approaches always come back to is learning. Student learning. How are you impacting student learning? What do you want students to learn? How effective are you in teaching students what you want them to learn? Creating a campus community of engaged learning forms the heart of our work. Make sure you develop your curriculum and examine your practices through the lens of student learning. If something doesn't contribute to student learning, should you continue to pursue it? There are many other goals you may have that are not explicitly about learning per se, but contribute to learning, such as your community building efforts. Be mindful of these efforts as well.

### **Do you view yourself as an educator?**

When you think about your day-to-day work, do you approach it with the mindset of an educator? Student affairs positions are varied—with some involving more operational or administrative-heavy roles. Some involve closer daily work with students while others may work at a distance. Individuals that embrace a curricular approach recognize themselves as educators and contributors to the student learning experience. How do you contribute to student learning?

### **Are you an educator?**

You may think of yourself as an educator, but is that what you do in practice? Perhaps you have certain duties in your position that don't make you feel like an educator but are nevertheless important to support the student learning experience. Are the policies, processes, and procedures you follow designed to enhance student learning?

### **Are you viewed as an educator by others?**

If one were to ask your students, their parents, the faculty on your campus, or other administrators, would they say you are an educator? Do you interact with these audiences in the way an educator might? What are the messages in the marketing materials put out by your department, division, or institution? How can you help educate others about your role as an educator?

### **What are the challenges to you fully realizing your role as an educator?**

What roadblocks are in the way of you fully realizing your role? Are they within yourself? Within your department? Within your institution? Or perhaps there are boarder societal challenges. If you are committed to being an educator, how can you address these challenges?



# **History and Elements**

## **Of A Residential Curriculum and Curricular Approaches**

WHAT IS A —

# Curricular Approach

OR A RESIDENTIAL CURRICULUM?

A "CURRICULAR APPROACH" IS USED TO DESCRIBE A SPECIFIC MODEL AND MINDSET THAT IS AN INTENTIONAL WAY OF PROMOTING LEARNING IN COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY STUDENT AFFAIRS PROGRAMS

## timeline

FIRST IMPLEMENTED IN THE EARLY 2000S,  
AND DOCUMENTED IN *ABOUT CAMPUS* MAGAZINE.

"BEYOND SEAT  
TIME AND STUDENT  
SATISFACTION: A  
CURRICULAR  
APPROACH TO  
RESIDENTIAL  
EDUCATION,"

2006  
KERR & TWEEDY

"SHIFTING TO  
CURRICULAR  
APPROACHES TO  
LEARNING BEYOND  
THE CLASSROOM"

2017  
KERR, TWEEDY,  
EDWARDS, &  
KIMMEL

GAVE RISE TO ACPA'S INSTITUTE ON THE  
CURRICULAR APPROACH STARTING IN 2007.

# History

More and more, student affairs divisions and residence life departments are moving to a curricular approach for their educational efforts, but what is a “curriculum”? The terms “residential curriculum” or “curricular approach” are used to describe an intentional, specifically structured way of promoting learning in college and university student affairs programs. Implemented at the in the early 2000s, the model was first detailed in a 2006 article by Kerr and Tweedy titled, “Beyond seat time and student satisfaction: A curricular approach to residential education,” in *About Campus* magazine. This approach led to the establishment of ACPA’s Residential Curriculum Institute (RCI) in 2007 (now known as the Institute on the Curricular Approach, ICA). Since then, the curricular approach has become increasingly common and popular.

## Past Institutes on the Curricular Approach

1. University of Delaware. “From Just Residential to Resident Intentional: Developing a Curricular Approach to Residence Life” (January 25-27, 2007)
2. University of Delaware. “Anatomy of a Paradigm Shift: Developing a Curricular approach to Residence Life” (January 24-26, 2008)
3. University of New Hampshire. “Purposeful Student Learning in a Time of Accountability” (October 1-3, 2009)
4. Macalester College. (October 28-30, 2010)
5. Penn State University. (Sept. 29-Oct. 1, 2011)
6. Saint Louis University. (October 21-23, 2012)
7. University of South Carolina. (October 20-23, 2013)
8. Virginia Tech. (October 19-22, 2014)
9. Indiana State University. (October 18-21, 2015)
10. University of South Florida. (October 16-19, 2016)
11. University of Oklahoma. (October 15-18, 2017)
12. Chicago, IL. (October 15-17, 2018)
13. Anaheim, CA. (October 12-15, 2019)
14. Virtual. (December 4, 11, 18, 2020)
15. Chicago, IL (October 10-13, 2021)
16. Baltimore, MD (October 16-19, 2022)
17. Long Beach, CA (October 22-23, 2023)
18. Chicago, IL (October 6-9, 2024)

Kerr, Tweedy, Edwards, and Kimmel (2017) followed up on their *About Campus* article a decade later further refining the notion of a residential curriculum and expanding its applicability as a curricular approach to all of student affairs work. In his 2015 book, *Student Learning in College Residence Halls*, Blimling (2015) provided an overview of the curricular approach and related models for designing residential education initiatives. Likewise, ACUHO-I’s Campus Housing Management series (Dunkel & Baumann, 2013) contributed text providing more details about the approach and its application in residence life. Outside of this, however, there is precious little literature addressing the theoretical foundations of the model and its implementation, impact, and growth. There is, however, a common understanding that has developed through this nascent scholarship as well as in the community of practice arising out of the Institute on the Curricular Approach that has refined the approach over time.

**NOTE:** Since the publication of this edition in early 2020, Kerr, Edwards, Tweedy, Lichterman, & Knerr (2020) have published a book entitled, *The Curricular Approach to Student Affairs: A Revolutionary Shift for Learning Beyond the Classroom*, which presents the best (and only) formally-published book on this topic.

The following sections of this chapter detail what are known as “the ten essential elements” of a curricular approach. These were first formally published in *About Campus* magazine in 2017 (Kerr, Tweedy, Edwards, & Kimmel, 2017). The essential elements are ten key components that a curricular approach implementation should adhere to in order to fit the ideals of the model. As you begin your journey, and throughout it, these elements can act as guides and reminders for you. The elements will be referenced throughout this book at various points.

## PAST ICA SHOWCASE INSTITUTIONS

### Divisional

- Concordia College (2021, 2023)
- Lehigh University (2013, 2014, 2019)
- North Dakota State University (2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2022)
- SUNY Geneseo (2019)
- Texas A&M University at Galveston (2020)
- Toronto Metropolitan University (2023)
- University of Illinois Springfield (2019)
- University of Kansas (2018)
- University of North Carolina School for the Arts (2018)
- University of North Carolina Greensboro (2021)
- University of Oklahoma (2015, 2017, 2018, 2020, 2022)
- University of St. Thomas (2019, 2022)
- West Chester University (2019)

### Residential Life and Education

- American University (2010)
- Appalachian State University (2017)
- Carleton University (2017, 2018)
- Central Michigan University (2017, 2018, 2019, 2023)
- Clemson University (2014, 2019, 2021, 2022, 2023)
- Colorado Mesa University (2012, 2013)
- Dartmouth College (2009)
- East Tennessee State University (2016)
- Eastern Kentucky University (2018)
- Florida International University (2019)
- Georgia Southern University (2015)
- Georgia State University (2021)
- Gettysburg College (2010, 2011)
- Indiana State University (2014, 2015, 2018, 2019)
- Indiana University Bloomington (2018)
- Macalester College (2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2016)
- Messiah College (2011)
- New York University (2010, 2015)
- North Carolina State University (2017)
- Northern Illinois University (2011, 2012)
- Pennsylvania State University (2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2015)
- Quinnipiac University (2018)
- Radford University (2018)
- St. Lawrence University (2012)
- Saint Louis University (2011, 2012, 2013)
- San Jose State University (2020)

- Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2018)
- SUNY Brockport (2011, 2013)
- SUNY Fashion Institute of Technology (2018)
- SUNY University of Buffalo (2014, 2018, 2019)
- Syracuse University (2009)
- Temple University (2023)
- Texas State University (2021)
- The College of New Jersey (2020, 2023)
- University of Alabama at Birmingham (2022)
- University of Central Florida (2016, 2018, 2019)
- University of California Irvine (2023)
- University of Colorado Boulder (2020)
- University of Colorado, Colorado Springs (2022)
- University of Connecticut (2017)
- University of Dayton (2012, 2015, 2023)
- University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (2016)
- University of Iowa (2019)
- University of Kentucky (2019)
- University of Maryland Baltimore County (2019, 2020, 2022, 2023)
- University of Massachusetts-Amherst (2017, 2018, 2023)
- University of Minnesota (2010, 2012, 2013)
- University of Mississippi (2016)
- University of New Hampshire (2009, 2014, 2016)
- University of South Carolina (2013, 2015, 2016)
- University of South Florida (2014, 2016, 2018, 2019, 2020)
- University of Texas at Austin (2019, 2020, 2023)
- University of Utah (2018, 2019, 2022)
- University of Vermont (2021)
- Virginia Tech (2013, 2014)
- Washington University in St. Louis (2023)
- Wesleyan University (2020)
- Western Washington University (2011, 2012, 2020)
- Whitman College (2009)
- Wilfrid Laurier University (2017)



## **Curriculum Reminders**

### **Curricular approaches are intentional.**

Intentionality requires you be specific about your outcomes and design strategies and interventions to achieve them. By utilizing a backwards design process, from outcomes to practice, you can better ensure you are achieving the outcomes you wish to achieve. During the design process, consider how you will assess your objectives. If you cannot assess or measure your outcomes, you should revisit and revise your objectives and strategies.



# THE TEN ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

① DIRECTLY CONNECTED TO THE INSTITUTIONAL MISSION

"LEARNING GOALS ARE TIED TO INSTITUTIONAL EDUCATIONAL PRIORITIES SUCH AS GENERAL EDUCATION, HISTORY, MISSION, AND CULTURE."

② LEARNING GOALS AND OUTCOMES DERIVED FROM A DEFINED EDUCATIONAL PRIORITY

"THE PRIMARY EDUCATIONAL AIMS OF A UNIT ARE FOCUSED, INTERCONNECTED, AND CLEARLY ARTICULATED."

③ BASED ON RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENTAL THEORY

"EDUCATIONAL CONTENT AND STRATEGIES ARE GROUNDED IN STUDENT DEVELOPMENT THEORY AND LEARNING PEDAGOGY."

④ DEPARTMENTAL LEARNING OUTCOMES DRIVE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATIONAL STRATEGIES

"EDUCATIONAL STRATEGIES ARE DETERMINED BASED ON WHAT CAN BEST FACILITATE EACH STUDENT ACHIEVING THE DEPARTMENT LEARNING OUTCOMES."

⑤ TRADITIONAL PROGRAMS MAY BE ONE TYPE OF STRATEGY — BUT NOT THE ONLY ONE

"STRATEGIES LIKE INTENTIONAL CONVERSATIONS, COMMUNITY AND ORGANIZATIONAL MEETINGS, SERVICE INITIATIVES, SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT, AND CAMPUS EVENTS ARE STRUCTURED TO HELP ACHIEVE THE LEARNING OUTCOMES."

(KERR, TWEEDY, EDWARDS, & KIMMEL, 2017, P. 25)

# the ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

6

STUDENT LEADERS AND STAFF MEMBERS PLAY KEY ROLES IN IMPLEMENTATION BUT ARE NOT EXPECTED TO BE EDUCATIONAL EXPERTS

"STUDENT LEADERS AND STAFF MEMBERS ARE CONSIDERED TO BE FACILITATORS RATHER THAN DESIGNERS OF EDUCATIONAL STRATEGIES."

7

REPRESENTS DEVELOPMENTALLY SEQUENCED LEARNING

"EDUCATIONAL CONTENT AND STRATEGIES BUILD UPON ONE ANOTHER FOR A COHERENT PLAN BOTH ACROSS THE ACADEMIC YEAR AND THE FULL COLLEGE CAREER."

8

CAMPUS PARTNERS ARE IDENTIFIED AND INTEGRATED INTO PLANS

"MULTIPLE UNITS WITH INTERSECTING GOALS WORK TOGETHER TO DEVELOP EDUCATIONAL STRATEGIES THAT COMPLEMENT THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE AND ADVANCE THE INSTITUTION'S MISSION."

9

PLAN IS DEVELOPED THROUGH A REVIEW PROCESS

"A REGULAR REVIEW PROCESS (INTERNAL AND/OR EXTERNAL) IS DEVELOPED TO GET FEEDBACK FROM KEY PARTNERS AND EXPERTS ON CONTENT AND PEDAGOGY"

10

CYCLE OF ASSESSMENT FOR STUDENT LEARNING AND EDUCATIONAL STRATEGIES

"ASSESSMENT IS FOCUSED ON STUDENT ATTAINMENT OF LEARNING OUTCOMES AND THE EFFECTIVENESS OF STRATEGIES IN A CYCLE OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT"

(KERR, TWEEDY, EDWARDS, & KIMMEL, 2017, P. 25)

# Element 1

## “Directly Connected to the Institutional Mission”

*“Learning goals are tied to institutional educational priorities such as general education, history, mission, and culture” (Kerr et al., 2017, p. 25).*

Curricula do not exist in a vacuum. They exist on college campuses which have unique histories, traditions, contexts, cultures, and demographics. To this end, a well-developed curriculum should be built based on the unique aspects of the institution for which it is developed. A curriculum is not a “copy and paste” job. There are no shortcuts. Instead, it must be developed based on the institutional context.

Many institutions starting a curriculum for the first time may skip over this step, but it is critical to ensure that a curriculum is built off a solid foundation. A curriculum is not merely a schema of categories and check boxes. It is a researched, developed, and scaffolded system that can take years to develop and hone. Although you should not get so bogged down in the details that it prevents you from launching a curriculum, a proper curriculum requires months and perhaps even a year of pre-planning.

When developing a curriculum on your campus, ask yourself some of the following questions and identify documents and artifacts that can help inform your curriculum:

- What is your institutional mission? Divisional mission? Departmental Mission?
  - Is your institution private? Public? Religiously affiliated? Liberal arts-focused? Career-focused?
  - Does your institution, division, or department have a strategic plan?
- How is your academic curriculum structured?
  - Are there general education or liberal arts distribution requirements?
  - What types of knowledge domains does it prescribe?
  - What are the most popular majors at your institution?
  - Are you preparing students for a specific career?
- What are the demographics of your institution?
  - Are certain populations represented more than others?
  - Are there certain vulnerable populations that require specific focus or attention?
- What is your campus climate?
  - Are certain issues more pressing on your campus?

Doing local research, engaging in these topics with stakeholders, and making sure your staff members are fluent in these materials can help ensure a well-grounded and successful curriculum at your institution. Rather than collecting this information, using it once, and letting sit on a shelf, knowledge and use of these materials should be infused into your staff orientation and training processes. Additionally, missions, demographics, and campus issues can change over time. Ensure that you are constantly reviewing this information and adapting your curriculum as your institution, division, and department evolves.

### Key Questions

- How can you ensure that the unique aspects of your institution are represented in the curriculum you develop?
- How can you engage staff in the vision and mission of your institution, division, and department?

## Element 2

### “Learning Goals and Outcomes Derived From a Defined Educational Priority”

*“The primary educational aims of a unit are focused, interconnected, and clearly articulated” (Kerr et al., 2017, p. 25).*

One of the important first steps in developing a curriculum is setting and defining an overall educational priority. Educational priorities are the basis upon which all other goals and outcomes are derived. Based in the mission, context, and values of your institution, a priority should provide a broad statement about what learning will be occurring within your division or department. In many ways, this serves as a sort of “mission statement” for the curriculum—a short, bite-sized statement about what the curriculum is about and what students will learn.

Although institutions and curricula are diverse, there are nevertheless some common ends that most higher education institutions share. This is one of the reasons why educational priorities from different institutions tend to look similar. Priorities often include language about education for civic engagement, participation in a global society, and an appreciation of diversity and difference. Institutionally specific priorities may include language about specific career field preparation, religious or other institutional values, or education for sustainability or social justice.

From an educational priority, goals and outcomes cascade like a waterfall. Three to six broad-based goals provide clarification and further detail. Goals, and their defining narratives, provide more specific language about what students should achieve through participation in the curriculum. Outcomes, derived from these goals, provide specific measurable statements that guide the development of learning opportunities.

The following is an example of what a cascade may look like. It includes an educational priority, goals (+ narratives), and an example of a set of outcomes (see Academic Excellence and Scholarship). Remember that every institution is different and that your curriculum may be structured somewhat differently than the example provided here. There are a number of equally valid approaches to structuring and organizing this.

#### Key Questions

- What common elements of an educational priority with your institution? What makes your institution unique?
- How will you share and communicate your priority-goal-outcome cascade with others?

#### Curriculum Reminders

**Curricular approaches are research and data driven.**

Curriculum should be grounded in what we know about student development and student learning. In order to be effective in developing a curriculum, your staff should possess a solid understanding of theories and research. This has implications for how you hire and train staff members and the professional development you provide to them once they are working with you. Making sure that you continuously review the foundational theories and research that inform your curriculum. This should be clear to all staff, and new staff members should be onboarded appropriately.

## EXAMPLE

### **Educational Priority**

Students will become Global Scholar-Citizens that act in service to their communities.

### **Educational Goals**

**Academic Excellence & Scholarship** – Students will gain the requisite skills and tools required to succeed in an intellectual environment and demonstrate academic and career skills.

**Narrative:** Academic Excellence and Scholarship is the core mission of higher education. The development of critical thinking skills, creativity, and the ability to engage with and understand diverse viewpoints are important capacities. Developing the competencies and skills to be a lifelong self-directed learner and scholar will serve a student well throughout their academic career and in the workforce.

#### **Learning Outcomes:**

- Students will engage in scholarly discourse—gathering and evaluating evidence, developing reasoned opinions and conclusions, and engaging others in dialogue and debate.
- Students will demonstrate academic and career planning skills.
- Students will develop enhance their scholarly capacities through research, creative endeavors, and practical experiences.
- Students will develop and employ skills for success in study, time management, and academic pursuits.

**Civic Responsibility & Engagement** – Students will engage in individual and collective involvement designed to identify and address important issues in a community, understand its impact, and develop the knowledge, skills, and opportunities to create purposeful change for the common good.

**Identity & Personal Wellness** – Students will define and seek balance of one’s physical, social, emotional, spiritual, and mental health to achieve a purposeful and fulfilling life.

**Multicultural Competence & Inclusive Communities** – Students will actively engage human difference to create a culture of belonging in which people are valued for the betterment of and contribution to the larger community.

**Sustainability** – Students will apply knowledge and utilize resources that support current and future populations and global longevity of economic systems, societal equity, and ecological integrity.

**Purposeful Leadership** – Students will demonstrate a reflective, interactive, and ethical process of influencing the achievement of common goals within a group or community.

## Element 3

### “Based on Research and Developmental Theory”

*“Educational content and strategies are grounded in student development theory and learning pedagogy” (Kerr et al., 2017, p. 25).*

Student affairs professionals are educators—college student educators. Although we may not always believe we are, or maybe we are not always perceived to be, we are educators. Education and development is at the core of what we do and what we are trained in.

To this end, curricula should be based in the latest in developmental research and learning theory. This is one of the reasons why the enactment of a curriculum often requires the presence of Masters-level trained professionals. To be effective educators, staff must be equipped with the requisite knowledge and skills in order to be successful.

Residential education and student affairs work is supported by a diverse and interdisciplinary knowledge base. Drawing from psychology, sociology, philosophy, education, and business, there are many theories and diverse research available to inform our work. Enacting a curriculum requires individuals that are well versed in this literature and in these conversations. When developing a curriculum there are several foundational documents and lines of research that can be particularly useful. These include:

#### **Professional Statements and Standards:**

- The Student Learning Imperative
- Learning Reconsidered
- Learning Reconsidered 2
- Powerful Partnerships: A Shared Responsibility for Learning
- AAC&U LEAP
- Lumina Degree Qualifications Profile
- CAS Standards

#### **Research and Theory related to:**

- Development (particularly the work of Marcia Baxter Magolda and Robert Kegan)
- Identity
- Assessment
- Educational Design

Because research and scholarship are critically important to the success of a curriculum, the ongoing professional development and engagement of staff is also critically important. This is one of the reasons why ICA participants return year after year. They recognize that a curriculum requires constant education, training, and re-training of all staff members. Attending conferences, reading journals, engaging in brown bag lunch discussions, and inviting speakers and consultants to campus can all help ensure that your curriculum is successful. Investing in a curriculum means investing in your staff.

#### **Key Questions**

- Do you view yourself as an educator? How do you demonstrate that you are an educator?
- What important research and theories will inform your curriculum?
- How might your own curriculum lead to further research?

## Element 4

### “Departmental Learning Outcomes Drive Development of Educational Strategies”

*“Educational strategies are determined based on what can best facilitate each student achieving the department learning outcomes” (Kerr et al., 2017, p. 25).*

A well-known approach to education in the residence halls is the programming model. Typically, a programming model will involve a menu of different categories that structure and guide programmatic efforts. These categories may be based on a wellness wheel, or they may include broader categories such as “social,” “multicultural,” or “educational” programming. To fulfill a programming model’s requirements, a staff member needs to hold a certain number of programs within each category, each semester.

The problem with this approach, however, is that it inverts the educational process. Rather than determining outcomes *first*, and method of delivery *second*, it assumes the method of delivery *first*, and determines the outcomes *second*. While the individual categories of a programming model can be construed as a form educational goal, the actual outcomes for each program are often set by individual staff members without regard for making a strong connection between goal and outcome.

When utilizing a learning-based approach, outcomes should drive the educational strategies used. By defining an educational priority, determining goals, and setting student-level outcomes, an educator can determine the most appropriate strategy to utilize to meet their objectives. As will be discussed later (see Element #5), there are many strategies one can use besides *just* a program or event.

Another way to think about it is through the analogy of a dartboard (an analogy I learned about after hearing Susan Komives speak). Rather than throwing a dart and drawing a bullseye around it, one should seek to identify a bullseye and aim to hit it. Defining an educational priority determines the dartboard (curriculum), and defining goals and outcomes determines the bullseye(s) (objectives). Setting objectives before planning one’s educational strategies for achieving them provides clarity and allows one to better aim for the ends one seeks to achieve. Furthermore, by defining a bullseye, one can more effectively assess whether one was successful in achieving it (see Element #10).

Determining the appropriate learning strategy for an educational objective is a key concept in the development of a curriculum. Just as a teacher or faculty member determines what they want to teach before they determine how they will teach it, a residence hall educator should determine what they want students to learn and then how best to help students learn it. Similarly, just as a teacher may employ lectures, group work, discussion, and reading and writing exercises in their curriculum, student affairs educators can rely on several different strategies to achieve their learning objectives.

#### Key Questions

- What is your dartboard (curriculum) and what are your bullseyes (objectives)?
- What strategies can you employ as they relate to specific intended outcomes?

## Element 5

### “Traditional Programs May Be One Type of Strategy— But Not The Only One”

*“Strategies like intentional conversations, community and organizational meetings, service initiatives, social media engagement, and campus events are structured to help achieve the learning outcomes” (Kerr et al., 2017, p. 25).*

We’re all familiar with the premise that food is a necessary component of any educational program. Attract students with pizza and then ambush them with educational content. Although there is nothing wrong with incentivizing participation in an educational activity, the premises behind this mindset are problematic. This approach assumes that the problem with an educational program is the students, not the program itself.

Successful educational strategies should not be limited to *just* programs. There are many ways to engage students in educationally purposive activities that fall outside of this traditional paradigm. Rather than assuming a programmatic approach first, however, one’s educational objectives should dictate what strategy is the most effective method for achieving one’s ends (see Element #4). Although a program may be the best method of delivery in some instances, other strategies may be more effective in achieving certain outcomes.

Moving beyond the program as the main unit of educational delivery means that when a program is carried out, it is because programming is the most effective method to achieve the desired outcomes. It will also (*hopefully*) attract students without the need to bribe them with pizza. Students will attend an educational initiative if it is (1) in their interests, (2) satisfies a relevant need, and (3) is well planned and executed.

When one moves beyond the program, there are a number of strategies that institutions and departments can employ to advance learning. Some strategies departments use include:

- Intentional Conversations
- Group Dialogue and Discussion
- Shared Experiences and Engagement
- Community-Based Learning Projects
- Visual/Aesthetic/Artistic Communications

In addition to these broad categories, many of the standard functions of a department can also be re-envisioned as educational strategies. In residence life, for example, these educational interventions include:

- The Roommate Agreement Process
- Community Standards Development
- Campus Issue Response

While programs and events still have a place within the curriculum, they should not be the only (and perhaps not even the primary) method of educational delivery. Think of the objectives first, and the strategy second. This is sometimes easier said than done because many of us are socialized to do the opposite.



#### **Key Questions**

- What other strategies can you use besides programming?
- What processes do you currently have in place that could be re-envisioned as educational opportunities?



## Element 6

### “Student Leaders And Staff Members Play Key Roles In Implementation But Are Not Expected To Be Educational Experts”

*“Student leaders and staff members are considered to be facilitators rather than designers of educational strategies” (Kerr et al., 2017, p. 25).*

In student affairs, student staff members and leaders are some of our most important partners in the educational process. They are front-line, on-the-ground, and are integral to promoting student learning. As peers, student staff members and leaders are often best positioned to help their fellow students in ways that professional staff members cannot. There are also some roles, however, for which professional staff members are better suited. One of the key components of developing an effective learning plan is recognizing the skills, strengths, and abilities of staff members and students and structuring their roles appropriately.

For example, under traditional paradigms in residence life, student staff members are often tasked with designing and executing educational programs for their residents. And yet, student staff members are likely not the best equipped to take on this role. How can an undergraduate, untrained in student development theory and learning-centered design, be expected to create a truly outstanding educational opportunity? Certainly, there are a few standouts. There are the all-star Resident Assistants, who, through a mix of talent, ability, and the luck of the housing lottery draw, can achieve a great level of success on their floors. These all-stars, however, are often the exception rather than the rule.

When designing a curriculum, masters-degree holding professionals should take on more (if not all) of the responsibility for designing learning opportunities for students. Trained in the writing, development, and assessment of learning outcomes, professional staff members should be the driving force behind the structure of a curriculum. This is not to remove student staff members and leaders from their educational roles, but instead to free them up to do what they are best suited to do: facilitate peer learning. By setting up parameters, or the core of the learning opportunities provided, professional staff members can empower student staff members and leaders to unleash their creativity—ensuring educational delivery is appealing and relevant to students.

### How should roles be delineated between professional and students?

One of the main difficulties in implementing a curriculum is striking the right balance between student staff member and leader autonomy and the plans of professional educational experts. A balance can be struck, however, when one reflects on the strengths of each. The following is an example about how one may wish to structure these roles and expectations:

#### **Appropriate roles for *professional* staff:**

- Using research and employing high-impact practices in designing educational environments and activities.
- Writing and developing learning outcomes.
- Assessing outcomes and determining adjustments to better enhance outcomes.

#### **Appropriate roles for *student* staff and leaders:**

- Utilizing creativity to connect and engage with students.
- Engaging in dialogue and promoting peer learning.
- Developing community and a sense of belonging.

Developing a curriculum is more than just defining educational objectives. It requires that one re-examine the way work is organized and defined. Many schools that develop a curricular approach find that it requires that they change the way they hire and train their staff. When the work changes, the priorities for hiring change.

Transitioning to a curriculum also requires a change in culture. While this is no easy feat, recasting and defining a department as a learning-centered organization has the potential to produce great dividends for students and staff alike. Curriculum is as much about educating the students as it is about educating the staff.

## Key Questions

- How will you need to alter or rewrite student staff member position descriptions to fit with a curricular approach? What about professional staff?
- How will your hiring and on-boarding practices need to change to set staff up for success?
- What cultural practices in your department need to change in order for it to become a learning organization?

## Curricular Approach Q&A

### **Where Can I Find Peer Institutions to Collaborate With and Benchmark Against?**

Whether you're just starting your journey towards a curricular approach or whether you're looking to improve your current practice, connecting with peer institutions for idea generation, collaboration, and benchmarking can be incredibly useful. There are a few different avenues available to you.

One of the easiest places to begin connecting is by attending ACPA's Institute on the Curricular Approach. At the Institute, there will be knowledgeable faculty who have studied the approach and implemented it on various campuses. You will also find over 500 participants who are at various stages in their journeys. The Institute is a great place to start.

Another way of connecting to other curricular approach institutions is by reaching out to them directly. There are two lists of institutions that might be useful. The first is the list of past Institute Showcase institutions noted earlier in this chapter. These institutions go through a peer review process to present at the Institute and are therefore typically the best exemplars to look towards. There is also an overall list of institutions who reference a residential curriculum or curricular approach on their webpages catalogued on [www.curricularapproach.com](http://www.curricularapproach.com). The links with the most helpful and detailed information are listed first. Institutions with a divisional curriculum are denoted with an asterisk. Although this can help start you on your journey, a note of caution: this listing has not been peer reviewed. Just because an institution uses the label "curricular approach," and has some evidence of work towards this process, does not necessarily mean it adheres to the essential elements of a curricular approach or does it well.

Finally, you can use social media to connect with others around curriculum. Consider joining the "Residential Curriculum and Curricular Approaches" Facebook Group, which is quite active. You can also follow the #ACPAICA hashtag on Twitter and other platforms during the Institute and throughout the year.

## Element 7

### “Represents Developmentally Sequenced Learning”

*“Educational content and strategies build upon one another for a coherent plan both across the academic year and the full college career” (Kerr et al., 2017, p. 25).*

Learning does not take place in a vacuum. It takes place in time and space. A well-designed curriculum recognizes that learning is most often a cumulative process. Individuals learn and grow over time. Sometimes they regress and sometimes they make large leaps forward, but the broad arc of learning is progressive over time.

To this end, designing a curriculum for student learning requires that one scaffold and sequence learning opportunities. “Sequencing” learning objectives requires one to align objectives through time such that each successive outcome builds off the one prior. This sequencing occurs from year-to-year, but it also occurs within the year, from month-to-month. “Scaffolding” a curriculum ensures that learning that is expected to take place is developmentally appropriate and takes place with an optimal balance of challenge and support— “stretching” students towards their next level of development.

The following is an example of how a learning objective can be sequenced as a student moves through their college experience. You will notice that many of the verbs and words used follow Bloom’s Taxonomy—successively building from lower-level to higher-level thinking skills. They also reflect a deepening of developmental capacity as a student reaches towards graduation.

### RUBRIC EXAMPLE

*Students will develop skills for success in study, time management, and academic pursuits.*

First Year	Second Year	Third/Fourth Year
Students will develop effective study and time management habits to be successful in daily academic life.	Students will differentiate the needs of to successfully prioritize and complete tasks. Students will apply study, time management, and organizational skills dependent on the context of the task.	Students will engage in a cycle of continued evaluation of study, time management, and organizational skills to identify areas of improvement and develop new or revised approaches to engage in increasingly complex tasks.

The need to scaffold and sequence learning objectives is one of the reasons why developing a curriculum can seem so daunting. It requires careful attention to the learning process and a deep knowledge of what students need to learn, when they need to learn it, and what is developmentally appropriate at a given time. For this reason, many institutions choose to start with their first-year students and slowly build their curriculum over time. In many ways, this phased approach mirrors the way our own students learn. Through time, a curriculum can be honed, applied, and created in such a way that it becomes more sophisticated and responsive.

#### Key Questions

- What years in a student’s educational journey should you focus on?
- If you work in residence life: What is your live-on requirement? How are your residence hall assignments structured? Are students clustered by class year?
- What are the key developmental moments throughout a student’s college experience and when do these typically take place?

## Element 8

### “Campus partners are identified and integrated into plans”

*“Multiple units with intersecting goals work together to develop educational strategies that complement the student experience and advance the institution’s mission” (Kerr et al., 2017, p. 25).*

Part of developing a curriculum is the realization that educational opportunities need not originate within one’s own department to be valuable for students. If there are experts in a given area on campus, and they already provide educational opportunities and services, why not figure out a way to package, market, and provide these to students in a way that fits with their needs? This is one reason why collaboration with key partners and stakeholders is an important part of any educational plan. The campus can act as a crucible for learning and a place where educational messages can be amplified.

For example, in the case of residence life, there are many ways to partner with campus stakeholders to promote educational opportunities, including:

- Have student staff encourage attendance at an event and bring residents along with them.
- Develop supplemental programming in the residence halls that deepens a learning experience. This can include discussions of events (pre- or post- opportunity) or workshops for applying learning.
- Develop suggested questions that a student staff member can ask a resident in a one-on-one conversation that relate to particular issues, services, or events associated with a partner office.

Engaging with stakeholders should not *just* be about providing educational opportunities to students. Stakeholders can also be of help in creating and developing the curriculum itself. When developing learning goals and outcomes, content experts exist across campus that can aid a department in choosing relevant and developmentally appropriate objectives. Stakeholders can also help in the review of the curriculum and ensure it is meeting its stated goals and outcomes. As is discussed in Element #9, they can be important partners in the curriculum review process as well.

Some schools that have begun the curriculum development process have found that, through collaboration, the curriculum becomes something much more than just the purview of a single department. Setting a division-wide curriculum is an intentional way of infusing learning throughout an institution. In many ways, a department can lead the institution in developing, assessing, and enhancing student learning.



#### Key Questions

- Who are your important partners and stakeholders?
- How might you engage partners and stakeholders in the development of learning opportunities?
- How can partners and stakeholders be involved in the curriculum development and review process?
- How can you extend the curriculum to a division-wide curriculum?



#### Curriculum Reminders

**Everyone must be bought in for a curriculum to be effective.**

One person alone cannot develop a residential curriculum. Since all of your staff members are educators interacting with students, they must all understand and be invested in the curriculum development and execution process. This is part of the “complete rethink” required for a curriculum. Although one person, or a select committee, may be the driver of a curriculum. Everyone needs to be involved in its creation.

## Element 9

### “Plan is developed through a review process”

*“A regular review process (internal and/or external) is developed to get feedback from key partners and experts on content and pedagogy” (Kerr et al., 2017, p. 25).*

Because curricula are educational plans, they should be subject to the same peer-review processes as their course-credit-bearing equivalents. The idea of peer-review is borrowed from scholarly circles, whereby communities of scholars engage in self-governance and ensure quality and standards are adhered to. The same holds true of a curricular review process. Within a curriculum, educational experts evaluate learning plans to ensure they are meeting their stated objectives and suggest areas for refinement and improvement.

In the case of a curriculum, the peer review process should involve a broad set of educational partners. These could include education faculty, who have expertise in curricular development, content experts, such as individual student affairs departmental heads, and members of other institutions, who can provide broader perspectives and ideas. However a peer review committee is structured, it should be intentional in its composition.

#### ***Suggested Peer Review Partners for Residence Life:***

- *Faculty with expertise in student learning and curriculum*
- *Engaged living learning program faculty and staff partners*
- *Faculty or staff from the Liberal or General Education office*
- *Staff members from key offices that represent your main learning goals (ex. Health Promotion, Multicultural Affairs offices, Orientation and First Year Programs, etc.)*

Peer review of a curriculum need not be viewed as a monolithic, once-a-year process. In developing a curriculum, pay attention to what feedback loops are created. When assessment data is gathered? Who reviews this and suggests changes? When outcomes need to be revised, when should this occur? Infusing a peer review process into a cycle of continuous improvement can ensure that a curriculum is constantly moving forward and advancing.

Many institutions that embark on a curriculum find the development of a peer review process to be the most difficult element to achieve. Some are unsure of how to structure such a review, and others may feel their curriculum is never “ready enough” to be reviewed. When embarking on peer review, it is important to remember that curricula are always evolving and subject to revision. There is no “good enough” or “developed enough” to be put to a review. Part of this process requires that you to learn by doing. Begin with low level outcomes and let your peer review process develop over time, alongside your curriculum. Doing this from the start, instead of waiting until later, will ensure that the idea of continuous improvement is baked into your educational planning.



#### **Key Questions**

- Who should be involved in any peer review processes?
- How can you infuse peer review throughout the year?
- How can you start working towards a peer review process from the beginning of your curriculum implementation?

## Element 10

### “Cycle of assessment for student learning and educational strategies”

*“Assessment is focused on student attainment of learning outcomes and the effectiveness of strategies in a cycle of continuous improvement” (Kerr et al., 2017, p. 25).*

To be successful, a curriculum must be supported by a robust plan for assessment. This includes assessment at all levels of the curriculum—from educational priority to learning goals and outcomes to your engagement strategies themselves.

When beginning a curriculum, institutions may have a number of broad assessment measures already in place. These could include summative assessments, accomplished through national standardized instruments, as well as procedures for individual real-time assessments. Assessing a curriculum can draw from these available resources, but often requires a re-orientation and a deepening of commitment to assessing student learning. This includes going beyond satisfaction towards assessments that measure actual student learning.

When developing assessment plans, it is important to recognize that curricula often attempt to achieve two types of objectives: learning outcomes and action outcomes. Learning outcomes outline what students *learn* whereas action outcomes outline what students *do*. For example, we want to teach students about study abroad, its benefits, how it will enhance their studies, and the opportunities available. These are learning outcomes. However, we also want students to *actually* study abroad, not just learn about it. This is an action outcome. It is well known that study abroad programs pay many educational dividends. Therefore, through assessment, one should track not only what a student learns, but also what they do (their behavior).

Below is an example of some different learning and action outcomes related to students developing academic and career planning skills. Each would entail a different type of assessment.

### EXAMPLE

***Goal: Students will develop academic and career planning skills.***

***Learning Outcomes:***

- *Students will be able to identify career and professional interests.*
- *Students will be able to associate their career and professional interests with a major field of study.*
- *Students will be able to outline the requirements of majors of interest.*
- *Students will be able to recall how to declare their major and who to contact for further assistance.*
- *Students will be able to identify resources to help them through the registration process.*
- *Students will be able to explain how the registration system works.*

***Actions:***

- *Students will select a major or minor program of study in alignment with their strengths and career interests.*
- *Students will have at least one contact in the school or college of their interest.*
- *Students will successfully register for courses related to their program of study.*
- *Students will feel supported through the registration process.*

In this instance, both sets of outcomes are equally important. Whereas an upper-level administrator may be most concerned with the action outcomes, as they are often measured by defined “hard numbers” and used in the calculation of rankings and other measures of educational quality, the learning outcomes are equally as important as they are the objectives that help move the needle on these numbers. Successful assessment of a curriculum incorporates all of these measures.



### **Key Questions**

- What types of summative and in-the-moment assessments do you utilize?
- Are your assessment questions set up to assess actual learning or are they relying on self-reported learning? How can you change this?
- What learning outcomes and what action outcomes are most important to you?
- How can you establish benchmarks?

# The Missing Element #11

## Customized Student Learning

Kerr et al. (2017) outline 10 “Essential Elements” that make up a curriculum and yet little to no research has been conducted specifically on these Elements. While that is not to say that the Elements are unsupported by research, they borrow from proven concepts and sound principles of instructional design, but there is currently no body of research that supports why an Element should be a part of a curriculum specifically or why these elements are all “essential.” This begs the question, are there additional Elements that should be included?

If additional elements are to be added, an important “eleventh element” may be the concept of customized student learning. One of the hallmarks of a curricular approach is that it moves beyond the “one size fits all” approach of programming towards more intentional and individualized student learning experiences. This is one of the reasons why intentional interactions (sometimes referred to as resident conversations, or intentional conversations), are so often key features of a curricular model in residence life contexts. These one-on-one opportunities allow students greater voice and options in choosing their own learning.

Trends towards customized student learning can also be seen in shifts throughout higher education. As a result of demands for educational accountability and the rise of new enabling technologies, learning is becoming more tailored to the individual student’s needs and goals. For example, the rise of training and education programs through certificates, micro-courses, and online coursework allows students to learn without the constraints of monolithic degree requirements and traditional 15-week classes. Furthermore, education can be sought in places other than the traditional classroom—through apps, online educational resources, and learning networks developed on social media. The transformation is a part of a shift from “teacher-centric” models of education to “peer-to-peer” models of education.

### **Teacher-Centric Model**

Traditional paradigms of education (sometimes called the “banking” model of education) often place the teacher at the center of the learning process. As a lecturer, or the “sage on the stage,” the teacher possesses knowledge and provides it to students. This can be seen in many of the traditional approaches to student affairs that employ programmed events with speakers or authorities providing information.

### **Peer-to-Peer Model**

Peer-to-peer models are more common to experiential education programs and are often discussed as they relate to technology. These more “modern” approaches to education utilize peer interaction, discussion, and activities to make learning more tangible and “hands on.” The traditional lines between teacher and student are blurred and everyone is viewed as possessing and contributing to the group construction of knowledge.

Customizing learning allows each student to set and pursue their own learning goals with the help and guidance of peer leaders and educators. The role of the educators more often becomes that of a guide. Pairing students’ individual goals with the knowledge and skills that research tells us that students need produces an educational experience that balances the needs and desires of students with the goals and outcomes of the institution. In many ways, this line of thinking is akin to Marcia Baxter Magolda’s “Learning Partnerships Model,” A model that is already in use at many institutions that utilize a curricular approach (Baxter Magolda & King, 2014).

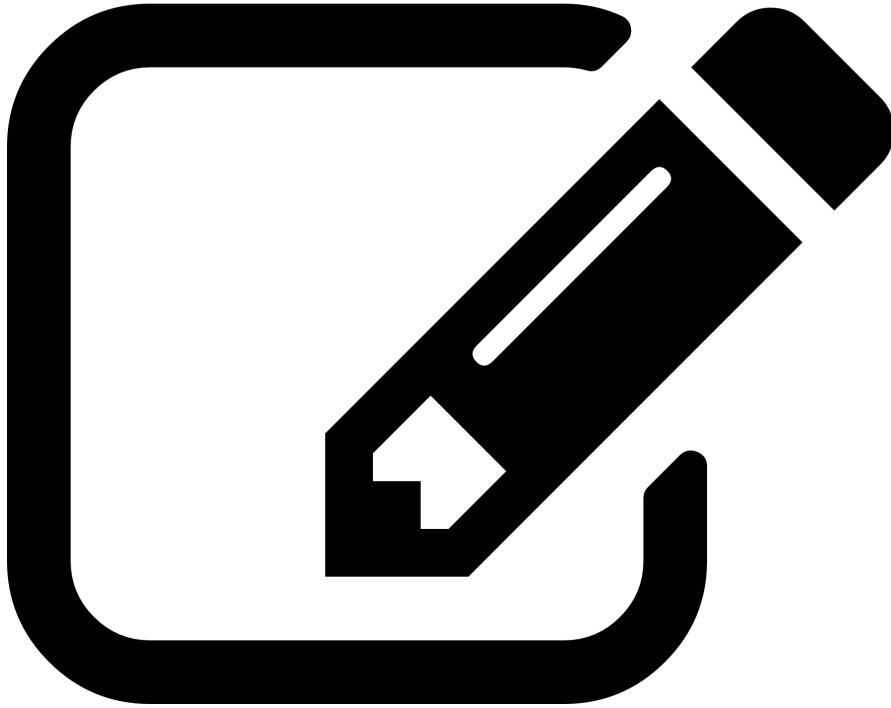


Perhaps an “eleventh essential element” for a curriculum includes the notion that learning is a partnership, that learning should be customized, or that connected peer-to-peer learning (and the facilitation of that style of learning) is an important goal. A key change in philosophy when one moves towards a curricular approach is that programming is not necessarily the only approach to student learning. Learning can occur using several strategies. Adding an element that speaks to the way learning should be facilitated explains the rationale and paradigmatic change one must create to be successful with a curricular approach.



### **Key Questions**

- How can you support customized learning approaches for your students?
- When is the teacher-centric model more appropriate and when might the peer-to-peer model be more appropriate?
- How can you best select and train staff members that can support student peer learning? How might your staffing models need to change?



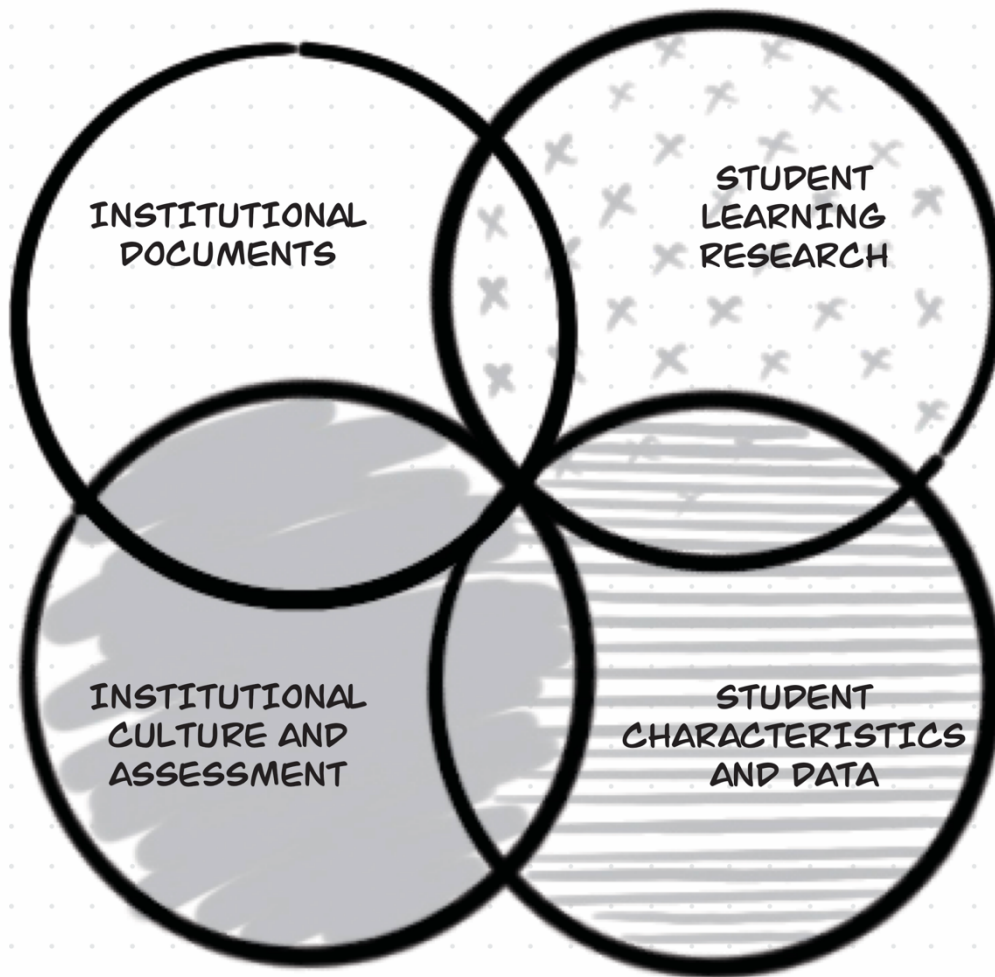
## **Archeological Dig**

Determining the Overall Focus of Your  
Curriculum

# ARCHEOLOGICAL DIG

## archeological dig

BEFORE BEGINNING YOUR CURRICULUM, IT IS IMPORTANT TO CONDUCT AN AUDIT, OR ARCHEOLOGICAL DIG, TO SURFACE IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS AND CONCEPTS THAT SHOULD BE PRESENT AND ACCOUNTED FOR IN YOUR CURRICULUM.



# Dig and Audit

Before embarking on a curricular approach, it is important to conduct an audit, or dig, to surface important characteristics and concepts that should be present and accounted for in your curriculum. As Siri Espy states, “Much like an archeological dig, your mission is to start with a set of bones and construct a skin that will fit. Ask yourself what an animal with all of your identified characteristics would look like, then set out to build one” (p. 86). During the audit and discovery phase of your dig, you should seek to collect information, documents, and statements that will form the basis and rationale for your curriculum. These data sources, outlined here, can be grouped into four categories:

## Institutional Documents

Each curriculum is unique to every campus. As a part of the discovery process, key institutional documents can help narrow the scope of and provide focus to your curriculum. These key institutional documents can include items like mission statements, values statements, and honor codes. The liberal arts or general education requirements of an institution can also be useful in suggesting synergies and areas of emphasis for a curriculum. Finally, the current goals and aspirations of the institution, often developed through strategic planning, can also guide the process ensuring that your curriculum is in line with current institutional needs and goals.

Institutional documents can include:

- Mission Statements
- Values Statements
- Liberal/General Education Requirements
- Strategic Plans

## Institutional Culture and Assessments

Beyond the documents and espoused values of a department or institution, it is also important to investigate unique insights into the culture of a campus and examine prior assessments of its students. How is the institution portrayed in admissions materials? Are there key words, phrases, or concepts that are repeated regularly? Does the institution have a specific curricular focus? Do certain majors or academic subject areas dominate? Finally, how do students feel about their education and the campus climate? Looking at institution-wide assessments can help hone one’s view as to what a campus privileges academically and how well the institution achieves its goals in practice. Digging deeper, one may ask, what are the knowledge and skills one must possess to achieve the goals set by the institution?

Institutional Culture and Assessments can include:

- Campus Climate Surveys
- Student Satisfaction Surveys
- Admissions Materials
- Student Evaluations of Learning
- Popular Majors and Programs

## Student Learning

In addition to looking at institution-level and student-level data, it is important to situate curricula into the broader context of student learning research and theory. Particularly prominent in many student affairs curricula is the work of Marcia Baxter Magolda and her work on learning partnerships (Magolda & King, 2014). Other works that may be useful include some of the seminal documents on student learning in higher education. Staff familiarity with these foundational theories and philosophies is key to ensuring that the curriculum is grounded in research and best practice.

Useful Student Learning Research includes:

- The Student Learning Imperative
- Learning Reconsidered 1 and 2
- The Lumina Foundation's Degree Qualifications Profile
- AAC&U's LEAP/VALUE Projects
- Baxter Magolda's Learning Partnerships Model

## Student Characteristics and Data

Finally, when developing a curriculum, one should also investigate specific student characteristics that may influence that curriculum. Are students of certain demographics represented or underrepresented? How are these different student populations supported or not? Demographics can include characteristics like race, gender, or veteran status. They can also include family socio-economic status, first generation status, or urban/rural home geographies. To dig further into the experiences of your students, some campus-wide instruments, such as the National Survey of Student Engagement or the CIRP Freshman Survey, can help. You may also have data collected through your campus' retention efforts. Lastly, conducting your own original data gathering processes, such as with student and staff focus groups, can help you hone, and test the salience of, your proposed curricular foci.

Useful Student Characteristics and Data includes:

- Student Demographics
- NSSE and CIRP Surveys
- SkyFactor, Starfish, and Other Retention Programs
- Student Focus Groups

## Conclusion

One of the defining characteristics of a curriculum is that it is unique to each institution and situated in context. Although many institutions may find overlapping concepts in the formulation of their curriculum, they will nevertheless define and achieve these in different ways. Furthermore, an audit or dig not only informs your curriculum, but also all of the subsequent cascading goals and outcomes which further define and hone your curriculum. Becoming familiar with the research and data that informs these can help guide staff and partners towards a greater understanding of the curriculum itself and lead to more successful implementations.



### Key Questions

- What documents, data, and information do you need to collect to begin developing your curriculum?
- Who should be involved in your audit/dig process and how and when should they be involved?
- How will you begin to bring all of this data together to justify and write your curriculum's educational priority, goals, narratives, and outcomes?

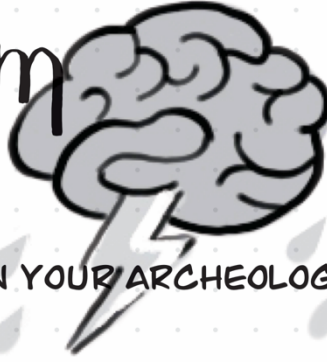


### Curriculum Reminders

**Curricular approaches require a complete rethink.**

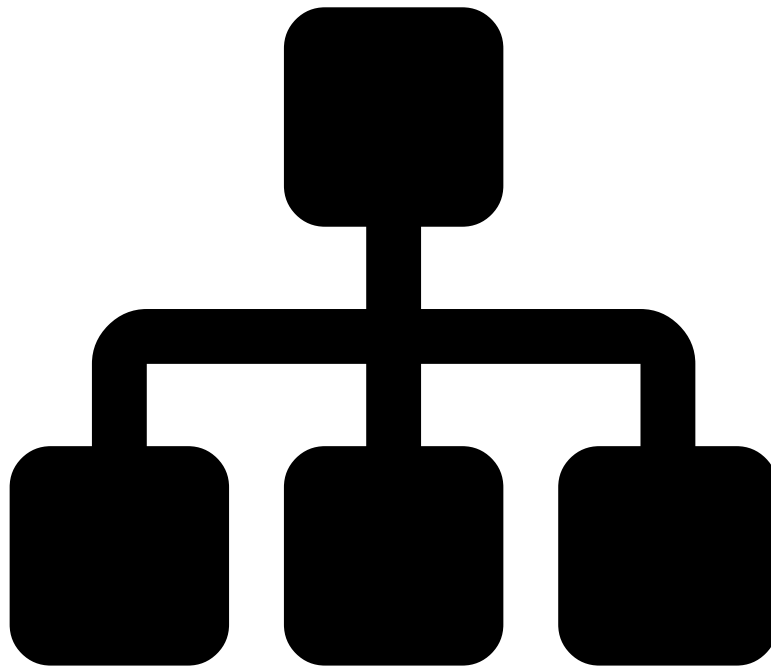
Old models and old programs need to be re-thought in light of curricular concepts. Often times this requires a different way of thinking than you may have been trained in or have practiced throughout your professional experience. Beginning from scratch can help you understand how to design things as if you were designing a university for the first time. Your knowledge is still important, and still applies, but you'll be utilizing it to inform something that you're building from the ground up.

# BRAINSTORM



WHAT SHOULD YOU REVIEW IN YOUR ARCHEOLOGICAL DIG?

<p>INSTITUTIONAL DOCUMENTS</p>	<p>EX. MISSION, VALUES, GEN ED REQUIREMENTS, STRATEGIC PLANS, ETC.</p>
<p>STUDENT LEARNING RESEARCH</p>	<p>EX. LEARNING RECONSIDERED 1 &amp; 2, STUDENT DEVELOPMENT THEORY, COMPETENCIES FROM LUMINA, AAC&amp;U, CAS, ETC.</p>
<p>INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE AND ASSESSMENT</p>	<p>EX. SURVEYS, ADMISSIONS MATERIALS, POPULAR MAJORS, ETC.</p>
<p>STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS AND DATA</p>	<p>EX. DEMOGRAPHICS, NSSE AND CIRP, STUDENT FOCUS GROUPS</p>



# **Educational Priority, Learning Goals, Narratives, And Outcomes**

Developing A Cascade

# *cascade*





# Cascading Goals and Outcomes From an Educational Priority

An important concept in developing intentional learning experiences for students is the idea of the “cascade.” Much like the successive steps of a waterfall, as water flows from one plateau to another, learning goals and outcomes in a curriculum should flow from more general statements of educational priority down to more specific and measurable student-level outcomes. Cascading goals can also be used for a number of different purposes outside of a curriculum, including staff development and departmental planning. The key to these processes, however, is to create links to ensure that all of your various objectives, at all stages in a process, are in alignment.

In a curriculum, the cascade begins when you set your educational priority. The educational priority is your ultimate statement about what you want your students to learn. If you are successful in your educational efforts, all students should be able to see themselves reflected in your priority statement. Although your educational priority is the guiding statement of your curriculum, it can also be considered part of a larger cascade at your institution. Educational priorities are developed in context. They are informed by your unique institutional mission, values, and culture.

From your educational priority flows your educational goals and ultimately the outcomes nested within those goals. This nesting, part of the cascade, reaches towards successive levels of specificity. By the time one reaches the outcome level, these individual statements of student learning should be more specific and measurable. When testing for student learning, it should be relatively easy to determine if these outcomes have been satisfied. Achievement of these outcomes can demonstrate the achievement of your broader goals and ultimately your overall educational priority.

## EXAMPLE

### Educational Priority

- Learning Goal 1 - Students will...  
Narrative Description/Philosophy
  - Learning Outcome 1-1
  - Learning Outcome 1-2
  - Learning Outcome 1-3
  - Learning Outcome 1-4 (Repeat as necessary)
- Learning Goal 2 - Students will...  
Narrative Description/Philosophy
  - Learning Outcome 2-1
  - Learning Outcome 2-2
  - Learning Outcome 2-3
  - Learning Outcome 2-4 (Repeat as necessary)

Repeat as necessary...

## Tips For Developing Your Cascade

### Keep Them Manageable

Although one may be tempted to create scores and scores of learning goals and outcomes attempting to define every possible scenario, try to keep your curriculum “human sized.” Having too many goals, more than 3-4 for a department, or 4-6 for a division, makes the curriculum unruly and difficult to track. Make difficult choices about what not to include and what is most important.

### Ensure They Align

Developing goals and outcomes is not a top-down-only process, but a reciprocal one. Each successive stage should inform and be informed by the other. Although it may be natural to start with the educational priority before moving on to goals and outcomes, at each successive stage return to earlier points in the process to ensure that objectives align and that all concepts are accounted for.

## Conclusion

Developing a cascade is a logical process. Logic helps inform how each of your learning goals and outcomes relate to one another and your educational priority. Although this is seemingly a linear process, it is actually reciprocal. Developing a tight and coherent educational plan will ensure that the educational offerings are focused and effective. Being able to test these objectives ensures that you can demonstrate that learning occurred. Cascading objectives can help you achieve this.



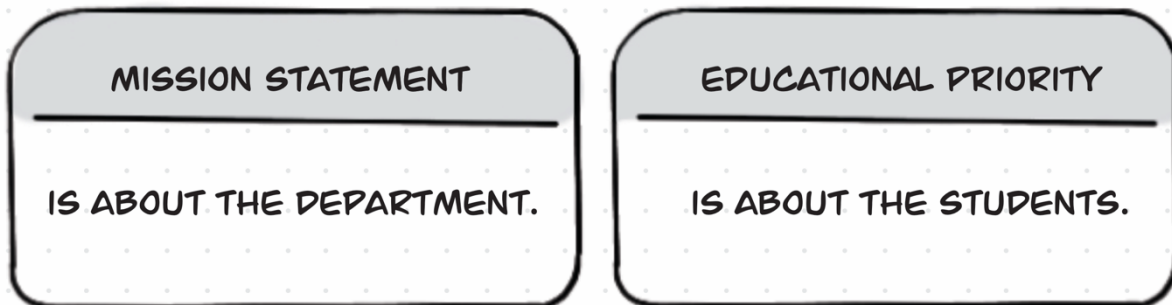
### Key Questions

- Is there coherence in your curriculum?
- Did you make difficult choices about what to include and what not to include?
- Do staff members all understand the connectedness and cascading nature of your educational objectives?
- Are all of your objectives in alignment?

# writing an EDUCATIONAL PRIORITY



AN OVERARCHING STATEMENT OF WHAT STUDENTS WILL LEARN AS A RESULT OF THEIR PARTICIPATION IN A CURRICULUM.



YOUR EDUCATIONAL PRIORITY

A large, empty rectangular box with a black border, intended for writing the user's educational priority. The box is filled with a light gray dotted grid pattern.

# Educational Priority Versus Mission Statement

In developing a curriculum, one of the first tasks a department or division undertakes is the establishment of an educational priority. It is the basis upon which all other goals and outcomes are derived. Based in the mission, context, and values of your institution, an educational priority should provide a broad statement about what your division or department aims to teach. It is a summative statement of what students will learn by their participation in a curriculum. Educational priorities are broad, informed by research and theory, and contextualized to an individual campus and student population. A priority can be used as a measure to determine if a curriculum is successful in achieving its educational aims, and it provides a goal towards which students can reach.

An educational priority for a departmental curriculum is different from its mission statement. Unfortunately, in practice, these two items can sometimes be conflated. Both are important, but they speak to different aims. So, what is the difference?

## **Mission Statement**

is about the department.

Often mentions the “environment,” “student and customer service,” and other methods of delivering the educational experience (through dialogue, in community, etc.).

## **Educational Priority**

is about the student.

Focuses on the learning students will achieve. Students will... “learn,” “become,” “achieve,” and “be able to.” The “end goal” of the student learning experience. Curriculum is about *learning*.

## **Mission statements are about a department.**

They direct the work of staff. They discuss the services a department provides, the aim of those services, as well as the quality and method of their delivery. Departmental missions include functions that are supportive of an educational function but are focused on the organizational delivery of that educational function. For example, the mission of a residence life department often states that doing “*these things*” will result in students being able to “*do this*” or “*become that*.”



## **Curriculum Reminders**

### **Curricular approaches are unique to you institution.**

In order to be successful, a curriculum should be tailored to the unique realities and culture of your institution and its students. You cannot copy another institution’s curriculum and use it at your own. The characteristics of your students are different. Your institutional goals are different. Your campus culture is different.

While there are some common outcomes that are relatively universal across higher education, how the outcomes are written and how they are understood can be very different depending on the context. Additionally, within these outcomes there may be different areas of emphasis that are necessary. Look to other curricula and standards as guides but develop something uniquely your own.

## **Educational priorities are about students.**

They are statements about what students will and should learn. They guide the entire educational enterprise and the development of a curriculum. The assessment of an educational priority involves an assessment of a student's knowledge, skills, and abilities. Curricula are built and assessed on their ability to achieve an educational priority.

Mission statements and educational priorities are distinct but related. A department, through its mission, may seek to advance student learning, and hence an educational priority. In this sense, a mission statement could be considered primary to an educational priority. In other words, if your classroom is not set up for success or functioning well (achieving its mission), then you are not likely to be able to deliver a quality learning experience. If you are not delivering a quality learning experience, then students are not as likely to achieve what is set out in the educational priority. Conversely, although not as likely, a department could be failing in its mission statement and yet a student could still successfully learn and achieve an educational priority despite it.

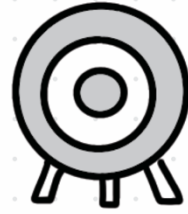
When developing a mission statement and an educational priority, there are key words that can indicate whether the two concepts are being conflated. Mission statements often mention the “environment,” “student and customer service,” and other methods of delivering the educational experience (through dialogue, in community, etc.). Educational priorities, in contrast, should avoid these words and focus on the learning students will achieve. Educational priorities often start with statements that “Students will... ‘learn,’ ‘become,’ ‘achieve,’ or ‘be able to.’”

Educational priorities represent the “end goal” of the student learning experience. Mission statements represent the environment and the methods and means of delivering that learning.



### **Key Questions**

- Is your educational priority about student learning?
- Are there concepts or words in your educational priority that better fit in your mission statement?
- Who and what needs to be assessed in determining if you are achieving your educational priority?



# GOALS

## learning goals

BROAD AREAS OF FOCUS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE EDUCATIONAL PRIORITY.

## tips

TYPICALLY 3-5 GOALS FOR A DEPARTMENT  
(BUT A DIVISIONAL CURRICULUM CAN  
INCLUDE MORE)



## example

STUDENTS WILL  
DEVELOP LEADERSHIP SKILLS  
THAT ALLOW THEM TO SET  
AND ACHIEVE ORGANIZATIONAL  
GOALS AND COLLABORATE  
AND COMMUNICATE WITH  
DIVERSE OTHERS.



# Learning Goals and Narratives

Goals and narratives are perhaps the least appreciated, understood, and often confused components of a curriculum. In reviewing the cascade of learning objectives in a curriculum, one starts with an educational priority. An educational priority is a broad summary statement of what students will learn as a result of their participation in the curriculum. This educational priority is then delineated further into a set of learning goals and related narratives (typically 2-4 for a department, maybe 4-6 for a division). Learning goals seek to provide more specific statements of what students will learn in a curriculum. They focus the educational priority into sets of more narrowly defined thematic learning outcomes. Each learning goal also has an accompanying narrative. Narratives are brief paragraphs that define terms and set the philosophy and reasoning behind the choice of learning goal.

Learning goals and narratives can be confused, conflated, or ill-defined in practice. When developing these components of your curriculum, if you can develop a focused set of goals and narratives, it will likely make your work significantly easier the further you get into the curriculum planning process.

## Learning Goals

After developing your educational priority, a department or division will settle on a set of learning goals. When developing learning goals, it is important to remember they are statements of student learning. In some of the curriculum plans that schools develop, learning goals are stated as themes as opposed to statements. For example, a department may state that their learning goals are “interpersonal development, citizenship, and diversity and inclusion.” Although these themes may represent the content of the learning goals, they are not, in themselves, learning goals. They do not state what a student will learn or what these “categories” mean in practice. Although these quick shorthand methods may be useful in communicating a curriculum’s focal areas to a broader audience, they should nevertheless be backed up by statements.

For example, “Leadership Skills” is not a learning goal. A more properly developed Leadership Skills-focused learning goal might read:

**GOAL:** “Students will develop leadership skills that allow them to set and achieve organizational goals and collaborate and communicate with diverse others.”

While this may be shorthanded in discourse to the “Leadership Skills” label, it nevertheless does not replace the learning goal statement. In practice, educational professionals should be utilizing the goal statement as a means of describing what is specifically meant by the term “Leadership Skills.” There can be many definitions as to what this entails. The risk posed by utilizing just the label is that staff may interpret it differently leading to a disjointed curriculum.

The following are common words used to describe goal areas found in various divisional and departmental curricula.

Diversity & Multicultural Competence  
Academic and Intellectual Capacities  
University Success and Traditions  
Understanding of Self and Others  
Effective Community Engagement  
Empathy and Interdependence  
Intrapersonal Development  
Community Responsibility  
Community Engagement  
Interpersonal Skills  
Identity and Esteem

Mutual Rights and Responsibilities  
Personal Development  
Social Responsibility  
Global Awareness  
Global Citizenship  
Self Development  
Academic Success  
Academic Engagement  
Global Citizenship  
Authorship

Self-Awareness  
Social Responsibility  
Academic Success  
Cultural Competency  
Global Context  
Life and Living Skills  
Practical Competence  
Academic Excellence  
Career Preparation  
Civility

Interculturalism  
Community Living  
Responsibility  
Global community  
Community  
Wellness  
Well-Being  
Identity  
Inclusive Communities  
Take Action

# Narrative

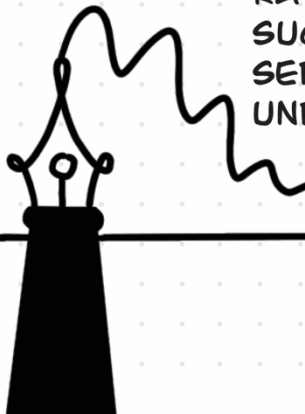
## NARRATIVE

NARRATIVE

EACH GOAL HAS A NARRATIVE - PARAGRAPH DESCRIPTIONS OF A LEARNING GOAL THAT PROVIDE FURTHER DEPTH AND MEANING AND THE PHILOSOPHIES AND THEORIES THAT INFORM IT.

EXAMPLE

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IS AN IMPORTANT GOAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES TO DEVELOP AN INFORMED CITIZENRY THAT ACTIVELY ENGAGES IN THEIR COMMUNITIES AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT. FURTHERMORE, THE NATURE OF WORK REQUIRES THAT INDIVIDUALS PARTICIPATE IN COLLABORATIVE ENVIRONMENTS TO MAKE CHANGE AND SUCCEED IN ACHIEVING GOALS. OUR NOTION OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IS BUILT OFF THE SOCIAL CHANGE MODEL OF LEADERSHIP RECOGNIZING THAT LEADERSHIP IS PROCESS-ORIENTED RATHER THAN POSITIONALLY RELATED. AS SUCH, CIVIC ENGAGEMENT INVOLVES SERVICE TO OTHERS AND IS ROOTED IN AN UNDERSTANDING OF SELF AND ONE'S POSITION IN THE WORLD AND SOCIAL SYSTEMS RELATIVE TO OTHERS.





## Narratives

This is where narratives come in. They provide further context and help other educators understand what is meant by the terms used. An accompanying narrative for the “Leadership Skills” learning goal would define what leadership theories the department draws from, why it is important, and how it fits into the overall educational priority of the curriculum. Narratives are brief paragraphs providing further specificity and context. Although narratives may not be widely communicated externally, they can be of critical importance internally to staff members when developing a curriculum. Narratives ensure there is consistency in understanding and interpretation of learning goals. An example narrative for a Civic Engagement skills goal may read:

**NARRATIVE:** “Civic engagement is an important goal of higher education in the United States in developing an informed citizenry that actively engages in their communities and democratic government. Furthermore, the nature of work requires that individuals work in collaborative environments to make changes and succeed in achieving goals. Our notion of civic engagement is built off the social change model of leadership recognizing that leadership is process-oriented rather than positionally-related. As such, civic engagement involves service to others and is rooted in an understanding of self and one’s position in the world and social systems relative to others.”

The above narrative gives significantly more context beyond what one may glean from just a learning goal statement, and much more than just a learning goal label. Narratives can help direct staff in designing more educationally purposive activities with greater focus and consistency. They can also help campus partners understand the goals of a curriculum better. Engaging campus partners in the creation and refinement of goals and narratives can ensure the consistency of the learning experience across campus. The goal of curriculum is not to create an entirely new set of goals devoid of campus context, but one that brings together all the pieces of the co-curricular experience into a coherent whole. It may also draw on expertise more present outside of your department and insulate a learning goal from being interpreted differently according to the whims and interests of an individual staff member.

## Conclusion

Goals and their related narratives are key components of the curriculum. They are what provide focus and consistency to your educational plans. They should be constantly reviewed, communicated, and revised. As new staff come in or as you develop partnerships with others, goals and narratives can serve as a means of centering the conversation and your work more squarely on the student learning experience. When developing goals and narratives, do not be tempted to take short cuts. A robust set of goals and narratives is key in developing your curricular framework.

### Key Questions

- Do you have well written and defined learning goal statements?
- What theories, philosophies, and approaches inform each of your learning goals?
- Have you developed narratives? Do you share these with internal and external stakeholders and partners?

# WRITING Outcomes

SPECIFIC CONCRETE OUTCOMES THAT SPECIFY WHAT IS NECESSARY FOR ACHIEVEMENT OF THE LEARNING GOAL.

## tips

TYPICALLY 4-6 OUTCOMES FOR A DEPARTMENT (BUT A DIVISIONAL CURRICULUM CAN INCLUDE MORE).



## example

OUTCOMES

STUDENTS WILL ARTICULATE A PERSONAL LEADERSHIP PHILOSOPHY.

# Outcomes

Continuing down the cascade of your curriculum, one becomes more specific in the learning objectives one hopes residents will achieve. In this way, the cascade functions as a nested structure and includes successively more specific statements as one moves towards the level of practice.

One's educational priority is the broadest statement of learning one hopes students will achieve. In a department, it is typically divided in 3-4 learning goals, and these learning goals are in turn divided into 3-4 learning outcomes. A division may have more, but fewer is often better in practice. It is at this level, the level of learning outcomes, that one begins to see the specificity in language that allows for more discrete measurement to occur. The only level beyond this stage is strategy-level outcomes. This final level is highly measurable and occurs during a planned educational activity or strategy.

Developing learning outcomes from your learning goals requires you to think of all the major components that may make up that learning goal. For example, one may have a learning goal related to health and wellness. It may read as follows:

**Learning Goal:** Residents will be able to make informed choices about their personal health and wellness habits that allow them to achieve their goals.

Examining this goal, one can already begin to see some subtopics that are present that provide clues as to what some outcomes may be. For one, students will need to set "goals." An outcome that deals with goal setting, and all the knowledge required to set reasonable and attainable goals may be one of your first outcomes. A second theme present is "making informed choices." This theme may entail a number of different learning outcomes. If one is to make informed choices, they'll need to know facts about their various potential choices. This could include aspects of nutrition, exercise, and sexual and mental health. Given these clues, one may wish to construct outcomes such as the following:

## **Learning Outcomes**

Students will be able to...

- Set health and wellness goals that are reasonable, achievable, and sustainable.
- Understand the impact of nutrition on their body and how to make food choices.
- Articulate the range of exercise options available to them, how to engage in these options, and the impacts on their overall health.
- Navigate sexual situations and decision making with an understanding of one's own agency and the consequences of one's actions.
- Describe their own state of mental health and identify supports and strategies for working through adversity.
- Understand the effects and consequences of alcohol on the body and mind and make decisions about consumption habits.

With these outcomes, one can begin to see the level of specificity that allows the outcomes to be assessed in a way that the larger learning goal categories could not be. These outcomes are also specific enough to allow for the creation of rubrics, which in turn, allows for the sequencing of educational activities and the development of facilitation guides for educational strategies that hope to achieve them.

## **Language, Words, and Being Specific**

One important aspect of writing learning outcomes (and any outcomes in a curriculum) is that they are constructed such that it allows the students to contextualize the outcomes to their own opinions, desires, and circumstances. The outcomes provide students with knowledge, but do not prescribe a particular opinion or action, per se. This comes

into play particularly with political beliefs. The educator’s role is not to make students take one political stance or another. It is within the educator’s role, however, to challenge students’ assumptions, present them with information, and help facilitate decision making and informed opinions. Sometimes this is a delicate balance. Take the following outcome as an example: “Students will be able to act from an internal coherent ethical belief system.”

This formulation of an outcome is written careful to allow for diversity of thought. The word “internal” is used because although students may be influenced by external belief systems, students should nevertheless choose and act from a belief system that they have personally vetted and adopted. The word “ethical” is included because of an institutional mission to create citizens that can act morally and with civility towards others—however that may be defined by an individual. The word “coherent” is used to encourage students to critically examine their beliefs (and yet not prescribe a certain belief system). Belief systems may differ from one student to another, but they should at least be coherent and not contradictory. For instance, if one believes in tolerance towards others, and yet actively speaks hateful words, can one justify that these two beliefs/actions are coherent? If they are not, why is that? How can one bring them into alignment through a deeper level of understanding or by changing beliefs? There can be multiple systems of beliefs that are different, but all equally coherent.

As creators of a curriculum, it is not the educator’s role to prescribe beliefs for students, but it is the role of an educator to get students to think critically about their beliefs. In the case of developing a curriculum, words matter. What matters even more, however, is how these are interpreted when enacting a curriculum. Training staff to understand the history behind an institutional curriculum, its formulation, its founding principles and learning goals, and why certain words were chosen, is equally as important as deciding on the language itself. Like the childhood game of telephone, an original phrase or meaning can change as it moves through time and from person to person. Developing a curriculum doesn’t just end at the initial conception but extends throughout its implementation year after year.

This is also why professional staff members are elevated in the curricular process. Although professionals are likely still working through these issues as human beings themselves, they are at least (hopefully) in a better position to have thought through these topics more deeply. Many student staff members and leaders who are of traditional college age are still in the process of developing their belief systems. By utilizing professional staff to develop the foundation of a curriculum, a division or department sets the tone for the entire learning environment. The work doesn’t stop there, however, as students must be engaged in dialogue to ensure the original intent shines through.

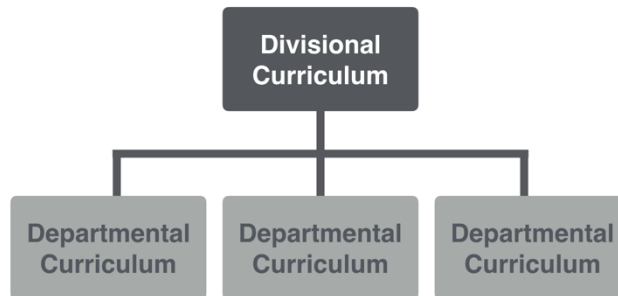
## Key Questions

- Are your learning outcomes specific enough? Or too specific?
- How can you be reasonable with the scope of learning outcomes you decide upon?
- Might your learning outcome fit better under a different goal area?
- Does the language of the learning goals allow for diversity of thought, but also encourage critical thinking and student agency?
- What mechanisms are in place to ensure that these concepts are carried through more uniformly and with the original intent?
- How can we engage student staff in this process and maintain the integrity of the curriculum?
- Are there any action-oriented outcomes that you should keep in mind?

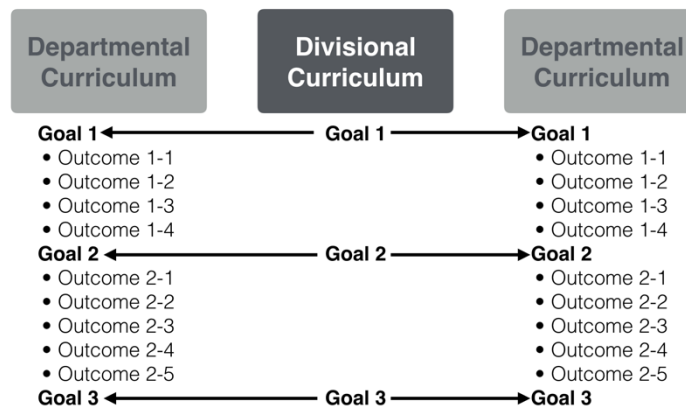
# Harmonizing Divisional and Departmental Curricula

Student affairs divisional curricula often evolve either from “division-to-department” or “department-to-division.” In the “division-to-department” approach, a division takes the lead in developing a collective educational priority and set of learning objectives that guide curriculum development at the departmental level. In a “department-to-division” approach, it is often one constituent department that may take the lead and a divisional curriculum is established that encompasses the entirety of the work of a division—across all departments. However a curriculum is developed, divisional and departmental curricula should be in sync and coordinated.

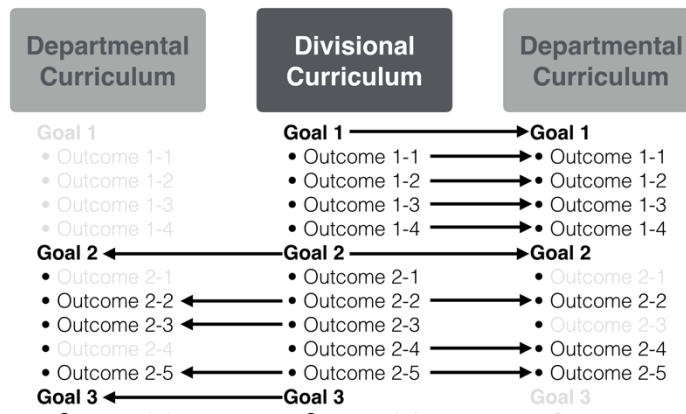
## Starting at the Divisional Level



Divisions that choose to embark on a curricular journey follow the traditional path of developing an educational priority and defining learning goal areas and statements. These goal areas should be broad enough to encompass the breadth of educational work across departments, but specific enough to provide focus. As a rule of thumb, divisions should generally aim to have no more than 4-6 learning goals to ensure the process maintains focus and does not become unwieldy to administer.

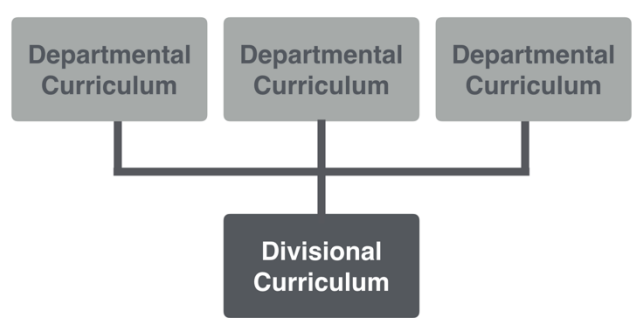


Outcomes, which cascade from a learning goal, can either be left to be defined at a departmental level, or pre-defined at the divisional level. If defined at the departmental level, work should be undertaken to ensure that common outcomes can be harmonized across departments. Outcomes should also be mapped back to the broader divisional goals. In cases where a department may have a goal or outcomes that are important to their work, but may fall outside the division’s priorities, a department may add a contributing goal of its own, even though it may not be formally tracked on a divisional level.

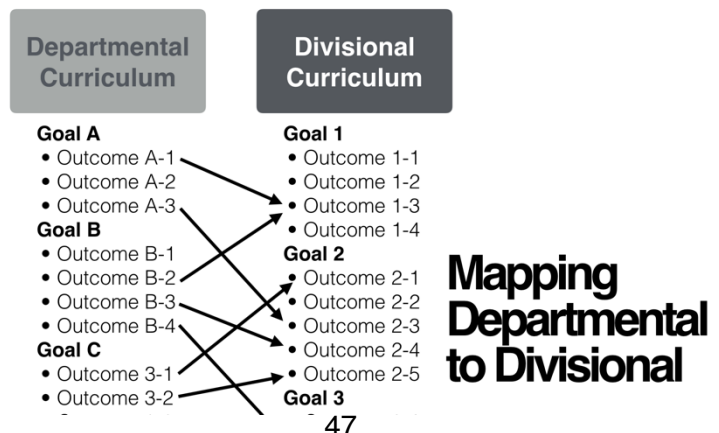


If outcomes are defined at a divisional level, departments should adopt those goals and outcomes that are most germane to their work. For instance, it is possible that more niche departments may only focus on one goal area or a specific sub-set of outcomes. This is perfectly reasonable given the expertise and focus of departments may be different. However, even with this variance, the division should ensure that all goals and outcomes are addressed in some manner.

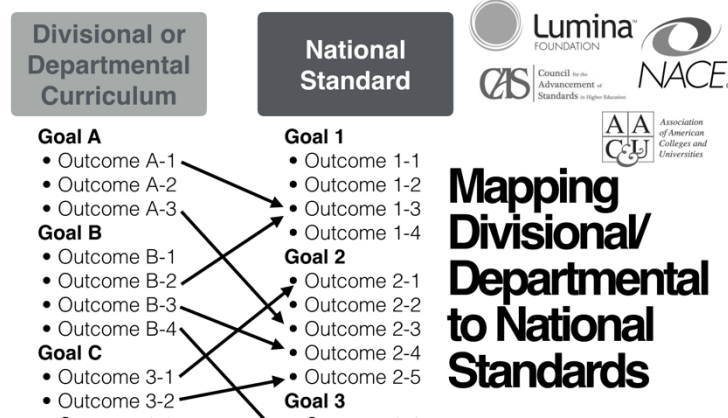
### Starting at the Departmental Level



In some cases, a department (or departments) may take the lead in curricular development. As partnerships are established and stakeholders engaged, it may become increasingly clear that a broader divisional curriculum could harmonize approaches across departments and lead to greater effectiveness in achieving stated objectives. Although this is a less frequently seen path, departments may take the lead in establishing their own curriculum and a divisional curriculum can be developed out of the emergent themes present across all departments. Although somewhat of a backwards design approach, the divisional and departmental curricula need to be harmonized and aligned. If this path is pursued, it is important that all departments feel represented and have voice in the process. Furthermore, there should be a reciprocal process of revision and refinement between divisional and departmental curricula.



Similarly, and as discussed in the chapter on assessment, this mapping of departmental to divisional objectives can also occur with international and national standards. What standards may be most germane to your institution and students will be based on several contextual factors. The key to this process is greater understanding and alignment through time.



## Key Questions

- How can you design a process at a divisional level that ensures all departments and voices are represented?
- How can you ensure that the divisional curriculum development process moves along smoothly and efficiently without becoming mired in overly specific detail?
- What international and national standards might inform your work?

## Curriculum Benefits

### More consistent outcomes achievement.

Too often when designing experiences for students we may think of what we want to do before what we want students to achieve. A program idea may be developed and then it is “back-filled” with outcomes. This type of design process can lack intentionality.

Curricular approaches follow a general “backwards design” style approach. Identify the “problem,” or, first understand the outcomes you want students to achieve, then work to design your intervention or engagement. Engaging in this type of design can achieve better and more consistent outcomes for your students.

Another way to think about it is, what if you were to design the student experience from scratch? What would its outcomes be? How would you build it? Freeing yourself up from the constraints of your current context can allow you to dream big. Brainstorm. You can figure out the how later.

# Utilizing National Competencies and Standards

Although each residential curriculum or curricular approach to student life should be contextualized to an institution, there are several non-profits and standards bodies within higher education and student affairs that can be useful in the development of learning goals and outcomes. Many of these associations provide sample statements, rubrics and other materials that can help guide and shape the development of your own objectives and provide potentially useful tools for benchmarking and other forms of assessment. Furthermore, as nationally developed standards, they provide justification for your curriculum and may allow you to connect your objectives more easily with those of other departments and divisions. The following four examples may help.

## Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education

In 2003, the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) articulated an original set of sixteen “learning domains and development outcomes” for college students (CAS, 2015, para 1). After the publication of Learning Reconsidered 2 in 2006, CAS convened a think tank to review these outcomes. CAS now identifies six domains of “student learning and development outcomes.”

1. Knowledge acquisition, construction, integration and application
2. Cognitive complexity
3. Intrapersonal development
4. Interpersonal competence
5. Humanitarianism and civic engagement
6. Practical competence

## American Association of Colleges and Universities

The American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) undertook a project known as LEAP, Liberal Education and America’s Promise, to identify contemporary learning outcomes for undergraduate college students. AAC&U (2008) identifies four “essential learning outcome” domains (outlined below). They also provide more detail on these outcomes can be found in College Learning for the New Global Century. They also detail “principles of excellence” to guide administrators in their implementation as well as suggested rubrics for their measurement.

*From LEAP (AAC&U, 2008):*

### **Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World**

- Through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts

Focused by engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring

### **Intellectual and Practical Skills, Including**

- Inquiry and analysis
- Critical and creative thinking
- Written and oral communication
- Quantitative literacy
- Information literacy
- Teamwork and problem solving

Practiced extensively, across the curriculum, in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects, and standards for performance



### **Personal and Social Responsibility, Including**

- Civic knowledge and engagement—local and global
- Intercultural knowledge and competence
- Ethical reasoning and action
- Foundations and skills for lifelong learning

Anchored through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges

### **Integrative and Applied Learning, Including**

- Synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies

Demonstrated through the application of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to new settings and complex problems

## **Lumina Foundation**

The Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) developed by the Lumina Foundation (2017), describes itself as “a learning-centered framework for what college graduates should know and be able to do to earn the associate, bachelor’s or master’s degree”. The DQP organizes identified learning outcomes/proficiencies into five learning categories.

*From the Degree Qualifications Profile (Lumina Foundation, 2017):*

### **Specialized Knowledge.**

“Most who receive degrees pursue specialized areas of study and are expected to meet knowledge and skill requirements of those areas. Specialized accrediting associations and licensure bodies have developed standards for many such fields of study. But all fields call more or less explicitly for proficiencies involving terminology, theory, methods, tools, literature, complex problems or applications and cognizance of limits.”

### **Broad and Integrative Knowledge.**

“U.S. higher education is distinctive in its emphasis on students’ broad learning across the humanities, arts, sciences and social sciences, and the DQP builds on that commitment to liberal and general education in postsecondary learning. However, the DQP further invites students to integrate their broad learning by exploring, connecting and applying concepts and methods across multiple fields of study to complex questions — in the student’s areas of specialization, in work or other field-based settings and in the wider society. While many institutions of higher education and most state requirements relegate general knowledge to the first two years of undergraduate work and present it in isolated blocks, the DQP takes the position that broad and integrative knowledge, at all degree levels, should build larger, cumulative contexts for students’ specialized and applied learning and for their engagement with civic, intercultural, global and scientific issues throughout their academic careers and beyond.”

### **Intellectual Skills.**

“The six crosscutting Intellectual Skills presented below define proficiencies that transcend the boundaries of particular fields of study. They overlap, interact with and enable the other major areas of learning described in the DQP.”

1. Analytic Inquiry
2. Use of Information Resources
3. Engaging Diverse Perspectives
4. Ethical Reasoning
5. Quantitative Fluency
6. Communicative Fluency”

### **Applied and Collaborative Learning.**

“An emphasis on applied learning suggests that what graduates can do with what they know is the most critical outcome of higher education. The proficiencies described in this section focus on the interaction of academic and non-academic settings and the corresponding integration of theory and practice, along with

the ideal of learning with others in the course of application projects. Research of different kinds and intensities, on and off campus, on and off the Internet, and formal field-based experiences (internships, practicums, community and other service-learning) all are cases of applied learning.”

### **Civic and Global Learning.**

“U.S. higher education acknowledges an obligation to prepare graduates for knowledgeable and responsible participation in a democratic society. The DQP reaffirms and upgrades that commitment. But the DQP further recognizes that graduates face a social, economic and information world that knows no borders, that is buffeted by environmental changes, and that requires both the knowledge and the experiences that will enable them to become genuinely interactive and productive. The DQP therefore envisions both global and domestic settings for civic engagement and outlines proficiencies needed for both civic and global inquiry and interaction.”



## **Curricular Approach Q&A**

### **Can a Curricular Approach Work on a Campus with a Large Commuter Population?**

Yes. A curricular approach to student affairs work utilizes the processes and methods of teachers in the classroom and adapts it to the out-of-class setting. Setting learning objectives and planning strategies and engagements with students works regardless of whether they live on campus or not. You may need to think about your curriculum differently, however.

Given that commuting students spend less time on campus than those that live in residence halls, you may need to rethink your strategies. For example, you may consider utilizing more electronic means of engaging your students—through social media, email newsletters, and even outreach to students via telephone or text. For events, you may need to intelligently schedule them when most students are likely to be on campus. You might also consider creating an event series at a predictable day and time (perhaps during a mealtime?) to help students make it part of their routine. Your college may even contemplate instituting an “all campus” hour for such programming.

Do you have a commuter center on campus or a space where commuters can engage and meet one another? This might be another avenue for engaging your students. Having all-day experiences, such as a fair, that allows students to come and go, may fit better with your students’ schedules.

Since you may engage commuting students differently or have less contact with them, you may also need to consider “right-sizing” your learning objectives. When setting the broad goals and outcomes of your entire curriculum, be practical about what a student could reasonably achieve and what your staff can reasonably deliver. You may have to scale back or modify your learning objectives based on the reality of the student experience. Finally, because commuting student populations can often vary widely in age and other identities, make sure you fit your learning objectives to the context of your students. When doing this, the work you did in your audit and dig can be a big help.

## National Association of Colleges and Employers

Developed in 2015 and revised in 2017, NACE, the National Association of Colleges and Employers provides an outline of competencies required of students to be “career ready” upon graduation from college. NACE defined “career readiness as, “the attainment and demonstration of requisite competencies that broadly prepare college graduates for a successful transition into the workplace” (NACE, 2017, para 3). These competencies are:

*From NACE (2017):*

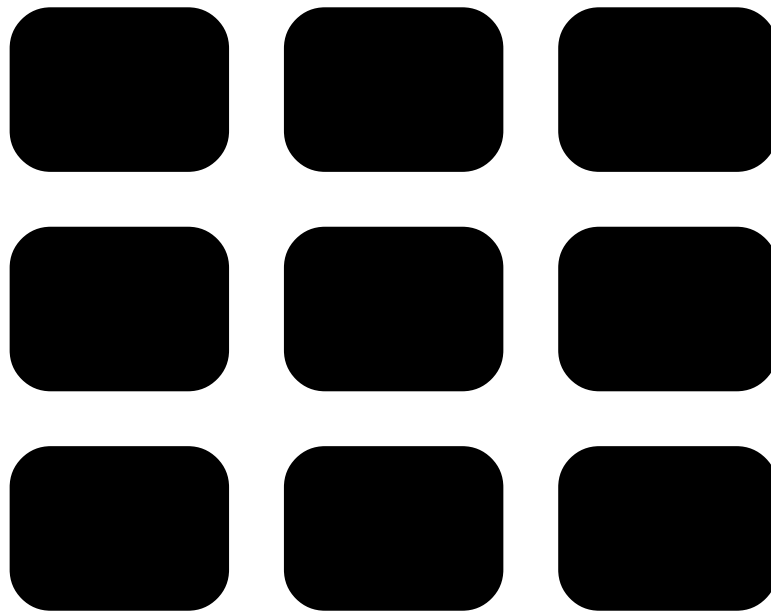
1. **Critical Thinking/Problem Solving:** “Exercise sound reasoning to analyze issues, make decisions, and overcome problems. The individual is able to obtain, interpret, and use knowledge, facts, and data in this process, and may demonstrate originality and inventiveness.”
2. **Oral/Written Communications:** “Articulate thoughts and ideas clearly and effectively in written and oral forms to persons inside and outside of the organization. The individual has public speaking skills; is able to express ideas to others; and can write/edit memos, letters, and complex technical reports clearly and effectively.”
3. **Teamwork/Collaboration:** “Build collaborative relationships with colleagues and customers representing diverse cultures, races, ages, genders, religions, lifestyles, and viewpoints. The individual is able to work within a team structure, and can negotiate and manage conflict.”
4. **Digital Technology:** “Leverage existing digital technologies ethically and efficiently to solve problems, complete tasks, and accomplish goals. The individual demonstrates effective adaptability to new and emerging technologies.”
5. **Leadership:** “Leverage the strengths of others to achieve common goals, and use interpersonal skills to coach and develop others. The individual is able to assess and manage his/her emotions and those of others; use empathetic skills to guide and motivate; and organize, prioritize, and delegate work.”
6. **Professionalism/Work Ethic:** “Demonstrate personal accountability and effective work habits, e.g., punctuality, working productively with others, and time workload management, and understand the impact of non-verbal communication on professional work image. The individual demonstrates integrity and ethical behavior, acts responsibly with the interests of the larger community in mind, and is able to learn from his/her mistakes.”
7. **Career Management:** “Identify and articulate one’s skills, strengths, knowledge, and experiences relevant to the position desired and career goals, and identify areas necessary for professional growth. The individual is able to navigate and explore job options, understands and can take the steps necessary to pursue opportunities, and understands how to self-advocate for opportunities in the workplace.”
8. **Global/Intercultural Fluency:** “Value, respect, and learn from diverse cultures, races, ages, genders, sexual orientations, and religions. The individual demonstrates, openness, inclusiveness, sensitivity, and the ability to interact respectfully with all people and understand individuals’ differences.”

As uncovered during your audit and dig and during your curriculum development process, documents such as those referenced here can be incredibly useful. Although you will need to contextualize these objectives for your own unique institutional characteristics, they nevertheless provide an excellent starting point for discussion. In developing your own, you may wish to connect or map these objectives on to your existing objectives to provide further avenues for assessment.




### Key Questions

- What standards most align with your institutional goals and outcomes?
- How can you use additional resources from the sponsoring organizations (such as rubrics, strategy ideas, etc.) to aid in the development of your curriculum?
- Are there standardized benchmarked assessments you can utilize in your curriculum?



# **Rubrics and Sequencing**

Scaffolded Learning Through Time



# Rubrics

## WRITING

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A VISUAL METHOD OF REPRESENTING THE SUCCESSIVE STAGES OF LEARNING AND MASTERY OF EACH OF THE LEARNING GOAL OUTCOMES.

### EXAMPLE

<p>START</p>	<p>STUDENT IS UNABLE TO ARTICULATE A PERSONAL LEADERSHIP PHILOSOPHY</p>
<p>MOVING IN</p>	<p>STUDENT CAN NAME AND DESCRIBE A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT LEADERSHIP PHILOSOPHIES.</p>
<p>MOVING THROUGH</p>	<p>STUDENT CAN IDENTIFY A LEADERSHIP PHILOSOPHY OR PHILOSOPHIES THAT GUIDE THEIR INVOLVEMENT.</p>
<p>MOVING OUT</p>	<p>STUDENT CAN ARTICULATE A PERSONAL LEADERSHIP PHILOSOPHY AND HOW THEY PUT IT INTO ACTION.</p>

# Developing Rubrics

Rubrics are tools that are used by educators to help evaluate the learning and performance of students. They are written documents, often presented in a chart format, that help define progress and achievement levels towards various goals and performance indicators.

When developing learning goals and their constituent outcomes in a curriculum, rubrics can help. Rubrics ensure that a learning outcome is “right sized” to the learning you want students to achieve (and that they can be reasonably capable of). Rubrics can also help the appropriate sequencing of one’s learning opportunities. Being familiar with “where students are” and “where you want to move students to” also allows one to structure learning strategies appropriately. Finally, rubrics can also serve as an important assessment tool.

Before providing an example of a rubric that can be utilized, it is first important to understand what rubrics try to evaluate and the basic types of rubrics that exist. The first type, outlined in the chart below, makes a distinction between rubrics that are attempting to evaluate a *process* and those that evaluate a *product*.

## Apply Rubrics to Co-Curricular Learning Processes

Type of Performance	Examples
<b>Processes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Life Skills</li> <li>• Academic Habits</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Conflict Resolution Abilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrating study habits and time management skills</li> <li>• Communicating across difference</li> <li>• Leadership skills (collaboration, planning, etc.)</li> <li>• Navigating a roommate or community conflict</li> </ul>
<b>Products:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Documents</li> <li>• Writing and Reflections</li> <li>• Quizzes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completed roommate agreements</li> <li>• Conduct sanctions (Reflection Papers, tangible end products)</li> <li>• Tests for knowledge (Online Training Modules on Alcohol, Sexual Assault, etc.)</li> </ul>

Adapted from Brookhart (2013)

Because co-curricular learning occurs outside of the classroom environment, it is likely that student affairs educators will be most often evaluating *processes*. Processes involve the evaluation of behavior and abilities. This is, in part, what makes this type of assessment more difficult than those that are designed to evaluate products. Behavioral statistics, such as student conduct cases and student utilization of resource centers on campus, can be used loosely for this purpose but with less detail than might be achieved through direct conversation or observation.

Rubrics for products evaluate tangible end results. Examples of products in student affairs work include student reflection papers (perhaps as a part of a student conduct sanction), roommate agreements, and knowledge tests for online training. These can be accomplished without the student needing to be physically present.

Beyond knowing the type of performance you are trying to evaluate, one must also choose what type of rubric makes most sense for what one is attempting to evaluate and what one desires to know as a result of the evaluation. The chart below provides distinctions between two sets of rubric types.

## Rubric Types

<b>Holistic</b>	<b>Analytic</b>
Criteria are evaluated in combination and simultaneously.	Criteria are evaluated individually in constituent parts.
Good for summative assessment.	Good for formative assessment.

<b>General</b>	<b>Task-Specific</b>
Can be used repeatedly looking for similar criteria across multiple instances.	Are specific to a particular instance and can only be used for that task.
Good for continued reuse and test for progress.	Good for specific strategies.

Adapted from Brookhart (2013)

In a co-curriculum, developed rubrics are most likely to be holistic and general. Although, for specific strategies, you may use a more task-specific analytic approach. An example of the former is developing a rubric for your learning goals that focuses on learning over the course of a student’s time in residence or on campus. An example of the latter may be a rubric developed for the evaluation of a roommate agreement.

One of the most common uses of a rubric in curriculum development relates to one’s defined learning goals and related outcomes. Developing a rubric for a curriculum’s overall goals can help with sequencing and planning multiple successive educational interventions that help move students towards your educational priority.

The example below, developed from a learning goal focused on academic excellence, describes learning development as it relates to academic and career planning skills, and study, time management, and academic skills. Although listed here as “Beginning,” “Low,” “Moderate,” and “High” development, some schools may adopt language of Nancy Schlossberg (1995), such as “Moving In,” “Moving Through,” and “Moving On.”

## EXAMPLE RUBRIC

	<b>Beginning</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>High</b>
<b>Academic and Career Planning Skills</b>	Is unclear of academic/career goals and means of achieving them.	Can identify a number of interests for academic pursuits and future careers.	Sets goals for academic and career future.	Engages in thoughtful planning for achievement of academic and career goals.
<b>Studying, Time Management, and Academic Skills</b>	Cannot articulate strategies for successfully completing academic work.	Able to list a number of academic and time management skills.	Identifies and utilizes academic and time management skills that are effective for them.	Able to adapt strategies and skills according to context and subject matter.

Whatever labels are used, one should be mindful of aligning the highest level of achievement with the achievement of one’s goal. It should be a reasonable end goal that students are able to achieve during their time in the residence halls or at college. At the other end of the spectrum, the rubric should start at a likely entry point for incoming students. Some students may enter campus already at a low or medium level of achievement and some may be starting from the beginning.

An important element of curriculum development involves scaffolding and sequencing learning. Rubrics, or tools developed for the purposes of scoring and rating development along a scale, can be useful in this scaffolding and sequencing process. As discussed earlier, curricular approach rubrics break down learning outcomes into successive stages of development and mastery. Although coming after the development of an educational priority, goals, and outcomes, rubric development is often an iterative and reciprocal process that requires one to loop back and revise goals and outcomes considering knowledge gained through the rubric creation process.

The process is iterative, because as one begins to identify key behaviors and concepts, these concepts can be re-categorized as the desired learning is better understood. In other words, the development of these learning statements often requires cycling back through them multiple times. In this sense, the process is also reciprocal. Reflecting back and forth across the various levels of your curriculum can help yield insights into the whole. At its most basic level, it is important to understand that the development of your learning cascade is not linear.

Rubrics can be a powerful planning and assessment tool when developing a curriculum. In designing rubrics, the process of thinking through the stages of the learning process can be equally as important as the end product itself. Well-developed rubrics can act as planning guides as well as assessment tools. By using rubrics, you can better justify and prove that student learning is occurring.



### **Key Questions**

- What performances are you applying your rubrics to? Products or Processes?
- What types of rubrics make most sense for your work? Holistic versus Analytic? General versus Task-Specific?
- How can you stage and sequence your learning goal outcomes in a measured way that allows you to plan and evaluate progress?



### **Curriculum Reminders**

#### **Developing a residential curriculum takes time.**

Developing a residential curriculum is not something that can be done in a few months or even a year. Developing an effective residential curriculum often requires one to spend multiple years investing in the process. Curricular change is also organizational change and organizational change and culture change take time. Typically, it will take an institution embarking on a curricular approach about three years before they believe their curriculum is on a solid footing.



GOAL

narrative

# Outcome

STUDENTS WILL BE ABLE TO...

START	MOVING IN	MOVING THROUGH	MOVING OUT

# Outcome

STUDENTS WILL BE ABLE TO...

START	MOVING IN	MOVING THROUGH	MOVING OUT

# Outcome

STUDENTS WILL BE ABLE TO...

START	MOVING IN	MOVING THROUGH	MOVING OUT

# Outcome

STUDENTS WILL BE ABLE TO...

START	MOVING IN	MOVING THROUGH	MOVING OUT

# Sequencing

One of the hallmarks of curricular approaches to student learning outside the classroom is that learning is scaffolded and sequenced to follow a student’s journey through their time in college. After educators identify their learning objectives (cascading from Educational Priority, to Learning Goals, Narratives, Rubrics, and Outcomes), the next step in the process is to map out objectives and sequence them to allow for cumulative learning. Rather than being a lock-step process, sequencing learning objectives is a dynamic process that can involve feedback loops whereby one may wish to revise learning objectives in a reciprocal process.

## Reciprocal Process

The planning process for sequencing student learning over the course of a student’s time in residence or on campus is a dynamic one. Starting with an end goal in mind (often one’s Educational Priority) and working backwards is one strategy. Starting with where students are likely to begin the process of their learning and development upon entering college and working forward is another. Realistically, however, this is a reciprocal process. As one begins planning, one may find that that their educational priority is too ambitious, or conversely, not ambitious enough. Likewise, the pacing of learning and development may seem too fast or too slow. Planning and sequencing learning towards the achievement of an overall end requires one to constantly renegotiate and adjust to reach an optimal level of challenge and support. Adding a layer of complexity is knowing that however well planned something is, learning and development are messy processes. Each individual that goes through a curriculum is unique. Strategies and programs should allow for customized learning unique to each student’s journey.

## Sequencing

In order to reach towards more complex learning, different stages in the learning process must be identified and built upon. For example, if I am learning to effectively work through conflict, I likely first need to understand what my own perspectives are and what my conflict management style is. After doing this self-reflective work, I will need to understand how various conflict styles interact. Finally, I will need to know and be able to apply strategies for mitigating conflict and reaching towards resolution. To be effective educators, the learning process we map out from month-to-month and year-to-year should help guide students through successive stages of learning.

	Strategy	Strategy	Strategy	Strategy
Week 1	Roommate Agreements			Intention Conversation 1
Week 2		Community Standards Meeting		Intention Conversation 1
Week 3				Intention Conversation 1
Week 4	Roommate Check-In			Intention Conversation 1
Week 5			Diversity Event	
Week 6				

Of course, not all sequencing processes are clean. There may be certain events at your university that occur at specific times of the year. You may need to account for this by starting with the outcomes of that event and working around it. You might provide opportunities to help prepare students for the event or to process it and continue learning afterwards. This is also true of key dates in the semester, such as course registration, or internship and study abroad deadlines. When beginning your sequencing process, you may wish to start with a calendar that includes known key dates already identified and build around them. This process does not occur in a vacuum. You should also be mindful of staff (and student) time to ensure that learning opportunities are evenly spaced out throughout your calendar.

REMEMBER  
- YOUR -

# Rubrics

ONCE YOU KNOW YOUR LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND YOUR STRATEGIES, BEGIN TO SEQUENCE THEM SO THAT EACH OPPORTUNITY BUILDS ON PRIOR KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL, JUST LIKE A SYLLABUS. YOU CAN SEQUENCE WITHIN THE ACADEMIC YEAR AND ACROSS CLASS YEARS.

# Sequencing

WEEK	STRATEGY	STRATEGY	STRATEGY
1	WELCOMING WEEKEND	RESLIFE FLOOR MEETING	
2			PEER HEALTH EDUCATOR
3		STUDENT ORG FAIR	
4	CAREER INTERESTS FAIR		
5		ACADEMIC ADVISING STARTS	INTERNSHIP FAIR

Despite your best efforts with sequencing, it is probable that a student may “miss” a key learning opportunity. This is akin to skipping a class session. To accommodate this, repeat learning objectives through different strategies. You might attempt to teach students about conflict style by developing a bulletin board, reiterating and applying this information through a guided roommate agreement process, and then asking a staff member to follow up with a student in a one-on-one conversation. Repeating learning objectives through multiple strategies ensures that students have a more consistent experience.

Other strategies for addressing consistency include developing incentive systems for student participation. The University of Dayton Department of Housing and Residence Life awards students points for participation in activities which helps determine their place in the housing selection lottery for the next year. Since participation in these activities is always voluntary, it is important to help students understand the potential benefits and why they may wish to participate.

## Conclusion

Sequencing learning objectives and opportunities is helpful in scaffolding your learning process over time. As one of the final steps in developing an overall educational plan, these processes allow one an opportunity to provide coherence to a curriculum and help students learn important information and skills at the appropriate times when they are ready for and need them. Sequencing is a dynamic, not a finite process. Revisit your curriculum sequence as necessary to enhance your curriculum over time.



### Key Questions

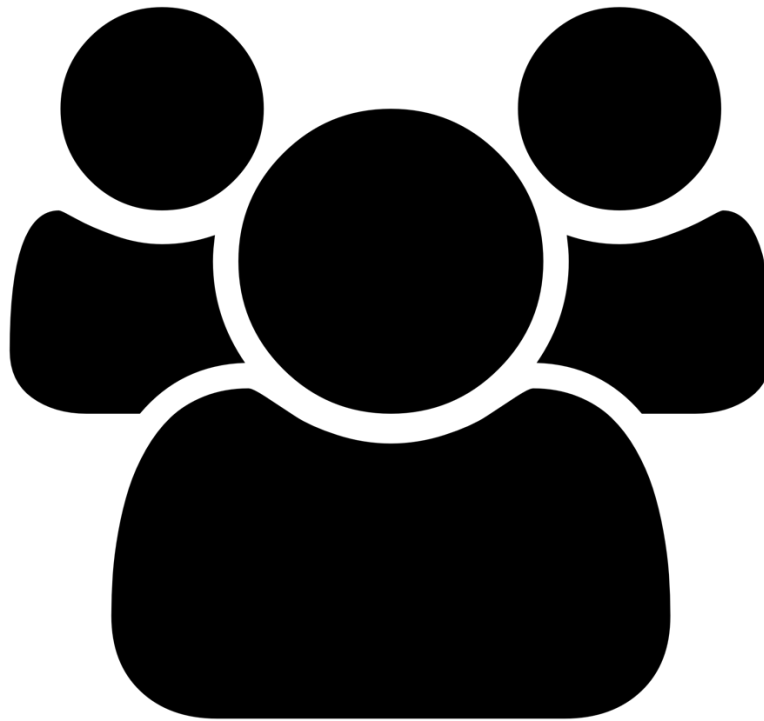
- How can you use your rubrics to inform your curriculum sequencing?
- What key events and dates are set in your calendar? How can you sequence learning around these?
- Are your learning objectives appropriately aligned and reasonable to achieve?



### Curriculum Reminders

#### A curriculum is never “done.”

Continuous review and improvement never ends. A curriculum is never truly “done.” You may get better and more successful with your curriculum over time, but your institution and your students aren’t static. Changes can include new leadership at your institution and new institutional goals, or changes in your student demographics or population. Your goals, outcomes, and pedagogy are therefore also not static. They will evolve over time. While certain concepts might be more durable than others, there are ways in which you may have to rethink your pedagogy and practice. Just because one strategy might have worked in the past does not always mean it will be as effective in the future. Ensuring you have a regular review process of your goals and outcomes, as well as your practice and pedagogy, is essential.



# **Strategies and Facilitation Guides**

**Putting Theory into Practice**

# STRATEGIES

# strategies

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THE VARIOUS VEHICLES OR METHODS FOR DELIVERING  
STUDENT LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES.

- INTENTIONAL CONVERSATIONS
  - PEER MENTOR PROGRAMS
  - STUDENT LEADERSHIP
  - STUDENT CONDUCT MEETINGS
  - MICRO-COURSES
  - COMMUNITY MEETING
  - CAMPUS EVENTS
  - BULLETIN BOARDS
  - WORKSHOPS
  - SOCIAL MEDIA
- 

THESE SHOULD MOVE BEYOND PROGRAMS AND  
ENCOMPASS ALL THE WAYS YOU INTERACT WITH STUDENTS.

strategies



# Selecting Your Strategies

The ultimate mission of student affairs work is to advance student learning. Unlike most faculty members, however, the educational environment created by student affairs and residence life educators is not confined to the classroom. This has both benefits and challenges as it increases the methods and means of educating students but lacks the directed consistency of a formal course.

Once you have decided on your educational priority, learning goals, narratives, and learning outcomes, and developed rubrics, it is time to begin putting these educational objectives into action through strategies. Strategies are the vehicles for educational delivery. They can include activities such as programs and events, newsletters, and guided community or individual conversations.

**Strategy Types As Defined By Time**

<b>One-Time</b>	<b>On-Going</b>	<b>As Needed</b>
Week of Welcome	Peer Mentor Check-Ins	Interventions
Residence Hall Move In	Community Meetings	Roommate Mediations
Student Org Fair	Student Org Meetings	Conduct Meetings
Programming	Workshop Series	Bias Incident Response

When conceiving of programmatic efforts, there can be a tendency to focus on the overall number of programs instead of their quality. For example, within residence life, many program models require that staff members must complete x number of events or programs per semester. Relying on an overall number of programs, however, ignores an important variable in the educational equation: frequency. Rather than focus on the total number of programs to be completed, it is perhaps even more important to ensure that programs are evenly spaced throughout the year and occur at the appropriate times. Additionally, understanding how different educational strategies are structured can aid you in selecting the best strategy for the achievement of given outcomes.

## Why Frequency Matters

The frequency of educational activities matters because education is a process that occurs over time and is iterative and cumulative. Although the educational process itself isn't always linear, the general arc of education over someone's lifetime bends in this direction. When it comes to programming, educational activities on college campuses are often structured as discrete one-time events that are devoid of context.

Additionally, in programming models that leave educational plans up to student staff and leaders, there can often be a tendency to promote end-of-the-semester programming "crunches." These crunches occur when students are looking at the overall number of programs they need to complete, or their still intact budgets, and recognize that they haven't fulfilled their requirements (typically due to poor planning) or they have a lot of money to spend.

Perhaps a better approach than setting a goal of an overall number of programs or educational interactions for a semester is to schedule one educational activity or intervention per defined time period (per week, per month, etc.). Changing the goals and requirements in this manner recognizes that frequency of educational contact may be more important (or at least equally as important) as the overall number of educational events and interventions.

## Strategy Types and Structures

Given their time-based structures, some strategies may be better suited to different types of learning. For example, ongoing strategies might be better suited towards cumulative learning as they allow for regular periodic learning opportunities. One-time strategies are not as well suited to this type of learning but may be more appropriate for "just in time" learning objectives. Strategies that are "as needed" mean that not all students will be exposed to these learning opportunities. Thinking about the structure of your strategies is similar to how a classroom teacher may choose between giving a lecture, assigning a group project, or having students complete an activity or paper. In

addition to thinking about how a strategy functions through time, think about whether the learning might be better suited to a one-on-one interaction, a group conversation or activity, or a blend of the two—perhaps with each reinforcing the other.

## Scaffolding Learning

Rather than seeing programs as one-off events, it is perhaps better to think of them as part of a whole. The whole is the entire educational experience you are attempting to build in the residence halls. The building of a holistic approach to residential education requires pre-planning and sequencing of educational experiences in a scaffolded way.

As discussed earlier, developing rubrics for your learning outcomes is one way of starting this scaffolding process. By developing a rubric, one can map how student learning may change over time. In developing a rubric, you can identify where your students currently are and where you would like them to move to. After identifying this, think about what learning is required “in-between.” This allows you to determine what types of programs (or other educational interactions) will be needed to help students achieve your learning goals. By developing rubrics, you are recognizing that learning takes place over time, not just in discrete chunks.

## Examples of Strategies

Although many departments rely heavily on programming as a means of education, there are many different strategies one can employ to further student learning. Additionally, looking at already existing processes and points of contact through an educator’s lens reveals opportunities for creating additional learning moments for students. The following are some examples of learning strategies you can use:

**1. The Move In Process and Welcome Weeks.** The move-in process and related welcome weeks offer several touch points for educational moments. From acclimating students to a new community environment to developing community standards at a first residence hall floor meeting, the move-in process can be rethought to focus on educational outcomes. Many campuses may already provide a slate of opportunities through their orientation and student activities offices. Academic partnerships can also be introduced at this early stage.

**2. Conflict Resolution and Roommate Agreements.** Planning for and working through conflict is an important life skill. For many students in the residence halls, this is learned through negotiating the roommate experience. Developing formal roommate agreements, or documented guides that help students understand their conflict styles as well as how to work through conflict, can provide important opportunities for learning. You might also wish to develop conflict resolutions services for your students to better address any and all types of conflict.

**3. Peer Mentoring and Intentional Interactions.** Sometimes referred to as intentional conversations, the one-on-one interactions that students have with student staff members and peer mentors can be an excellent strategy for learning. Well planned interactions provide staff and/or peer mentors with suggested questions and prompts for students that are developmentally appropriate and timely.

**4. Community Meetings.** Gatherings of a residence hall floor and hall community, or community gatherings for identity or interest-based groups, can be used for celebration and for opportunities to work through community and campus issues. Leveraging the discussion and interaction opportunities provided by community meetings requires well written facilitator guides as well as staff who possess the skill development to enact them.

**5. Campus Events.** Utilizing campus partners and already existing events can be an excellent strategy to engage students in the broader campus while also personalizing the learning experience through community. Adding pre- or post-event discussions or meetings with faculty and other relevant experts can provide space for reflection and the furthering of learning objectives.

**6. Bulletin Boards, Newsletters, and “Passive “Programming.”** The use of advertising and other physical means of disseminating information that students can consume on their own time is an important educational tool. Beyond a bulletin board, this can include the distribution of thoughtful and timely articles as well as newsletters and other materials. Developed with student learning in mind, these should be guided and designed by educational experts who can best develop their message.

**7. Traditional Programming.** Traditional programming—a timed physical event where students gather to listen to a speaker, watch a movie or other media, and/or participate in an activity—still works as a strategy, even if it is not the only strategy you should employ. When deciding to do a program, reflect on whether it is the best strategy for achieving your intended outcomes. The outcomes should drive the strategy, not the other way around.

**8. Conduct Meetings.** Conduct hearings, as well as any assigned sanctions, can present educational opportunities for students. Sanctioning can be creative to fit the nature of the violation and ensure the learning is contextualized to the behavior and experience of the student. Furthermore, it should fit within the already defined learning objectives of your division or department.

**9. Student Leadership Opportunities.** Getting involved in student organizations, student government, or becoming a student employee provides opportunities for students to gain enhanced and advanced skills. Much like the other strategies listed here, learning objectives should be clearly articulated and enacted in the student experience. What do these leadership opportunities “teach” and how can you ensure that educational objectives are not left to chance?

**10. Social Media and Networks.** Social media engagement represents one of the newest strategies available to student life educators. As opposed to viewing social media as just an evolved form of advertising, find creative ways to engage with students, connect them to learning opportunities, and run educational campaigns. Although this area is still evolving, several institutions are innovating and succeeding with social media strategies.

## **Conclusion**

There are many educational strategies that one can employ within the college environment. The above list provides some examples, but there are likely many more that you may use in your practice. The most important takeaway when thinking through strategies is how they relate back to the learning objectives you hope students will achieve. By creating detailed plans for enacting and assessing these strategies, you can become more effective in furthering student learning.

-WHAT-

• Strategies:

DO YOU

HAVE?

# Facilitation

## — GUIDES —

FACILITATION GUIDES ACTUALIZE YOUR STRATEGIES.  
YOU CAN THINK OF THEM AS LESSON PLANS FOR  
EACH INTERACTION.

**FACILITATION GUIDES**  
*common components*

FACILITATION GUIDES CAN VARY,  
BUT MOST INCLUDE SOME OF  
THE FOLLOWING MAIN COMPONENTS:

- ❑ TITLE
- ❑ STRATEGY TYPE
- ❑ TARGET AUDIENCE
- ❑ RELEVANT LEARNING GOALS & OUTCOMES
- ❑ SPECIFIC LESSON OUTCOMES
- ❑ PURPOSE
- ❑ PLANNING & PREPARATION
- ❑ FACILITATOR GUIDE
- ❑ ASSESSMENT

# Facilitation Guides

After deciding on your educational strategies, the next stage in the curriculum development process is to develop facilitation guides. Facilitation guides (sometimes referred to as lesson plans) are detailed plans that provide all of the information necessary so that anyone with the appropriate level of training and skills could execute the planned strategy. Beyond just the execution of the strategy, facilitation guides also serve several important objectives related to your curriculum development. They are living documents that staff can use to enhance and improve their practice over time.

## What Makes Up A Facilitation Guide?

A department or division that has a fully realized a curriculum will have a catalog of facilitation guides upon which to draw when executing their educational plans for the academic year. Facilitation guides function exactly as their name would suggest. They are detailed plans that provide all the information necessary so that anyone with the appropriate level of training and skills could execute the planned strategy.

There are a few ways of structuring a facilitation guide. How you design them may depend on the intended facilitators. For example, if the guide is intended for student staff or leaders, you may design it differently than if it is for professional staff. If multiple staff may execute the strategy, it may be different than if it is executed solo. Furthermore, if the experience is a one-off event, it may look different from a guide for an ongoing series, or a 1-on-1 coaching session, or a student conduct conference. Although the structure of facilitation guides can vary across campuses and departments, at their most basic level, facilitation guides typically contain the following information:

### EXAMPLE

**Title:**

A title provides a name for the facilitation guide and is reflective of what it is about. Because departments may have many facilitation guides by the time they fully execute a curriculum, it is sometimes useful to determine a consistent naming scheme for these guides. For example, something like “FG 30: Alcohol Education Workshop 1” will give some context and provide shorthand indicators that can keep your organized.

**Strategy Type:**

The strategy type indicates the method of execution. This could be an “intentional interaction,” a “program,” a “roommate agreement,” or some other form of strategy.

**Target Audience:**

For each facilitation guide, you should identify who the target audience is. Perhaps this facilitation guide is intended for first year students, second year students, or graduating seniors. It may also target certain sub-demographics, like first generation students, or students with specific majors. Finally, if you work in residence life, you may wish to identify if this is intended to be executed for a floor-level community, hall-level community, or to the campus as a whole.

**Relevant Learning Goals and Outcomes:**

Because of the cascading and nested nature of the curriculum, each facilitation guide should be associated with specific outcomes (and therefore goal areas) from your curriculum. By establishing this connection, strategy-level assessments can be summarized and associated as evidence of the achievement of your curriculum’s overall learning objectives.

**Specific Strategy Outcomes:**

In addition to specifying which curriculum outcomes the facilitation guide addresses, the facilitation guide should have its own, strategy-level outcomes. These outcomes should be highly specific and measurable. (For example, “Students will be able to recall three ways....”) These outcomes should include micro knowledge

and skill indicators that are specifically addressed through this strategy. The outcomes should be testable, tied to the audience being addressed, and promote movement along the learning rubric you've developed for each of your curricular goal-outcomes.

**Purpose:**

This will provide an overall rationale for the activity. Why is it being done? How does it fit into the overall curriculum? Why is this important for students?

**Planning and Preparation:**

This section should include all the necessary materials and supplies one would need to gather in order to execute the activity. This can include purchasing or procuring items such as index cards, AV setups, etc. Preparation may also require one to read an article, review some facilitation strategies, or contact key partners.

**Facilitator Guide:**

The facilitator guide sub-section provides a step-by-step breakdown of all the key components of the activity. This includes detailed instructions on how to execute the activity in-the-moment. It may also include some options or choices that go beyond the baseline learning that is expected to occur during the execution of the strategy. This is likely to be the longest section of the overall facilitation guide.

**Assessment:**

Specific assessment measures should be identified, explained, and tied back to the strategy learning outcomes you have identified. This may include a follow-up survey or quiz, a pre-test/post-test design, or a quick review and check for understanding. Information should also be provided about where this will be logged or how it will be utilized after the strategy is complete.

## Objectives For Facilitation Guides

There are many reasons why facilitation guides are a key component of the curricular approach process. The main purpose of the guides is to:

1. **Connect the learning experience described in the facilitation guide to the overall goals and outcomes of your curriculum, allowing you to:**
  - Identify gaps and overlap in your overall curriculum and educational plan.
  - Connect strategy assessments to measures of your overall curriculum goal and outcome assessment.
2. **Ensure the learning experience described in the facilitation guide is assessed, allowing you to:**
  - Determine the effectiveness of the experience.
  - Improve the experience year-over-year to enhance learning.
3. **Document the logistics the experience, allowing you to:**
  - Improve efficiency year-over-year with better executed planning.
  - Provide continuity through staff change by having a documented plan for executing the experience.

## Connection to Overall Curriculum Goals and Outcomes

Look at the goals and outcomes of your overall curriculum. Which of those goals and outcomes are addressed in this learning experience you are designing? By making this connection, you can articulate which goals and outcomes your experience is targeting? These connections can also help you identify gaps and overlap in your overall curriculum. Perhaps you find that you have 100 experiences designed that reach towards one outcome of your curriculum and only 10 that address another outcome. Although numbers only tell part of the story (the intensity and reach of the experience may also matter), this may reveal that you need to put more effort into addressing one of your curriculum outcomes. Or, alternatively, it may make you question whether the outcome is even necessary in your curriculum at all or if it could be collapsed into another outcome. This is the type of activity you would engage in through a review process.

Making the connection to your overall curriculum aims will also help you with assessment. When it comes time to write an annual report, you will know all of the learning experiences you provide that address each of your goals

and outcomes. Furthermore, you can connect the assessment in those experiences back to the overall goals and outcomes allowing you to better tell your story.

## Strategy Level Outcomes & Related Assessment

Each of your facilitation guides should include strategy-level outcomes. These are the outcomes for that specific experience. They should be narrow and highly measurable. For example, if you are designing a facilitation guide for an intramural sports program, some of your outcomes may be:

- Participants will be able to make at least one personal connection with another player.
- Participants will be able to demonstrate the ability to be a team player.
- Participants will be able to improve their physical wellness.

After defining these outcomes, you will want your facilitation guide to also include how you're going to assess these outcomes. This assessment could be done during the course of the activity, such as through a verbal check for understanding, or as a post assessment through a survey, quiz, or a reflection experience. When designing these assessments, you may find that you need to define your terms or revise your outcomes (ex. What does it mean to demonstrate the ability to be a "team player?" OR "Can you be more specific than "physical wellness?"). The facilitation guide should include what these assessments are, including their questions, if applicable. Each outcome identified should be connected to an assessment.

Once you define these outcomes, and tie them to assessments, the data you collect during and after an experience can be used to improve your practice. If participants didn't demonstrate learning related to an outcome, maybe you need to change your guide for the future, or maybe the outcome itself needs to be revised. By documenting, repeating, and iterating your facilitation guides in light of the data you collect, you can improve your practice over time. This is similar to what teachers may do when they write and improve their lesson plans each time they teach the lesson.

## Logistics and Instructions

The final key objective for facilitation guides is to document the planning and logistics process for the learning experience. This could include prep work, deadlines for completion, supplies that need to be procured, presentation slides, and a step-by-step walk through of the learning experience. By documenting these details you can improve your efficiency year-over-year by adjusting your planning. You can also ensure consistency if multiple staff members may be executing the experience and even when staff members may leave or join your organization. Documenting these details can save you time through detailed planning and allow you to improve the execution of the experience.

## Reviewing Your Facilitation Guide Drafts

One of the essential elements of a curricular approach is to have a regular review process in place. Peer review is one of the best ways of building buy-in for your curriculum and improving its effectiveness. Part of this review process may include a comprehensive review of your strategy facilitation guides. If you are writing this as a department or division, you may want to have a mini-retreat where departments or staff members swap and rotate facilitation guides and provide feedback for improvement. This can also be incorporated into a regular review process. You may wish to do it semi-annually to further look for overlap, and for opportunities for synergies, collaboration, and sequencing.

The following rubric is one you can use for reviewing your facilitation guides. It's broken out into two main categories:

1. **Curricular Connections** – Related to the goals and outcomes of your curriculum, the outcomes of the strategy itself, and assessment.
2. **Content** – Related to the specific details of the facilitation guide's design and pedagogy.



## Curriculum Facilitation Guide Rubric

### Curricular Connections

Clearly states/articulates which curriculum goals and outcomes this facilitation guide focuses on.

Does Not Meet Criteria                      Partially Meets Criteria                      Meets Criteria

Clearly states/articulates learning outcomes for the facilitated strategy.

Does Not Meet Criteria                      Partially Meets Criteria                      Meets Criteria

Includes effective assessment measures for the learning outcomes identified for the facilitated strategy.

Does Not Meet Criteria                      Partially Meets Criteria                      Meets Criteria

### Content

The facilitation guide is clear and well written.

Does Not Meet Criteria                      Partially Meets Criteria                      Meets Criteria

The facilitation guide provides context to facilitator about how the strategy fits into the overall curriculum.

Does Not Meet Criteria                      Partially Meets Criteria                      Meets Criteria

The facilitation guide provides enough information to successfully execute the strategy.

Does Not Meet Criteria                      Partially Meets Criteria                      Meets Criteria

The strategy is designed to effectively reach its stated learning outcomes.

Does Not Meet Criteria                      Partially Meets Criteria                      Meets Criteria

The content of the strategy is developmentally targeted to the appropriate student participants/audience.

Does Not Meet Criteria                      Partially Meets Criteria                      Meets Criteria

The strategy is engaging/informative/effective for student audiences.

Does Not Meet Criteria                      Partially Meets Criteria                      Meets Criteria

### Notes/Suggestions for Improvement

*Provide details about the ratings you choose and why.*

## Conclusion

The prior example provides some of the basic characteristics of a facilitation guide that you may wish to include in your own guides. In contextualizing this for your campus, you should be mindful of who your facilitators are and what will best set them up for success. In some cases, these facilitation guides are developed for execution by student staff members or student leaders, and therefore you may wish to add additional detail that can help advise your staff.

You may also want to guide facilitators on how to use their creativity (within the confines of the required components) to engage students. Just because the facilitation guide contains required details does not disallow a facilitator from using their own unique skills and abilities to add to the core of the learning activity. It should be universally understood, however, that adherence to the minimum required components of the facilitation guide is what will ensure consistency in the curriculum and provide an opportunity for improvement informed by assessment.

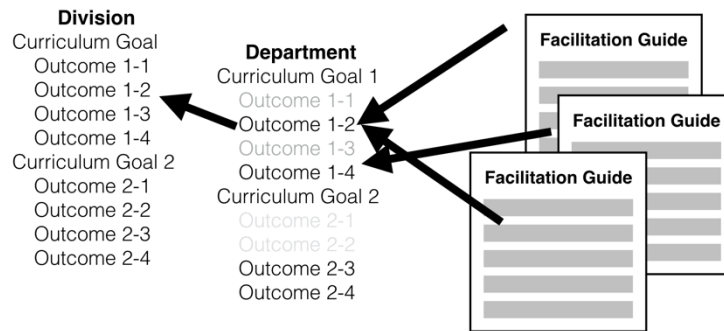


### Key Questions

- How will you set up a consistent naming convention for your facilitation guides?
- Who is your audience of facilitators and how might you make these guides most relevant and useful to them?
- What are the key details you need to include to ensure learning occurs?
- What assessment measures will you use in each strategy to ensure learning has occurred and provide feedback about the activity's execution?

# Strategy-Level Assessment

Moving to a curricular approach calls upon us to become better at assessing student learning. Although it may be common on a campus to have students respond to short surveys providing feedback about a program or service, it is often less common to assess student acquisition of knowledge and skills as a result of an engagement. Institutions and departments transitioning to a curricular approach need to be mindful that every touch point with a student is an opportunity for learning and that assessments should be integrated into these moments to check for the advancement of this learning. These touchpoints, or strategies, are outlined in your campus' facilitation guides, and these guides should include required assessment activities that are associated with the learning outcomes you've identified.



*Assessment at the strategy-level, built into your facilitation guides, can complement overall assessment of your learning goals and outcomes. When aggregated, the whole should be able to demonstrate learning effectiveness.*

## Formative versus Summative Assessment

When developing assessment measures for different strategies, staff members should be mindful of two categories of assessment: formative and summative. Formative assessment typically occurs during the learning process and allows for modification of teaching and activities to improve student learning in the moment. Checking for student understanding, and reviewing material already covered, allows the teaching facilitator to ensure that learning is occurring and to review educational content as necessary. Summative assessment is utilized at the conclusion of a strategy or learning activity to gauge student success in achieving identified learning outcomes. The data from summative assessment can be used to improve the activity for the future. Furthermore, it may cause one to re-examine the identified learning outcomes themselves to gauge if the outcomes may need to be modified. This approach is known as “double loop assessment” (Kennedy, 2016).

## Student Self Report vs. Student Demonstrated Learning

Under curricular approaches, it is important to note that student learning is the core activity that needs to be assessed. This means that student satisfaction and feedback about educational activities, while still important, is not enough. Furthermore, asking for student self-reports, such as, “Do you feel you understand...?”, or “Did you learn...?”, are also not enough. Instead, student assessments of learning need to be constructed to test for actual acquisition of knowledge or the ability to apply, analyze, or synthesize new information.

For this reason, many professionals utilizing a curricular approach turn to techniques utilized in the classroom. Utilizing one-minute papers, quick quizzes, or tickets-out-the-door can help in measuring whether student learning is occurring and what modifications to the learning activity may need to be made during the learning activity or in subsequent years or months when the activity may be repeated. If you're looking for examples of these types of assessments, you may want to read Angelo and Cross' (1993) *Classroom Assessment Techniques*, or Barkley and Major's (2016) *Learning Assessment Techniques*.

## Certifying Student Learning

When one begins to collect summative assessment data on student learning, it becomes possible for educators to certify that learning. By achieving strategy-level outcomes, students are also advancing towards the achievement of overall curricular goals and outcomes. While this is useful to departments and divisions to demonstrate success in achieving student learning, it also presents an opportunity to develop programs and certificates in co-curricular competencies. Student leadership programs have already been doing this for years. Imagine what could be accomplished if these programs could be applied institution wide. They could also be broadened to represent a diverse array of competencies, beyond leadership skills, that students could include in transcripts, resumes, and other documentation provided to future employers. In this sense, the curricular approach is one that has far more potential than just organizing a department or division's learning program. It provides an opportunity for students to receive certified credentials in a broad array of skill areas.



### Key Questions

- What types of strategy-level assessments will you use in your educational programs and activities?
- How can you ensure that you're measuring actual student learning and not just student self-reports or satisfaction?
- How might you be able to use this assessment data to certify student learning?



### Curricular Approach Q&A

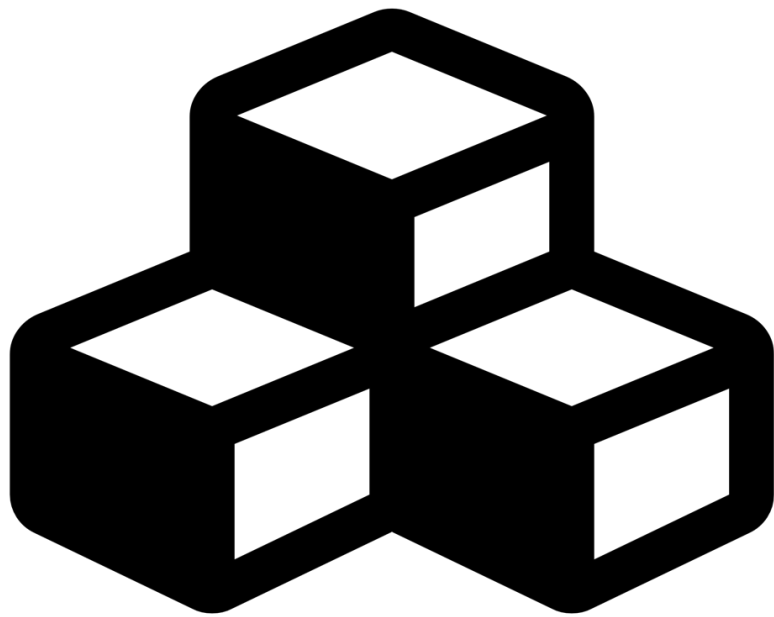
#### Where Can I Find Examples of Facilitation Guides?

Facilitation guides function as the “lesson plans” for delivering educational strategies in a residential curriculum or curricular approach. Facilitation guides are detailed plans that provide all of the information necessary so that anyone with the appropriate level of training and skills could execute the planned strategy. A department or division that has a fully realized a curriculum will have a catalog of facilitation guides upon which to draw when executing their educational plans for the academic year.

When developing a curriculum, it is common to seek examples of facilitation guides from which to draw inspiration. Be cautious when doing this, however, because facilitation guides are often developed to fit the unique learning objectives and educational plans of the authoring department or institution. Although they may give you ideas for your pedagogy, make sure they fit with the outcomes you have outlined for your students.

There are a number of professional bodies and non-profits that may provide facilitation guides around specific competencies or topics. College student leadership development literature, for example, has numerous guides that can be adapted. If you are looking for more specific divisional or departmental facilitation guides developed by peer institutions, however, you may find few examples online. You may consider posting to the Residential Curriculum and Curricular Approaches Facebook group or reach out to a past Institute on the Curricular Approach Showcase institution.

Because a curriculum is holistic, many institutions or departments, may also package their entire curriculum and facilitation guides into a workbook for their staff. These workbooks include week-by-week guides as well as additional development around timely topics and the facilitation guides needed for the execution of the entire curriculum over the course of an academic year. If you reach out to an institution, they may share some examples of their development.



# **Educational Plan**

Bringing It All Together

# Educational Plan(s)

Once a department or division articulates the goals, outcomes, and objectives it hopes to achieve, and they've undergone the work to rubric, map, and sequence these objectives, the final step in the process is the development of an overall educational plan. Educational plans function much like blueprints. As plans, they outline time-based progression through the curriculum. They include all the major components of the curriculum (from the Educational Priority to Goals, Outcomes, and Rubrics) and include all the facilitation guides for each individually executed strategy. In short, your educational plan is the master document of your entire curriculum.

Different institutions develop and use their educational plans differently. In most cases, a "master" educational plan is developed. This master educational plan is the singular source from which curriculum is put into practice. In the case of residence life, individual hall communities may each develop educational plans utilizing this master plan as the base. Having one educational plan and allowing for community modifications, however, does not mean that each staff member or area does something completely different. Instead, the educational plan can be seen as the base upon which individual needs may be accounted for through additional or alternative engagement strategies. In this sense, the plan acts like "bumpers" on a bowling alley. It narrows the focus, defines a range of variance, and ensures that staff are still delivering a curriculum within an agreed upon range.

Departments or divisions may also wish to develop multiple related educational plans. Perhaps it is easier in practice to develop different educational plans based on a student's class year. In this case, a residence life department may have a first-year student and a second-year student educational plan. Although these may be separated in practice, they nevertheless are related and demonstrate a seamless learning progression from one plan to the next.

Instead of having multiple educational plans, some institutions develop a master educational plan and have supplemental curricula that add an additional layer for a particular population or community. For example, a residence hall may have a living learning program (LLP) component. Students participating in this LLP still need to learn the same things as their non-LLP counterparts, but they may have a more specific focus because of their program. In this case, some institutions may develop educational co-plans. You can think of these co-plans as "riders" or an addendum that supplements the main educational plan. This allows for unique community learning while ensuring consistency across a curriculum.

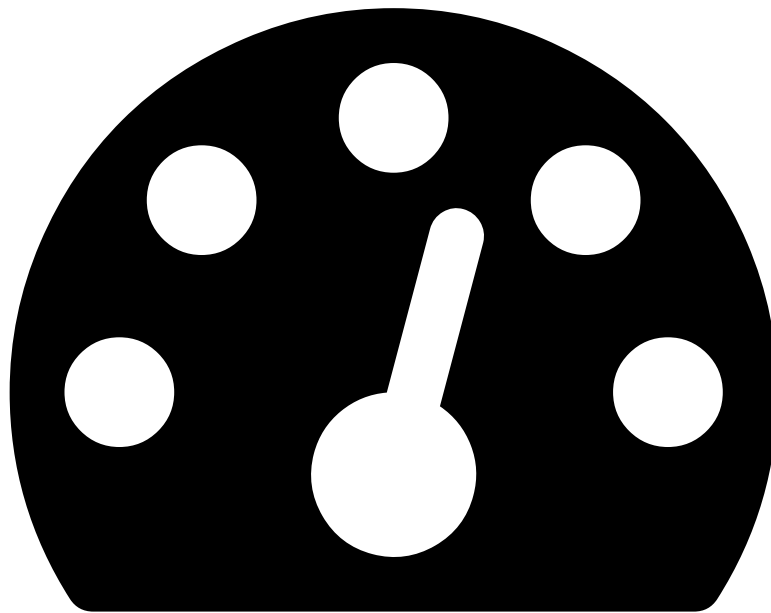
Educational plans are your opportunity to "put it all together." They also form the basis of many internal and external review processes since they are the final record of all goals and planned actions in a curriculum.

After the development of an educational plan (or plans) many institutions will develop workbooks containing the entire plan for staff to utilize in its execution. Specifically, in the case of residence life, which employs and relies on many student staff members to execute its plan, a workbook helps outline an educational plan in an accessible way that helps staff understand their roles and duties in executing the curriculum. Workbooks can include week by week task lists, calendars, facilitation guides, and helpful reminders and tips for the staff member.



## Key Questions

- How will you structure your educational plan? Will you have one or multiple?
- How will you account for special populations or communities with your educational plan?
- How will you revisit, review, and revise your educational plan(s) based on assessment data and feedback?



# **Assessing Learning**

Determining Student Achievement  
and Success

# Assessment

Because developing a curriculum entails refocusing your departmental efforts towards student learning, it necessarily follows that you must develop a culture of assessment. A culture of assessment is one in which decisions are data-driven and tested through the design, implementation, and review of assessment measures. As Lakos and Phipps (2004) describe it, a culture of assessment is:

An organizational environment in which decisions are based on facts, research, and analysis, and where services are planned and delivered in ways that maximize positive outcomes and impacts for customers and stakeholders. A Culture of Assessment exists in organizations where staff care to know what results they produce and how those results relate to customers' expectations. Organizational mission, values, structures, and systems support behavior that is performance and learning focused. (p. 352)

These cultures therefore have adopted premises and strategies that continuously refocus organizational efforts on improving practice through feedback and data. Although authors Lakos and Phipps (2004) discuss creating a "culture of assessment" within a university library environment, almost all the same principles apply to residence life and student affairs settings. For example, the authors outline some of the difficulties inherent in developing these cultures. The following quote from their article replaces the word "libraries" with "student affairs":

One challenge associated with creating a culture of assessment in [student affairs] relates to professional values. A profession that inherently believes that it is a "public good" does not feel the need to demonstrate outcomes and articulate impact. There is a deeply held and tacit assumption that the "good" is widely recognized and that the value of [student affairs] is universally appreciated. In the current environment of competition and of questioning every assumption, this deeply held value results in resistance to change and resistance to continuous assessment. (p. 350)

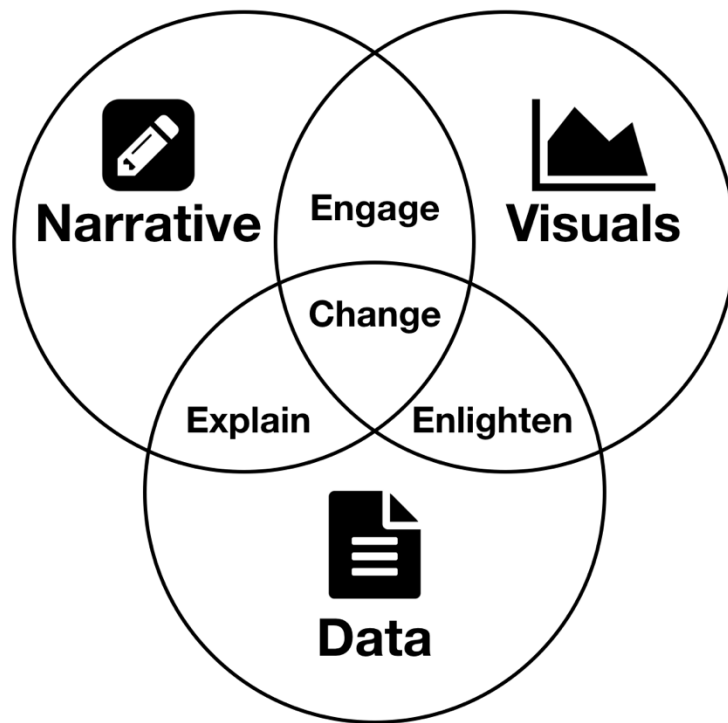
The difficulties the authors identify here can consistently be seen in many student affairs divisions across the country. Student affairs professionals often know they do good and important work, but are increasingly called upon to justify, demonstrate, and ultimately improve the effects of this work through data. Socialized through systems that often perpetuate the status quo, student affairs professionals may fail to critically examine practices that have become assumed (such as residence life programming models, bulletin boards, and door decs). Moving to a curricular model forces one to focus on learning first, and then evaluate (and reevaluate) these practices as to whether or not they are effective at promoting this learning. For this reason, creating a culture of assessment is a key component to developing a successful curriculum.

A video, from ACPA's Institute on the Curricular Approach (formerly the Residential Curriculum Institute), discusses three key components of an effective assessment culture (ACPA, 2017a). First, responsibility for assessment can be found in almost all staff job descriptions. Although a department or division may have a staff member solely dedicated to assessment, the assessment process must be owned by all members of staff. Second, there should be clear learning goals and outcomes articulated to define what is being measured. Without clarity in objectives, assessment will lack focus and effectiveness. Finally, having a "data strategy," or knowing how this data will be analyzed and used, can increase effectiveness. This includes how assessment data fit into the overall efforts of the university.

## Data Storytelling

An often-overlooked aspect of creating a "culture of assessment" is making sure that assessment results are shared with key partners and stakeholders. This includes being effective at "telling your story." It is not enough to just collect data, but the data needs to be shared and used towards continuous improvement. Being open and transparent with this data can also help with staff member, partner, and stakeholder engagement. The graphic below (from Dyekes, 2016) provides an excellent visual explaining how this sharing process can look. Taking your raw data and providing context (narrative) and presenting it in a way that others can understand it (visuals) can help fuel informed change in your curriculum and department. If refocuses attention on student learning and the effectiveness of initiatives attempting to promote that learning.





Source: (Dykes, 2016)

Assessment is not just a one-off occurrence or practice, rather, it is an integral component of any learning organization. It is also a process that is continuous, not just something that occurs at the end of the semester or year. By engaging in real-time assessment, changes can be made throughout the process, not just at its conclusion. For this reason, departments must look to supplement monolithic time-limited survey assessments with micro-assessment points throughout the year. During a program or event, a facilitator may wish to do a quick in-the-moment assessment of student learning and adjust the program on-the-fly. With data captured through conversation, real time trends may emerge that would suggest a heightened emphasis or less emphasis on particular topics. With recent advancements in technology, this data is becoming increasingly easier for staff members to access.

## Conclusion

Developing a curriculum is not just about the nuts and bolts of writing learning outcomes and facilitation guides. Rather, it is a process. A process that entails organizational change and culture building. Key to this cultural change is developing a culture that grounds its work in outcomes and backs it up through data. Creating a culture of assessment is therefore key, not only in ensuring continuous improvement but also in engaging with internal and external partners and stakeholders. Like tending to a garden, careful attention to these cultural factors can help ensure you curriculum, and your students, grow to their greatest potential.



### Key Questions

- What practices do you currently do that promote and sustain a culture of assessment and learning?
- Who is “responsible” for assessment in your organization? How can you ensure shared responsibility?
- How do you share your story through data with staff members, partners, and stakeholders?

# Feedback Versus Assessment

When evaluating programs and other educational interventions with students, it is important to make a distinction between two concepts: feedback and assessment. Although the types of questions you may ask in each of these categories may differ, the overall goal is how to design and execute effective experiences for students that are engaging and achieve educational outcomes. The following includes some distinctions that you may find useful, as well as some guiding questions that you could employ in reviewing your educational efforts. These questions can be used in the design of student surveys and assessments and as reflective prompts in your planning and review.

## Feedback

Feedback is the overall reaction to an educational intervention, its logistics, and execution. Feedback can be helpful in determining if an intervention was practically effective. Some questions to ask oneself may include:

- What did students like about the intervention? What did they not like?
- Did the staff members feel the intervention went well (or not)? Why?
- Was the intervention engaging?
- Was the plan for the event or intervention clear? Did it account for all the necessary details?
- Was the intervention easily executed?
- Were the resources required to execute the intervention readily available?

## Assessment

Assessment seeks to determine if learning occurred, what learning occurred, and if the learning relates to stated outcomes and objectives. Assessment in this sense requires a test for knowledge, skills, capacities, and abilities. Students can recall, state, or do what is expected of them as a result of their participation in the educational intervention. Some questions to consider:


- Did learning occur? What did students learn?
- How did student learning evolve from the start of this intervention to its end? (pre-test/post-test? rubric?)
- Was this learning related to the stated outcomes of the intervention?
- What else was learned that may have fallen outside of the stated outcomes of the intervention?

## Applying Feedback and Assessment to Improve Learning Plans

After collecting feedback and assessment data related to an educational intervention, this information can be used for improvement. Questions to reflect on include:

- How might the intervention be modified to be more engaging, relevant, and better executed?
- Are potential future facilitators and planners adequately equipped to execute this intervention? What knowledge, capacities, and skills are required?
- Do the identified outcomes and the intervention advance the appropriate learning goals?
- Are the identified outcomes developmentally appropriate for the audience?
- Are the identified outcomes reasonably achievable with this intervention?
- How might the intervention be modified to better fit the outcomes identified?
- Were the assessment questions appropriate to determine if the learning outcomes were achieved?

Asking these types of questions and being clear on what you're asking and why you're asking it can help in the design of educational programs and interventions with intentionality. Each institution is unique, and therefore each requires that you apply the specific lens of your educational priority, goals, and outcomes to each intervention to determine its effectiveness. Developing these feedback and assessment habits are an important goal in advancing student learning and one's effectiveness in enhancing learning. When executed regularly, they aid in continuous improvement.



# Assessment

ASSESSMENT IN A CURRICULUM SHOULD FOCUS ON LEARNING.

*instead of*

"DO YOU FEEL LIKE YOU KNOW THE POLICIES?"

ASK → →

"WHAT IS THE POLICY ON X?"

## DIVISION

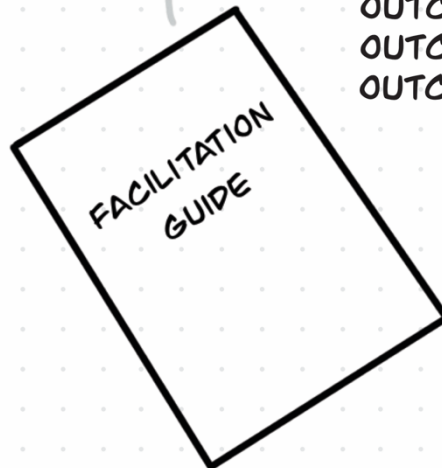
CURRICULUM GOAL 1  
 OUTCOME 1-1  
 OUTCOME 1-2  
 OUTCOME 1-3  
 OUTCOME 1-4

CURRICULUM GOAL 2  
 OUTCOME 2-1  
 OUTCOME 2-2  
 OUTCOME 2-3  
 OUTCOME 2-4

## DEPARTMENT

CURRICULUM GOAL 1  
 OUTCOME 1-1  
 OUTCOME 1-2  
 OUTCOME 1-3  
 OUTCOME 1-4

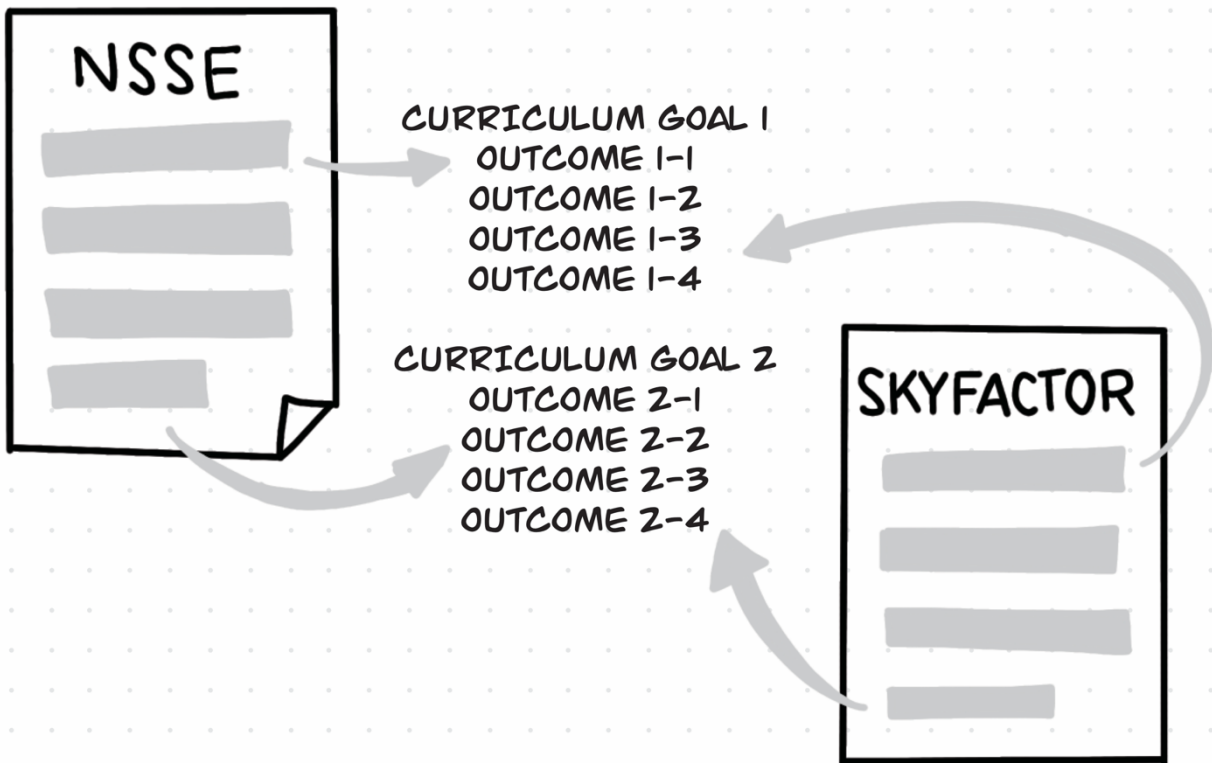
CURRICULUM GOAL 2  
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 OUTCOME 2-4



# ASSESSMENT

## assessment

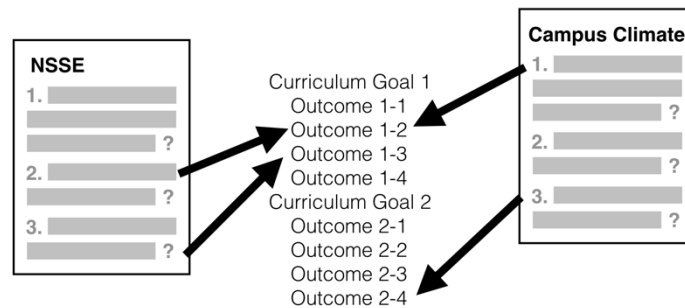
EACH FACILITATION GUIDE SHOULD INCLUDE THESE ASSESSMENTS. YOU SHOULD ALSO THINK ABOUT BROADER INSTITUTIONAL ASSESSMENTS THAT MAY MAP ON TO YOUR CURRICULAR OUTCOMES.



# Utilizing Existing Campus-Wide Assessments and Measures

As one of the essential elements of a curricular approach, assessment should occur at all levels of your curriculum. This includes on-the-ground assessment of individual learning activities, but also broader-based assessment of overall curriculum effectiveness. One way of achieving this broader-based assessment is to utilize data collection instruments you may already be using and assessment data you may already be collecting.

## Mapping Existing Assessment Instrument Questions to your Curricular Objectives

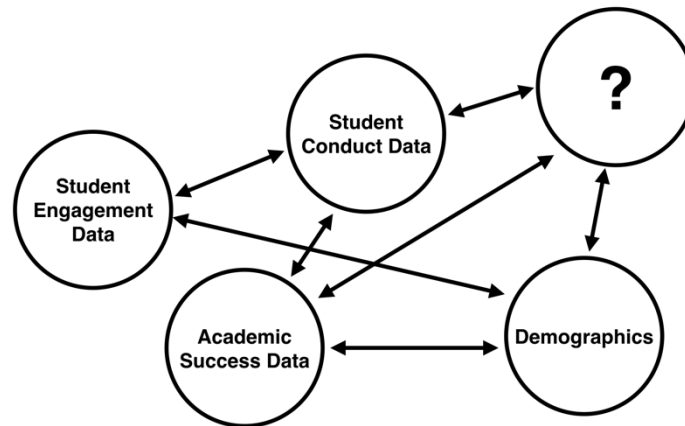


Your institution likely already administers several campus wide assessments. Some of the more common international/ national instruments may include the NSSE (National Survey of Student Engagement), the CIRP Freshmen Survey, campus climate surveys, and sometimes functional area specific surveys (ex. Skyfactor’s Benchworks surveys). Furthermore, your institution may have its own internally developed instruments that it administers on a regular basis.

One method for collecting additional data points to examine the effectiveness of your curriculum is to map specific questions from these pre-existing surveys onto your curricular objectives. To do this, scan through the questions asked in these instruments. Do specific questions align with the learning objectives you identified? Highlight these questions and create a running list of your objectives and the questions in these instruments which apply to those specific objectives. This can give you a baseline to follow through time or create a pre-test post-test opportunity to check for curricular effectiveness.

Although this mapping may not be a perfect fit, it can nevertheless be useful. Many of these surveys rely on student self-report and are not squarely focused on learning, or demonstrating learning, per se. Nevertheless, they can sometimes act as proxy indicators. For example, if you focus your educational efforts on pluralistic or multicultural outcomes, you should hopefully see movement in your campus climate numbers. Although you cannot prove causation, it can still be a telling measure. Presumably if you do your educational work well, these indicators should be positively impacted.

## Integrating Data into Your Institutional Database



In the future, this information could be integrated into a “big data” approach. “Big data” attempts to collect all information we have on students and on our institution and create predictive models. Going forward, we are likely to see increased attention paid to these types of endeavors. A recent report from NASPA recognized, “Many institutions have adopted data analytics practices to forecast operational needs and enrollment trends, and are now applying the use of predictive analytics directly to student success initiatives” (Burke, Parnell, Wesaw, and Kruger, 2017). Curricular approaches, with their emphasis on assessment, are consistent with this trend. Collecting, triangulating, and utilizing data to predict trends and needs can be an important byproduct of your curricular efforts. Much of the work in this area is still relatively nascent in higher education contexts but it is likely to become more important over time. Technology, in particular, has an important role to play in its development.

### Conclusion

Curricular assessment is not restricted to just the efforts you conduct yourself but should be integrated into your institution’s overall assessment plans. Pre-existing efforts can be mapped and paired with your learning objectives to provide a broader and stronger snapshot of your effectiveness. Furthermore, the data you glean from internal assessments can help shape your institution’s overall efforts.

#### Key Questions

- What campus-wide assessments do you already administer that might provide insight into the success of your curricular efforts?
- How can you map and track relevant data that can help inform the health and direction of your curriculum?
- How might assessment data collected through your curricular efforts aid in overall institutional goals?

#### Curriculum Reminders

##### Assess learning and not just “seat time.”

When looking for easily quantified, reportable, and understandable results, the easiest measure one may default to are attendance figures and satisfaction scales. These measures, however, only tell part of the story and do not address the achievement of outcomes you may identify for your programs, strategies, and services. When designing assessments, think beyond student self-reports and test whether they knowledge and takeaways you hope for students were actually achieved. This can help in reforming your efforts in subsequent years for improvement.

# Review

CURRICULAR PLANS SHOULD BE REVIEWED BY MULTIPLE ADVISORS, STAKEHOLDERS, AND NEUTRAL PARTNERS—BOTH WITHIN AND OUTSIDE OF THE ORGANIZATION. THROUGH A REVIEW PROCESS, CURRICULA CAN BE IMPROVED. REVIEWS SHOULD OCCUR ON AN ANNUAL, SEMI-ANNUAL, OR ONGOING BASIS AND SHOULD INFORM THE OVERALL EVOLUTION OF THE CURRICULUM.

## BRAINSTORM



THINK THROUGH YOUR LOGISTICS:

- WHAT SOURCES OF FEEDBACK WILL YOU USE?
- HOW WILL YOU ORGANIZE YOUR TIME?
- WHAT IS THE SCOPE OF YOUR REVIEW? FULL? PARTIAL?
- IDENTIFY EXPERTS, PARTNERS, AND STAKEHOLDERS THAT CAN HELP IN THE REVIEW.

# Peer and External Review

Developing a culture of continuous improvement within your department or division requires one to put structures in place to gather assessment data and utilize that data to make change. A curriculum is never truly “done.” It evolves over time as staff become more effective educators (and learn what works and what doesn’t) and as your institution and student population changes. As a part of your curricular efforts, you should engage in multiple forms of continuous review. In a review, you are looking to increase your overall effectiveness and revise your educational plans and objectives.

## Standards and Benchmarking for Housing and Residence Life Operations

Many residence life departments utilize an internal or external review process for their operations. ACUHO-I provides several resources that can help with this. The ACUHO-I Standards and Ethical Principles for College and University Housing Professionals (ACUHO-I, 2017) provides a baseline against which a department can evaluate their progress. The companion Self-Assessment Guide is a tool staff can utilize to self-rate their progress towards the fulfillment of these standards and identify, and prioritize, areas for improvement. ACUHO-I also holds the Professional Standards Institute (PSI), which trains professionals in these standards as well as how to use them in a review. The PSI experience also includes a real-world expedited review of an institution to allow participants to practice the review process. In addition to the resources provided by ACUHO-I, The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) also provides standards for Housing and Residential Life Programs (CAS, 2013).

Curriculum assessment and review goes beyond measuring student satisfaction and service provision. It includes not only student-level assessment of educational initiative effectiveness, but a review of the educational model and the identified goals and outcomes themselves. A video from ACPA’s Institute on the Curricular Approach explains that this requires putting the appropriate structures in place and identifying the relevant data sources and experts for analysis (ACPA, 2017c). The video (ACPA, 2017c) suggests the following steps for your review process:

- Brainstorm a list of questions you want answered.
- Think through your logistics:
  - What sources of feedback will you use?
  - How will you organize your time?
  - What is the scope of your review? Full? Partial?
- Identify experts, partners, and stakeholders that can help in the review.

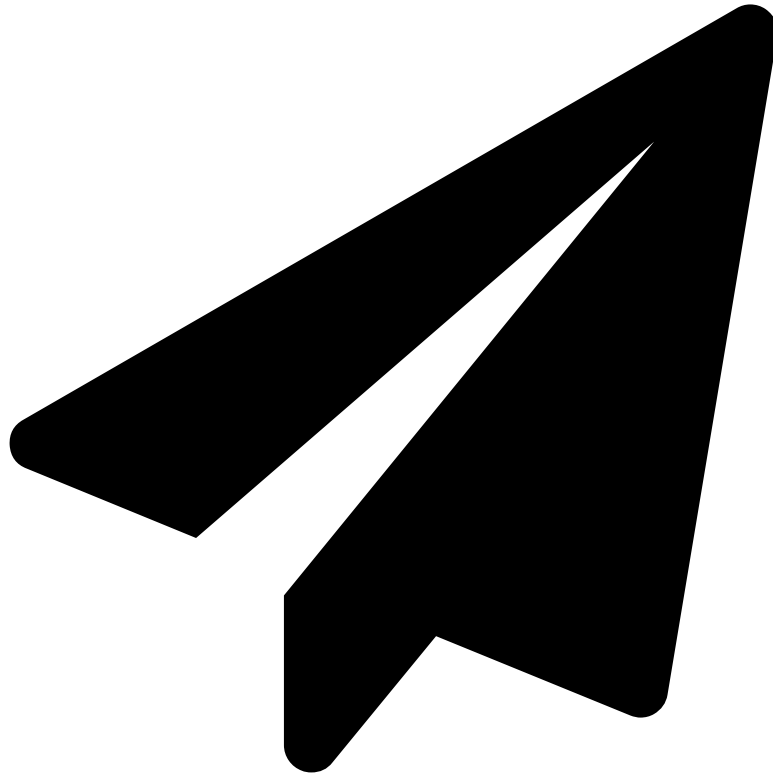
At the end of this book you will also find a tool which may be useful for institutions looking to identify a set of curriculum standards against which they can benchmark themselves. The Residential Curriculum Self-Assessment Instrument is geared towards Residence Life departments and provides a worksheet that staff can utilize to assess their progress in curriculum development. Beyond this guide, all peer review processes should include an analysis of the effectiveness of curricular initiatives in succeeding in their stated objectives. This should not be just student satisfaction or self-identification of learning, but rather actual demonstration of achievement. If an academic initiative is not successful in achieving its stated outcomes, it should be revised or retired. If an overall curriculum has gaps that do not address all aspects of a goal or outcome, it should be re-sequenced or modified to better catch these objectives.



### Key Questions

- What processes do you have in place for peer/external review of your housing operations? Of your educational functions?
- What staff, stakeholders, and partners would be useful in your review process?
- When does this review process take place? Is it monthly? Annually? Continuously?
- How are you measuring student learning as opposed to satisfaction or self-reported progress?





# **Launching A Curriculum**

How Curriculum Changes Our Work

# Organizational Readiness

Because a curricular approach is revolutionary as opposed to evolutionary, it is necessary that you think about organizational culture and organizational change processes before undertaking this journey. For many, this shift in approach requires the development of a learning-centric organization. An organization that moves beyond “exposure” through program attendance, and towards “learning” (Kerr & Tweedy, 2006).

A learning organization is “an organization that is continually expanding its capacity to create its future. For such an organization, it is not enough merely to survive. ‘Survival learning’ or what is more often terms ‘adaptive learning’ is important—indeed it is necessary. But for a learning organization, ‘adaptive learning’ must be joined by ‘generative learning,’ learning that enhances our capacity to create”  
(Senge, 2006, p. 14)

This is also a shift from a “doing”-focused culture towards one with greater intentionality. Therefore, *how* “staff learn and perceive their efforts within an organization while creating learning-enhancing experiences for students” is just as important as *what* learning-enhancing experiences are created (Lichterman, 2016, p. 49). In short, the process is just as important as the product.

As you embark on a curricular journey, the following are five questions you should ask yourself to determine your readiness to take on the effort.

## 1. Do you have your core operational functions operating smoothly?

At the very start of your curricular journey, before you even begin writing an educational priority, make sure your unit and your staff are in a good position to take on the planning and change process. One useful concept may be Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. If the base of your operation is not sound, you shouldn’t (and probably can’t) focus on higher order and more complex efforts to promote student learning.

Applying Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs to your organization, there are certain aspects of your division or department that are your core functions. These are likely student services and other administrative procedures that are necessary for the critical functions of the university and to serve students in their roles as students. Although these processes are likely never to be perfect, and their efficiencies and alignment may change over time, it is important to ensure these are functioning well before taking on the work of a curriculum. A curriculum cannot “fix” these problems. The focus of a curriculum is on student learning, and although it may impact your operational processes by making them more learning-centric, it does not address issues of efficiency and sound management. Ensuring that you are operationally, fiscally, and administratively sound (or at least moving towards improvement) will help set you up for greater success with a curriculum.

## 2. Do you have the leadership in place that is supportive of this change?

Because curricular change requires rethinking practice (and has implications for assessment, measurement, resource allocation, staffing, training, and professional development), it is critical that leadership within your department and/or division is supportive of and understands what this change entails. Your curricular journey will take time—in most cases it could take up to three years or more before the basics are fully in place. Having leadership that understands this, is patient, and helps keep you focused on your journey can be crucial. Furthermore, you will make mistakes, or receive assessment data that causes you to change course. Having leadership that perceives these as positive learning experiences can assure staff members that they are supported in their journey towards creating a culture of evidence that drives the curriculum.

Not all schools may have this supportive leadership in place. For example, if a department reports to someone who sees program attendance as the only and most important factor in determining success, a curriculum does not privilege these metrics. In these cases, one should work to educate leadership about the nature and importance of curriculum before beginning the journey. Using resources such as videos, books, and articles can help. Having someone in leadership attend the Institute on the Curricular Approach and/or bringing in an outside facilitator can also help. External voices sometimes carry more power than internal voices simply because of their positionality.

### **3. Do you have the right staff with the requisite skills and training to execute a curriculum successfully?**

It is not enough to have the support of leadership when transitioning to a curriculum. Your professional staff and those involved in the implementation of a curriculum need to be bought-in and hired with, or trained for, the right skill sets to be successful. Some of these skill sets include knowledge and application of:

- Curriculum development (learning outcome development, lesson plan/facilitation guide construction)
- Assessment practices (from on-the ground to program review)
- Student development theory
- Pedagogical practices

Specifically, when beginning your journey, it is also critical that all staff be brought up to speed on the basics of the curricular approach. The Institute on the Curricular Approach is one such vehicle, although it may be cost prohibitive to send all your staff members. Therefore, many campuses may opt to have an outside trainer come in and help provide a guidance. This ensures all your staff members start out on an equal footing and with the same basic common knowledge. Consistent, all-encompassing training also increases the likelihood of staff buy-in and success with curricular roll out.

Training and professional development should not be a one-off event but a commitment throughout the entire year. This can include informal professional development practices such as brown bag discussions, common reads, and article shares. It can also be more formalized through how professional development funds are allocated, retreats are designed, and meeting times are allocated. Before jumping into a curricular approach, give thought to how you can invest your staff in the process.

“For example, a yearlong training and on-going development plan, for professional, graduate, and student staff should be designed to mirror the residential curriculum approach. Staff competencies, inclusive of competencies tailored to responsibilities and duties within a specific housing and residence life department, should influence outcomes for training and developments. The content of the residential curriculum should be integrated into all facets of onboarding and training as well as developments through the use of relevant literature and readings, pedagogy on teaching and learning techniques, and assessment practices to gauge learning.” (Lichterman, 2016, p. 334)

### **4. Are your staff ready for transition? Is a strong team and culture in place?**

Beyond looking at your staff member skillsets and abilities, you should also review your overall staff culture and the strength of your team. Curriculum is a collaborative effort that requires staff to be involved in and engaged at all levels. If there is dissonance within your team, if the team doesn't have a strong sense of collaboration, or if your culture is not oriented towards change and a focus on student learning, you may find a lot of difficulty moving forward.

Before you begin the curricular process, spend time focusing on strengthening your teamwork. This includes building trust, camaraderie, and a shared sense of purpose. With a strong base in place, staff will more readily take on the necessary rethink and change processes a curriculum requires. This will also further a shared sense of ownership over the curriculum. Curricula can be doomed to fail if lead by only one champion. Curriculum is not one person's pet project but must be owned by the entire team. It requires the commitment of an entire team to reach for permanent change and longevity.

### **5. Do you have the bandwidth and time to dedicate to the curricular transition process?**

Developing a curriculum takes time. Although a curriculum is never truly “finished,” it can take 2-3 years before the basics of the curriculum are in place and begin to take hold. With the busy schedules and day-to-day crises that impact student affairs professionals' work, it can be hard to carve out the time to focus on longer term projects. When developing a curriculum for the first time, it is important to go in with a plan and to make the commitments necessary to see it through. Some strategies include:

- **Doing an inventory of staff time.** Are there certain practices that you may be able to give up? Might a reshuffling of duties free staff members up to focus more on other priorities?
- **Setting aside a dedicated time to work on curriculum development.** This could be at regular intervals throughout the year (2 hours once a month, 1 hour every week) and/or at designated full or half day retreat times that can allow for uninterrupted focus.
- **Building a culture of assessment.** In learning-focused organizations, assessment isn't an afterthought, it's part of the planning process. Developing and rewarding habits that bring assessment efforts into the regular routine of daily work can yield great dividends.

## **Conclusion**

It is important to think of the curriculum development process not just as a series of tasks, but as an organizational change process. As such, there can be organizational “prep work” that you may need to contemplate before undergoing a curricular journey. Curriculum development is not an “off-the-shelf” process but instead one that is unique and ingrained into the distinct cultural contexts of the institution and staff teams doing the development.

# Staff Duties, Selection, and Training and Development

Transitioning to a curriculum is as much about educational plan development as it is about organizational change. The reason for this is that curricular approaches are often paradigmatic change—change predicated on an entirely new set of premises. In other words, rather than just rearranging the furniture in the room, you’re changing the entire room itself. Because of this, there are many implications for how your organization itself may need to change to account for a curricular focus. Chief among these changes may be related to your staff member duties, and your staff selection, training, and development plans.

## Staff Duties

Part of the change to curriculum requires you to take a hard look at how your staff position descriptions are written and the duties required of each staff member. Transitioning to a curricular approach need not be more work, but it is different work. Therefore, in reviewing staff member position descriptions, one may need to re-evaluate practices and determine if it remains an effective use of staff time and if the duties suggested are in line with the skills the staff member was hired for.

If your department or division has a heavy operational or service focus, this may require you to look at ways to free up your staff to focus more on their educational efforts. Although this may be more easily accomplished in larger organizations, which typically have more staff members allowing for centralization and specialization, this is also possible for smaller schools. For smaller schools, technology may be beneficial to increasing staff efficiency. Furthermore, one may be able to swap duties between staff members that are more appropriate to their skill development and backgrounds. This idea is illustrated in the curriculum essential element related to student and professional staff members and aligning duties that are appropriate to them.

Another area related to staff duties is determining “who” is responsible for the curriculum. Many of the most successful schools utilizing a curricular approach typically have one (or a few) staff member(s) designated as the lead(s) to make sure the curriculum continues to evolve and that assessment feedback loops result in continuous improvement. At some larger campuses, there may be a specific staff member who is hired with curricular development as their primary role. At other intuitions, this is a shared responsibility. Regardless of how leadership is determined, curriculum should be a shared and mutually owned effort by all the staff.

Changing staff member duties can be a difficult process. Change is a difficult process. As your curricular efforts evolve it is highly likely you will encounter resistance. Staff members who may have been hired with one set of expectations will find their work changed. This is particularly prominent with student staff members who may have been hired with the model of their previous experience in mind. Therefore, throughout this change process, it is integral to be open, transparent, and clear in your communications. Engaging returning staff members in the change process is key, while also making it clear that this change is moving forward. Be open to slowing your timeline for change implementation and adjusting the scope of your curriculum to keep workloads at a reasonable level and disruption to relative minimum.

## Staff Selection

How you select your staff members also changes under a curriculum. Curricular schools put an emphasis on student learning and therefore will look for staff members with strong backgrounds in educational and developmental theory. This does not have to be limited to traditional student affairs degrees. Candidates with experience in teaching and curriculum as well as psychology may provide expertise that can be useful in your curricular development. Part of the selection process entails knowing what to hire for and knowing what can be trained on. In most cases, the nuts and bolts of the curricular approach can be trained on, but general knowledge of student learning and developmental theory cannot be easily replicated. Some of the competencies required of staff under a residential curriculum include:

- A strong command of student development theory, research, and trends
- Ability to translate broad educational statements and philosophies into practice
- Ability to write clear, specific, and measurable learning outcomes
- Ability to assess learning outcomes through multiple methods
- Ability to translate student development theory into developmentally appropriate learning opportunities

How you structure the interview process may also change under a curriculum. Having a case study, a presentation, or asking candidates to develop sample facilitation guides can give you insights into their skills and abilities in focusing on student learning. You can also apply elements of curricular design to test for candidate knowledge and skill. Focusing on these themes will also help candidates determine if your position is the right one for them.

Change in staff selection processes also extends to student staff. Under a curricular approach, you will likely no longer be biased towards extroverts with programming skills. Instead, you will likely look for peer leaders with strong interpersonal, helping, and counseling skills. Hiring for these skills may require you to ask different questions in your application process and re-envision what group and individual interview processes may look like.

## **Staff Training and Development**

Once selected, staff need to be trained. Training on the curricular approach does not just occur once at the start of a staff member's employment but is a continuous journey that will start with the basics during an onboarding process and supplemented throughout the year through continuing professional development. It is imperative that staff are continually trained and retrained in the curricular approach.

Many institutions utilize different methods for initial training and re-training on the curricular approach. Some send new staff members to ACPA's Institute on the Curricular Approach every year. The Institute is an excellent way to ensure all staff members are thoroughly trained in curricular basics. While the Institute provides significant value, costs may make it difficult for all new staff members to attend. As a result, many institutions may replicate a similar institute experience on their own campus either internally or with the help of an outside facilitator. Institutions may instead reserve formal Institute attendance to key point people in their curricular development.

During these on campus Institutes, and especially during staff member on boarding processes, all staff members should become acquainted (and re-acquainted) with the theories and documents that guide the unique aspects of the curriculum at your institution. During your dig process in developing the curriculum, it is likely that you identified specific theories on which your curriculum is based and important institutional documents that guide your learning objectives. Make sure that staff members are provided these documents, that they read and review these documents, and that they understand them through application and discussion. These foundational materials should be continuously reviewed for new insights or to determine if they continue to fit with your curriculum and industry and institutional trends.

Continuing from these initial yearly on-boarding and training processes, it is important to establish a culture of learning and assessment around curriculum-related topics. You might have brown bag discussions on key articles related to student learning or utilize social media to share interesting articles and blog posts (such as the ones from which this book was created). A department or division can also bring in speakers and consultant experts in student learning and curriculum. Periodic curriculum review retreats can also help ensure that there is dedicated time devoted to curricular development that may be overlooked when staff members are unable to step away from day-to-day duties.

Training will also look different for student staff members. Although they are not educational experts, it is important to help student staff members understand the learning and developmental processes they and their fellow students undergo while in college. Furthermore, you should help student staff members understand how departmental learning goals and outcomes were derived so they better understand the role they play in this work. Many institutions who have transitioned to curriculum teach their student staff members the basics of developmental and learning theory. Furthermore, they share goals and outcomes and demonstrate to student staff how these were derived.

For student staff practice, it is important to ensure the staff members have a solid set of leadership skills in place for the types of strategies they will enact in the curriculum. Whereas under programming models, event planning skills may have been paramount, under a curriculum, skills such as group facilitation, counseling, and interpersonal communication may become more important. The transition to a curriculum is an excellent way to develop a leadership training for staff members that connects to broader themes. You may consider mirroring the process of curriculum development in designing a training program for your staff.

## Conclusion

Transitioning to a curriculum can touch all aspects of your division, department, and staff. More than just a new model, it also requires a change in the way one works. To this end, a close examination of staff duties as well as how they are selected and trained is a key stage in the process. At its core, this re-examination requires staff to think differently about the way they do their work and how the department structures and rewards that work. Although change and transition are hard, there are ways that you can include all staff in these processes that ensures a smoother transition to a learning-centric curricular organization.



### Key Questions

- When is the last time you reviewed staff member duties and responsibilities? How might these change under a curricular framework?
- What should be hired for and what can be trained on?
- How are you ensuring all staff members are knowledgeable and capable of enacting a curricular approach?
- How do you ensure ongoing training on learning and curricular concepts?
- How will you manage the transition with current staff?



### Curriculum Tips

#### Mapping your objectives.

Mapping student learning objectives allows one to make connections between specific outcomes and activities or strategies through which these outcomes can be learned. Begin by creating a table where your learning outcomes are listed in one column. Then, in subsequent columns, list the individual strategies and learning opportunities you provide. Place X's in the areas where these overlap. By mapping your learning objectives in this way, you may notice that you place too much emphasis or not enough emphasis on a particular objective. You can also repeat this process with variables other than your learning opportunities such as a student's class year or departmental offerings across campus. The mapping process is less about creating a concrete end-product and more about what you learn in the process of developing it and from your analysis of it.

## Utilizing Behavioral-Style Interview Questions and Rubrics in Hiring for a Curricular Approach

Although some of the skills required for professional staff members to be successful under a curricular approach are taught in Higher Education and Student Affairs Master’s programs, some are not. Furthermore, some candidates may not demonstrate a competency in these skills to the level required by a curricular approach. These skills can be trained on-the-job, but it’s far easier if you can hire a candidate with a strong level of skill from the start. So how does one find these candidates?

One method is to follow the model of behavioral-style interviews. Behavioral-style interviews are predicated on the notion that the best indicator of future performance is how candidates performed in the past. Questions under this style typically ask for an example or a story of a time that a candidate did something or encountered something. For example:

- Can you tell me about a time that you developed learning outcomes for an educational intervention and enacted them in practice? How did you arrive at these outcomes? How did you ensure they were present in the intervention? And how did you know you were successful?
- Student affairs professionals are increasingly called upon to justify their work through data. Do you have an example of a time that you used assessment methods to measure the effectiveness of an educational intervention? How did you choose these methods and what methods did you choose? Did you measure what you set out to understand?

More generic interview questions are not able to achieve this level of specificity. If you ask a candidate if they can write learning outcomes, they are going to say, “yes.” This doesn’t provide you with the answers that you need. Behavioral-style questions like these get at the candidate’s ability to actually *do* the actions prescribed and *do* them *well*.

Another approach you could take in interviewing candidates is through a demonstration or presentation. Provide the candidate with a statement of your educational priority and learning goals. Ask them to create a plan/presentation that includes specifics including relevant theory, learning outcomes, justification for the appropriateness of those outcomes, strategies for achieving those outcomes, and assessment measures.

Then, in evaluating these presentations/demonstrations, use a rubric for scoring specific skills and competencies. For example, we may want to know about the candidate’s ability to write learning outcomes. You might create a rubric that looks something like this:

0	1	2	3
Candidate is unable to articulate any learning outcomes.	<p>Candidate’s learning outcomes lack clarity, specificity and are not measurable.</p> <p>Outcomes are a mismatch with the audience’s developmental capacity.</p> <p>Outcomes are not achievable with the intervention and within the time frame suggested.</p> <p>Outcomes cannot be assessed.</p>	<p>Candidate’s learning outcomes are somewhat vague, could be more specific, and measurability may be problematic.</p> <p>Outcomes are at a questionably appropriate level for the audience’s developmental capacity.</p> <p>Outcomes may not be able to be achieved by the intervention and/or within the time frame suggested.</p> <p>Outcomes are difficult to effectively assess.</p>	<p>Candidate’s learning outcomes are clear, specific, and measurable.</p> <p>Outcomes are at the appropriate level for the audience’s developmental capacity.</p> <p>Outcomes are reasonably achievable with the intervention and within the time frame suggested.</p> <p>Outcomes are able to be easily assessed.</p>



# Onboarding New Professional Staff

Student Affairs offices, particularly those within residence life and education, typically see a steady turnover of professionals year-over-year. When building and maintaining a curriculum, it can be a challenge to onboard new staff members who (1) may not be familiar with the model at all or (2) are not familiar with your institution's specific implementation of the curricular approach. There are several strategies you can employ to ensure greater traction and continuity for your curricular efforts while maintaining progress over time. The following are five strategies you can use to help in the successful onboarding for new staff members to a residential curriculum.

## **1. Keep your audit and dig documents updated and accessible.**

One of the foundational steps of crafting a curriculum is completing an audit or dig. An audit or dig is a way of surfacing the relevant data and knowledge sources that will guide your curriculum and its resultant priority, goals, and outcomes. During this “dig” process, participants collect and audit relevant educational theories and documents as well as institutional data including statements, philosophies, cultural artifacts, and assessments. After completing this audit, the educational objectives are written and derived based on the uncovered information.

Maintaining, updating, and using the information collected during the dig can be an excellent way of identifying what knowledge new staff members will need to be in successful in their roles. You may consider assigning new staff members readings from the key documents uncovered in your dig. You can also use these documents for ongoing professional development and common reads. Staff can continuously add to these resources as the literature develops and your sophistication in these areas increases.

## **2. Document your curriculum.**

Because the creation of a curriculum can be a messy process involving many partners and stakeholders—both internal and external—it is supremely important that you work to document the core of what informs your curriculum. This “core” includes items like (1) your educational priority statement, (2) your goal statements and related narratives, and (3) your outcome statements and related rubrics. You should also document and describe (1) the educational strategies you use in implementation, (2) the maps and inventories of your scaffolded and sequenced outcomes, and (3) your plans for implementation, delineation of responsibilities, assessment, and campus partner engagement.

Having all these components in one summary document or set of summary documents will ensure you stay organized. Furthermore, revisiting and revising these foundational documents can help ensure that the curriculum's consistency is maintained, and that continuous improvement-through-revision is possible. For new staff members, these documents can be especially important in onboarding as they will provide the staff member with all of the key pieces of information they need to be successful.

## **3. Make sure everyone owns the curriculum.**

Although the first two items entail physical documents and products that can help in onboarding staff with the knowledge required to be successful, the third strategy is more process orientated. To be successful, staff at all levels must own or “buy-in” to the curriculum. A curriculum cannot just be one staff member's project or owned by a small committee. All staff must be involved in some aspect of continuously developing and maintaining the curriculum. Ensuring that curriculum is a team effort can help set a culture that welcomes new staff members into the learning community in a way that involves them in the process and sets expectations for engagement. Developing a curriculum is as much about organizational change and culture as it is the nuts and bolts of planning and development.

## **4. Share and utilize assessment data and analysis.**

Part of developing buy-in and a culture of continuous improvement is ensuring that feedback loops are developed and maintained. The systematic sharing of assessment data can help with this. Staff at all levels need to understand how their participation in the curriculum helps in the achievement of learning objectives. Furthermore, through data sharing and analysis, staff can better engage with the curriculum. These assessments can also be useful tools for onboarding new staff members—allowing them to get more quickly up to speed on what is working well within the

curriculum and what requires more work. This knowledge can help new staff set goals and understand where their energy is best focused.

## 5. Consider holding a “mini-ICA” each year during training.

Although the use of curricular methods is becoming increasingly popular at many institutions, it is still probable that recruited staff may possess varying levels of knowledge of what a curricular process is and how it works. Curricular development is a sophisticated process that can often take years of learning to become fully competent in. For this reason, many departments may choose to hold a “mini-ICA” on their campuses every year and typically during staff training time in the summer. A “mini-ICA” borrows from the model created by ACPA’s Institute on the Curricular Approach, and replicates aspects of it to train all staff on the curricular process. Having all staff members attend the Institute every year is often cost prohibitive and holding an internal “mini-ICA” can be a way of achieving some of the same ends. Sometimes the training is completely developed in house at an institution, or an external facilitator is hired. Either way, continuous professional development and remedial education on the basics of curriculum development can be useful for returning and new staff alike.



### Key Questions

- How do you ensure that new staff members are appropriately onboarded for a residential curriculum?
- What knowledge and skills must a new staff member possess in order to be successful in developing curriculum?
- Do you maintain and continuously revise key documents that outline your curriculum?
- How can you systematize the onboarding process and build continuous improvement into your organizational culture?



### Curriculum Reminders

**Celebrate failure. It’s a learning opportunity.**

Consistent with the idea of prototyping your curriculum, learn to celebrate failure. Controlled failure can help you to do better. If you try something and it doesn’t work, analyze it and figure out how to improve it or recognize you might need an entirely different approach. Bring this concept to your staff as well. By empowering staff members to make informed risks and choices, you can achieve greater outcomes. Failure and experimentation are important part of the curricular process.

# Gaining Buy-In from Student Staff Members and Leaders

Transitioning to a curricular approach represents a cultural shift. A department can have well-articulated goals, outcomes, and educational plans, but a curriculum will never be successful without the necessary cultural and organizational change that comes along with it. For residence life departments, in particular, this means preparing your student staff members for this shift, involving them in the process, and helping them through the process of change. This is also true of other departments that may employ large numbers of student staff programmers or for those that work with student leaders involved in peer education work.

One of the questions I frequently get asked when consulting with campuses on transitioning to a curricular approach is how to gain buy-in from student staff members and student leaders. Shifting to a curriculum necessarily means that the role of these students will change in some ways. Hiring practices must change and training practices must also change.

For example, within residence life departments that operate under a programming model, RAs may be hired for and trained on their event planning skills. When transitioning to a curricular approach, it may become more important to hire RAs for their interpersonal skills and their ability to connect, counsel, and act as peer mentors for students. When transitioning, some RAs hired under the old model may feel out of place. Removing program requirements and de-emphasizing bulletin board and door dec crafting skills can be seen as a threat to the job for which they were hired. A quite reasonable and normal reaction. So, in managing the transition to a curriculum, it is incumbent upon campuses to prepare staff for this change and help ease the transition.

One piece of advice I give to campuses is to reflect on Marcia Baxter Magolda's Learning Partnerships Model (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004). In a true learning partnership, learning is co-constructed between teacher and student, blurring some of the lines of "authority" in the relationship. Cultivating this type of open learning partnership is an excellent way to gain buy in, and the expertise and perspective of student staff members and student leaders. When developing these relationships, keep the following four tips in mind:

## **1. Validate RAs, Student Staff Members, and Student Leaders as Knowers.**

Student leaders and staff members are integral to the execution of your curriculum. They possess knowledge of current students in a way that administrators can often never fully realize. They are also experts in aspects of peer culture and influence. They can connect with other students, as peers, in ways that administrators cannot. Recognizing this, valuing this, and naming this can help student staff members and leaders see their importance in a curriculum. When discussing curriculum with student staff members and leaders, it is important to highlight these themes, communicate these themes in hiring processes, integrate these themes into training programs, and recognize students for their efforts on a regular basis.

## **2. Involve Student Staff Members in the Curriculum Development Process.**

Given the expertise of student staff members and leaders, it is important to involve them in the curriculum development and review process. Although they may not be the ones explicitly or solely writing the learning outcomes or facilitation guides, they nevertheless have insights and feedback that can make them stronger. Consider using focus groups. Regularly check in on practice to make sure your theory-to-practice link is sound. Also include staff members in review processes you may have set up to revise and enhance your curricular objectives.

## **3. Utilize Returning Staff Members as Leaders and Peer Teachers.**

Breaking down the teacher-student binary means that we all have a role to play in improving our knowledge and practice with curriculum. To further this, utilize the execution of the curriculum itself as a learning opportunity for student facilitators and staff. Invite students to co-facilitate learning opportunities and reflect on the process afterwards. In some ways, the curricular process is mirrored at a meta level to enhance learning for the "teachers."

You can also replicate this strategy during student staff and student leader training. Pair a professional with a returning student when presenting a training session or topic. Utilize direct staff input when constructing a training

or leadership session. Re-envisioning student staff and student leader training overall to focus on student roles as teachers and connectors can help set the tone for how your students approach their work with their peers.

#### **4. Share Assessment Data Freely and Transparently.**

Gathering assessment data is useless unless it is used and shared. You can stress the importance of assessment with student staff members and leaders by "closing the loop" and showing how the data they collect informs changes to practice. Being open and honest about what went well and what missed the mark encourages a culture that focuses on continuous improvement. This can shift a culture away from an operational "checklist mindset" towards one that is more learning centric. Sharing this data also helps you tell your story and helps student staff members and leaders articulate the "why" of a curriculum.

### **Conclusion**

Student staff members and leaders are essential to the success of a curricular approach. Utilizing their strengths and utilizing them appropriately in the curricular development process and the execution of it can greatly enhance the learning environment for students. Rather than treating them solely as executors of a curriculum, re-envision how you can bring them in as partners.



#### **Key Questions**

- How can you validate (through thought, deed, and action) student staff members and leaders as "knowers"?
- In what ways can you use returning staff members and leaders and peer trainers and teachers?
- How can you ensure the cycle of assessment is shared widely and that all levels of staff are able to contribute towards continuous improvement?



#### **Curriculum Benefits**

##### **Better individualized attention for students.**

Program models that rely heavily on programs and events as the main means of student engagement and educational delivery typically privilege one-to-many style learning environments. Akin to giving a lecture in a large classroom, they are efficient at communicating knowledge to a mass audience. Where they are often lacking is in individualization and meaning making opportunities.

Curricular approaches require thinking about other methods of engagement and educational delivery outside of the traditional program. One of the more common strategies that departments and divisions adopt, is 1-on-1 interactions or "intentional conversations." The idea behind these is to provide more space for student meaning making and contextualization. This can also encompass mentorship programs or peer led efforts—such as orientation advisors or student leadership advisors.

# Engaging Partners

Educational and curricular efforts exist in context. Furthermore, departments do not exist on an island. When developing curriculum, it is important to identify partners and stakeholders early on and include them in the curriculum design process. This inclusion should be at all stages (from planning to implementation) and throughout assessment and review processes.

## EXAMPLE WITHIN RESIDENCE LIFE

Internal	External
Residents	Faculty
Student Staff	Parents
Professional Staff	Student Affairs Staff
Dept. Student Organizations	Academic Affairs Staff
	Living Learning Programs
	Student Organizations
	Community Members

## Who are these partners and stakeholders?

Partners and stakeholders can be both internal and external. Internal partners and stakeholders are those within your own department. For example, in residence life, they can include your resident assistants, professional staff, residents, and student leadership organizations (such as your hall governments or Residence Hall Association). External partners can include on-campus constituencies (such as student affairs departments or faculty), or off-campus constituencies (such as parents or community members).

## What is the potential impact on these stakeholders?

The transition to a curricular approach entails a complete rethink in the way one approaches and accomplishes their work. Because of this, a shift towards a curricular paradigm can have a profound impact on internal and external stakeholders. For internal stakeholders, moving to a curricular model can impact everything from position descriptions, to how staff are selected, trained, supervised, and evaluated. Change in these areas can often be difficult. Therefore, it is imperative that departments transitioning to a curricular approach engage their staff members and students in a transparent way that involves everyone in the process. Not all staff members or students will want to help in the transition, however. It is probable that a department may find resistance amongst staff members who have different ideas as to the direction of the department. Perhaps these staff members were hired with a skill set that is no longer suited to the work or maybe they have been with the organization for years and are invested in the status quo. Knowing potential reactions to change from staff members and students can help departmental leadership prepare and include these stakeholders in the journey.

External partners are also impacted in the transition to a curriculum in a way that may change previous ways of interacting and open opportunities for new partnerships. Reestablishing relationships with existing partners often requires you to help educate your colleagues about how the curricular approach is different. Part of this process is establishing credibility. Partners often possess expertise that you may lack. You can gain traction with these partners by sharing the principles of the curricular approach and how it is predicated on building deep and lasting relationships with campus partners. Besides educating partners about the curricular approach itself, another strategy is to start with your mutual learning goals and outcomes and look for areas of overlap. If previous programs and other engagement activities do not reach towards these newly articulated goals, discuss how you can re-envision these activities for mutual wins. Also, be on the lookout for initiatives from partners that you may wish to support or by designing your own curricular strategies that can help support your campus partner's goals. Engaging with external partners requires relationship building, crossing real and perceived boundaries, and a commitment to honest communication about shared learning goals. Remember to always put student learning at the center.

## How can you involve partners and stakeholders?

As you develop and implement your curriculum, campus partners and stakeholders can be involved in the process in numerous ways. They can be involved in the planning of your curriculum, the development and sequencing of learning objectives, and the development of facilitation guides. Partners can also be useful in the implementation of your strategies. One of the key insights of curriculum is that learning opportunities need not always originate within one's own department in order to help in the achievement of stated learning objectives. Approaching external stakeholders to discuss partnerships is an excellent way to gain buy-in for the curriculum and an opportunity to achieve a better mutual understanding of how your goals align. Finally, partners and stakeholders can also be useful in analyzing assessment data and in curricular review processes. This fosters further and deeper investment.

## How can you foster investment by partners and stakeholders?

For your internal partners and stakeholders, it is critical that you include them in the journey towards a curriculum. Change can sometimes be intimidating for individuals and being transparent about the process and what the process entails can foster inclusion. Connecting the curriculum to the mission and strategic plans of the institution can help individuals connect the curriculum to broader themes in their own work. Finally, being clear in articulating the change, its benefits, and how this can transform your work (collectively and individually) can ensure that staff understand this is not just an incremental change, but a complete change in ways of working.

Many of the suggestions above also apply to external stakeholders and partners. Our external constituencies, however, often require more attention to their needs, an explanation of the benefits of a curricular approach, and an understanding of how they can fit into the overall picture. You'll want to recognize your external partners' expertise and include them in the development process (as appropriate). Depending on who these partners are and where they are situated, you may rely heavily on their content expertise, recognizing that this expertise does not exist solely within your own department.

There are several different factors that may influence how you engage your partners. Your unique institutional culture, intuitional trends, and the attitudes and disposition of the individual partners themselves can all have an impact. From some academic partners, there may even be prevailing attitudes that residence life staff should not be involved in working on "curriculum" at all. Engaging with partners, particularly external ones, can sometimes require cross-cultural communication skills that allow both parties to understand how they can fit into the overall goal of promoting student learning.

## What are the challenges and strategies for developing partnerships?

Developing a curriculum is a journey that can take years before one feels they are on a solid footing. The transition to a curricular approach is as much about cultural and organizational change as it is about developing the nuts and bolts of your learning program. Do not let fear of not having it "perfect" be a barrier for building partnerships. Begin with developing partnerships internally and with select external partners. Gaining buy-in from your internal stakeholders and partners is perhaps most important at the start of your journey. Keep it simple, be transparent, and model the types of learning community behavior you hope to foster through establishing your curriculum. This can help partners overcome fear and perceived loss of ownership. Overall, developing these partnerships requires time and dedication. It requires meeting with folks one-on-one, helping them understand why change is occurring, and the development of formal and informal relationships. By centering student learning throughout the process, it can provide you with a common ground and potentially deeper relationships than ever before.



### Key Questions

- Which current internal and external partners are critical to your success?
- What new partners and stakeholders does the curriculum open you up to partner with?
- What are the shared goals you may have with your potential and current partners and stakeholders?
- How can you educate others about the curricular approach, why it is important, and why you are transitioning to this model?
- What regular, sustained commitments can you make to ensure these relationships remain healthy?

# Benefits

When encountering the curricular approach for the first time, many staff may wonder why the approach has gained such currency within student affairs and residence life and what research and data backs up and supports its use. When asking these questions, it is important to understand that the curricular approach is a model of how to organize one's educational activities to ensure the achievement of learning outcomes. It is a planning and organizational tool. The actual execution of a curriculum occurs differently on different campuses. Therefore, it is difficult to ascribe success to the model itself. Furthermore, because institutions have not systematically engaged students in these ways before, they may not have prior data with which to compare their newfound practices. Each individual campus' curriculum needs to be evaluated on its own merits and successes. This is why some of the nascent research on the topic, such as Lichterman's (2016) doctoral research, utilizes a single-institution case study approach.

When exploring the soundness of the curricular approach itself, one can look to literature within education. Teachers and educators have written learning objectives and developed lesson plans for decades. The research on the effective writing of these plans is too numerous to review here, but many of the emergent best practices one finds in that literature can help student affairs educators in the development of their own curricula.

There is also a significant body of research on the effectiveness of various strategies in achieving set learning objectives. Industry associations typically identify "best" or "high impact" practices and programs at various institutions that have done a particularly effective job at advancing student learning in various areas. Associations may highlight these through their annual awards processes, through sponsored sessions at conferences, or spotlights in magazines and other industry publications. When developing a curriculum, one may find success in researching these identified exemplars and incorporating or modifying them as appropriate to fit the specific learning objectives identified for one's campus or in a way that accounts for the unique needs and demographics of one's student populations.

Several professionals have indicated that their internal institutional data has revealed some of the benefits of the curricular approach. One practitioner reported that her internal institutional data indicated that students participating in the curriculum indicated feeling a greater sense of belonging (ACPA, 2017b). She stated that students "felt more welcomed, enjoyed their floors more, felt more included on the floor, felt more challenged to think broadly about an issue, and were more likely to have worked to increase their understanding of diversity" (ACPA, 2017b). As the practitioner notes, these are all factors that have been identified as increasing the likelihood of student retention (ACPA, 2017b). These types of findings are frequently echoed by exemplar institutions that showcase at the Institute on the Curricular Approach. Other benefits institutions mention include decreased student conduct issues, lesser strain on institutional budgets, and staff reporting a more proactive stance when responding to student issues. Depending on the structure of one's curriculum and its focus, an institution may find these or additional benefits.

While the research is still nascent, the overwhelming response from institutions and departments that have shifted to a curricular approach is positive. These include benefits for students, staff members, and campus partners. One of the biggest strengths of curriculum is that it surfaces student learning, it measures this learning with data, and it utilizes that data for continuous improvement through intentional educational design. Moving forward, campuses undertaking a change to a curricular approach should be mindful of setting performance metrics and utilizing assessment data to measure the effectiveness of their curricular efforts.



## Key Questions

- How will you evaluate the effectiveness of a switch to a curricular approach?
- What outcomes and performance indicators are you hoping to move the needle on?
- How can you share your successes and challenges with other institutions that might benefit?

# Sample Curriculum Implementation Timeline

Curricular development is a complex process that involves planning and organizational change. Each institution, or within each division or department, there may be unique contextual factors that may influence the development timeline of a curricular implementation. Below you will find a sample timeline to provide you with a general map of how this process may look. This is merely a guide. A special column is dedicated to residence life departments undergoing this change due to the complexity of working with large staff sizes composed of a significant number of student staff members. Finally, immediately below are some organizational change factors you will need to consider in your planning. Because these can vary widely between institutions, spend time thinking through these and planning your own change process.

## Organizational Change Factors to Consider:

- Will you call your work a “curriculum” or use a different name?
- What assessment resources do you currently have available to you? What assessment resources will you need? Are your staff adequately trained in assessment processes?
- Do current staff position descriptions need to be revised? How do you hire your staff members? What knowledge, qualities, skills, and abilities do you hire for? Should some positions be phased out? Should new ones be created?
- How are your staff training programs structured? What content do they cover? How do you set the stage to create a learning-centric organization? What on-going regular professional development programs do you provide to further enhance staff knowledge and skills in key curricular areas? Do you need to commit resources to attending the Institute on the Curricular Approach and to hire a trainer/consultant?
- What will your budget needs be under a curricular approach? How might current budgets need to be reallocated?
- Who are your most important campus partners and stakeholders? How can you involve partners and stakeholders in the curriculum development and implementation process? How will you present and/or market your curriculum to your partners, stakeholders, and students?
- For Residence Life: Is the class make-up of your buildings ideal for your curricular aims? How will you involve student staff and gain their investment?



### Curriculum Reminders

#### Experiment, prototype, and test out your curriculum.

When keynoting one of the Institutes on the Curricular Approach, Charles Schroeder encouraged institutions to “launch at 40%.” What he meant by this was that institutions often try to develop the perfect program or the perfect experience for students without prototyping experiences to learn what works and what doesn’t. The idea of “launching at 40%” is helpful for schools as a reminder. Not everything needs to be perfect right out of the gate. Experiment to find out what works, what does not, and then make it better over time.



## Year 1

Time Frame	Divisional/Departmental Curriculum Planning Actions	Unique Changes for Residence Life Departments
<b>Fall</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attend the Institute on the Curricular Approach.</li> </ul>	
<b>Winter</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hold a retreat (or consider hiring a consultant) to introduce/train entire professional staff team in the curricular approach.</li> </ul>	
<b>Spring</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Begin the audit and dig process.</li> <li>Write an Educational Priority.</li> <li>Begin to define Learning Goals.</li> <li>Set bi-weekly/monthly meeting times devoted specifically to curriculum work and consider regular brown bag professional development series focused on roles and competencies or an educator and learning-centric organizations.</li> </ul>	<p>Introduce student staff members to their educational role, the basics of curriculum, and engage them in the Educational Priority and Goal development process.</p>
<b>Summer</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Finalize your Educational Priority.</li> <li>Develop and finalize Learning Goals, Narratives, Outcomes.</li> </ul>	<p>Revise professional and student staff training to focus on educational roles, soft skills, and introduce them to the philosophy of the curricular approach. (You may also consider bringing in a consultant to train the entire professional staff on the curricular approach.)</p>

## Year 2

<b>Time Frame</b>	<b>Divisional/Departmental Curriculum Planning Actions</b>	<b>Unique Changes for Residence Life Departments</b>
<b>Fall</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop Rubrics for each of your outcomes.</li> <li>• Identify Strategies you use/will use to enact the curriculum.</li> <li>• Begin the learning outcome and strategy mapping and sequencing process.</li> </ul>	<p>Introduce Intentional Conversations as a strategy and reduce student staff-led educational programming requirements. If your programming model has categories, consider replacing categories with newly defined Learning Goal Areas and introduce the concept of Facilitation Guides for key select programs. Involve student staff members as appropriate in the curriculum development process.</p>
<b>Winter</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hold a retreat (or consider hiring a consultant) to finalize your curricular cascade (Priority, Goal, Narrative, Outcomes, Rubrics).</li> <li>• Identify Goals and Outcomes in need of revision based off the prior semester's experience.</li> <li>• Begin developing Facilitation Guides.</li> </ul>	<p>Check in with student staff for feedback about changes and involve student staff members as appropriate in the curriculum development process.</p>
<b>Spring</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue developing Facilitation Guides.</li> </ul>	<p>Involve student staff members as appropriate in the curriculum development process.</p>
<b>Summer</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hold a retreat to “finalize” your curriculum, establish plans to launch your pilot curriculum, and mutually agree on staff expectations about implementation.</li> <li>• Map your curriculum Goals and Outcomes on to pre-existing campus assessments.</li> <li>• Ensure meaningful assessments or learning are attached to each Facilitation Guide.</li> </ul>	<p>Continue to revise and enhance professional and student staff training for curricular roles.</p>

### Year 3

<b>Time Frame</b>	<b>Divisional/Departmental Curriculum Planning Actions</b>	<b>Unique Changes for Residence Life Departments</b>
<b>Fall</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launch full pilot curriculum.</li> <li>• Continue to work on Facilitation Guides and revise after implementation.</li> </ul>	Remove student staff-led educational programming requirements entirely. Set expectations for community building and fun activities. Involve student staff members as appropriate in the curriculum development process.
<b>Winter</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hold a retreat to review your curriculum and adjust for the Spring.</li> </ul>	
<b>Spring</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to work on Facilitation Guides and revise after implementation.</li> </ul>	Involve student staff members as appropriate in the curriculum development process.
<b>Summer</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct a summative review Assessment data.</li> <li>• Revisit entire curriculum adjusting Goals, Narratives, Outcomes, and Rubrics as necessary.</li> </ul>	

### Year 4 and Beyond

- Continue with a consistent curricular review process that occurs at regular intervals. (Options may include a self-study, an internal review, or an external review.)
- Utilize ongoing assessment to revise learning goals and outcomes as appraise as well as for the refinement and enhancement of Facilitation Guides.
- Develop an ongoing training and professional development plan that ensure staff are consistently trained on the curricular approach and that enhances their skills as an educator.

# planning

LAUNCHING A CURRICULUM REQUIRES PRE-PLANNING. FIRST, THINK OF HOW YOU MIGHT DIVIDE THE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT OVER MULTIPLE YEARS. DO CERTAIN ASPECTS NEED TO BE WORKED ON PRIOR TO OTHER ASPECTS? WHAT IS A REASONABLE TIME FRAME GIVEN THE REALITIES OF STAFF TIME?

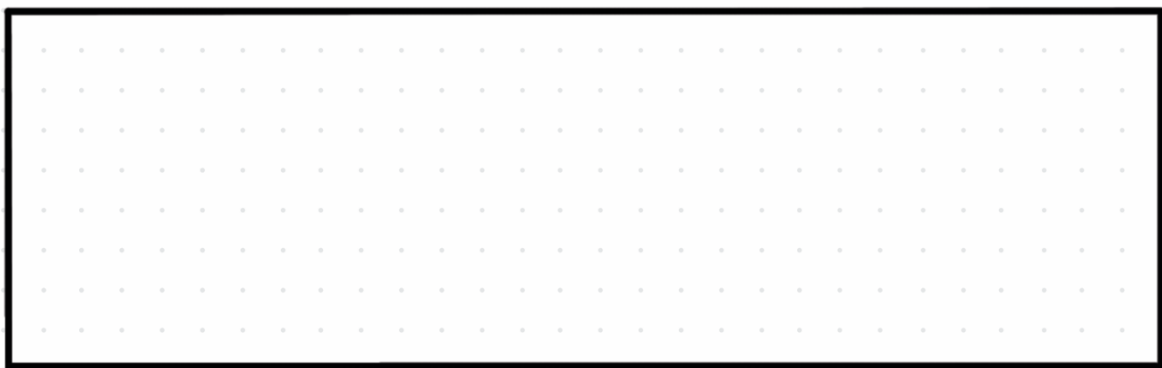
YEAR 1



YEAR 2



YEAR 3



## Setting Aside Time

HOW WILL YOU ENSURE YOU MAKE PROGRESS ON YOUR CURRICULAR DEVELOPMENT? WEEKLY/MONTHLY WORKSHOP MEETINGS? RETREATS?



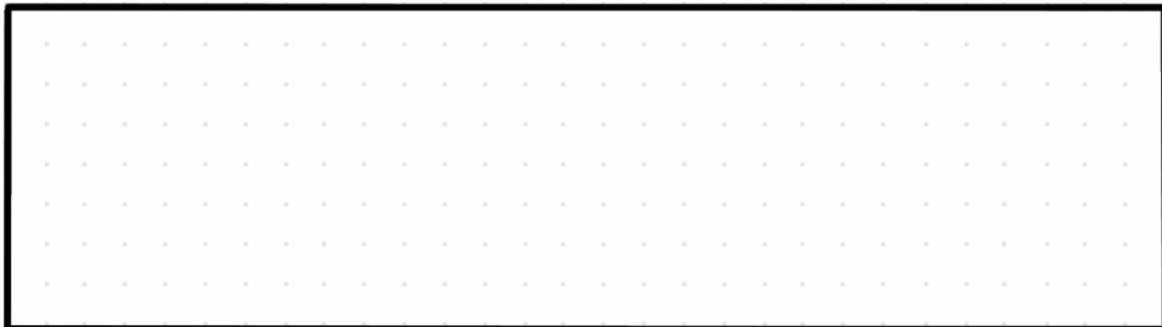
## Organizational Opportunity & Barrier

WHAT OPPORTUNITIES AND BARRIERS EXIST TO YOUR SUCCESS? CAN THESE BE LEVERAGED OR CHANGED? THESE CAN INCLUDE: PARTNERS, SUPERVISORS, THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT, ETC.



## Cultural Change

WHAT ASPECTS OF CULTURE WOULD YOU LIKE TO CHANGE TO MAKE YOUR ORGANIZATION MORE LEARNING-CENTRIC AND TO EQUIP YOUR STAFF WITH THE NECESSARY KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND ABILITIES?





# **Special Topics In Residence Life**

Unique Aspects Of A  
Residential Curriculum

# Residence Life and Education

Historically, the current conception of curricular approaches to student learning outside of the classroom has its roots within residence life. The Institute on the Curricular Approach itself started as the Residential Curriculum Institute. Because of this, much of the earlier work done in this area focused on residence life and education. Residence life Departments are also typically some of the largest and most complex units on a college campus—employing the most staff and interacting the most with students on campus. Because of this, a special section was added in the fourth edition of this book to address some of the unique challenges and topics that these departments face.

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## Curricular Approach Q&A

### Where do RHA's and Hall Councils Fit into a Curricular Approach?

Residence Hall Associations (RHAs) and Hall Councils are student organizations commonly found in residence halls across the United States. Typical functions for these organizations include student-lead programming, community building efforts, and representation for and advocacy around issues of concern to residents. When developing a curricular approach, several institutions have questioned what role these types of organizations should play under this different model.

In many ways, a curricular approach has minimal impact on the traditional work of RHAs and Hall Councils—students still need a voice in institutional decision-making and social and community building efforts are still important. Community building and social programs do not end under a curricular approach, although the nature of these programs may change. RAs, however, may do fewer logistics-intensive social programs and more informal hall-level and floor-level community building activities. This allows RHAs and Hall Councils to focus on larger-scale more heavily-planned social events and ways of building community hall and campus-wide.

One of the essential elements of a curricular approach states, “Student leaders and staff members are considered to be facilitators rather than designers of educational strategies” (Kerr et al., 2017, p. 25). Although students should have voice in the process, it is unfair to expect student staff members and student leaders to learn how to write, design, and assess learning objectives. Your curriculum should focus on the core of learning you hope for all your students—in a sense your “general education” requirements—and if an RHA or Hall Council identifies other needs that they want to engage in educational work around, these efforts can act as a great supplement to your efforts.

Another way to view RHAs and Hall Councils is as opportunities for student leadership development. Working with the students, you could develop a leadership curriculum that can help students learn important leadership skills. It's likely that some form of leadership development already occurs on campus, perhaps in your Office of Student Activities. This presents an excellent opportunity to partner with other colleagues on campus to develop a more consistent leadership development program. Rather than duplicate efforts already existing on campus, you can partner and create stronger experiences for students.

# Program Models Versus Residential Curricula

Curricular approaches are more than just writing and defining learning priorities, goals, outcomes. In many ways, implementing a curricular approach is as much about organizational change as it is about defining a structure. This is one of the reasons why Kerr, Tweedy, Edwards, and Kimmel (2017) call it a “paradigm shift.” The word “paradigm” is most famously associated with Thomas Kuhn. In a book Kuhn (2012) wrote entitled, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Kuhn describes shifts in thinking that are so fundamental in nature, that they represent completely revised ways of thinking resting on entirely new sets of premises and assumptions. Moving to a curricular approach is an excellent example of such a shift as it represents a complete change in the assumptions about how to approach educational activities in the residence halls. Many of these “new assumptions” are enshrined in the ten essential elements of a residential curriculum. Furthermore, enacting these changes at an institution requires that one re-examine their values, culture, and organizational structures.

Without fully appreciating the breadth of the change this approach entails, some schools may attempt to recreate curricular models and end up falling short. Rather than having a “true” curriculum, some schools may be tempted to develop a robust set of learning outcomes and attach it to their already existing program model. This is not a full embrace of a curricular model but is instead a traditional programming model that has more developed learning outcomes attached. It does not consider that student staff members are not experts in developing educational activities and learning outcomes. A traditional programming model mindset assumes the educational strategy of programming first. It lacks the intentional design of deciding on outcomes first and methods of delivery second. Program models also do not work towards scaffolded and sequential learning, and likely do not include robust assessments of student learning.

So how do you know if you have a true curriculum or just a programming model with highly developed learning outcomes? The following are five warning signs that may indicate you haven’t made the curricular shift:

## **1. You survey your residents at the beginning of the year to guide your programming.**

Although it’s not a bad idea to get an understanding of your residents self-identified needs and desires, it should not be your only, nor primary, source of data for educational planning. What students want and what students need are not necessarily the same things. Through research on college students and our own on campus assessments, professionals already know much of what students need to learn throughout their collegiate experience. This should form the bedrock of a residential curriculum.

This is not to say students do not have a voice in the design or enactment of a residential curriculum. Successful curriculums often borrow heavily from the work of Marcia Baxter Magolda and Patricia King (2004) and their concepts of developing learning partnerships. This is one of the reasons why programming is de-emphasized in a curriculum. Programming often mimics the style of a lecture, with a one-way exchange of information. A successful partnership helps set the stage, define parameters, sets measurable outcomes for achievement. Students have voice in co-constructing this, but educators do not cede control over the entire focus of a curriculum.

## **2. Your student staff write learning outcomes.**

Having undergraduate student staff members design educational activities and interventions does not play to their strengths. Student staff member strengths typically lie in their creativity and their abilities, as peers, to connect authentically with their residents. Writing specific and measurable learning outcomes is typically not something student staff members are well trained on or something they have extensive experience in doing. This is more the strength of professional staff members with master’s degrees in education and educationally related fields. Furthermore, these professional staff members are also typically situated to view the larger educational picture—including how all the educational activities fit together and how they can be sequenced and scaffolded. While



student staff members should be trained on learning outcomes, the primary responsibility of writing, developing, and mapping these outcomes should be on the professional staff members.

### **3. Your staff members decide what learning goals and outcomes they want to focus on for their halls and floors.**

Having learning goals and outcomes for your department but then allowing staff to pick and choose which ones they want to focus on leads to an inconsistent student experience. Why should the students in one building or on one floor receive different educational experiences than those on another? Curricular approaches set a baseline and parameters for what students should expect to learn through their experience in residence. Furthermore, through consistency, educational activities can be better assessed and improved. When approaches are completely decentralized, assessment data becomes useless for continuous improvement. Furthermore, focal areas are often subject to the whims and interests of individual staff members instead of being student centric.

### **4. Staff expectations are defined through “numbers” of activities achieved.**

In traditional programming models, staff may be expected to complete “X” number of programs from a given category or goal area per semester. With this approach, learning activities are often scattered and non-sequential. Relying on an overall number of programs ignores an important variable in the educational equation: frequency. Rather than focus on the total number of programs to be completed, it is perhaps even more important to ensure that programs are evenly spaced throughout the year and occur at the appropriate times.

One of the bedrock principles of a curriculum is that it recognizes that learning occurs through time and is cumulative. For example, to write an effective resume, I first need to be clear about what my values, goals and desires are. When staff do not take responsibility for designing educational activities that are scaffolded and sequenced, the result is often a hodge-podge of disconnected programs that do not adequately allow for learning progression.

Similar issues arise in how the effectiveness of such models is measured. The number of activities that occur, although still a useful data point for determining a potential level of engagement, does not measure learning. Similarly, recording the number of students attending a program does not measure whether learning occurred or the extent to which it was achieved.

### **5. No staff members have attended the Institute on the Curricular Approach.**

ACPA’s Institute on the Curricular Approach (ICA, formerly the Residential Curriculum Institute) is the source for learning about how to enact these models. Designed as an Institute, with faculty members leading progressive learning sessions, ICA guides attendees through a staged process of designing a curriculum. ICA also showcases the unique ways institutions have instantiated the curricular process in practice. In addition to attending ICA, some institutions may wish to bring in an expert consultant to train their entire staff. While it may be tempting, especially during periods of tight budgets, to try to hack together a curriculum based off information gleaned online and through colleagues, this often risks missing important steps in the process and a full appreciation of the transformative nature that the shift requires. Not attending ICA and/or not bringing in an expert to fully re-train your staff means the probability of developing a robust curriculum is severely diminished.



#### **Key Questions**

- Have you made the shift to establishing objectives, first, and methods of achieving them, second?
- Are your professional staff members driving the curriculum?
- Do you assess learning or just count engagement opportunities?
- Have you attended the Institute on the Curricular Approach and invited in a trained expert for your entire staff?

# Intentional Conversations

Intentional Conversations are a feature of many residential education programs and are particularly prominent with schools that deploy a residential curriculum model. Some campuses will use the more generic terms “Intentional Conversations” or “Intentional Interactions” to describe these learning opportunities, while others may incorporate their school names, mascots, or mottos into a uniquely branded experience (ex. Eagle Chats, Mustang Meet-Ups, etc.).

## What are Intentional Conversations?

Intentional Conversations are one-on-one meetings between student staff and residents that are guided by a suggested set of questions and prompts that are developmentally appropriate and situated within the context of a resident’s experience. For example, under this model, the conversation guides for a first-year student in the first month of their college career may focus on issues of homesickness, adjustment to the rigors of college academics, and navigating campus cultures around alcohol and other drug use. In contrast, the conversation guide for a rising sophomore may focus on choosing an academic major, an adjustment towards more independent living, and being more intentional about campus involvements.

## What are the benefits?

There are many benefits to using Intentional Conversations.

As a strategy, Intentional Conversations allow for the ability to:

- Provide scaffolded and sequenced learning experiences for students according to their developmental level and their stage in the college journey.
- Customize student learning to the student, allowing the student to guide what they want to learn and how they can achieve it.

For residents, these conversations:

- Allow residents to practice the development of interpersonal relationships, advocacy for needs, goal setting, and other psychosocial skills.
- Provide more purposeful, meaningful, and targeted resources and supports, helping residents navigate college life more efficiently and adeptly.

For staff, Intentional Conversations are:

- A better use of a student staff member’s ability to be a peer mentor and advisor.
- A better use of a professional staff member’s abilities in crafting developmental learning environments supported by theory and research.

Because of these benefits, some departments have moved away from focusing on student-staff-led programming as their primary educational strategy in the residence halls. While programming still has a place in the overall educational environment of the residence halls, the goals and educational priority of each campus should guide the strategies used and how they are deployed. Rather than assuming programming is what staff should do, and then figuring out the educational goals and outcomes to focus on, the educational goals should be decided upon first and then decisions should be made about whether these goals are best delivered through Intentional Conversations, a program, or by other means.

## What research and literature can support the development of Intentional Conversations?

While general documents about student learning in college can provide a baseline for constructing Intentional Conversations, literature specific to student development and transitions can be of particular use. Because the content of Intentional Conversations with students changes according to the student’s journey, literature on the first-year student experience, on the sophomore year experience, and on upper class transitions can help guide what questions and prompts are developed for student staff in these conversations.

The National Resource Center for the First Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina provides several resources and professional development opportunities that can help in the construction of journey-appropriate conversation guides. In particular, the Resources section of their website provides you with access to databases containing examples of programs, courses, and other experiential activities that individual schools offer for various student populations, including: first year, sophomore, senior, and transfer students. There are also several books that address these topics.

Intentional Conversations represent an important educational strategy in the residence halls. When researched and implemented well, they are better suited to some educational outcomes, allow for individualization, and provide more customized support for students. Intentional Conversations can also capitalize on staff strengths in better and more efficient ways than other educational strategies. After deciding to deploy Intentional Conversations as a strategy to achieve learning goals and outcomes, the next step in the process is to provide structure and support to student staff in their implementation.



### **Key Questions**

- What educational goals and outcomes do you have for students that might best be implemented through Intentional Conversations?
- Will Intentional Conversations be complementary to or replace current educational strategies you utilize?
- How will you research and structure the guides and prompts student staff members will utilize through Intentional Conversations?

## **How to Structure Intentional Conversations in a Residential Curriculum**

### **How frequently should Intentional Conversations occur?**

First and foremost, the structure, content, and frequency of your Intentional Conversations should be directed by your learning goals and outcomes. If your learning goals and outcomes are best achieved through an Intentional Conversation strategy, then the next step is deciding on how frequently these should occur.

Several schools will require student staff to complete 1-3 conversations per resident per semester. This may vary if a school is on a trimester or quarterly system or if a school uses an academic calendar that deviates from the typical August/September-to-May calendar. Furthermore, when designing Intentional Interactions, the workload for individual staff members should be considered. If the student-to-staff ratio in a particular community is high, it may be unreasonable to expect that a staff member complete multiple conversations with each resident in a semester.

These expectations may also vary based on the student population and demographics in a community. For instance, upperclassmen may require fewer touch points than first-year students. Or, if a community has a high proportion of first-generation college students, one may wish to increase the frequency of formalized contact between staff and students. Additionally, if a community is a part of a formalized living learning program, there may be opportunities to leverage other resources that may impact how Intentional Conversation expectations are structured.

For schools on a semester-based academic calendar, a schedule of Intentional Conversations may look like the following:

#### **Fall Semester**

- August/September – Entering into the community and setting goals
- November/December – Reflecting on the first semester experience

## Spring Semester

- January/February – Returning to the community and revising goals
- April/May – Reflection and closure on the academic year

The benefit of this type of schedule is that it allows for pre- and post- test-like reflections at the beginning and end of each semester. At the beginning of the semester, a student staff member can help a student set goals and prepare for the challenges and transitions ahead. This also sets the stage for the staff member to be able to check in on a student and their progress throughout the semester. An end-of-the-semester meeting allows for a student to reflect on their achievements and begin the process of setting new goals or revising prior goals. These expectations are also typically reasonable for a staff member with 25-30 residents in their community.

## How long should Intentional Conversations be?

Intentional Conversations should be organic, not forced conversations. Therefore, although guidelines about the frequency and length of these conversations can help in setting minimum expectations for staff, it should be stressed that these conversations may take longer or be more frequent depending on the student. If a staff member is expected to have a minimum of two Intentional Conversations per semester, it is probable (and preferable) that they may have additional conversations throughout the year.

A typically suggested length for an Intentional Conversation is 20-30 minutes. This allows a staff member enough time to have a deeper level conversation about topics of interest to a student, while balancing staff work expectations and student time.

## How should Intentional Conversations be communicated and marketed?

Schools that successfully implement Intentional Conversations are typically very transparent about the process and communicate the opportunity, value, and intent for Intentional Conversations directly to residents. Schools report that residents come to welcome and expect that these types of scheduled check-ins will occur on a regular basis. In communicating about Intentional Conversations to residents, you may structure your message similar to the following:

Residents Assistants and community assistants are in the halls to help guide you through your time in residence and in navigating college life in general. At periodic points in the year, your staff member will reach out to you to have a conversation about your goals and your progress towards achieving them. Although staff are always here to help at any time, these 20-30 minute conversations are scheduled opportunities for you to interact with another student leader on campus who can help guide and advise you. Although these are not required, most residents welcome and find these opportunities helpful.

Some schools take these efforts a step further by giving Intentional Conversations a more formalized, campus-specific name. A school may market them as “Eagle Chats” after their mascot, or call them “Leadership Check-Ins.” How Intentional Conversations are marketed to residents can be guided by and folded into the overall marketing efforts a department makes in communicating their residential curriculum or educational model.

Developing a well thought out structure for Intentional Conversations can provide benefits to student staff members and residents alike. Schools typically set expectations that student staff members meet with students 1-2 times per semester for 20-30 minutes. Communicating the value of these conversations to residents can help in the promotion of an overall curriculum and educational plan that places student learning at the center of the residential education experience. After developing structure and expectations, the next step in the process is to develop a lesson plan or guide for implementation.



## Key Questions

- How frequently should your staff have more formalized Intentional Conversations with residents?
- How can you balance your student staff members' workloads while achieving the outcomes you desire?
- How will you market and share the opportunities provided by Intentional Conversations with residents?

# Developing an Intentional Conversation Curriculum Guide for Student Staff

## Why is having an Intentional Conversation curriculum guide important?

One of the reasons residential education programs utilize Intentional Conversations as an educational strategy is due to the intentionality that these conversations can provide. Rather than being every-day informal conversations between student staff and residents, Intentional Conversations are guided by what theory and research tell us are key developmental issues and transition issues for students.

An Intentional Conversation curriculum guide or lesson plan provides prompts and suggested topics that student staff should explore with a resident based on where residents are in their journey through college. For this reason, different guides are appropriate for students of different class years. Additionally, special populations including non-traditional students, international students, and first-generation students may benefit from different or supplemental questions. The goals of a student's living learning program may also suggest a different set of questions. As departments become more sophisticated in their approaches, different guides may be developed.

## What should be included in an Intentional Conversation curriculum guide?

Guides, or lesson plans, for Intentional Conversations should include all the information that student staff need to execute the strategy. Rather than be overly prescriptive, these guides should give student staff members the basic information they need to execute the strategy in a way that fits within their own style and abilities. The guide, however, should include everything necessary to ensure that learning goals and outcomes are achieved. In other words, a balance should be struck to avoid between being overly prescriptive while still ensuring a standard is met.

Intentional Conversation curriculum guides and lesson plans should include some of the following sections:

### 1. The Outcomes of Intentional Conversations as a Strategy

This section of a guide should include the overall purpose of why staff members are conducting Intentional Conversations. This provides the reasons why these conversations are occurring and help staff members understand why they are conducting them. Later in the guide, individual questions and topics will guide the learning goals and outcomes associated with each conversation.

## EXAMPLE

The outcomes for Intentional Conversations are:

- To engage with residents through interpersonal conversations on relevant topics of interest to the residents.
- To develop a mentoring relationship and safe space for conversation with a peer leader.
- To aid residents in navigating conflicts, life decisions, and other issues.
- To aid residents in setting goals and creating action plans to achieve these goals.

## 2. The Expectations for Student Staff Regarding the Frequency, Length, and Other Details of Intentional Conversations

As discussed in the previous article in this series, you should decide on basic expectations regarding how you will implement Intentional Conversations as a component of your overall educational plan or curriculum. This should include the “nuts and bolts” of what a student staff member will be held accountable to.

### EXAMPLE

Student staff members should be having conversations with their residents regularly throughout the year. Intentional Conversations are intended to be a minimum baseline expectation and involve some specifically suggested questions and prompts that might be particularly relevant to a resident. Student staff members are expected to conduct 2 Intentional Conversations per semester according to the following schedule:

#### Fall Semester

- August/September
- November/December

#### Spring Semester

- January/February
- April/May

Intentional conversations should be organic and last as long as necessary, but typically a conversation will last 20-30 minutes and flow according to the level of engagement from the resident. At the conclusion of each conversation, The student staff member should submit a summary of topics discussed including any follow up actions or check-ins that may need to be taken.

## 3. Advice on How to Best Conduct the Intentional Conversations

Through your training programs for student staff, you should provide them with the skill development to successfully conduct Intentional Conversations. This should include training on low-level counseling and active listening skill, mentorship skills, and how to record conversations with appropriate notes. This training should be hands-on, allowing student staff members to practice their skills. Your guide can help remind them of how to put these skills into action.

### EXAMPLE

When conducting an Intentional Conversation, consider the following guidelines to ensure success:

*Make a plan.* Think about and develop a plan for how you will ensure you have these conversations with residents. You may want to have them sign up to meet with you during a community meeting, place a schedule on your door, or set your own goals for which residents you want to connect with each week.

*Be comfortable.* These Conversations should occur wherever a resident feels most comfortable. They could be over a meal, in the resident or Staff member’s room, or during a walk together on campus.

*Actively listen.* Remember to use the basic listening skills you were taught during training. This includes asking open-ended questions, helping a resident think through their choices, and being ready and able to suggest resources.

*Be transparent.* New residents may be unfamiliar with why we do Intentional Conversations and what their roles are. Let residents know that these conversations are opportunities for them to utilize a peer leaders as a resource and sounding board. Although Intentional Conversations are not required, they are encouraged and are an

opportunity for the student to explore getting the most out of their college experience. If residents are concerned about confidentiality, remind them that although you will treat the information you discuss with discretion, you will share information with your supervisor, especially if you are concerned about the student's health and safety. The counseling center can provide confidential services, if needed.

*Don't be creepy.* This guide contains suggested topics to explore and questions to use in your conversations. This is not a check list. This is not an interview. You should not read suggested questions verbatim to a student. Instead, incorporate the questions and topics organically into your conversation and if a particular theme or question resonates more with a resident, feel free to help them explore it more deeply.

#### **4. Suggested Outcomes, Topics, and Questions for each Intentional Conversation iteration**

The remainder of your guide should be dedicated to suggested topics and questions a student staff member might employ in their Intentional Conversation with a resident. There should be a different set of topics and questions for each time the staff member is required to meet with a resident. These should be sequenced so that they successively build off one another and should be timely based on a student's class year and when they are occurring within an academic year.



#### **Key Questions**

- Who should be involved in developing the content of your Intentional Conversation curriculum guide?
- How can campus stakeholders and specialists in certain student issues contribute to your guide?
- How can you translate your formal educational plans and goals into a student staff-friendly guide that avoids jargon and presents plain-language practical tips and suggestions?

## **100 Questions You Can Use for “Intentional Conversations” in the Residence Halls**

Intentional Conversations are, as their label describes, intentional. They are well thought-out, guided conversations. The following list is a generic set of topics and questions for Intentional Interactions based off known student issues and concerns that frequently arise as one journeys through college. Institutions should use these as starting points, but tailor individual questions and topics to fit their own unique student populations, contexts, and learning goals. Appropriately trained student staff members should be able to modify their conversations with residents according to the context of each individual student. Some topics may be more or less germane to an individual student based on their experiences and circumstances. Personal identities may also play into these conversations and student staff should be mindful of this while not being leading.

The following suggestions assume a more traditionally aged student population, but could and should be modified for a different student population or in a conversation with a particular student. Furthermore, a campus may wish to supplement these questions if a student participates in a specific living learning program, major, or holds certain identities. The questions and topics are presented here, chronologically, organized from a student's first semester in college through their graduation.

Some campuses have found greater success with providing student staff with topics as opposed to example questions. The reason for this shift is that listing out example questions, even though they are presented as a guide, can sometimes lead student staff to treating these as a checklist. Providing topical areas can reduce the likelihood of this tendency from occurring.

## First Year Student Conversation - Early Fall

For this conversation, focus in on the resident's transition to living with a roommate, their academic performance, and their college experience overall. Help them set some preliminary goals and ensure that they are connected on campus and getting involved. Pay attention to warning signs of homesickness, poor choices regarding alcohol and health-related habits, and lack of involvement on campus and in the community.

When taking notes on your conversation, highlight the resident's roommate relationship status, any transition issues, and their goals for the semester.

### *Opening Questions:*

- What goals do you have for the semester?
- What do you like about living on campus? What do you dislike?
- What has stressed you out so far?
- What has been the most positive and the hardest part of your transition to college?

### *Theme: Homesickness*

- How has it felt being away from home?
- How do you maintain connections with friends and family that are at home?
- What has been your biggest struggle since coming to college? How did you handle it? What could you have done differently?

### *Theme: Transition to College-Level Academics*

- How have your study habits changed since you started college?
- Have you received any grades or feedback yet in your courses?
- What courses do you think you will do well in? Find more difficult?
- Have you chosen a major? How is the coursework in your major going?
- Have you developed any relationships with faculty members?

### *Theme: Building Community and Making Friends*

- Do you feel connected to the campus community?
- What kinds of new connections and friends have you made so far?
- How is your relationship with your roommate? Did you complete a roommate agreement?
- Have you experienced any social situations that have made you feel uncomfortable? What did you do?
- Have you attended the student organization fair? What campus organizations have you gotten involved in?



## First Year Student Conversation - Late Fall

For this conversation, a student will be beginning to think about going home (perhaps for the first time since they left for college) and will be preparing for finals. Help them think through what “going home” will be like. (And be careful not to assume everyone has a “home” as you may conceive of it, or that it is necessarily a positive environment.) Help your resident think through the academic choices (and mistakes) they made this semester so they can adjust and improve.

When taking notes on your conversation, highlight what has changed for the student throughout the semester, what they’ve learned, their involvement and connectedness on campus, and any anxieties they may have about returning “home.”

### *Opening Questions:*

- What do you like/dislike about living on campus?
- What has been the most positive and most difficult part of your transition to college?
- Do you feel a part of/connected to the campus community?
- What have you gotten involved in on campus? Are you pursuing any leadership roles?
- Are you pleased with your personal development thus far?

### *Theme: Returning Home After a Semester of Change*

- Are you excited or nervous to leave campus and go home? Where is home for you?
- What will you be doing over the semester break?
- Do you feel different? Do you think friends and family will notice?
- How has your college experience changed your perception of home, relationships, and other experiences?

### *Theme: Setting Goals for Semester Two*

- How have your goals changed since the beginning of the semester?
- What goals for the first semester have you achieved and which ones are you working on?
- What would you do differently academically based on what you’ve learned this semester?

## First Year Student Conversation - Early Spring

Your residents will be returning from break and will have received their first formal college grades. Help them process through what they did well, as well as where they could improve. Some students may be surprised that college-level work requires different levels of effort and habits. Students may also be questioning their choice of major. This conversation is an excellent time to revise and set new goals after a semester of learning.

When taking notes on your conversation, highlight how the resident's break went, how they feel about their academic progress and achievement thus far, and their new and revised goals for the semester.

### *Opening Questions:*

- What did you do over break? Did you see friends and family?
- How has your world view changed after a semester at college?
- Have you thought about where you will live next semester?
- How has your roommate relationship been so far? Does your Roommate Agreement Guide need to be revisited?

### *Theme: Reflections on Academic Performance*

- Are you happy with the grades you received last semester?
- How might you change your study habits and make different choices to succeed academically?
- How is your time management? Do you feel you are managing your time well?

### *Theme: Setting Goals for the Semester*

- Were you satisfied with your involvement on campus last semester?
- What are your goals for this semester?
- Are you getting support and connecting to resources to help you achieve those goals?
- What will you do differently this semester?

## First Year Student Conversation - Late Spring

This conversation will be the final one you have for the year and occurs at the end of a student's first year in college. Because of this, students may be reflecting on how their first year went, will be gearing up for a summer job, internship, or vacation, and will be making plans to say goodbye to, and stay in touch with, friends over the summer. This is a great time to plan closure activities for your community.

When taking notes on your conversation, highlight what your resident learned over the course of their first year in college and what their goals are for the summer and the following academic year. Also note whether the resident plans on returning to college next year or if they are considering stopping or transferring.

### *Opening Questions:*

- How are your preparations for final exams and papers going?
- How has your approach to classes this semester been different from last semester?
- Where do you currently stand in your classes?
- How are you preparing for finals?
- What Fall classes are you planning on taking?
- How has your experience living in a community this year prepared you for your living arrangements next year?

### *Theme: Closure and Moving Forward*

- What has been the most positive and the hardest part of your first year in college?
- Did your first-year college experience match what you thought it would be before you started?
- What was your biggest success this year? How are you going to build from that success?
- What about your college experience surprised you?
- Do you think you've changed over the course of your first year?
- Is there anything you'd do differently next year based on what you learned this year?

### *Theme: Setting Goals for the Summer and Fall*

- What are you doing this summer? Are your plans helping you achieve any goals?
- Are you excited or nervous for the summer?
- How will you maintain connections to your college friends over the summer?
- Do you have your financial aid/scholarship arrangements for the Fall?
- Have you made your housing arrangements for the Fall?

## Second Year Student Conversation - Early Fall

Residents will be returning from their summer and will begin to re-establish friendships or readjust to changed relationships. They will have received their final grades after their first full year in college and may be considering declaring or changing their majors. They will likely want to set new goals for the academic year and may feel like they made mistakes or didn't focus enough during their first year.

When taking notes on your conversation, highlight the student's commitment to their academic programs and major, their goals for the year, and how they are connecting to their new communities.

### *Opening Questions:*

- How was your summer break? What did you do?
- Are you happy to be back at college after the summer?
- Are you reconnecting with friends after the summer?
- How is the transition to a new residence hall community?
- How do you feel about this year's residence hall community? Do you feel as though you have connected with others on the floor?
- How does it feel to no longer be a first-year student?

### *Theme: Setting Goals for the New Academic Year*

- What are you most excited for in your second year?
- What goals do you have for the semester? What will you do this semester to achieve those goals?
- Did anything change over the summer that made you revisit your goals?
- What will you get involved in on campus this year?
- Have you missed any classes so far this semester? Have you spoken with your professor about your absence?
- What is your plan for staying healthy this semester?

### *Theme: Making Commitments to a Major*

- How do you feel about your course schedule? What courses do you think you'll find most difficult? What courses do you think you'll enjoy the most?
- Have you declared a major?
- Are you satisfied with your current major?
- What are you doing to deepen your experience in your chosen major?

## Second Year Student Conversation - Late Fall

Your residents will have begun to make some deeper level commitments to their majors, involvement on campus, to internships, and may be preparing to study abroad. This is an opportunity to check in on their progress towards their goals.

When taking notes on your conversation, highlight the student's co-curricular involvements and any planning they may be doing for their academic major and related programs.

### *Opening Questions:*

- What are your plans for the upcoming semester break?
- How has your relationship with your family changed as you've grown?
- How did you feel the semester went?

### *Theme: Thinking about Study Abroad, Internships, and Other Opportunities*

- Did you attend any study abroad fairs or internship fairs this semester?
- Are you getting involved in any activities that can help advance your major or career choices?
- Have you met with an academic adviser recently?

### *Theme: Academic/Co-Curricular Check In*

- How are your preparations for final exams and papers going?
- Are there any classes you're struggling with or excelling in?
- Have you completed your General/Liberal Education requirements?
- Have you met with your academic advisor?
- What clubs and groups did you involve yourself in? Did you seek out a leadership role or thinking about pursuing one?
- Have you gone to any events that challenged your thinking? Exposed you to a new culture or social view? What did you learn?

## Second Year Student Conversation - Early Spring

Your residents will be recommitting to their goals for the year and altering them as necessary. In many cases they may begin to think about moving off campus for their housing. Help your students understand everything this entails and discuss resources available to them.

When taking notes on your conversation, highlight their academic performance from the previous semester, changes to their goals, and plans for housing next year.

### *Opening Questions:*

- What did you do over break? Did you see friends and family?
- What are your goals for the upcoming semester?

### *Theme: Living Plans for Next Year*

- Have you thought about where you will live next semester?
- If you're thinking of moving off campus, do you know where to look? What resources there are to help?

### *Theme: Academic/Co-Curricular Check In*

- Are you happy with the grades you received last semester?
- What classes are you taking this semester?
- Do you feel like your involvement in student groups and activities will contribute to your post-college success?

## Second Year Student Conversation - Late Spring

Your residents are completing their second full year at college. They hopefully have direction for their future and are actively making and following through on plans to achieve their goals. Discuss your resident's summer plans with them, how they fit into the larger picture of their major and career aspirations, and how they have done and are doing academically.

When taking notes on your conversation, highlight the resident's plans for the summer and their progress towards achieving their goals for this year.

### *Opening Questions:*

- How are your preparations for final exams and papers going?
- Are you looking forward to anything before the semester ends?

### *Theme: Closure and Moving Forward*

- What did you struggle with the most this year? How can you improve for next year?
- What was your biggest success this year? How are you going to build from that success?
- What are three positive things you have learned about yourself this year?
- What are three areas of improvement you can identify about yourself after your second year at college?
- Do you think you've changed over the course of this year?
- Is there anything you'd do differently next year based on what you learned this year?

### *Theme: Setting Goals for the Summer*

- What are you doing this summer? Are your plans helping you achieve any goals?
- Are you excited or nervous for the summer?

## Third and Fourth Year Student Conversations

Since residential requirements and rates of return to campus housing for third and fourth year students can vary based on the institution, the following are some themes that may be present during a student's final two (and maybe three) years. Depending on how you structure your Intentional Conversations, it may be more appropriate to have one conversation per semester (as opposed to two) as students begin to become more self-reliant and independent.

### *Theme: Academic Success*

- Are you satisfied with your cumulative GPA? What can you do to raise your GPA?
- Have you declared your major? Are you happy with your choice? Have you spoken with your Academic Advisor?
- Have you completed all of your General/Liberal Education and major requirements? If not, which do you still have to complete and what is your plan for completing them?

### *Theme: Transitions*

- Are you anxious about graduation? How do you feel about leaving college? Have you spoken with anyone about your feelings?
- Are you nervous about getting your first job?
- Have you applied for graduation? If not, have you contacted your Academic Advisor for additional information?
- Have you completed your cap and gown order request?

### *Theme: Internship, Study Abroad, and Other Opportunities*

- Are you considering doing an internship or similar work experience?
- Have you attended an internship fair or inquired with your department?
- How would an internship help you achieve your career goals?
- Have you thought about joining any professional clubs or organizations? Have you consulted with your Academic Advisor for advice or assistance?
- Are you considering study abroad? Where would you go? What program would you take advantage of?
- Do you know how you could pay for a study abroad experience?
- What are you excited for with study abroad? What worries you?
- How do you think you can prepare for study abroad?

### *Theme: Career Preparation*

- Do you know what types of jobs you want to do and what you'll apply for?
- Have you gone to the Career Center, attended an event, or met with a career counselor?
- Do you have a resume? Are you happy with it? Have you practiced writing a cover letter?
- Have you thought about creating a digital presence or having a LinkedIn profile?
- Are there experiences you still want to have that would make you a stronger job applicant?
- Do you know where to look for potential jobs?

### *Theme: Graduate School Preparation*

- Are you considering going to graduate school? Does your desired career path require a graduate degree?
- Do you know the academic programs and schools you want to apply to? Do you know what the deadlines are?
- Have you made preparations to complete tests such as the GRE, the MCAT, the LSAT, or the GMAT?
- Have you identified faculty members who can help you in this process?
- Have you gotten involved in research or other opportunities that can help you prepare for and get into graduate school?

### *Theme: Closure*

- What will be your favorite memory of college?

- What have you learned about yourself in college?
- Did you accomplish all of the goals you wanted to before leaving college?
- How did your goals change over the course of your college life?
- Have you thought about or prepared for what life will be like after college?
- What excites you about graduation? What worries you?
- Are you moving away after college? How will you establish yourself?



### **Key Questions**

- How can your Educational Priority guide the development of your questions?
- What student characteristics, campus cultures, living learning communities, and other factors might guide the questions you include in your Intentional Conversations?
- Are there certain touchpoints or events in the semester that you might want to incorporate into your questions?



# Training Student Staff for Genuine Conversations

Student staff members in the residence halls can be powerful resources for students as peer mentors, leaders, and advisors. To assume this role, student staff members need to be appropriately trained to fulfill these roles. This becomes even more important when they are expected to implement Intentional Conversations as an educational strategy.

Although Intentional Conversations are guided by formalized prompts and questions, these conversations are intended to be free-flowing organic conversations. Intentional Conversations should be natural, genuine, authentic conversations that allow residents to explore themselves and better navigate the college or university environment. For more dualistically minded staff members, this may, at first, be difficult. The impulse for some staff members may be to treat the conversation guides as checklists, robotically asking the student each of the questions listed.

To combat this issue, one ICA faculty member, Kathleen Gardner, gives this simple and straightforward advice to student staff members: “Don’t Be Creepy.” In fact, a training program on conducting Intentional Conversations could include an entire session devoted to “Not Being Creepy.” “Not being creepy” means not treating Intentional Conversations as robotic information gathering exercises. The purpose of these conversations is not primarily to gather information, although a student staff member will take notes afterward, instead it is meant to be a point of contact and engagement with another student.

Student staff members should be trained to utilize the conversation guides as a starting point for conversation and to steer their conversation towards the listed topics as appropriate for each student. The student staff member should also feel empowered to modify or change the conversation according to each student’s unique context and identities. No conversational guide can ever hope to anticipate every student need and situation. Fostering staff member judgement and skill is a key outcome of any training program for Intentional Conversations.

A well-designed training program for Intentional Conversations should include three primary components: (1) a module providing the basic expectations and requirements for Intentional Conversations, (2) a module teaching staff members listening and interpersonal communication skills, and (3) a module allowing staff members to apply these skills and information to Intentional Conversations. Outlined below are some sample learning outcomes that can guide the development of these training modules for student staff members:

## **The What, Why’s, and How’s of Intentional Conversations**

- Recall the learning outcomes associated with Intentional Conversations.
- Recall the expectations and requirements for conducting Intentional Conversations.
- Prepare a plan for completing Intentional Conversations in their communities.
- Discuss how they will share the purpose behind Intentional Conversations with their residents.
- Write useful and appropriate follow up notes after an Intentional Conversation.

## **Listening and Interpersonal Skills for Intentional Conversations**

- Describe active listening skills, interpersonal skills, and their components.
- Model active listening and interpersonal skills.
- Engage in Intentional Conversations that are genuine, contextualized to a student, and address learning outcomes and topics suggested for the conversation.
- Evaluate when a conversation or situation requires a referral to a supervisor or trained professional.

## **Don’t Be Creepy: Conducting Genuine Intentional Conversations**

- Identify strategies for conducting effective and genuine Intentional Conversations.
- List behaviors to avoid when conducting Intentional Conversations.
- Apply listening and interpersonal skills to conversations with residents.
- Demonstrate having effective and genuine Intentional Conversations that achieve learning outcomes.

Implementing Intentional Conversations as an educational strategy requires that one rethink hiring and training practices for student staff members. Whether one makes the change because of a switch to a residential curriculum model, or as an evolutionary change to an existing program model, the skills and abilities required of student staff members changes and so must their skills and abilities. Implementing new training programs that are mindful of the outcomes listed above can set a department up for success.



### **Key Questions**

- What skills and abilities are required of student staff to effectively conduct Intentional Conversations?
- Are your hiring practices (including position descriptions, preferred qualifications and skills, applications, and interview processes) aligned with what you are requiring student staff members to do?
- How can you incorporate the required knowledge, skills, and abilities for conducting Intentional Conversations into your formal training programs?

## **How to Track and Assess Intentional Conversations**

The integration of data collection, analysis, and other assessment techniques is integral to the development of a residential curriculum and educational program. This includes the range from formative to summative assessments and from the individual student level to the broader programmatic level. Assessing the learning occurring during Intentional Conversations is an important component of any comprehensive assessment plan, and yet, given very individualized and contextual nature of Intentional Conversations, it can be difficult to achieve. The utility of Intentional Conversations is in part dependent on the ability to demonstrate student learning is occurring and revise and enhance the strategy based on assessment data and feedback.

When evaluating Intentional Conversations, it is important to make a distinction between tracking their occurrence, and a resident's satisfaction with the conversations, and assessing the student learning that is occurring during and between them. The former is a significantly easier endeavor than the latter, but both are important pieces to the overall assessment and evaluation puzzle.

### **Tracking Intentional Conversations and Student Satisfaction**

Tracking Intentional Conversations is important to ensuring that the expectations placed on student staff members are being met and in ensuring that all residents are provided the opportunity to participate in the conversations. This tracking occurs with staff members (How many of the required Intentional Conversations have staff members completed during defined time frames?) and with residents (How many times has a student been met with (or not)?).

Another component of this tracking may be follow-up surveys to collect feedback from residents about their satisfaction with the interaction and any feedback about the Intentional Conversations program itself. It is important to note that this is different than attempting to assess the learning occurring during the Intentional Conversations. Although assessing learning may be brought into a follow up survey, much of it may rely on student self-report—not the most reliable strategy.

### **Working with Data from Intentional Conversations**

To assess learning and the individual Intentional Conversations, many institutions rely on data collected through student staff member notes. This information, unlike the quantitative nature of tracking and gathering feedback on Intentional Conversations as a strategy, often relies on more qualitative measures. This realization is key if one is transitioning to a residential curriculum model. Just tracking the occurrence of Intentional Conversations is no better than counting heads for attendance at programs. What matters even more is a demonstration of student learning.

**Individual Resident Learning.** On an individual level, a student staff member should check for resident learning during an Intentional Conversation as it is occurring. Methods for achieving this could be incorporated into student staff member training. Students could end the conversations with a check for understanding, asking residents what they reflected on or learned about themselves, or asking residents to state their goals at the conclusion of the conversation. Examples of summary questions include:

- What is one goal you are setting for yourself this semester?
- What is one take away you have from our conversation today?
- How will you know you're successful in achieving [this outcome]?

**Community Themes.** After completing an Intentional Conversation, a student staff member often records notes about what was discussed. Consider developing a consistent set of keywords or tags that denote topics or goal areas that arise in these conversations. These tags could include topics like homesickness, academic difficulty or success, developing multicultural competence, involvement, etc. With this data, a professional staff member can review staff member notes and codes, double check their work, and run frequencies and look for emergent themes. These themes can include common issues, struggles, or successes that a student may be experiencing. After checking frequencies and coding for themes, certain emergent connections can be made that will allow the professional staff member to write summaries and suggest implications or areas of growth that may be more common to a residential population.

**Rubrics.** Another evaluation strategy is the use of rubrics. Rubrics are tools that allow for the evaluation of student learning and development across a continuous scale. The example of a rubric below demonstrates how a student moves through various levels towards the achievement of desired outcomes. In this case, the rubric is measuring “Academic and Career Planning Skills” and “Studying, Time Management, and Academic Skills.”

### EXAMPLE RUBRIC

	<b>Entrance</b>	<b>Moving In</b>	<b>Moving On</b>	<b>Moving Through</b>
<b>Academic and Career Planning Skills</b>	Is unclear of academic/career goals and means of achieving them.	Can identify a number of interests for academic pursuits and future careers.	Sets goals for academic and career future.	Engages in thoughtful planning for achievement of academic and career goals.
<b>Studying, Time Management, and Academic Skills</b>	Cannot articulate strategies for successfully completing academic work.	Able to list a number of academic and time management skills.	Identifies and utilizes academic and time management skills that are effective for them.	Able to adapt strategies and skills according to context and subject matter.

If written appropriately, rubrics can provide very concrete evidence to watch out for when speaking with a student. At the end of a conversation, a staff member can place a student on this scale and check later for movement along the continuum. If a curriculum is effective, a student should be able to move through the successive stages over the course of their time in residence. This type of data can also be used to evaluate departmental learning outcomes to gauge if they are reasonably achievable by students, or if they are too ambitious or not ambitious enough.

**Demonstrating Learning and Effectiveness.** If you do follow-up surveys with your residents to assess student learning, you may consider doing a pre-test post-test type evaluation. With this model, you could ask residents to respond at the beginning of the year with goals or issues there are facing in the coming semester or year. At the end of the term, you could follow up with questions about their achievement of their stated goals, what their experiences were, and what they learned. You may also consider building this into the questions that student staff members ask.

Moving towards Intentional Conversations as an educational strategy has the potential benefit of enhancing student learning and allowing for more customized educational experiences. Tracking and assessing these conversations is an important part of this shift. This includes both the tracking of conversations, soliciting feedback on their execution, and looking for evidence of student learning. Going in with a plan will ensure that your Intentional Conversations will remain as their name implies, intentional.



### **Key Questions**

- How are you tracking the occurrence of Intentional Conversations?
- What will you do with any data collected through student staff member notes?
- What technology are you using to help with these tracking and assessment efforts?

# Designing RA Training for Residential Curriculum

In order for a residential curriculum to be successful, the staff implementing a curriculum need to be skilled and well trained in order to execute it. RAs, who are frequently called upon to facilitate learning experiences for their peers, have specific training needs to set themselves up for success. In addition to skill and capacity building, student staff members also need to be trained on curricular basics and the specifics of the learning objectives you have developed for your students.

In designing an RA training for residential curriculum, you can use the curricular approach itself as a guide for how you develop your training programs. Instead of designing a curriculum for resident students, you are essentially designing a curriculum for your paraprofessionals. When doing this design work, keep the following ideas in mind:

## Introduce Curricular Concepts

One of the essential elements of the curricular approach reminds us that, “Student leaders and staff members are considered to be facilitators rather than designers of educational strategies” (Kerr et al., 2017, p. 25). Although student staff members are not designing the curriculum per se, they still need to understand how and why a curriculum exists. When designing a training program for RAs, help them understand the reasons behind why goals and outcomes were selected. Training in this area could involve teaching RAs the basics of student development theory, how a curriculum is developed and revised based on feedback, review, and assessment, and a review of prior assessment data that is driving the curriculum in the coming year.

## Involving RAs and Generating Excitement and Buy-In

A successful design of an RA training program involves staff at all levels of its creation and execution. Although student staff members are not responsible for identifying and writing the learning objectives for training, their insights and feedback can be invaluable in their creation and revision. Utilizing returning staff members in this way validates them as knowers, who, in turn, can be utilized as peer mentors for new staff members. Pairing up a returning RA with a professional staff member in presenting or facilitating a training strategy or session can not only improve its execution, but also provides a leadership opportunity for that staff member. Furthermore, it can make the content more accessible to their student staff peers.

## Designing an Intentional and Scaffolded Schedule

Designing an RA training program for a curricular approach should use the same principles of design as those you may use in developing a curriculum for your resident students. A key to developing your training is identifying your learning objectives and letting the objectives drive the selection and development of your strategies. Could a training objective be best achieved through online training, a lecture-style presentation, a retreat, or an experiential learning opportunity? Let the learning objectives lead you. Then, as you design your training, make sure each training strategy successively builds your staff members’ knowledge over time. You might even consider developing distinct training opportunities for your new staff that are different than your returning staff, exactly as you may sequence learning opportunities differently for first year students versus second year students.

## Incorporating Assessment and Modeling the Way

Assessment is a key element of a curricular approach. When designing your RA Training programs, share and close the loop on assessment initiatives with your RAs. This could include sharing data from benchmarking surveys, to help them understand where your departments success and challenges are, or summative assessment regarding the achievement of your curricular learning objectives and their impact. Incorporating assessment data into your training programs can help student staff members see the impact and importance of the data they are often instrumental in collecting. Finally, conduct learning assessments during RA training itself. By modeling this for your staff members, they will gain a better appreciation for why they are called upon to do assessments with their residents throughout the year.

## Continuing Training Throughout the Year

Because a residential curriculum is sequenced throughout the year, there may be different topics that you will need to train your student staff members on that mirror the sequencing of your curriculum. This “just-in-time” training can help your RAs be more effective facilitators for your learning objectives. In a curricular approach you should not think of RA training as a monolithic event. Instead, work to further enhance and build your RA’s skills throughout the year and provide specialized training appropriate to the content they may be facilitating with their residents at a given time.

## Conclusion

Transitioning to a curricular approach does not end at the creation of your learning objectives. A full embrace of the curricular approach requires you to rethink your processes and engage in organizational change work to be successful. Student staff members are key to this success and their training and development requires just as much intentionality as the curriculum you design for your resident students. Think about how you can bring your staff along for the journey.



### Key Questions

- What are the goals and outcomes of your RA training programs?
- How can you enter into a learning partnership with your RAs in the development of the training and as a paradigm through the year?
- How might you look at the RA learning experience as a yearlong opportunity, delivering just-in-time training, instead of it being collapsed into one intensive training at the beginning of the academic year?

## Tone Setting and Basics

Typically, the residence life academic year begins with a lengthy period of training, before the opening of the residence halls, intended to prepare staff members for their roles. Beyond being a time to train staff members on procedures and their duties, it is also an excellent time to set the tone for the year and introduce staff members to the underlying philosophies and skills that undergird their work. For campuses with a residential curriculum, you will likely want to approach RA training with a different mindset than you may have in the past.

To start, you may wish to begin your training with topics focused on student learning, the curricular approach itself, and do a deeper dive into the content of your learning objectives. Beginning with concepts of learning as opposed to policies and procedures can break staff members out of the “check the box” mindset. Ordering training in this way instead challenges staff members to think about how they approach their work through the lens of your student learning and campus-specific educational priorities and objectives. When designing your RA training programs, consider leading with the following topics.

### Student Learning

Curricular approaches are about student learning, and therefore, it may make most sense to start off a semester or quarter training program focusing on the concept of learning both for the residents and the staff members themselves. You might want to teach your staff members some fundamentals of student development theory—or specific theories that guide your specific campus curriculum. The thought process behind this idea is to make sure staff members understand that everything they do in their roles is intended to enhance student learning and success.

### Basics of a Curricular Approach

Although student staff members are not leading the charge in designing the curriculum, it is still important to help them understand the basics of a curricular approach to help them understand where they fit into the overall picture. Understanding how your institutional learning objective cascade was developed, why certain objectives were

selected, and how they are put into practice through sequenced and guided strategies can help staff members understand where they fit into the process. This training does not need to be exhaustive but understanding how a curriculum is developed and the intentionality behind it can help staff members understand their roles.

## **Learning Outcomes**

Although student staff members will not be writing the learning outcomes of a curriculum, they nevertheless need to be trained in their structure, and most importantly, how to interpret them and put them into practice. By teaching student staff members the basics of writing measurable learning outcomes they will gain a better appreciation for those that they encounter in facilitation guides. As a result of understanding these more clearly, they will be better able to give life to these outcomes when they put them into practice—and provide feedback on their effectiveness. Furthermore, with a better understanding of learning outcomes can come a greater appreciation for assessment. The importance of training on assessment and the presentation of assessment data during training is addressed in a later post in this series.

## **Your Curricular Objectives**

When developing your training, contextualize it to your campus and/or departmental learning goals. For example, if one of your learning goal areas relates to “wellness,” do a training on basics of wellness—teach theories of wellness, share campus assessment data about students and wellness behaviors, and have each staff member explore and come to a common understanding of what successful achievement of your wellness goal looks like. Diving into the content of your learning goals, and not just the structure of them, can help your staff members become more competent in these areas. If staff members are supposed to help teach residents about these concepts, they need to learn them first.

## **Skills and Capacity Building**

Because RAs in a curricular approach are frequently called upon to be facilitators of student learning, it is critical that they be trained on these and related skills. For this reason, you may wish to focus on capacity building in areas that are critical to the success of your curriculum. These can include topics such as:

- Understanding group dynamics
- Group discussion and facilitation
- Mediation
- Interpersonal skills—specifically one-on-one dialogue and advising
- Low-level counseling and helping skills
- Goal setting and academic planning

To further empower your staff members, you may wish to address these topics in more of a leadership retreat-type format. Approaching teaching these topics as lifelong skills, as opposed to just RA-role based skills, can increase buy-in. This can be empowering to RAs and help them make connections to what they are learning in their jobs and their future success.

## **Tone and Learning Partnerships**

Finally, while the content of your training programs is important, the tone and the pedagogical practices utilized in those training sessions is equally important. Aim for engagement. Validate the RAs as knowers. Be transparent. Help staff members understand that everyone, even the professional staff members and trainers, are learners. Be humble. Share assessment data. Work with RAs to co-construct the learning environment.

Having a pre-training discussion with all your training facilitators can help ensure that your training sets the right tone and models this tone in its execution. Much as you’d develop goals, outcomes, and facilitation guides for a campus curriculum, repeat these processes in your training design. Develop facilitation guides for each of your sessions. Revise and enhance these year-after-year to enhance the learning of your staff. Spend time discussing how best to facilitate these topics as “teachers” of the training. Reviewing Baxter-Magolda and King’s concept of learning partnerships might be particularly useful.



## Key Questions

- What key theories or philosophies guide your curriculum? How can you ensure these are consistent themes in your training from the onset?
- What key skills and capacities do you need to develop in your student staff members?
- How can you infuse the concept of a learning partnership into the way all of your training facilitators approach their roles?

## Involving RAs and Generating Buy-In

One of the more misunderstood shifts in the change from a program model to a residential curriculum is the role that student staff members play. Because a curricular approach involves such a fundamentally different way of conceiving of staff member roles, the change process can be difficult. To successfully launch and maintain your curriculum, all staff members must be involved and buy-in to the process. This can begin with your RA training program.

### Channeling RA Creativity

One misunderstood aspect of a curricular approach involves the concept of creativity. When providing structure through a curriculum, some argue the opportunity for creativity is diminished. If creativity is defined as complete freedom to do whatever one wishes, that may be the case, but, a well-executed curriculum allows for more focused creativity. By creating a common set of objectives, and narrowing the scope of efforts, staff members can be more creative in how they execute various strategies in an attempt to achieve the defined learning. Furthermore, defining and providing structure to these aspects of the resident experience does not preclude staff from responding to situations and needs as they arise or to modify content to fit individual student needs. This is still an important part of the job.

Facilitation guides are never meant to outline everything in a proposed activity down to the last detail. Instead, their focus should be on the essential components that ensure the learning takes place in the most effective way for achieving it. Although many staff members may be working off the same facilitation guide, their execution of them can look very different. This is similar to how two professors teaching the same introductory course may teach the same material in completely different ways. The innovation is in the pedagogy and the delivery of the learning, not in the content of that learning. And although residential curriculum facilitation guides may prescribe some aspects of the pedagogy, they still allow variance for each resident assistant (teacher) to tailor it to their individual styles and audiences.

During RA training you may wish to focus on aspects of pedagogy and the skills and capacities required of staff members to effectively execute facilitation guides. These can include group dialogue and facilitation skills, interpersonal skills, and basics of teaching and good pedagogy. Have RAs reflect on their own experiences in education. Help RAs develop a personal philosophy of education and mentorship. Engage them in the critical work of reflecting on their values, the values of the department and institution, and how these show up in their daily work. During RA training, empower your staff members to take ownership of the curriculum and make it their own through developing their own leadership and “teaching” style. Framing RA training around a notion of building peer educators and leaders can help RAs find their voice and their creativity.

### Involving RAs in Your Training Development

Involving RAs in the development of your training programs can be another critical opportunity to develop buy-in. Utilizing returning staff members can help by investing them in the process and making them feel valued and heard. Returning RAs can be leaders and tone setters for other members of the staff. They can also be important sources of insight into your curricular and training efforts.



When including your returning student staff members in your training programs, you may wish to think about their experiences from a curricular perspective. How might you build a curriculum for the development of your RAs as student employees? This may require you to think about multiple tracks for your training programs so first year and returning staff members receive different levels of content. For key areas where both tracks overlap, you may also consider pairing a professional staff member with a student staff member for the development and facilitation of a training session. As returning staff members, involving them in the presentation of the material or in some of the experiential components as guides can help them develop their own skills by having them teach others. Buy-in is also enhanced.

## Peer Mentorship

A great way to involve all your staff in training is to develop a formal staff mentorship program. Similar to enlisting your returners as co-presenters for training sessions, a mentorship program can challenge your returning staff members to develop their skills to the next level and enhance the training experiences of your new staff members.

When approaching a mentorship program within the context of training and development, it is again useful to think about it through a curricular lens. What skills do the mentors need to be successful? How can you guide the mentorship relationship? How can you engage the mentors in their practice and help them become better mentors over time? Building a mentorship curriculum can help returning RAs develop more employable skills, aid with investment in their positions and work, and enhance and build on the skills they gained through their first year as an RA.

An example set of outcomes for a mentorship training may look like the following:

- Identify one mentor in the participant's personal experiences who helped to grow and shape them as an RA.
- Describe the values and principles of a mentoring relationship.
- Explain three positive strategies to interact with a mentee.
- Explain strategies for working with a mentee that may be struggling.
- Develop a plan for applying the principles of mentorship to the returning RA/new RA relationship.

## Conclusion

Involving RAs in the training and development process is key to generating buy-in amongst your staff but can also be an excellent opportunity to provide opportunities for returning staff members to enhance their skills and grow in their positions. By keeping in mind the tenets of "learning partnerships" and providing spaces for RA engagement in the curriculum, this communicates to your staff that they have value and they are integral to the success of your curricular efforts. Transforming your organization into one that is learning-centric is key to this evolution.



### Key Questions

- How can you encourage RA creativity in utilizing facilitation guides?
- How can you involve the RAs in the planning and execution of training programs?
- How can you sequence your training for new and returning RAs?
- How can you involve RAs in peer teaching, training, and mentorship?

## Sequencing and Planning

After determining the goals and outcomes for a curriculum, the magic happens when you begin scaffolding and sequencing your learning. It is in this stage that you find the key to the transformation from a highly developed program model into an intentionally designed curriculum. The same is true of your RA development. Utilize the same principles of residential curriculum design and apply it to your training efforts—determine an educational priority, establish goals, and write narratives and outcomes. After establishing your objectives, begin to craft your

schedule such that each session successively builds off the one prior. This will guide the facilitation guides you develop for each of the sessions in your training.

## The Importance of Rubrics

Rubrics are critical to your sequencing efforts. A well-designed rubric takes one of your defined learning outcomes and breaks it down into stages of development. For example, let's say you want RAs to be skilled in group dialogue facilitation. A rubric for these skills may look something like this:

	Beginning	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
Group Dialogue Facilitation	Heavily reliant on instructions. Does not deviate from a script. Does not engage group with probing questions or attempt to seek further understanding.	Relies on instructions but is able to engage the group in dialogue through follow up prompts. May still remain the center of the discussion rather than a facilitator for participants.	Is able to interpret instructions and moderately tailor it to one's own style as a facilitator and/or according to the needs of the group. Begins to de-center themselves as facilitator and encourage more group ownership in the discussion.	Is able to interpret instructions and fully tailor it to one's own style as a facilitator and/or according to the needs of the group. Acts as facilitator rather than leader of the discussion. Is able to recenter the group if it gets off track.

## Group Dialogue Facilitation Rubric

A rubric, such as in the example above, can help with the design of your training sessions and the content you are sequencing within them. Digging in deeper, one can think of ways to start sequencing training activities. It would seem that RAs would first need to reflect on and define their own facilitation style. Next, they may need to understand the general goals of group dialogue and strategies for facilitating it. Further, they need to understand how to look for and interpret group behavior to help guide the conversation. You may also wish to review group development theories such as Tuckman's stages of group development. Finally, remember to provide space for an experiential component, where RAs can apply their learning and receive feedback.

Not all of these objectives need to be covered in a single discrete session, however. Instead, some may overlap with other training topics you may wish to cover. In a fully developed training curriculum, content in each session may help inform the content in another, helping RAs work towards synergies.

An alternative, or complementary approach, might be to think of rubrics in terms of years of job experience. For example, by the end of the year, a first year RA should know and be able to do the following things. A second year RA can achieve more advanced outcomes, and therefore they should receive a different type of training than that of a first year RA. By creating rubrics for each year of the RA experience, you can also share these documents with RAs to help them understand expectations and what they can learn through their employment. Furthermore, you could tailor your performance evaluations to the RA's experience level, raising the bar for returning staff members in the process.

## Bloom's Taxonomy and RA Training

Similar to rubrics, reflecting on the successively more complex cognitive tasks outlined in Bloom's Taxonomy can also help with the sequencing of your training efforts. The idea behind reflecting on Bloom's work is to reason out how an RA may come to a deeper level of learning and how you can structure your efforts to help them achieve it. Bloom's sequence roughly follows the following order: remember (recalling facts), understand (explain concepts), apply (using knowledge to inform responses to situations), analyze (connecting ideas), justify (providing a rationale for decisions), and create (produce original work). Utilizing this framework can help you understand how you might organize your training within sessions and between sessions.

For example, if we were hoping to develop an RA's capacity to handle or confront potential policy violations, we may outline something as follows:

- Remember – Be able to recall the policies.
- Understand – Be able to explain why the policies exist and their rationale.
- Apply – Be able to handle/confront situations where policy violations may have occurred.
- Analyze – Be able to understand the intent behind the policy and how it connects (or not) to the current situation.
- Justify – Be able to explain why they handled/confronted the situation the way they did.
- Create – Be able to uniquely handle/confront situations according to context and engage in strategies to reduce the possibility of them occurring in the first place.

## Think Ahead to Further Training

Training programs do not need to be conceived of as monolithic experiences. An RA’s learning about their role does not begin and end in a two-week span in August. Instead, think about how you can begin your training program from the point of pre-hire application and continue it throughout the academic year. There may be ways you can already start the training process with how you structure information sessions for RA applicants and in the application and the interviews processes themselves—perhaps through providing panels with current RAs, shadowing opportunities, an RA class, online modules, the types of experiential activities you may incorporate into your interview days, etc.

You can also expand training throughout the academic year. (Are there timely training topics that can wait and are better suited to another time? Can individual hall staff meetings be reconceived as opportunities for continuous training? Are there opportunities to build off of knowledge skills gained and move them towards increasing complexity? etc.) Thinking of the entire academic year as a training opportunity instead of it being collapsed into a two-week span can help in building a learning-centric organization and culture. Furthermore, it can help with staff buy-in.

## Conclusion

Applying curricular concepts to your RA training programs can be immensely beneficial in honing your focus on learning, increasing its level of complexity, and modeling good educational design. Sequencing your training efforts can help with developing a more intentional training and one that can encourage more investment from and benefits to your staff members. This is why establishing a curriculum is not just a one-off activity, but one that needs to be infused in all of the work that you do. By establishing curriculum as a mindset and not just a set of goals and outcomes, you can lead your organization towards transformation. This transformation can begin with the training of your staff members.



### Key Questions

- How can you model-the-way for your staff members in applying curricular concepts to training?
- What are the learning outcomes for your training efforts and their associated rubrics?
- How can you help RAs achieve successively more complex levels of knowledge and skill?
- How can you provide deeper level of training for your returning staff members?
- How can you conceive of RA training as a year-long process?

## Resources and Examples

The following are some further topics, resources, and examples you may want to explore when re-envisioning your RA training programs under a curricular approach. Because RA training tends to be an internally focused event, and furthermore because examples only provide the after-product of training development and rarely provide insight into the philosophies and pedagogies that lead to their development, these examples can sometimes be hard to find online.

## Competency-Based Training

Many institutions working towards curriculum may find it useful to explore competency-based training programs. By focusing on the skills necessary to be successful in their jobs, an RA training program can be more easily constructed with clear objectives and also benefit RAs who can better understand and articulate the skills they gain on the job. Furthermore, by identifying competencies, you can also align your hiring processes to seek out candidates with advanced skills in the most important areas for success. Rothwell and Garber (2010) describe “competency” and “competency-based training” as follows:

“The term competency refers to any characteristics of an individual performer that lead to acceptable or outstanding performance. Competencies may include technical skills, level of motivation, personality traits, awareness of bodies of knowledge, or just about anything else that can assist in producing results.” (p. 1-2)

“Competency-based training is intended to help individuals acquire or build the necessary characteristics to match the skills of good or exceptional performers.” (p. 2)

If you’re looking for competency ideas specifically related to the RA position, Blimling (2015, p. 169-176) suggests the following competencies for a competency-based RA training program:

- Helping Skills
- Crisis Management Skills
- Conflict Resolution Skills
- Multicultural Skills
- Administrative Skills
- Resource Skills
- Problem Solving Skills
- Leadership Skills
- Educational Skills
- Relationship Skills
- Technology Skills
- Student Skills

## Flipped Classroom Models and Technologically Enhanced Instruction

As many institutions have evolved their training programs, they have looked to technology to enhance instruction and to better utilize (and even reduce) the amount of time spent in in-person training. Utilizing course management systems, developing online modules, and using simple techniques such as incorporating pre-reading can all enhance training if executed well. If you’re looking for ideas, take a look at the Online Learning Consortium’s website and resources. A related concept in this space is to explore flipped classroom models. Flipped classrooms typically involve students (or resident assistants in our example) to work on more knowledge-based tasks outside the training room, while reserving in-person training time for more experiential and applied forms of learning. For example, an RA may watch a pre-recorded lecture on counseling skills prior to in-person training where they may apply these through guided exercises or cases studies with peers.

## Example Outcomes

Providing an example schedule for an RA training reconceived under a curricular approach is difficult to demonstrate in practice. Similar to how a residential curriculum should be contextualized to an institution, an RA training curriculum should also be contextualized to the institution, and unique departmental and residence hall structures. It may be useful, however, to see some examples of the types of sessions you may uniquely develop if you are embarking on a curricular approach. The following outcomes can help get you started:

### **Understanding the University**

- Identify the university's strategic plan objectives, goals, and general education requirements.
- Identify connections between the university and departmental goals.

### **Knowing Our Students**

- Name one assumption or myth about our students and the data that supports it.
- Name one demographic about our student population and its percentage makeup of the student body.
- Explain how knowledge about our students can be incorporated into the execution of strategies and facilitation guides.

### **Understanding our Curriculum**

- Describe the curricular evolution of residential education at our campus.
- Name the learning goals of our curriculum.
- Explain the RA role within the curriculum.
- Explain how to use facilitator guides and RA opportunities for personalization.

### **Assessment Efforts**

- Explain what assessment data the department collects and how it is used for improvement.
- Name 3 goals the department has set for improvement.
- Describe how you can contribute to department goals and improvement.

### **Student Development Theory**

- Describe the student development theory/theories that support the curriculum.
- Apply student development theory to student situations.

### **Helping Skills**

- List three different skills related to effectively listening.
- Demonstrate effective strategies for communicating with residents.

### **Confrontation**

- Know techniques for addressing confrontational students.
- Understand the confrontation model.
- Articulate the value of assertive behavior versus aggression or passive behavior.

### **Mediation**

- Explain the differences between mediation, arbitration and conflict coaching.
- Identify two examples in which mediation would be the preferred method to solve the problem.

### **Diverse Communities**

- Describe two identity or diversity related theories.
- Summarize how assumptions and expectations about difference have an impact on the residence hall community.
- Identify four core concepts related to communication and language in diverse communities.
- Develop three strategies to incorporate inclusivity and multicultural awareness in learning opportunities and community standards.

### **Intentional Conversations**

- Recognize the importance of one on one resident/RA interactions.
- Describe strategies to promote open communication between residents and RAs.
- Identify concerning behavior which should be reported to an RD.

# Assessment Data and Exercises

Assessment has an important role to play when designing your RA Training efforts, both in terms of assessing the effectiveness of your training programs themselves and in contributing to the overall success of your curriculum and your departmental assessment efforts. By incorporating multiple forms of formative and summative assessment into your training, you can get actionable insights to improve your training curriculum over time. Furthermore, by incorporating these assessments into your training, you can also use the assessment strategies as teachable moments for staff members who must also integrate assessment into their practice. Presenting assessment data about your curriculum and department can help engender buy-in—both in terms of the achievement of departmental goals and in the importance of assessment itself.

## Closing The Loop on Assessment Data

One topic that may often be overlooked in designing your RA training content is how your review processes are evolving the curriculum. For frontline staff members like RAs, it is important to “close the loop” on assessment. Closing the loop entails helping RAs understand how their feedback and the assessment information they collect results in changes to practice. Doing this can help shift RAs away from checklist mentality when it comes to administering an assessment strategy. It demonstrates that the work they do is actually used for improvement and the data they collect does not just sit on a shelf.

By reviewing your assessment data with your staff members, you can also tie this data back to departmental goals and help staff members see their place in helping improve the department and the experiences of students. By being transparent with this data—showing both the good and the areas for improvement—you can help staff members understand that assessment does not exist just to reinforce what one is already doing, but to lead to discussion and change, reaching towards improvement. This helps reframe assessment efforts. It can also help you in developing a culture that “celebrates controlled failure.”

## Focus on Learning

A curricular approach is about enhancing student learning. RA training is about enhancing the learning of student staff members. When designing your assessment efforts for either your curriculum or for training programs, try to design your assessments to include as many direct measures of student learning as possible.

For example, if you are training your student staff members on college policy, instead of asking them if they think they understand the policies (“Do you feel like you understand the college policies?”) ask them direct questions about the policies instead (“What is the college policy related to alcohol possession and consumption on campus?”). If the staff members can effectively answer the question, then you have effectively taught them what you wanted them to know. If they cannot, this can give you insights into whether your training plans and pedagogy are being effective.

## “Modeling the Way” With RA Training Assessment

It is common for many departments to do some form of post-training survey to assess the effectiveness of their efforts. While a good first step, post-training monolithic assessments can only provide a portion of the overall assessment picture you may need to capture. In-the-moment assessments can also be an important part of your efforts. When designing training sessions, incorporate assessment points that can allow the trainers to adjust their training in response to real time student staff needs.

Returning to the previous example, if you are teaching about college policies, provide a short quiz during your session or do a check for understanding to see if student staff members are retaining and understanding what you are training them on. Depending on the content being taught, you could also incorporate experiential exercises where they must apply what they learned. Observers can provide feedback and this data can help inform whether a topic needs to be revisited, or if the training is having its intended effect. Many professionals who undertake curricular approaches find a lot of inspiration from books such as *Classroom Assessment Techniques* and *Learning Assessment Techniques*. Both are compendiums of various assessment techniques and activities that can be incorporated into your training. They are also excellent resources when developing assessment for your strategies with students throughout the academic year.

Finally, by incorporating in-the-moment assessment efforts, and diverse assessment strategies into your training programs, you are also helping student staff members understand that assessment is not just doing a post-event survey. Helping them understand that assessment is deeply incorporated into the work of educators can break them away from a mindset that might see assessment as an “add on.” This models the way for resident assistants by allowing them to see how diverse assessment strategies can be deployed and how they can change practice.

## Conclusion

Assessment can play a critical role in your RA training efforts—both in terms of improving the training itself and establishing an organizational culture of learning and assessment. To be successful, try to think of assessment as an area that is incorporated into all of the work you do, woven into the fabric of all of your educational efforts. This process can take time, but in the end, it will lead towards transformation.



### Key Questions

- How are you sharing the assessment data you collect with your staff members?
- How are you sharing your assessment data “story”?
- What diverse assessment strategies are you deploying in your RA training efforts?
- How can you make your RA training assessments more learning focused?
- How are you moving your organization towards a “culture of assessment”?

## Throughout the Year

RA training does not just end with the opening of the residence halls in the Fall but is an effort that continues throughout the academic year. A curricular approach implores us to scaffold and sequence learning, and this concept is equally valid when applied to RA training. Thinking of the entire year as a training and learning opportunity can transform your staff culture into a more learning-centric one and lead to a more focused and responsive training program.

The curricular concepts of assessment and review for continuous improvement are also highly applicable to RA Training. Reviewing learning assessments from training efforts can help you identify areas that may require changes to your pedagogy or if further training in a given area is required. Utilizing a review process can aid in honing learning objectives and allow for revisions in response to changing student needs or institutional priorities.

## Deconstructing Fall RA Training

Time is a finite resource and spending two weeks on training during one of the busiest times of the academic year is a luxury few institutions can afford. This is where an intentionally planned RA training curriculum can help. When applying curricular concepts to your training efforts, it may be useful to think of the entire academic year as a training opportunity. Some topics may not need to be covered during a Fall training and can wait until a later, and perhaps more appropriate time. Other topics may not be best addressed or need to be addressed in a large group format.

Just as with a curricular approach, use student learning as a starting point for your RA training efforts. Too often we may begin planning for training by starting with a schedule. This is similar to how a program models assumes every learning opportunity must be a program. Rather than starting with a schedule and filling in time slots, start with what you want your RAs to learn. Identify your learning goals and outcomes. Then, after identifying your learning objectives, determine the best strategies and formats to teach these concepts. Only after this occurs should you begin crafting your schedule. Taking it a step further, you could deconstruct the concept of a schedule altogether. Not all training needs to occur in a two-week span in the Fall, and all training sessions need not be constructed as a lecture.

## **Diverse Strategies and Just-In-Time Training**

When thinking of diverse strategies to engage your RAs, think of all of the different ways in which you can engage them. These strategies could include various ways of teaching, such as through readings, group projects, lectures, or experiential activities. It could also include different formats, such as during 1-on-1 meetings with supervisors, in-hall staff meetings, or in large all-staff gatherings. By tailoring your strategies to maximize your desired learning, you can create a more intentional training and one that is more engaging for RAs.

There may also be benefit in reflecting how “just in time” training may be a more effective way of engaging your staff. The concept of “just in time” means that training is provided at the times appropriate to when staff members will utilize those knowledge and skills. Luckily, with a residential curriculum in place, you’ve already sequenced and set out a calendar for student learning throughout the year. Let this guide your training efforts around strategies and facilitation guides. Furthermore, your learning goals and outcomes were constructed from theory and research. Sharing this knowledge with your staff members at the appropriate times throughout the year can help deepen your RA’s understanding of their students’ learning and developmental journeys in a way that is appropriate to the time and context of the academic year.

## **A Training Timeline for Continuous Improvement**

Much like your training efforts should be continuous and year-round, your planning for these efforts should also be continuous and year-round. Establishing this cycle can help you reach towards a more responsive, iterative training and development program and one that works towards continuous improvement. The following provides an example of how you may think about organizing yourself:

### **September/January:**

- Form a committee or other working group.
- Review assessment data from just completed training.
- Identify gaps in staff knowledge from prior training to establish needs.
- Revise ongoing training schedule as necessary.

### **October/February-March:**

- Revisit training goal/outcome cascade for overall training efforts.
- Outline upcoming training schedule with learning outcomes for each strategy/session.
- Assign leads for facilitation guide development.
- Begin contacting partners, assign internal staff as liaisons, and develop session learning outcomes as starting point for discussion.
- Meet with partners to review and revise facilitation guide.

### **November-December/May-Summer:**

- Finalize facilitation guides and materials needed for Winter training
- Finalize any assessment tools needed



## Conclusion

Effective RA training programs for a residential curriculum, utilize the principles of curriculum in their design. This includes developing a training program that is scaffolded and sequenced, and one that utilizing assessment and review towards continuous improvement. Much as a curricular approach require a complete rethink of residential education practice, your RA training efforts need this same level of deconstruction in order to be effective.



### Key Questions

- What are the learning goals and outcomes for your RA Training efforts? How can these guide the selection of your strategies and formats?
- How can you develop a review and continuous improvement process for RA Training and development?



### Curricular Approach Q&A

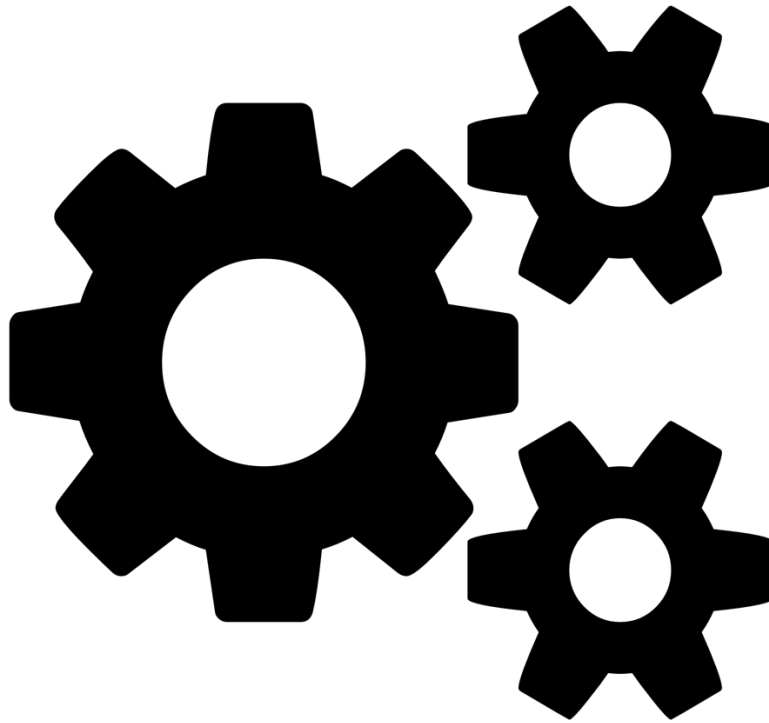
#### Where does Residence Life Community Building Fit into a Curriculum?

Residential curricula are focused on student learning. Ultimately, curricular approaches primarily concern themselves with what we hope students will know and be able to do once their time with us comes to an end. Community building falls outside the learning-focus of the curriculum but it is critically important for its effectiveness. A switch to a curricular approach does not mean that a department abandons its community building responsibilities, rather, community building is a critical component of a department's pedagogy.

Community building is important, but it should not eclipse the other important objectives you have for your work with students. A department that is focused solely on community building may be missing opportunities for promoting student learning. A department that focuses on student learning, but ignores community development, will be hampered in the effectiveness of reaching its learning objectives. Community development and student learning are not in competition with one another. Instead, our mission is to find the right work balance between the two so our staff members can be the most effective they can be and our students can have their needs met.

Utilizing a classroom analogy, a teacher may prepare lesson plans, identify readings, and design assignments and activities to help students learn important objectives that have been identified for the course. However, even with the most well-designed lesson plans, a teacher must also be concerned with the environment that they create in the classroom to ensure this learning happens effectively—doing introductions/icebreakers at the beginning of a course, making sure students have the opportunity to interact and share their perspectives, making sure difference is celebrated and that folks of different identities feel comfortable, etc. In residence life, this is the work of community building.

Community building doesn't need to be overly elaborate to be effective. It can be as simple as floor dinners, making introductions of students with shared interests, celebrating birthdays, watching a movie together, or doing a joint art or craft project. When I was facilitating a residential curriculum, one of the expectations I had for my student staff members was that they make at least one extra effort at community building per week. I also trusted and recognized RA's expertise as peer leaders on the floor to give RAs the autonomy to decide what community building activities best suited their residents. These efforts could be simple. They should be simple. If a RA was spending inordinate amount of time designing a community building activity to the detriment of their curricular work and making connections with students, I corrected it. The community building activities didn't need to have learning outcomes. They could just be fun. For assessment, I only required them to report what occurred and who was involved.



# **The Curricular Approach Self-Assessment Instrument**

# The Curricular Approach Self-Assessment Instrument

The following Self-Assessment Instrument was developed to provide a free resource for schools implementing a curricular approach to their work. This document is intended for use by institutions to assess the strength of their current curricular efforts and identify areas for improvement. It is our hope that it will provide a standard by which schools can benchmark their efforts.

*The following scale can be used in completing the self-assessment. Data and supporting documentation should be available to justify assigned scores. Given differing institutional contexts, it may be decided that certain criteria may not apply.*

## Rating Scale:

1 = No Development

2 = Minimal Development

3 = Partial Development

4 = Substantial Development

5 = Full Development

Unk = There is not enough data available to make a determination. This status is unknown.

N/A = Due to institutional or contextual factors, or because of alternative curriculum design, this standard is not applicable.

## 1. Foundations

*Curricula are grounded in theory and developmental research and are also a product of the institutional contexts in which they are taught.*

	1	2	3	4	5	Unk	N/A
1-1 Theories and research that support the curriculum are clearly identified and articulated.							
1-2 Institutional values and philosophy, as defined through institutional documents and statements, are present throughout the curriculum.							
1-3 The curriculum accounts for unique institutional characteristics and student demographics and composition. (ex. urban/rural spaces, popular majors, student identities, etc.)							

## 2. Educational Priority

An educational priority is an overall statement of student learning. The ultimate goal of a curriculum if it is successful.

	1	2	3	4	5	Unk	N/A
2-1 There is a written statement of educational priority that clearly articulates what students will learn and/or be able to do.							
2-2 There is a clear distinction between a departmental mission statement ( <i>services, delivery, environment, etc.</i> ) and the educational priority ( <i>statement of learning</i> ).							
2-3 Is brief while providing all of the necessary information. ( <i>Typically 1-2 sentences.</i> )							

## 3. Learning Goals and Narratives

Learning goals identify components of an educational priority. If learning goals are achieved, they will lead to achievement of the educational priority. Narratives are brief paragraph descriptions of these goals that identify the reasoning, theory, and philosophy behind the goals.

	1	2	3	4	5	Unk	N/A
3-1 Learning goals are tied to and aligned with the educational priority.							
3-2 There are a manageable number of learning goals identified that can be put into practice. ( <i>Typically 3-5 goals.</i> )							
3-3 Learning goals are clearly articulated statements of learning in 1-2 sentences and are not solely 1-2 word categories.							
3-4 Narratives are developed that provide (1) the reasoning behind why the goal is included, and (2) any theoretical or philosophic underpinnings.							

#### 4. Learning Outcomes and Rubrics

*Learning outcomes further define each learning goal area into more measurable and discrete objectives. If learning outcomes are achieved, they reflect progress in achieving the overall learning goal area. Rubrics for each learning outcome define successive stages of knowledge as a student develops towards achievement of that outcome.*

	1	2	3	4	5	Unk	N/A
4-1 Specific and measurable learning outcomes are written and defined for each learning goal area. <i>(Typically 3-6 learning outcomes per learning goal.)</i>							
4-2 Assessment measures and methods are identified for each learning outcome.							
4-3 Rubrics are developed that outline developmental learning stages for a student, through time, for each learning outcome.							
4-4 Defined learning outcomes are reasonably achievable within a student's time in residence.							

## 5. Strategies and Facilitation Guides, Sequencing and Scaffolding

Strategies are different methods for achieving learning outcomes and goals. Facilitation guides articulate how to execute these strategies to achieve the desired strategy learning outcomes. The strategies should be sequenced and scaffolded to promote an iterative and cumulative learning process.

	1	2	3	4	5	Unk	N/A
5-1 Learning strategies that go beyond just programmed events are identified and utilized, ( <i>ex. intentional conversations, floor meetings, newsletters, etc.</i> )							
5-2 Facilitation guides that reach towards the achievement of curriculum learning goals and outcomes are developed for each execution of a strategy.							
5-3 Each facilitation guide articulates strategy-level learning outcomes that will be achieved and include measures and indicators of successful learning achievement.							
5-4 Properly trained professional educators are leaders in the development and implementation of facilitation guides.							
5-5 The design and execution of facilitation guides is sequenced to the time of year and level of development for the targeted audience of students.							
5-6 Facilitation guides are scaffolded such that successive lesson plans build off of prior knowledge and skills acquired.							
5-7 Facilitation guides include strategy-level assessment plans to determine if desired student learning is achieved.							
5-8 Facilitation guides are revised based off of assessment data and feedback to be improved upon for future implementation.							
5-9 There is a plan in place to promote community development and cohesion alongside any curricular learning efforts.							

## 6. Assessment and Review

*Assessment occurs on a curriculum-wide basis, as well as on a student level basis. Through analysis and use of assessment data, a curriculum and its components can be improved. A peer review process allows inside and outside experts to help evaluate the effectiveness of the overall curriculum and provide suggestions for its improvement.*

	1	2	3	4	5	Unk	N/A
6-1 Formative assessment data is collected about the overall curriculum planning and execution process and its effectiveness.							
6-2 Summative assessment data is collected about student achievement of stated learning goals and outcomes in order to gauge student learning success.							
6-3 Assessment data and analysis is regularly communicated to campus partners and other relevant educational partners.							
6-4 Assessment data and analysis is regularly communicated to the professional staff members and educators who design and execute the curriculum.							
6-5 Assessment data and analysis is regularly communicated to student staff members who execute the curriculum.							
6-6 Assessment data is regularly analyzed and used to enhance the effectiveness of the curriculum as a part of a commitment to continuous improvement.							
6-7 A curriculum review process is developed whereby the entire curriculum is reviewed by educational experts who provide guidance on its improvement.							
6-8 Curriculum review teams incorporate a diverse set of internal and external voices—including students, staff, faculty, campus partners, and educational experts.							
6-9 Suggestions for improvement made through a review process are acted upon and incorporated into future curricular planning.							

## 7. Branding and Communication

*Through branding and communication, institutions can promote buy in and investment from students, staff, and partners in the curriculum.*

	1	2	3	4	5	Unk	N/A
7-1 Accessible marketing materials and documents are developed that articulate the purpose and goals behind the curriculum for various constituencies.							
7-2 The curriculum, its purpose, and its goals are communicated to students in accessible language that promotes investment and involvement.							
7-3 The curriculum, its purpose, and its goals are communicated to a student's family members, parents, and/or guardians in accessible language to promote investment and involvement.							
7-4 The curriculum, its purpose, and its goals are communicated to campus partners to promote investment and involvement.							
7-5 Staff members can articulate the purpose, goals, and philosophy behind the institution's curriculum development process and the curriculum itself.							



## 8. Partnerships and Special Programs

*A successful curriculum identifies partnerships with relevant offices and departments to promote seamless learning experiences for students. Not all educational opportunities in a curriculum need to be initiated and executed by the curriculum planners themselves.*

	1	2	3	4	5	Unk	N/A
8-1 Partnerships are sought with departments that provide educational opportunities relevant to the achievement of the goals and outcomes of the curriculum.							
8-2 Campus partners are involved in the curriculum development process in a meaningful way.							
8-3 Any living learning communities or programs are integrated into the curriculum and may have their own supplementary curriculum.							
8-4 Residence hall associations and student leadership groups are advised and included in the execution of curriculum and in community development aims.							

## 9. Staff Roles, Training, and Hiring Practices

*Because curriculum development requires a special set of skills, staff members should be involved in all aspects of curriculum development. Furthermore, staff members should be hired for and continuously trained on the requisite skills they need to be successful. Position descriptions and expectations should align with these needs.*

	1	2	3	4	5	Unk	N/A
9-1 Staff members are included and invested in the institution's curriculum development process.							
9-2 Student staff members are utilized in roles that capitalize on their strengths as peer educators and leaders.							
9-3 Student staff members are utilized in roles that capitalize on their strengths as experts in educational delivery and design.							
9-4 Staff member position descriptions are written to align with the necessary skills and duties required to successfully execute one's role in a curriculum.							
9-5 Staff members are hired for and evaluated on the skills necessary to execute their roles in the curriculum.							
9-6 Adequate training on the curriculum and curricular design principles is provided on an annual basis. <i>(Through in-house training and/or attendance at RCI.)</i>							
9-7 Ongoing professional development opportunities are provided for staff that train on relevant educational skills. <i>(ex. assessment, learning outcome construction, etc.)</i>							

# Glossary

When getting started in developing a curricular approach to student learning outside the classroom, there are a number of different terms and concepts that are used with which one should become familiar. Many of the terms used have been systematized over time, particularly by the faculty of ACPA's Institute on the Curricular Approach. However, some of the terms may be used differently in practice at various institutions. Regardless of whether you call something a learning goal, a learning outcome, or a learning objective, what is more important than the actual word is that it is used consistently and is universally understood by those who engage with your curriculum. The following glossary can help in establishing a common curricular nomenclature.

## Curricular Approach/Residential Curriculum

Although it can be given many different names in practice, curricular approaches entail the use of educational and pedagogical practices adapted from the classroom into co-curricular student life contexts. Curricular approaches are focused on student learning and all educational interventions and activities are designed to promote cumulative and successive learning towards a defined set of learning objectives. Some campuses choose to use the words "Residential Curriculum," while others use a more generic term like "Residential Learning Model." Although arising from residence life, many student affairs divisions and other departments have adopted a curricular approach to their work.

## Ten Essential Elements

Developed for use by ACPA's Institute on the Curricular Approach and as a guide for differentiating a curriculum from other educational approaches involving student learning outcomes in the residence halls, the ten essential elements outline the philosophy behind the curricular approach. These are formally outlined in Kerr, Tweedy, Edwards, and Kimmel's 2017 *About Campus* article, "Shifting to Curricular Approaches to Learning beyond the Classroom" (p. 25). They are equally applicable and adaptable to various student affairs contexts.

1. "Directly connected to institutional mission"
2. "Learning goals and outcomes are derived from a defined educational priority"
3. "Based on research and developmental theory"
4. "Departmental learning outcomes drive development of educational strategies"
5. "Traditional programs may be one type of strategy—but not the only one"
6. "Student leaders and staff members play key roles in implementation but are not expected to be educational experts"
7. "Represents developmentally sequenced learning"
8. "Campus partners are identified and integrated into plans"
9. "Plan is developed through a review process"
10. "Cycle of assessment for student learning and educational strategies"

## Educational Priority

An Educational Priority is an overall statement of student learning that describes what a student should ultimately achieve through participation in and engagement with the curriculum. A Priority is developed through an archeological dig process of reviewing educational theories and institutional level data and characteristics to contextualize the Priority to an institution and/or department. An Educational Priority differs from a departmental mission statement in that its focus is on *what students will learn*, not on how that learning or related services are delivered.

## Learning Goals

Learning Goals cascade from an Educational Priority. Learning Goals seek to provide more specific statements of what students will learn in a curriculum. They focus the Educational Priority into sets of more narrowly defined thematic learning domains. Often not specific enough to be explicitly measured themselves, Learning Goals are broken down into constituent Learning Outcomes that can be more specifically measured. For feasibility in implementation, most departmental curricular programs include 3-5 Learning Goals.

## **Narratives**

Each Learning Goal has an associated Narrative. Narratives are brief paragraphs that define terms and set the philosophy and reasoning behind the choice of a Learning Goal. Narratives provide further specificity and context, defining key terms and specifically identifying what relevant frameworks are adopted. Narratives ensure there is consistency in understanding and interpretation of Learning Goals across staff members and educational partners.

## **Learning Outcomes**

Sets of Learning Outcomes (typically 4-6 for a department) are derived from each identified Learning Goal. These statements of learning (typically beginning with the stem, “Student will be able to”) are more specific than learning goals. They guide the development of specific Strategy-Level Learning Outcomes that are concrete and measurable. Learning Outcomes have associated Rubrics which allow one to sequence student learning activities towards the achievement of these Outcomes.

## **Rubrics**

Each Learning Outcome in a curriculum has an associated Rubric. Rubrics are tools that are used by educators to help evaluate the learning and performance of students. They are written documents, often presented in a chart format, that help define progress and achievement levels towards various goals and performance indicators. Rubrics help ensure that one is appropriately sequencing one’s learning opportunities and serve as an important assessment tool.

## **Strategies**

Strategies are the range of educational activities, events, and touch points with students that provide opportunities for learning. Each instance of a strategy identifies certain Strategy-Level Outcomes that participation in that strategy will achieve. These Strategy-Level Outcomes are related back to the broader Learning Outcomes and Goals of the overall curriculum. Strategies can be ongoing, episodic, one time, or accomplished through partnerships. Examples of some strategies include: intentional conversations, roommate agreements, events, community meetings, social media engagement, or campus partner programs.

## **Facilitation Guides/Lesson Plans**

Facilitation Guides (sometimes referred to as Lesson Plans) are written documents that outline how a specific instance of a strategy should be facilitated. They provide detailed information about how the activity relates back to curricular Learning Goals and Outcomes, identify specific Strategy-Level Learning Outcomes for the specific activity being facilitated, provide instructions and options for how to facilitate the activity in practice, and identify ways to assess the effectiveness of the facilitated activity. Facilitation Guides are durable and should be improved and revised over time based on the effectiveness of the activity in achieving its stated learning objectives.

## **Educational Plan**

An Educational Plan is the overall plan for a curriculum. It includes all elements of the learning objective cascade (Educational Priority, Learning Goals, Learning Outcomes), the Strategies one is employing and their related Facilitation Guides. One may wish to have one overarching Educational Plan for an entire division or develop a number of sub-educational plans for specific department. Within residence life, this may include a departmental Educational Plan with sub-Educational Plans for specific buildings, class years, or student populations.

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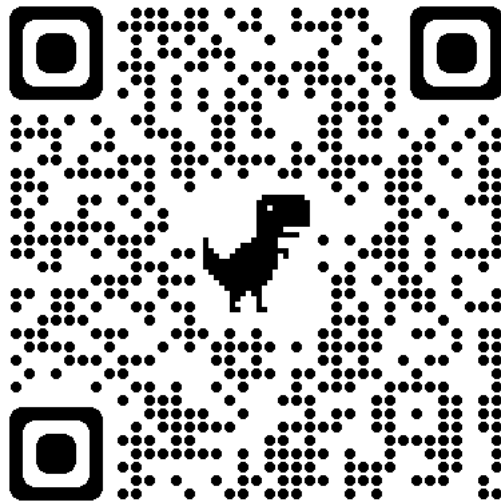
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