



STUDENT EMPLOYMENT MATTERS:

**A DECADE OF
DEVELOPMENT
OUTCOMES
ANALYSIS**

Photo courtesy of the University of Minnesota

How many union and activities professionals wish they had the opportunity to tell their university regents or trustees about their organization's positive impact on student success? University of Minnesota Student Unions & Activities has had that opportunity twice. The first time was upon development of its student employee program in 2005 and the second time was to showcase the success of that same program in 2014 after more than nine years of data gathering.

Background

It all began in 2004 when the university's vice provost embraced concepts from *Learning Reconsidered: A Campus Wide Focus on the Student Experience*, a joint publication of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators and the American College Personnel Association. The publication's message was that true learning on campuses occurs when academic learning and student development outcomes are integrated to provide a holistic experience for our students.

According to *Learning Reconsidered*, "Society expects [universities] to graduate students who can get things done in the world and are prepared for effective and engaged citizenship." The publication further emphasized that it is not only the academic side that bears responsibility for the development of students, but rather that, "All of the resources of the campus must be brought to bear on the student's learning process."

The vice provost had previously been an administrator in the business school where he spent many years hearing directly from employers about the characteristics they were looking for when hiring students. These characteristics included the ability to problem solve, a tolerance of ambiguity, and self awareness.

After reading *Learning Reconsidered* and learning from the vice provost's experience, the division of student affairs developed a set of student development outcomes, also known as the SDOs, which complemented the university's academic learning outcomes. All departments within student affairs were then challenged to think of ways to integrate the student development outcomes into their everyday work with students. Additionally, information about the student development outcomes and their importance to holistic learning was presented at first year orientation. Therefore, all new students were familiar with the development outcomes starting their first day on campus.



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CORE COMPETENCIES

STUDENT LEARNING
Assessing Desired Outcomes



EXAMPLE JOB DESCRIPTION USING STUDENT DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES

TOLEBRANCE OF AMBIGUITY
Custodian/Room Set-Up Crew

- Able to handle an error or challenging customer when there is no information available
- Able to handle last-minute schedule and room set-up changes

GOAL ORIENTATION
Office Assistant

- Handles duties required on shift and seeks direction from supervisor as needed
- Able to set and manage timelines in order to complete all assigned tasks during a shift

A Modern Approach to Student Employment

Astronomer Zechariah Bridgen of Harvard University was noted in the game Trivial Pursuit as being the first person, in 1657, to have said: "I worked my way through college." As recently as 20 or 30 years ago, students could still say they worked their way through college. That is virtually impossible today. Postsecondary Education Opportunity estimated that a student would have to work 61 hours a week for 52 weeks a year to afford nine months of full-time study at a public university.

Still, according to the 2008 National Survey of Student Engagement, more than two-thirds of students at four-year colleges and four-fifths of students at two-year colleges work at some point in their college career. Other than attending class, it is the most common experience for

undergraduates, and ranks higher than participation in student groups. More intentional student employment can be a low- or no-cost way of improving student success as we are already doing it.

Among the 250 students employed in the University of Minnesota's college unions, approximately 25% are work-study positions. There is a broad variety of positions in areas such as graphic design, custodial, retail, office support, games room and facilities maintenance, and event services. While most of the student employees are undergraduates, graduate students may fill these positions as well.

In 2004-05, a pilot program was developed in which student development outcomes were integrated into student employee job descriptions. A survey instrument was created to measure students on the outcomes and was

administered in the pilot project three times: at the beginning of the program, at the end of the first semester, and at the end of the second semester.

The department and supervisors of the student employees, who were full-time staff members, introduced the program to student employees at the beginning of the year. Supervisors also discussed progress on the student development outcomes at mid-year and at the end of year, using individual student survey results as the basis for the conversation.

This pilot program included 12 students and three supervisors. Immediately, Supervisors reported benefits they received from being involved in the pilot project. They started to feel more like mentors and educators versus simply overseeing day-to-day student employee operations. They valued their discussions and felt the student development outcomes helped them articulate the strengths and challenges the students were having with their job and skill development. They understood how important their role was as a supervisor in providing a holistic educational experience for students.

Tina Siverson, one of the staff supervisors in the pilot project who continues to work for the department, said: "As supervisors, working with the student development outcomes revolutionized our jobs. Our main focus changed from standard management to developing students. Focusing on student development gives depth, meaning, and purpose to jobs. The SDOs provide a language in which to easily talk to students about their development on the job and provide a framework for goals. Students are able to see their progress and get more out of the work they do."

Another lesson from the pilot was how important it was to educate and train supervisors on why to include the student

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF LEARNING WITHIN THE STUDENT DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES

Knows personal strengths and talents and acknowledges their shortcomings

"With the upbeat atmosphere working with Student Unions and Activities, I am able to project an optimistic attitude when completing projects and taking on new tasks."

Makes appropriate decisions on behavior and accepts the consequences of actions

"Working at SUA has helped me become a much more independent and accountable student by requiring me to do many important tasks with little to no supervision. These tasks are a vital part of communication with the customer and ensuring an efficient outcome, and as a result have made me a more accountable student as well as more professional for any future employment."

Manages energy and is able to achieve specific outcomes

"Setting goals in the workplace has given me the skill to measure my abilities as well as the talent to adapt and overcome the obstacles that prevent me from completing my goals."

Recovers and learns from setbacks or disappointments

"My job has taught me a lot about flexibility and openness. I am better able to handle changes or unclear circumstances by working through them and adapting. This new go-with-the-flow mentality has also helped me better handle the frustrations and disappointments that sometimes arose."

Knows when to collaborate or seek help; and when to act on own

"Working with SUA has made me appreciate the value of teamwork and cooperation more than ever. It's nice knowing that someone's got your back, but it also taught me how important holding my end of that agreement is. No matter how busy I can get, you have to be flexible enough to work together and get everything done."

Demonstrates the ability to perform in complicated environments where clear answers or standard operating procedures are absent

"Being an administrative assistant has helped me develop tolerance of ambiguity. In particular, sharing a desk with three other people forced us to get creative about how we can organize and communicate with one another to help our office still."

Recognizes the value of interacting with individuals with backgrounds and perspectives different from own

"Through working for the student activities office and being constituted by a diverse array of student groups, I have developed a deeper appreciation of differences as I continually find myself seeking out new ideas through the plethora of varied knowledge that exists in each student's unique experiences."

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT PROCESS:

Department Orientation for Student Employees

Explain Student Development Outcomes program

Supervisor meeting with student employees

Review Job descriptions and performance criteria, both based on student development outcomes

MID-YEAR

Supervisor meets informally with student employees

END OF YEAR

All student employees complete assessment tool

Supervisors meet and discuss performance

development outcomes as part of the job description. Initially supervisors thought more work was being added to their plates and that they wouldn't have time for the conversations with their students. However, once they started the program, supervisors found the discussions valuable.

In 2005, the vice provost and Student Unions & Activities staff were asked to present the program information at a Board of Regents meeting and were given many accolades. Some of the regents were current or former employers or CEOs and felt the program was necessary to developing specific skill sets so students would be prepared to join the workforce. One regent commented that many students leave the university with knowledge regarding leadership skills, but have no idea how to supervise or manage people, solve problems, nor work in the "gray areas" that are practical aspects of most jobs.

Based on feedback from the pilot, the program was expanded to student employees in entry-level positions in 2005-06 (about 160) and to all 250 student employees with the unions in 2006-07.

Until 2007, supervisors conducted student job performance reviews in addition to the outcomes process. At that time, Student Unions & Activities staff decided that the two separate processes, to assess outcomes development and to assess job performance, should be one and the same. A new tool was developed, the Performance & Development Process, dubbed the PDP internally. The Performance & Development Process incorporated the student development outcomes into the criteria upon which student job performance was assessed and thus mirrored the student job descriptions.

In 2011, student managers in the retail area were trained and began facilitating the Performance & Development Process with

student employees. Because that area is the department's largest at 120 student employees, this change further alleviated the problem of staff time allocated to the process and provided further opportunities for Student development.

Lindsay Hendricks, a current senior student manager of the information desk, said: "Getting to work with PDPs and the SDO process has made me more aware of my individual growth as a Student employee. I am constantly thinking about how aspects of my position apply to each one of the SDOs or multiple at the same time. Being apart of the PDP review process has definitely been the most challenging part of being a student manager because not only do you have to review everything a student has done over the semester and discuss their strengths and mistakes, you also have to come up with a plan with the student on how they can improve in the upcoming semesters. It can be difficult to come up with step-by-step attainable goals, but the more I work on it with other students, the better I get at doing it for myself. Being a part of the PDPs has really helped me improve my professionalism and supervisory skills."

Measuring Student Development

Since 2004, Student Unions & Activities has worked with the Office of Measurement Services on campus to measure students' progress on the development outcomes, which are: Responsibility and Accountability, Independence and Interdependence, Goal Orientation, Self-Awareness, Resilience, Appreciation of Differences, and Tolerance of Ambiguity. Ten years of data clearly show the impact the program has on students.

At the end of each fiscal year, Student Unions & Activities administers an end-of-year survey. The data are summarized, shared with staff and utilized to

There was a significant positive difference on all seven factors comparing Student Unions & Activities students to the general student body. It was also interesting to note that Appreciation of Differences was ranked as having the most positive impact of the seven outcomes for both groups (72.1% of all students, 90.3% for SUA students). That is an item that warrants further study and resonates with higher education's role in developing students to work in the current global economy.

In addition to the student development outcomes, in 2013-14, student employees indicated that working at Student Unions & Activities has had a positive impact on their career development (88.5%), personal life (87%), and academic performance (63.5%). Most also agreed with the following statements:

- Working at Student Unions & Activities has helped me understand how the skills I have learned can be transferred into other careers (85.4%)
- My on the job tasks allowed me to continuously improve my job skills(80.8%)
- I was provided with enough coaching to develop my skills on the job (89.9%)
- The conversations and meetings I had with my supervisor helped me with my skill development (93.0%)
- I would recommend working at Student Unions & Activities to others (93.4%)

In addition to these data points, alumni and supervisors confirm the program's positive effect on students. Paul Downing, a 2012 graduate who served as a student manager at both Goldy's Gameroom and the Coffman Information Desk, recalled: "Coffman was able to harness my previous leadership skills,

STUDENT DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES RESULTS FROM 2014 COFFMAN SURVEY

STUOENTSWHO INDICATEDTHEIR EXPERIENCE WITH COFFMAN/SUAHAD A POSITIVE IMPACT

	ALL	SUA
Responsibility and Accountability	63.1	82.0
Independence and Interdependence	59.5	79.7
Goal Orientation	67.4	83.7
Self-Awareness	52.7	79.2
Resilience	51.5	76.8
Appreciation of Differences	72.1	90.3
Tolerance of Ambiguity	56.1	81.8

develop them to better adapt in a work environment, and teach me how to use them effectively. As a Student manager, I had the opportunity to get direct experience in reviewing applications, managing colleagues, and creating new initiatives-all skills which are vital to my current position and developed me as a strong Leader in my work place.

"While working with Coffman, I also had the opportunity to work with colleagues and customers of many different races, genders, and cultures. Coffman taught me how to keep an open mind and understand that not everyone learns the same way, and not everyone has the same experiences. This experience is timeless and applies not only to my new work environment, but also to my everyday life."

In addition to development outcomes, alumni report a strong feeling of connection based on their employment at the student union. Felipe Checa, an international student who worked in Coffman until his graduation in 2010, said: "Coffman has a special place in my heart; it's a family, a learning experience, and a journey that helped me adapt to American college life and culture."

Savina Proykova, a 2014 graduate and recipient of a 2014 President's Student Leadership and Service Award, now works in Chicago in graphic and web design. She started working in Coffman at the information desk and went on to be a program board

visual arts chair and to work for Student Union & Activities web team. Proykova said: "The most important thing I took away from my time working for SUA was definitely a mixture of character and professional development skills. The student development outcomes I have certainly come in very handy during interviews and often, in my experience, even impress employers. The outcomes also teach students a lot about themselves through resilience and self-awareness. I've also met quite a few awesome students and staff that I am glad to still call my friends even upon graduating. I've taken away friendships and a better understanding of my goals and strengths."

Andrea Johnke, event services manager, oversees Student employees and said: "Students don't always see the value of the daily tasks that employment involves and what they are learning from those experiences, but if you can show them they are practicing valuable soft skills they can pair with the concrete skills they are learning in their classes, it makes their experience more significant and meaningful."

The longitudinal data on student employees in the department, the comparison to the rest of the university population, and the qualitative insights from program alumni and supervisors collectively confirm that employment offers measurable benefits to the learning process.

What's Next?

Since its inception, departments throughout the university have adopted the Student Unions & Activities program as a framework. It's also been used as a model for other university campuses throughout the United States. Future implications for these student employment programs and their findings include:

- **Retention** - There is support for the positive impact of outside-the-classroom experiences on student satisfaction and retention. Future studies should include the impact of intentionally structured student employment experiences on these factors.
- **Impact on career and success** - Longitudinal studies could connect the impact of student employment in college to career path and success/happiness.

- **Accreditation** - As accreditation becomes more focused on outcomes and employability, a university's student employment program can be an asset.
- **Outsourcing services** - According to *Enhancing Student Learning through College Employment*, as more services are outsourced, some campuses have required bookstores, dining, and retail to use development outcomes for their employees.

At a University of Minnesota Board of Regents committee meeting in October 2014, the university's vice president for human resources used the student development outcomes program to highlight the good work being done in skill development of Student employees. One of the Student Unions & Activities student information desk managers,

Samantha Scheiecker, spoke about her personal experience working with the department and the Student development outcomes. She concluded her remarks by saying: "Working with Student Unions & Activities has allowed me to develop into a superb young professional. When asked what I do I always share that SUA and the university community prides itself on preparing students for professional endeavors. I always strongly suggest working as a student employee for the University of Minnesota."

The learning offered through student employment is an important story to assess and tell. As has been the case at the University of Minnesota, adding structure to the process and evaluating its success can attract the attention unions and activities departments deserve from the campus administration and governing board. !!!

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