

Use of Student Learning Outcomes in Postsecondary Disability Offices

Jean L. Ashmore¹
Ann S. Knettler-Smith²
Sally S. Scott³

Abstract

The expectation for defined student learning and development outcomes has become established in all elements of higher education and is reinforced by external agencies. Within the realm of student services, many different departments link their programs to these outcomes. Student learning and development outcomes, or more simply student learning outcomes (SLOs), are constructs integral to education put forth by a number of professional associations and academics. The SLOs from the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) have been available for many years yet their adoption as part of program review and assessment has varied across institutional co-curricular units. Very little information is available about how disability resource and service (DRS) departments develop and use SLOs. This study reports data from a 2016 survey of Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) members about knowledge and use of SLOs in DRS offices. Data reported suggest limited use of SLOs in DRS when compared to other campus departments. Responses reflected divergent development, understanding, and use of SLOs. Implications for training and resource development for DRS professionals are discussed.

Keywords: Disability services, learning outcomes, student outcomes, member survey, program evaluation

The process of discussing and defining student learning and development outcomes has long been associated with the academic elements of higher education. Regulations from governmental and accrediting bodies typically establish expectations for academic disciplines and professional programs to define anticipated outcomes at the course level and beyond which then constitute core elements of assessment (American Association for Higher Education and Accreditation [AAHEA], 1996; Suskie, 2009). The expansion and use of a learning and development outcomes perspective to co-curricular entities on campus has been gradual and subject to resistance despite thirty years of discussion about assessment in student affairs (Elkins, 2015; Henning & Roberts 2016; Robbins, 2009). Leading professional associations, including the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) and the American College Personnel Association (ACPA), stated in the groundbreaking publication *Learning Reconsidered*, that, “all areas of college engagement provide opportunities for student learning” (NASPA, 2004, p. 20). They further state, “both academic and student affairs administrators

should commit to holding *all* [emphasis added] campus educators accountable for the contributions their learning experiences make to overall student learning outcomes” (p. 28).

Student affairs professional associations have put forth various frameworks of student learning and development outcomes at divisional and departmental levels. These outcomes, for ease of reference, will be referred to as student learning outcomes or SLOs throughout this article. The *Essential Learning Outcomes* from the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU, 2005) presented four domains for structuring SLOs: knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world, intellectual and practical skills, personal and social responsibility, and integrative and applied learning. Similarly, the American College Personnel Association ([ACPA], 1996) introduced six categories of learning outcomes: complex cognitive skills, knowledge acquisition, intrapersonal development, interpersonal development, practice competence, and civic responsibility. Schuh and Upcraft (2001), longstanding scholars in assessment practices in student affairs, endorsed the six

¹ Rice University, Emerita; ² Delaware State University; ³ Association on Higher Education and Disability

ACPA broad categories of outcomes while adding two they believe to be critical: academic achievement and persistence.

As additional professional organizations joined NASPA and ACPA to endorse and provide guidance on use of SLOs, *Learning Reconsidered 2* (Keeling, 2006) was produced. This now seminal publication reflects the endorsement of seven professional organizations and extends the ideas presented in the earlier publication, *Learning Reconsidered* (NASPA, 2004), to report on campus experiences and challenge the field to continue to deepen the examination of student learning. This work clearly establishes that student learning occurs well beyond traditional classroom applications of the term and co-curricular entities such as student affairs have a role to play in identifying and assessing SLOs.

What are Student Learning Outcomes?

Student learning outcomes (SLOs) are statements, typically linked to methods of assessment, that indicate what a student should learn as a result of his or her participation in or interaction with a learning opportunity (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education [CAS], 2015). Developing meaningful learning outcomes requires a strong foundational structure typically achieved by connecting a well-developed mission statement with recognized program components that are the means through which outcomes are assessed. Schuh (2008) emphasized the importance of aligning departmental missions and activities with those of the institution for truly meaningful learning outcome statements and program assessment. To emphasize the importance of curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular education to overall student learning and development, higher education communities must create and nurture integrated practices that allow students to meet SLOs (Robbins, 2014).

The value of learning outcome data is well recognized. While outcomes help students articulate what they are learning, outcomes also help staff to communicate to stakeholders what they are doing and the impact they are having (Henning, 2016). Developing or modifying program elements based on outcome data can lend strength to an appeal for resources. For example, evidence of achieved student learning outcome(s) linked to a dedicated orientation activity can justify continued or expanded funding. In a DRS related example, evidence of achieved practical competence with adaptive equipment is an outcome from a DRS program of training and thus supportive of expanding a program's adaptive equipment resources. SLOs also provide rationale for practices, thus becoming and bolstering evidence-based

practice. Ultimately, using SLOs brings the focus to student learning rather than student satisfaction, a distinct difference identified in *Learning Reconsidered* (NASPA, 2004).

The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education

The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) provides professional standards and guidelines for the development and assessment of programs serving students in higher education. CAS was established in 1979 as a consortium of professional student affairs organizations. Each professional organization appoints a Representative and Alternate Representative to CAS (2015). The Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) has been a member of CAS since 1981. CAS Professional Standards and Guidelines are reviewed and revised on a recurrent basis with input from outside professionals in the respective fields. General standards apply to all functional areas, and specialty standards address specific areas of student services in higher education such as residence life, academic advising, and disability resources and services (CAS, 2015). As of 2016 there were 45 different CAS Standards and Guidelines covering a broad array of programs and services in higher education.

In 2008 CAS adopted a framework of learning and development outcomes. The model includes six broad categories called domains as well as more specific outcomes within each domain called dimensions. The domains are knowledge acquisition, construction, integration and application; cognitive complexity; intrapersonal development; interpersonal competence; humanitarianism and civic engagement; and, practical competence (CAS, 2015). The learning domains and dimensions are incorporated uniformly into the Program section of all CAS functional area standards. With the inclusion of learning and development outcomes in all standards, CAS promulgates the expectation that developing and assessing SLOs is integral to program structure and review.

Applying this expectation to the area of DRS, however, presents some inherent challenges. For example, most DRS offices would describe their role as one of supporting and assuring access on campus. Promoting an environment that does not discriminate against individuals with disabilities is key to compliance with federal laws. How does a learning outcomes perspective fit with this campus mandate? Do the typical tasks of reviewing disability documentation, meeting with students to discuss barriers and accommodations, and facilitating assistive technology and services promote student learning?

The CAS Disability Resources and Services Standards and Guidelines are a tool for SLO creation and assessment in the area of disability resources. They clearly outline the expectation that, similar to every other service area in higher education, DRS professionals need to understand and address the means through which disability-related services and professional roles contribute to students' transformative educational experiences. Under the CAS model, all service areas need to develop and assess SLOs in order to provide a cohesive means of defining and measuring the impact of the given service area for students.

Increased member requests to AHEAD for training, workshops, and support shed light on expectations that SLOs and program assessment be implemented routinely. A search for disability resource specific research or reports on these topics revealed a void in this vital area of professional competence. Moreover, professional presentations at AHEAD conferences and other venues indicated DRS professionals had considerable interest in these topics and a need to know more.

To learn about current understanding and use of SLOs in disability resource offices, the authors conducted a survey of AHEAD members in the spring of 2016. The purpose of the study was to gather baseline data and learn more about how AHEAD members are experiencing and responding to national initiatives promoting the use of SLOs as part of institutional assessment activities. The main questions guiding this study included: (1) Are DRS offices using SLOs? (2) How are SLOs being developed in DRS offices? (3) What are examples of SLOs developed by DRS offices? (4) What professional development or training do AHEAD members need to respond to this form of institutional assessment?

Methods

Participants

Members of AHEAD were the target participants of this study. AHEAD is the "premiere professional association committed to full participation of persons with disabilities in postsecondary education" (AHEAD, 2017, para. 1). A recent survey of AHEAD members found that 92% are full time employees and 94% work in a disability resource office in a postsecondary educational setting (AHEAD, 2016).

Instrument Development

Due to the specific nature of the questions under study, there were no existing instruments that met the needs of the current research. The principal author drafted an initial series of questions based on

extensive experience interacting with the AHEAD membership through professional conference presentations and technical assistance on the topic of CAS Standards and SLOs. The research team developed the questions into a survey format consisting of multiple choice and open response items. A panel of five professionals with extensive experience in disability resources, professional development, and program assessment reviewed the initial survey instrument. Specific feedback was requested in regards to the clarity, formatting, and content of survey items. As a result of this feedback, some response options were further refined, directions were clarified, and a brief list defining key acronyms were added to the introduction to the survey. The survey was then piloted with three professionals to gather additional information about time required for completing the survey and to receive any additional suggestions for improving the instrument.

The final survey instrument consisted of five parts. Part 1 requested information about the respondent's institution and disability resource department. The remaining four parts consisted of a total of 20 questions that paralleled the research questions presented above. Part 2, familiarity with SLOs and program standards; Part 3, use and development of SLOs on campus; Part 4, examples of SLOs used in DRS departments; and Part 5, professional development and training needs.

Procedures

The AHEAD member email distribution list was used to reach out to all members and invite them to participate in the study. The email invitation contained information that advised potential participants of the nature of the study and included a link to the online survey instrument. A follow-up email was sent two weeks after initial contact to encourage participation.

Survey Gizmo, an online survey software tool, hosted the survey. AHEAD had previously vetted this survey tool and found it to be an accessible platform compatible with use of a variety of assistive technologies. Anticipating the access needs of the target participants was an essential component of supporting response rate and working in alignment with AHEAD's mission. Participants had access to the survey for a three-week period. Respondents replied anonymously unless they chose to provide their name and contact information as an indication they were interested in providing the researchers with more information.

Analysis

The researchers used Survey Gizmo to clean the data once the survey was closed. Complete responses, defined by Survey Gizmo as respondents who reached the final page of the instrument, were then examined. Basic descriptive statistics were run for each of the survey items including frequency counts, as well as mean and median ratings. Open ended response items for common themes were reviewed.

Results

Of the 2,916 AHEAD members, 472 responded to the survey. This reflects an approximately 16% participation rate. Respondents to the survey reported working at a variety of types of institutions of higher education. Of the 286 participants who reported on their employment settings, the large majority of respondents indicated they worked at a four-year institution. Four-year public (36.7%, $n=105$) and four-year private (35%, $n=100$) campuses were equally represented. Two-year public institutions were indicated by 28% ($n=80$) of respondents, and one participant (.3%) worked at a two-year private campus. Campus size ranged from student populations of 600 to 78,000 ($M=16,960$; $Mdn=38,970$; $mode=3,000$).

DRS offices also reflected a variety of settings. Participants reported numbers of students with disabilities registered with their campus DRS office ranging from as few as 15, to as many as 3,000 ($M=655$; $Mdn=1,492$; $mode=350$). The number of staff in the DRS office, including full- and part-time employees, ranged from 1 to 90 ($M=5$; $Mdn=44$; $mode=1$). Over half of respondents indicated their DRS office was administratively housed within Student Affairs/Student Life (55.5%, $n=157$). Other frequent reporting lines included Academic Affairs (23.7%, $n=67$), Student and Academic Services (5%, $n=16$), Diversity and Equity (3.2%, $n=9$), and Counseling and Health Services (3.2%, $n=9$).

Familiarity with Student Learning Outcomes

Respondents to the survey reported that they were familiar with SLOs. Ninety-three percent ($n=260$) indicated they were “somewhat or very familiar” with this concept. Far fewer respondents indicated they were knowledgeable about the CAS Disability Resources and Services Standards and Guidelines, with 31% ($n=88$) reporting very limited knowledge. A slightly greater number of respondents were “very familiar or somewhat aware” of AHEAD Program Standards (78%, $n=217$).

When asked if SLOs were being used in the respondent’s DRS office, only 28% ($n=78$) responded

affirmatively. Among the 72% of respondents who said they were not currently using SLOs, 6% ($n=17$) indicated they had used SLOs in the DRS office in the past. While numbers are quite small, it is intriguing to note that of the campuses currently using SLOs in their DRS offices, almost half (49%, $n=38$) were public, four-year institutions. Private four-year institutions (27%, $n=21$) and private two-year institutions (23%, $n=18$) in this small sample report using SLOs much less frequently. In contrast to the infrequent use of SLOs in DRS offices, 72% ($n=200$) of respondents reported that SLOs are used by other departments on their campus.

Development of Student Learning Outcomes

Campuses that currently use SLOs in the DRS office indicated several factors leading to their use. The most common reason for adoption of SLOs was reported to be compliance with institution or division-wide requirements for their use (66%, $n=57$). Other influential factors included accreditation requirements (35%, $n=30$), departmental initiatives (30%, $n=26$), and program reviews using the CAS standards (19%, $n=16$) (see Figure 1).

When asked about how disability resource office SLOs were developed, respondents reported a variety of approaches (see Figure 2). The most frequently reported approach was that SLOs are established by the institution (38.5%, $n=35$). Other approaches included using the SLO structure in the CAS standards (17.6%, $n=16$) and developing SLOs for a specific program component (17.6%, $n=16$). Program components identified by respondents included such areas as academic coaching, transition programs, and self-advocacy development. Over a quarter of the respondents (26.4%, $n=24$) provided “other” approaches to SLO development. Frequent responses identified development as department driven, basing SLOs on DRS mission, and SLOs linking with larger division or campus priorities.

SLOs were most frequently reported as being developed by the department director (42.5%, $n=37$). Almost one third of respondents (28.7%, $n=25$) indicated departmental committees develop SLOs, with committees comprised of disability resource staff, ADA advisory group members, or various members from Student Affairs teams, for example. Other frequent responses included a DRS staff member or a university administrator such as a dean, vice president, or representative from the office of institutional effectiveness/research as the individual who developed SLOs.

Use of Student Learning Outcomes

The majority of respondents using SLOs reported that they currently assess SLOs within the disability resource office (55%, $n=52$) or have used and assessed SLOs in the past (9%, $n=9$). Many respondents noted that their SLOs were currently in development. Most respondents indicated they assess SLOs at a specific time of the academic year (42.5%, $n=31$) such as the end of each semester or annually. Others use the SLOs and assess them continuously (23.3%, $n=17$) such as when the SLOs are tied to programs, workshops, or training modules that are provided. Less frequently, respondents indicated the SLOs are used and assessed only during periodic program reviews (12.3%, $n=9$).

The SLOs serve various purposes for disability resource offices (see Figure 3). Most frequently, respondents reported using SLOs for assessment of program goals (66.3%, $n=55$), effectiveness of departmental components (42.2%, $n=35$), and compliance with accreditation requirements (39.8%, $n=33$). However, respondents also described a variety of other ways they have found SLOs useful. Several noted their usefulness in advocating for resources or funding. One respondent described SLOs as a means of assessing faculty learning about inclusive instruction. Another respondent noted, "The SLO assessment process has provided important guidance toward improving the instruction we provide to our students in the areas of: access to curricular and co-curricular programs, maintaining health, utilizing technology, developing self-awareness, and projecting self-confidence."

Given the different approaches to development of SLOs, written by different professionals on campus, and serving different assessment purposes, it is not surprising that the examples of SLOs provided by survey respondents varied extensively in scope and clarity. For example, one respondent's SLO focused on understanding department processes: "As a result of participating in the accommodation conference, students will demonstrate the ability to describe the process involved in requesting disability accommodations." Another respondent provided an SLO that applied to all individuals attending a program: "By attending Ability Awareness Week, students will be able to identify three environmental barriers encountered by students with disabilities." A third respondent provided an example with three different outcomes identified: "Students will be able to explain/articulate how to secure specific accommodations, how to communicate with faculty, and where to find specific services/supports on campus."

AHEAD members almost unanimously (97%, $n=271$) indicated that professional resources on SLOs are needed. Online trainings and face-to-face workshops and conferences were the most highly requested format for training options.

Discussion

The findings of this study describe practices of DRS offices and their use of SLOs. Respondents reported they have knowledge of SLOs and are aware their peers in departments across campus are using SLOs as an aspect of program evaluation. Yet, DRS professionals state they have limited knowledge of the CAS Standards, and very few use SLOs as an aspect of program evaluation.

Among those respondents reporting use of SLOs, the definition and understanding of learning outcomes vary considerably. Many outcome statements from the survey refer to program results such as offering educational activities rather than individual learning outcomes. Some identify completion numbers such as the percentage of students who recognize the importance of effective communication as a result of using disability services as evidence of achieving learning outcomes. Given this wide variation, it is evident there is limited consistency in the use and definition of SLOs among respondents.

Development of SLOs occurs in different ways on different campuses but is most often reported as being in response to expectations from within the institution or from accrediting agencies. While commonly developed by a disability department's director at the behest of the institution, survey results suggest that limited guidance is provided. This reactive use of SLOs mirrors the experiences of other areas of student services (Elkins, 2015). The inconsistencies in SLOs used by respondents to this survey reveal limited understanding of the CAS adopted domains and dimensions of student learning and development, thus suggesting an area where professional development would be extremely beneficial.

To better understand the dynamics influencing the limited use of SLOs, it is perhaps instructive to consider the field of disability services. Professionals enter the field from a wide array of backgrounds including psychology, education, social work, and counseling among others (AHEAD, 2016). The lack of advanced degree programs with a focus on postsecondary disability issues and services could be posited as a contributing factor. Limited graduate coursework and professional experience that incorporates program and student learning outcomes are likely contributors to a low level of SLO use in DRS assessment prac-

tices. There may even be a philosophical resistance to the suggestion that DRS professionals are conduits for student learning and development. Some might argue that the role of DRS offices is to promote an inclusive campus environment, not teach students. Additionally, does identifying and assessing SLOs such as increasing student self-advocacy skills reinforce negative “other” or “special” associations with disability? These are important questions for the field to continue to discuss and address while keeping in mind Schuh’s (2008) guidance that, “practitioners delivering support services to students cannot afford to ignore, obfuscate, or refuse to be engaged in assessment activities” (p. 358).

While survey results indicate the majority of programs using SLOs do assess them at particular intervals, the preponderance of program review by DRS units is not known. Anecdotal information suggests comprehensive program review, with or without use of SLOs, is not routine in many DRS departments. Higher education institutions often devote time and resources to assessment of programs and services in a reactive fashion, typically on a periodic basis and in preparation for an accreditation evaluation. The data in this study suggest that assessment is approached similarly in disability resources. This practice may miss the mark in truly assessing program effectiveness when student learning and development is not the motivating force. Periodic assessment does not allow for consistent improvement or higher level curiosity about how, what, when, where, and why students learn (Maki, 2002). In addition to the proactive, regular creation and assessment of SLOs, liberal education by nature should be integrative (Robbins, 2014). Incorporating SLOs into program design and identifying what students will learn from a program component leads directly to the means for measuring and assessing program effectiveness. As stated by Bresciani, Zelna, and Anderson (2004) outcomes must be meaningful, manageable, and measurable.

Student learning outcomes can be addressed at various levels across the institution. Maki (2002) presented a graphic on the interrelatedness of outcomes starting from institutional-level outcomes encircling program-level outcomes encircling course-based and individual service-based outcomes. From a values perspective and applicable to use of SLOs, Schuh (2008) stated, “What is important...is that institutions behave in ways that are consistent with what they indicate is important; that is, their enacted behavior must be aligned with their espoused behavior” (p. 359). These practices must be owned and embraced by faculty and staff alike, including disability resource professionals.

Implications for Practice

The authors suggest SLOs be thought of on a continuum. Some pertain to understanding and use of processes and services provided by the DRS office whereas others can be written such that they are developmental with periodic assessment reflecting a student’s development during their time at the institution. Both types of SLOs then become sources of feedback for staff with an expectation that the data will be used for continuous program improvement. Outcome data, itself, is a tool with which to discuss learning as a process with students reinforcing personal development and continual learning (Maki, 2010).

DRS units are often isolated and sometimes insular for reasons mainly focused on their unique responsibilities, especially when it comes to confidential services and legal compliance. However, the CAS standards for DRS indicate that institutional duties to advise, consult, and collaborate in creating an inclusive and accessible educational environment for students who experience disability is as or more important than provision of individual student services (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2015). Institutional missions and values provide frameworks from which individual service units address their own missions with collaboration implicit or stated. Additionally, institutionally adopted SLOs can become lenses through which different populations of students’ experience and development can be viewed. Data from global outcomes can therefore be very informing for population-specific service units such as disability resources. Beno (2004) presented a strong argument for learning outcome work at an institutional level that can inform departmental programs with their own respective learning outcomes. An example of an institutional value that could very directly shape learning outcomes within departments would be the value of social justice. A corresponding SLO could be stated as, *students will understand diverse philosophies and cultures within and across societies* (Hawks, 2007). A DRS SLO, then, that is written to capture student understanding/value of social justice as evidenced by behavior could be, *students identify physical or attitudinal barriers in the institutional environment through verbal report or use of an online tool*.

Collaboration with colleagues is an important mission of DRS units. With the emergence of the academic discipline of Disability Studies, opportunities are emerging where SLOs may be mutually endorsed and shaped. An example of that would be the development of disability identity. A plausible learning outcome focusing on disability identity could be whether a student would endorse the

following: *as a result of interaction with Disability Services/Studies I think differently about disability*. Note that this is not a positive or negative qualifying statement, implying that a student's thinking could be affected in either direction.

The authors posit that disability resource professionals should not consider assessment due to pressure from accreditation agencies a process with a discrete end point. Adopting an SLO perspective along with regular program review can have ongoing, beneficial results for the DRS program. Erwin (1991) described reaction to assessment as occurring in five stages: "discovery, questioning, resistance, participation, and commitment" (p. 26). Using these five stages as a guide in comparison with the results of this study, the field of disability resources can be seen in almost all aspects of the spectrum. Based on the volume and variety of response the authors have received when offering professional development opportunities centered around learning outcomes, assessment, and the CAS standards, it is apparent some DS professionals are moving through discovery toward questioning by attending workshops and beginning to raise questions about the necessity, or lack thereof, of assessment in their practice. Others are being spurred by accreditation standards and individual institution requirements to begin the reactive participation stage. While few in number, there are also disability resource professionals in the proactive commitment stage who view assessment as independently valuable and who are working to regularly incorporate the practice, using resulting data to guide their work. An outcome of embracing assessment, can be realization that, "evaluation and assessment provides real data on which to base innovations, justifications, and requests, and, as a result, may place an institution in a favorable position with external entities" (Robbins, 2009, p. 266). The results of this survey provide additional insight into the status of the progression of disability resources within the arena of assessment, particularly the use of SLOs.

Limitations

There are limitations of the study that need to be considered in using and applying the findings. The target population for this work was focused on AHEAD members. While AHEAD is the largest professional organization comprised of individuals working in DRS offices, the experiences and perspectives expressed by these respondents may not be reflective of disability resource professionals overall. Among the population of AHEAD members, there was a fairly small response rate. While nonprofit organizations such as AHEAD face inherent challenges

in survey response rates (Moss, Killam, Skillman, & Williams, 2014) the data presented are valuable for their descriptive use in exploring a relatively new aspect of disability resource work. The low response rate restricted the amount of additional data analysis that would result in meaningful findings and limited the ability to generalize the findings as reflective of the membership overall.

Conclusion

The survey on knowledge and use of SLOs in disability resource offices revealed a number of important results with implications for professional development and further research. Survey results and strong member response to professional development opportunities underscore interest in knowing about and using SLOs yet shows limited current use of outcomes that are consistent with guidelines put forth by CAS or other organizations. This inconsistency has the potential to put DRS units out of step with other student affairs units who are developing outcome statements aligned with nationally recognized definitions of SLOs thus creating potential vulnerability during internal or external reviews and accreditation. Collaborating with other institutional departments as review partners can broaden understanding and use of an outcomes perspective by disability resource professionals. NACADA, the professional association for academic advisors, has long promoted use of SLOs and program assessment thereby making advising staff potential mentors and partners for disability resource professionals as they strive to adopt learning outcomes along with program assessment and review.

The paucity of literature on SLOs and program assessment in the field of disability resources should serve as a call for action. Professionals in this field, especially given their varied educational and professional backgrounds, would benefit from resources and research on program review, assessment, and evaluation. Henning and Roberts (2016) astutely observed that fears of change, failure, and punishment can contribute to staff resistance to developing and using an SLO perspective. These factors need to be taken into consideration as the field develops professional training and workshops on SLOs, learning outcome foundations, and strategies for proactive utilization.

When taken broadly, SLOs are but one element of comprehensive assessment. Elkins (2015) stated that to prevent our being deemed unnecessary, or at the least misunderstood in our mission, "We can begin by claiming our responsibility for student learning, building relationships with faculty, and taking a 'just-do-it' attitude toward assessment of student learning"

(p. 46). Moving from reactive to proactive assessment further affords access to a continuum of data useful in not only daily work but also for shaping a department's strategic mission and vision. Through use of comprehensive data, including achievement of identified learning outcomes, the disability resource department fulfills its duty to be a good steward of time, resources, and influence. Recognition for needed professional development and departmental resources to enhance comprehensive and consistent assessment practices in DRS is underscored by this study. ACPA (1996) has brought attention to the role of professional associations in preparing student affairs staff in general to focus on student learning. With the growing attention to this arena in the field of disability resources, AHEAD, as the premier association for disability resource professionals, is well situated to inform and assist its members in this important area.

Proactive use of a SLO perspective, rather than reactive in response to external pressures, can be difficult to adopt yet extremely beneficial to students, staff, collegial partners, and administrators. As Henning stated, "defining outcomes provides staff a road map to structuring programs and services as well as determining appropriate assessment methods" (2016, p. 26). Data drives decisions at all levels, and when the disability professional has a command of assessment data including that from meaningful, manageable, and measurable SLOs his or her voice is well heard.

References

- American Association for Higher Education and Accreditation. (1996). 9 principles of good practice for assessing student learning. *AAAHE Assessment Forum*.
- American Association of Colleges and Universities. (2005). *Essential learning outcomes*. Retrieved from <http://www.aacu.org/leap/essential-learning-outcomes>
- American College Personnel Association. (1996). *The student learning imperative: Implications for student affairs*. Retrieved from <http://www.myacpa.org/sites/default/files/ACPA%27s%20Student%20Learning%20Imperative.pdf>
- Association on Higher Education and Disability. (2016). *The 2016 biennial AHEAD survey of disability resource professionals in higher education*. Huntersville, NC: The Association on Higher Education and Disability.
- Association on Higher Education and Disability. (2017). *About AHEAD*. Retrieved from <https://www.ahead.org/about>
- Beno, B. A. (2004). The role of student learning outcomes in accreditation quality review. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 126, 65-72.
- Bresciani, M., Zelna, C., & Anderson, J. (2004). *Assessing student development and learning: A handbook for practitioners*. Washington, DC: NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education.
- Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education. (2015). *CAS professional standards for higher education* (9th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.
- Elkins, B. (2015). Looking back and ahead: What we must learn from 30 years of student affairs assessment. *New Directions for Student Services*, 151, 39-48.
- Erwin, T. D. (1991). *Assessing student learning and development: A guide to the principles, goals and methods of determining college outcomes*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Hawks, S. (Ed.). (2007, May). *Outcomes of undergraduate education at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities*. Retrieved from <http://academic.umn.edu/provost/teaching/Uslo07.pdf>
- Henning, G., & Roberts, D. (2016). *Student affairs assessment: Theory to practice*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.
- Keeling, R. P. (Ed.) (2006). *Learning reconsidered 2: Implementing a campus-wide focus on the student experience*. American College Personnel Association, Association of College and University Housing Officers-International, Association of College Unions-International, National Academic Advising Association, National Association for College Activities, National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association.
- Maki, P. L. (2002). Developing an assessment plan to learn about student learning. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 28(1-2), 8-13.
- Maki, P. L. (2010). *Assessing for learning: Building a sustainable commitment across the institution*. American Association for Higher Education. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.
- Moss, S., Killam, C., Skillman, K., & Williams, B. (2014). *Research and publications policies and procedures*. Washington, DC: Association Management Press.
- Robbins, R. (2009). Evaluation and assessment in career advising. In K. Hughey, D. Burton Nelson, J. Damminger, & E. McCalla-Wriggins (Eds.), *Handbook of career advising* (pp. 266-92). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- Robbins, R. (2014). AAC&U's integrative liberal learning and the CAS Standards: Advising for a 21st century liberal education. *NACADA Journal*, 34(2), 26-31.
- Schuh, J. H. (2008). Assessing student learning. In V. Gordon, W. Habley, & T. Grites (Eds.), *Academic advising: A comprehensive handbook* (pp. 356-368). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Schuh, J. H., & Upcraft, M. L. (2001). *Assessment practice in student affairs: An applications manual*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Suskie, L. (2009). *Assessing student learning: A common sense guide*. (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- is currently pursuing a Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership in Higher Education from Delaware State University.
- Sally S. Scott, Ph.D., is Senior Research Associate for the Association on Higher Education and Disability and the National Center on College Students with Disabilities. Her experience includes working as director of disability resources and faculty member on multiple campuses including the University of Georgia, the University of Connecticut, and Longwood University. She is former editor of the Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability, and has published and presented extensively on topics related to Universal Design and postsecondary disability program development. She currently leads AHEAD's initiative to promote the use of evidence-based practices and research in the field of postsecondary disability.

About the Authors

Jean Ashmore received her B.S. Degree in Psychology from the University of California Los Angeles and her M.S. Degree in Counseling with concentrations in Rehabilitation and School Counseling from California State University, Los Angeles. Ashmore is Disability Director Emerita from Rice University where she began the department of Disability Support Services and taught Special Education in the Department of Education. A past president of both AHEAD and AHEAD in Texas, and a long term member of the AHEAD Board of Directors, she is a representative for AHEAD to the Council for Advancement of Standards in Higher Education. Ashmore is an independent disability consultant interested in program review, use of standards in disability services and other areas of higher education, student learning, and inclusive education and opportunity. She can be reached by email at: jean@ahead.org.

Ann Knettler-Smith is the Coordinator of Student Accessibility Services (SAS) at Delaware State University. A member of the Association for Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD), Ann currently serves on the Standing Committee for Professional Development and represents the Association as a member of the Council of Representatives for the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS). She has been in the Disability Services field for over 10 years and is an experienced presenter, and educator. Her passions include student empowerment, education, online accessibility, fostering inclusion and collaboration, the college to career transition for students with disabilities, and promoting a campus culture that embraces disability as another aspect of diversity. Ann received a Masters of Arts in Counseling in Higher Education with an emphasis in Mental Health from the University of Delaware and

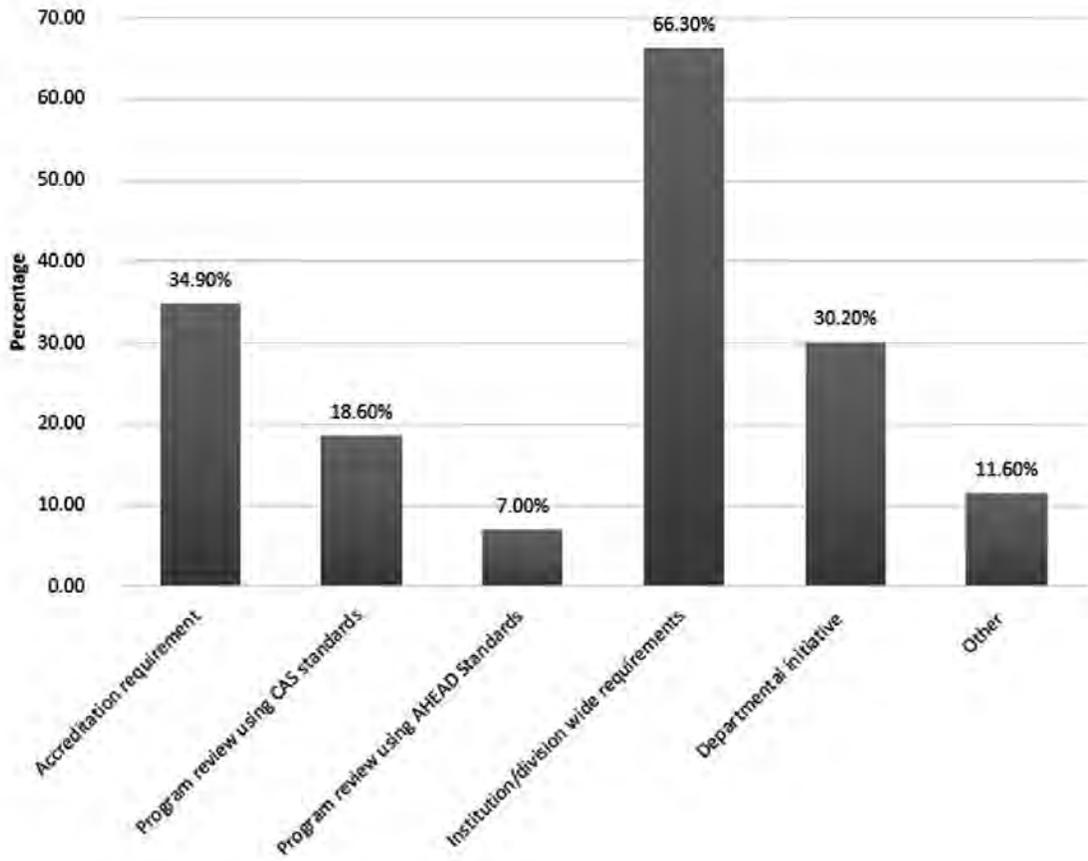


Figure 1. What Prompted Disability Resource Use of Student Learning Outcomes? Respondents could indicate more than one response.

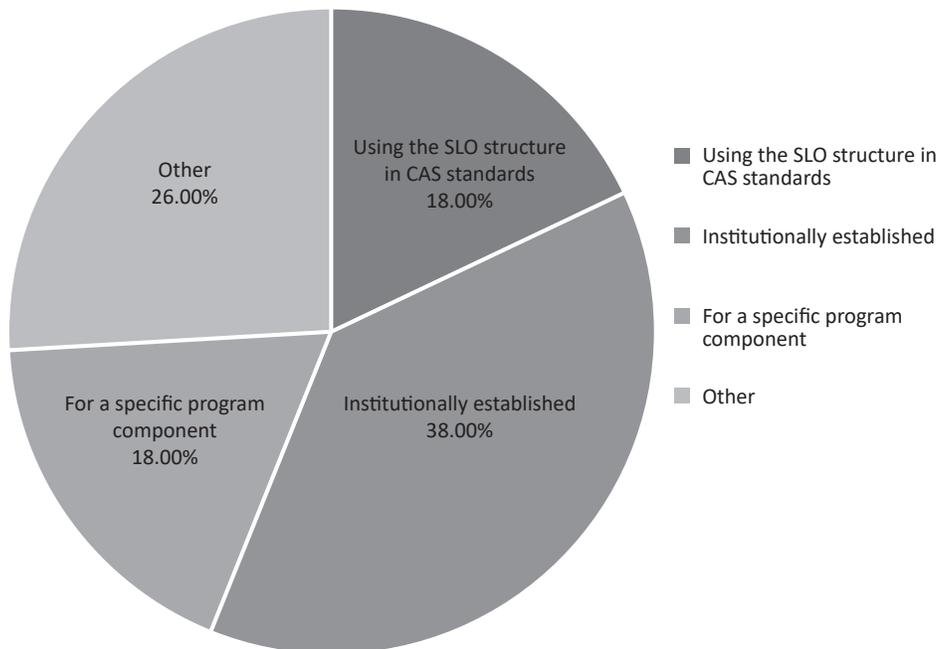


Figure 2. How were Disability Resource Office Student Learning Outcomes Developed?

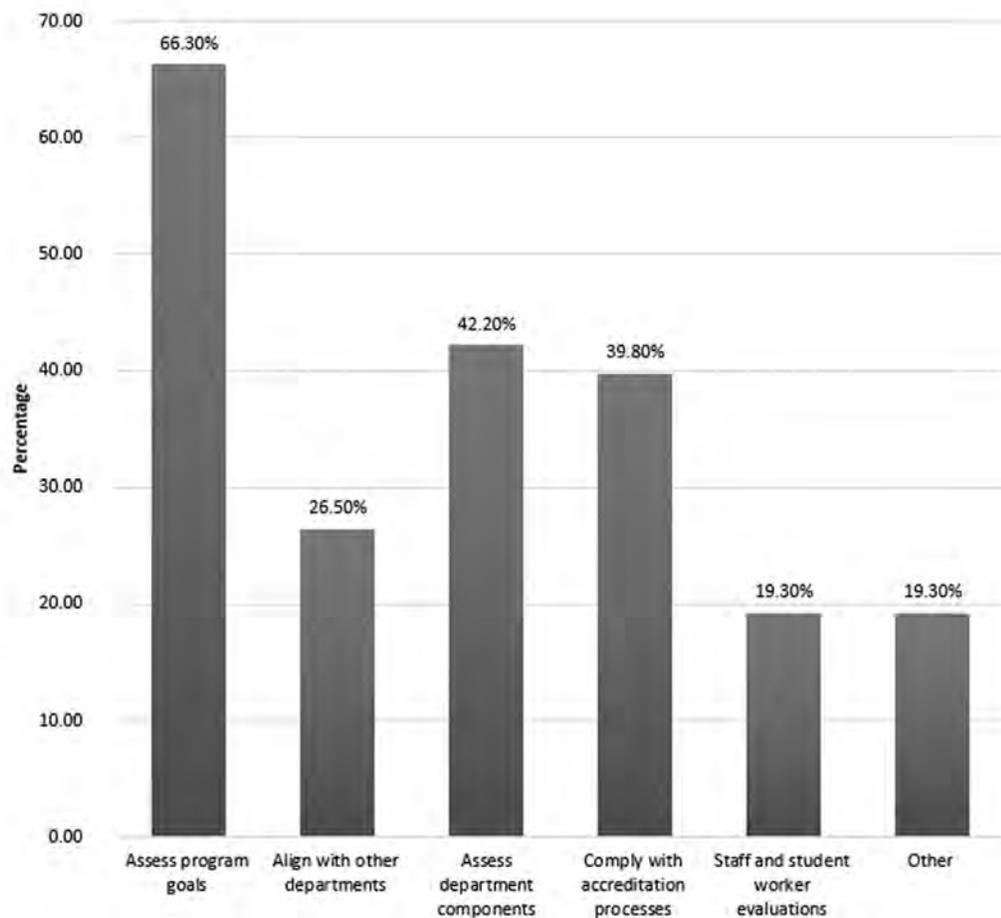


Figure 3. What Purpose do SLOs Serve for the Disability Resource Department? Respondents could indicate more than one response.