JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

Co-Curricular & Extra-Curricular Learning
Definitions & Assessment

Understanding the effects of co-curricular learning and assessment on student engagement, achievement, and success warrants a review of the literature to establish a well-articulated definition and tenets of the term. Co-curricular activities were preceded by another concept, the extra-curricular experience and activities that described student learning outside the classroom. In many instances, both terms have been used interchangeably even though they define and describe different experiences. In this document, we review the literature for definitions and application of both terms to establish definitions for co-curricular and extra-curricular learning from a JHU perspective, and to determine assessment best practices.

Definitions in the Literature

According to Suskie (2015), the earlier mention of extra-curricular activities referred to experiences outside the curriculum. Such activities were often conducted by divisions such as student services and athletics without consultation with faculty or academic divisions. Suskie (2015) adds that out of classroom experiences are more effective when integrated in academic experiences. It is well documented that these types of experiences help students achieve meaningful outcomes when they are connected to and derive from their academic studies (Kolb, 1984; Kuh, 2008; Stirling & Kerr, 2015; Suskie, 2015; 2018). Co-curricular learning and engagement are rooted in a well-established theoretical framework drawing on the works of Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory and Kuh's (2008) high impact practices applying Kolb's theory (Stirling & Kerr, 2015).

To further clarify the meaning of co-curricular activities and to differentiate it from extra-curricular, Bartkus et. al. (2012) conducted a review of the literature to better understand and articulate the definitions. Most often, reference to either term was more a description of the activity rather than a definition of the term. They argue that the lack of a formal definition for either term, extra-curricular and co-curricular limits researchers' ability to conduct meaningful studies to understand impact of these types of activities on student engagement and learning. To better classify the terms, they analyzed the meanings of *extra* vs. *co*. "Extra" in extra-curricular means it is in addition to or outside the curriculum. While "co" in co-curricular means it is in conjunction with and aligned with the curriculum. Therefore, extra-curricular activities can be either academic or non-academic, are outside the normal classroom, and are not part of the curriculum, may or may not be assessed, and are optional (Bartkus, et. al., 2012, p. 698). Consequently, co-curricular activities are aligned with the student's major or divisional goals and objectives, are outside of the classroom, they enhance the curriculum, are evaluated and assessed, and are required (Bartkus, et. al., 2012, p. 699). Subsequently, an activity can be extra-curricular or co-curricular depending on the student's area of study and interests. For example, if a business major enrolls in an activity to learn how to play the guitar as a hobby, then the activity is extra-curricular, since it is not related to the student's studies and it is not linked to any learning objectives within the program. However, the same activity can be co-curricular if a student is majoring in music and playing the guitar can be linked to learning objectives as defined by the student's major or divisional outcomes and must be assessed in this case. Some sources differ in their agreement on whether co-curricular activities are required or voluntary. Sterling and Kerr (2015) cite sources that define co-curricular learning as voluntary and not required (Great School Partnership, 2013), while others refer to these activities as required (Bartkus, et. al., 2012). Nonetheless, all cited sources agree that co-curricular activities are aligned with the curriculum and learning objectives and are designed to enhance the student experience (Kuh, 2001; Beltman & Schaeben, 2012; Elias & Drea, 2013; Foubert & Graiger, 2006). Kuh (2013) asserts the

interrelations between curricular and co-curricular experiences and how important they are to enhance the student experience and development. To ensure that activities and experiences are meaningful, one must align them to clear learning objectives, and shift the emphasis to learning and not overemphasize the activity.

Theoretical Framework

Co-curricular learning is rooted in Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory. Kolb stresses that for experiences to be effective, one must be purposeful in connecting the experiential activity to curricular learning and linking the experiences to authentic real-world applications (Sterling & Kerr, 2015; Moore, 2010). Additionally, Kuh's (2008) application of Kolb's *Experiential Learning Cycle* in creating high-impact experiences, emphasizes that activities should be designed to teach students to reflect on concrete experiences, integrate all connections experienced, curricular, and co-curricular, and apply learned experiences in a variety of settings (Kuh, 2001; 2003; 2008; Sterling & Kerr, 2015). Kuh (2013) further accentuates the interdependence of curricular and co-curricular learning as a crucial part in the student's holistic development and well-being. Considering Kolb's theory and its application through Kuh's High Impact practices model, supports the symbiosis between curricular and co-curricular offerings as part of a learning process where additional experiences could be transformative (Evans, et.al, 2010; Kolb, 1984; Boyatzis & Mainemelis, 2001). However, these co-curricular experiences need to be excellent and tailored to the student's needs. To achieve this goal these experiences should be well-focused and have clear and measurable learning objectives (Suskie, 2015).

Definition @ JHU

Given the variability in expectations of what constitutes a co-curricular learning experience, JHU adopted the following definitions. These definitions rely on elements that were common to all definitions in the literature and additional components to meet institution and divisional needs when implementing co-curricular activities.

Working definition for co-curricular learning @ JHU

Co-curricular activities:

1. Deliver learning experiences that complement academic curricular instruction, thereby enhancing and supporting student learning and engagement.
2. May reside within an academic program or outside the academic departmental and programmatic structure in divisions such as athletics, and life design.
3. Connect to an academic or non-academic curriculum and can be mapped to university, school, unit, or program learning objectives.
4. Align to learning objectives connected to students' academic program of study, divisional learning objectives, or career stated objectives.
5. Are assessed:
    a. to create a verified record of skills and competencies, developed within the academic and non-academic curricula, in the JHUCLR.
    b. and data collected are used to inform improvements in courses, activities, offerings, and programs.
6. Most co-curricular offerings and activities are not part of the mandatory academic curriculum, but there may be some programs where activities are required.
7. In the uncommon instances where credit is assigned to a co-curricular activity, credit does not typically count toward degree requirements.
8. **Experiential Learning Activities** may be curricular, co-curricular, or extra-curricular, depending on whether they are assigned credit toward graduation, or if they are not assigned credit and align with learning outcomes related to student's chosen program, or if they are non-credit bearing and do no align to stated outcomes.

Working definition for extra-curricular learning @ JHU

Extra-curricular activities:

1. Provide students with opportunities to enhance and support student learning and engagement.
2. Are activities that fall outside the realm of the formal curriculum but may be part of the student's lifelong learning portfolio.
3. Are typically voluntary and not for credit.
4. May or may not assess learning.

Figure 1 outlines the differences between curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular learning.

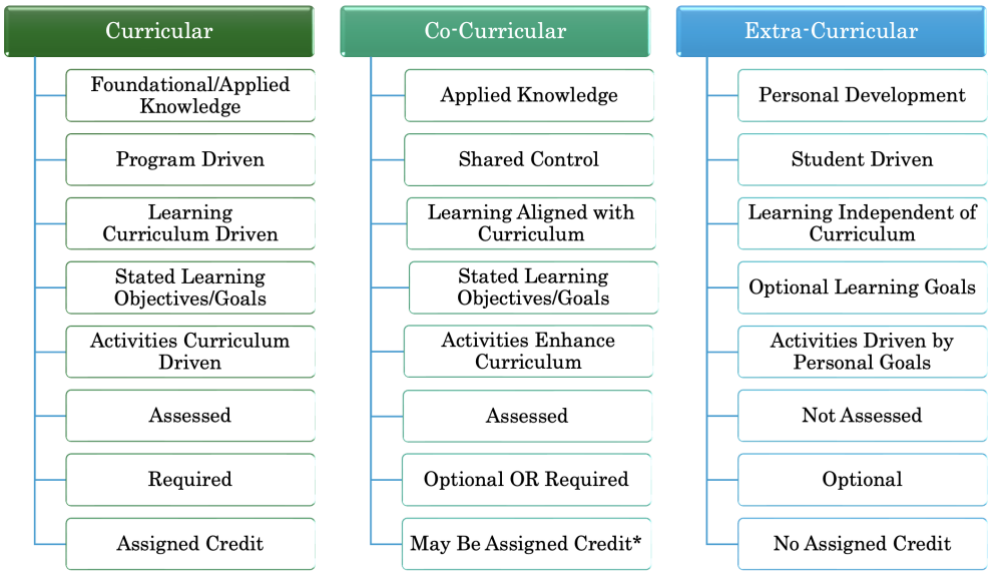

Figure 1. *Comparison between curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular learning*

Assessment of Co-Curricular Learning

UCLA recognizes that assessment in the co-curricular space is not as extensive as in academic spaces. Tracking students' growth in these spaces is sometimes unrealistic, and the need for evidence of learning using one assessment may be sufficient to collect evidence of mastery of the content. Regardless, assessment in co-curricular learning still needs to follow the quality and rigor outlined by UCLA's vision for best practices and quality assessments. In order to maintain the quality offerings in co-curricular learning expected at JHU, there is a need for: 1) co-curricular activities to articulate learning outcomes that describe the expected performance required by the end of the activity; 2) learning outcomes aligned to programmatic and or students stated goals and career expectations; 3) learning materials to align with well-defined learning outcomes, and to provide students with the skills, knowledge, and abilities they need to succeed; 4) learning outcomes to be evaluated using effective and authentic assessments that measure attainment of knowledge, skills, and abilities, and; 5) activities to deliver a quality and rewarding learning experience that enables students to achieve the expected and stated learning outcomes.

Figure 2, affirms UCLA's vision on the need of evidence of learning, using quality materials and assessments. Assessments need to measure and be a part of learning and be outcome-based.

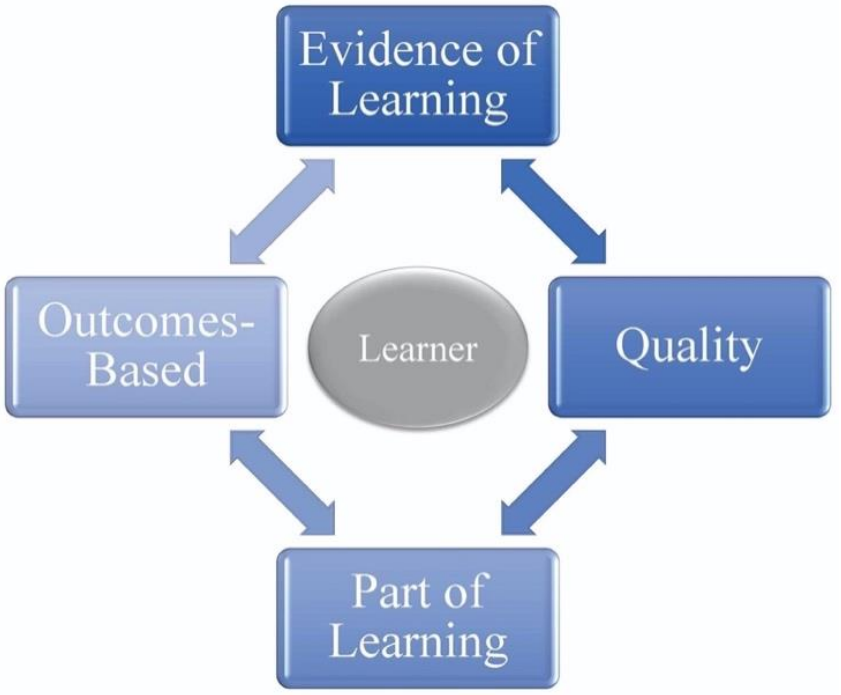

Figure 1. Assessment expectations in co-curricular learning

Creating Effective Learning Outcomes

UCLA recommends that when creating co-curricular activities learning outcomes, the divisions need to ensure that these outcomes reflect the following best practices: 1) **Mastery -** Need to reflect the level of mastery necessary for the student to demonstrate level of knowledge, skill, or performance; 2) **Measurability -** Are stated using measurable outcomes; 3) **Relevancy -** Demonstrate skills and knowledge relevant to the student's program of study or stated career goals, and 4) **Accuracy -** Accurately reflect performance requirements associated with the stated learning outcomes.

Assessment Results and Evidence Tracking

Collecting data and tracking evidence of learning are crucial steps on the way to improvement. Therefore, collecting these evidence-based artifacts and evaluations in one system is paramount to ensuring the success of assessment best practices. To that end, UCLA recommends that all assessments are tracked in the JHU- Assessment Management System (JHU-AMS) and its associated JHU-CLR. Micro-credentials and badges are issued by the same system and can be shared on social media or directly with the appropriate stakeholders using the JHU-AMS.

Assessment data and results could be administered and collected by staff, instructors or faculty overseeing the activity, and uploaded to the system, or students' performance can be evaluated directly in the JHU-AMS or the chosen Learning Management System.

In addition, we stress that data collected from assessment of co-curricular activities must be part of the overall data gathering for a course, an activity, a program, and/or a division, should be included in a student's comprehensive learner record (CLR), and must be part of data analysis and application for overall improvements and resource allocation in these spaces.

Assessment Types & Evaluation of Learning

Assessment types[1] (Appendix A) in the co-curricular learning space could be but are not limited to group activities, discussions, presentations, observations, or quizzes. They could be formative or summative depending on need. However, all these activities need to be associated with evaluative rubrics that represent the student's performance in attaining mastery, proficiency, or not meeting expectations. The evaluation of these activities using an established rubric that carefully aligns to learning objectives, is expected to be completed by the instructor in the course or activity.

Self and peer-evaluations are acceptable measures of learning when paired with other measures that are conducted by the instructor. Self or peer-evaluations cannot be used as the only measures that determine student performance, since they are not reliable in determining that the learner accurately attained the stated level of knowledge, skills, and abilities for the activity.

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[1] Consult Appendix A for a proposed list of assessment types that would work for co-curricular activities.

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Appendix A

Proposed Assessment Types

- Group activities
    1. Instructor evaluates participant performance based on observing activities.
    2. Have participants rate each other's performance based on a rubric.
- Discussions
    1. Evaluate participants answers in discussions.
    2. Determine level of understanding based on a rubric that directly maps to expected competencies.
- Presentations
    1. Ask students to present to the group and evaluate their understanding of the concepts.
    2. Evaluation could be done by instructor, TA, peers, or self.
- Quizzes
    1. Give a quiz at the end of the unit to determine attainment of knowledge of stated competencies.
    2. The quiz could be automatically graded by the system and links directly to competencies and a rubric.
- Observations
    1. Observe candidates applying skills that will demonstrate that they acquired the stated outcomes.
    2. Create a rubric that will evaluate all learning outcomes/competencies related to the desired skills.
    3. Observations can be completed during the performance of the desired task.
- Self-evaluations
    1. In addition of self-evaluating performance in the specific activities stated above, instructors could create a survey mapped to competencies, and built on a Likert scale that fits the pre-determined rubric.
    2. Ask students to evaluate their own performance, which could be normed against other evaluations, such as peer-evaluations.
- Peer-evaluations
    1. Ask participants to evaluate each other's performance using a pre-determined rubric, based on established competencies.

Note: Both self and peer evaluations are not reliable measures of participants' performance and should be used in conjunction with other types of assessments.