

A Plan for Co-Curricular Programming and Assessment



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Abstract

This report spells out a plan for co-curricular student learning and development at Navajo Technical University. An ad hoc committee formulated the plan, under the direction of a student learning consultant and the Deans of Instruction and Student Services.

The student learning consultant served as team chair; committee members included a graduate program faculty representative, an undergraduate program faculty representative (also representing Chinle Campus), a student services representative, and a student representative. Team members met regularly in spring, 2018.

The goal was to research requirements, best practices, and optimum possibilities for co-curricular programming at NTU, starting in 2018-19. This report fulfills that goal.

The team devised a six-pronged co-curricular program, in synch with NTU's mission, that would be overseen jointly by academic and student services administrators, assessed by the Assessment Committee, and supported administratively by the Assessment Coordinator. Co-curricular activities would take place as learning activities organized by the faculty in academic courses and by club sponsors in student organization activities. The activities would promote research, civic engagement, service-learning, and appreciation for Diné language and culture, environmental sustainability, and economic development.

The activities would be assessed in one of two ways: by students developing reflective essays in response to a writing rubric and set of question prompts; and by students completing an end-of-activity survey, administered online by the Assessment Director. Program reflection and ongoing improvement would be managed by the Assessment Committee with the assistance of the Assessment Director.

No new monies would be required for co-curricular student learning and development at NTU. The activities would take place and would be supported within the context of academic departments and student services and existing levels of funding.

Starting Places

What is “co-curricular”?

Co-curricular is defined as follows: “Activities, programs, and learning experiences that complement, in some way, what students are learning in school, i.e., experiences that are connected to or mirror the academic curriculum. Co-curricular activities are typically, but not always, defined by their separation from academic courses.”¹

What is the significance of co-curricular programming?

“The greater the student’s involvement in college,” wrote a well-known higher education researcher several decades ago, “the greater will be the amount of student learning and personal development,”² Stated another way, most of what students understand from their higher education experience is learned at the university but *outside* of the classroom. Thus, the organization of out-of-classroom experiences that connect to the advancement of the university’s mission is of utmost important in accomplishing that goal.

Formation of NTU’s Co-curricular Planning Team

NTU hired Dr. Daniel McLaughlin as student learning consultant in spring, 2018, among other things, to design a plan for co-curricular programming and assessment. With the help of Dr. Casmir Agbaraji, Dean of Undergraduate Programs, McLaughlin formed a Co-curricular Planning Team (CCP) – an ad hoc group whose members represent graduate program faculty, undergraduate program faculty, student services, and students. CCP team members included the following:

- Wallace Dale (student rep)
- Franklin Elliott (undergraduate and Chinle Campus rep)
- Jerlynn Henry (student services rep)
- Wesley Thomas (graduate faculty rep)

The CCP met regularly over the course of spring 2018 semester to develop this plan.

NTU mission

Any consideration of co-curricular program design begins with an analysis of the institution’s mission. The key portion of NTU’s mission that informed the work of the CCP is this statement:

¹ Glossary of Educational Reform, retrieved on Feb 12 2018 from: <https://www.edglossary.org/co-curricular/>.

² Astin, A. (1984: 528-9). Student Involvement: A Developmental Theory for Higher Education. In *Journal of College Student Development*, January.

Students, faculty, and staff will provide value to the Diné community through 1) research, 2) community engagement, 3) service learning, and activities designed to foster 4) cultural [preservation]... 5) environmental preservation and 6) sustainable economic development (numbers added).

These six foci led to the development of six different student learning and development outcomes for NTU's co-curricular program.

Accreditation requirements

Focusing on student learning and development outside of the classroom but under the auspices of the university, in mission-driven ways, is the right thing to do for NTU students. It is also the expedient thing to do, in that co-curricular teaching and learning are expectations of the university's accreditation agency, the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). Accreditation criteria that relate to co-curricular program include the following:

Criterion 3. Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources, and Support

Criterion 3E: The institution fulfills the claims it makes for an enriched educational environment.

- Co-curricular programs are suited to the institution's mission and contribute to the educational experience of its students.

Criterion 4. Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement

Criterion 4B: The institution demonstrates a commitment to educational achievement and improvement through ongoing assessment of student learning.

- The institution assesses achievement of the learning outcomes that it claims for its curricular and co-curricular programs.
- The institution's processes and methodologies to assess student learning reflect good practice, including the substantial participation of faculty and other instructional staff members.

Best practices

The CCP team conducted internet searches on co-curricular program design and assessment. Members reviewed materials presented by sister organizations in New Mexico and learned much from the experiences of Northern New Mexico College, in Española, New Mexico, whose academic staff presented on co-curricular planning and assessment at the annual meeting of the New Mexico Higher Education Assessment and Retention conference, in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in February, 2018.

Salient best practices include the following:

- Co-curricular learning and development ought to be considered a shared responsibility of academic faculty and student services support staff.³
- Co-curricular program design and assessment should be developed as a function of established best practices for academic programming. Methods for assessing co-curricular programming include direct and indirect measures that also apply to the assessment of academic programs. Using evidence from multiple sources can provide detailed accounts of student achievement. Data gathered from writing essays, triangulated by data from local and nationally administered surveys (e.g., the National Survey of Student Engagement) can provide a rich picture of what’s working, what’s not, and how to improve the program.⁴
- A framework for co-curricular learning and development ought to stipulate a minimum number of clock hours for co-curricular activities, ensuring for depth and breadth of student learning and development.⁵

CCP team’s plan

Steps and timeframes for CCP planning were as follows:

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| Feb 2018 | 1. Created an ad hoc committee (what came to be called the “CCP team”) responsible for co-curricular program development. Ensured representation from key stakeholder groups: undergraduate academics, graduate academics, student services, and students. |
| Feb/Mar 2018 | 2. Researched requirements, models, and best practices concerned with co-curricular program and assessment. |
| Feb/Mar 2018 | 3. Created a draft framework including mission, vision, student learning outcomes, measures, templates, data gathering and analysis strategies, and improvement cycle. |
| Mar/May 2018 | 4. Developed and implemented a pilot project in the second half of spring semester 2018. We invited faculty participation at a meeting of NTU’s faculty assembly. An instructor in the Education and Business Department – Ms. Tilda Harrison-Woody – took up the offer. She partnered with the CCP team to develop a pilot service-learning project for her accounting students in tax preparation. |
| May 2018 | 5. Analyzed the draft CCP framework in light of the pilot project, and revised framework components as needed. |

³ Busby, K. (2015: 39-50). Co-Curricular Outcomes and Accreditation. In *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 2014(164).

⁴ Banta, T. & Palomba, C. (1999). *Assessment Essentials: Planning, Implementing, Improving*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

⁵ Service-Learning Student Learning Outcomes Assessment, retrieved on May 9 2018 from: [http://www.elon.edu/docs/e-web/org/nccc/Service-Learning_SLO_Assessment_2010-2011%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.elon.edu/docs/e-web/org/nccc/Service-Learning_SLO_Assessment_2010-2011%20(2).pdf)

Co-Curricular Program Profile

Mission

Through its co-curricular program, NTU will provide value to the Diné community through research, community engagement, and service learning projects, and projects that foster cultural preservation, environmental sustainability, and economic development.

Outcomes: *Students should be able to...*

1. Implement research projects that explore issues in Diné communities.
2. Implement projects that promote community engagement.
3. Implement service-learning projects in Diné communities.
4. Demonstrate increased appreciation for Diné cultural preservation through out-of-class projects.
5. Demonstrate increased appreciation for environmental sustainability in Diné communities through out-of-class projects.
6. Implement out-of-class projects that promote economic development.

Direct measures

- Reflective essay or survey

Direct measures

- Reflective essay (with rubric) (see Appendix A)
- Survey (see Appendix B)

Indirect measures

- Enrollments
- University retention percentage
- University completion rate
- National Survey of Student Engagement
- Focus group interview

Additional details

- Co-curricular projects will be organized by faculty members as course assignments for course credit and by faculty sponsors in student organizations. Projects ought to require at least twenty hours of out-of-class participation and will be assessed through a reflective essay or survey.
- Copies of students' reflective essays will be submitted to the Assessment Director for program improvement analysis.

- Students who complete an end-of-project survey will do so using an online instrument. Data will be organized by the Assessment Director.
- The co-curricular program will be overseen and improved annually by NTU’s Assessment Committee.

Pilot Project

The CCP team chair presented the draft program profile to NTU’s faculty assembly in mid-March, 2018. The chair asked the assembled faculty members, “Is there an instructor, or several instructors, able and willing to work with the CCP team to develop a service-learning project in the second half of spring semester and to pilot-test draft assessments with their students?” One instructor volunteered to do this: Ms. Tilda Harrison-Woody, in the Business and Education Department.

Ms. Harrison-Woody revised an ongoing project she had organized in an Accounting course. Students were required to help community members prepare state and federal tax returns. Ms. Harrison-Woody’s students participated in the tax preparation exercise for course credit. In addition, at the conclusion of their work, the students developed reflective essays, using the draft co-curricular essay measure as a guide, and completed the draft co-curricular survey measure. Eight students completed the survey; six wrote essays.

Survey data are summarized below.

TABLE ONE: Service Learning Survey Summary	
Co-curricular Pilot Project • Spring 2018	
<i>Agree or disagree with the following statements</i>	<i>N = 8</i>
1. The assignment improved my understanding of community needs.	5.0
2. The assignment improved my ability to study and report findings.	4.9
3. My experience increased my empathy and respect for others.	5.0
4. My experience advanced my knowledge of how organizations operate.	5.0
5. As a result of my experience, I have improved my teamwork skills.	4.6
6. The experience improved my valuing of civic engagement.	4.9
5 = strongly agree; 4 = mildly agree; 3 = equally agree and disagree; 2 = mildly disagree; 1 = strongly disagree	

In addition, the survey posed two open-ended questions. “What went well with the experience?” Highlights of students’ comments follow:

- Learning tax software in order to file taxes for community members and educating them on their filing needs.
- Helping out community elders and students.
- Knowing that I made an impact.
- Finishing tax returns on time.
- Everything went well.
- Being able to understand and speak Navajo, helping the elderl[y].
- Hands-on experience.

“What can be improved with the service learning assignment?” the survey also asked. Students’ responses included the following:

- Reaching more clients and educating them about taxes.
- Get the word out about [the activity].
- Teach our natives that there are other tax services not just in G-town.
- Have computers logged in and ready for students.
- Personally I really felt that I didn’t get enough actual time to really understand everything. I wasn’t able to get some questions answered. I do wish there was somewhat of a work schedule. Getting an available computer was difficult.
- More time on the assignment could provide better understanding.

Students expounded at length about the activity in reflective essays. Here are several representative quotes:

This was my first hands-on experience involving income taxes. I enjoyed every minute whether it was time-consuming or difficult... I realize now that my future job could be a tax preparer whether it’s for a tax center for just for the community. I would like to help out the community. What inspired me one day, I went with my mom to do her taxes... If I keep learning and gaining experience, I could accomplish an important goal. All I have to do is keep going with my studies and keep practicing. Overall this was a great experience. Honestly, I would like to help out the class for the next tax season.

I didn’t know about this tax services provided by Tilda and her students. Many people thought they had to travel to town to file their taxes. It helped me communicate more with our community and our elders. The most challenge I had was communicating with our elders but they got the understanding when I had one of my classmates help translate. Being a part of a Diné nation is huge because we stand as one and help one another out... It has touch my heart because many elders and others needed help and I had the courage to do that for them.

[The] experience was different and fulfilling that I provided a good service for those who cannot afford such as a service. The smile and happy feeling that you receive from the client makes you as a student and a person in general feel good about yourself and what you’re doing by continuing your education.

Ms. Harrison-Woody reported afterwards to the CCP team about the students’ experiences:

How did the tax preparation activity go? What about the survey and writing prompt measures designed to assess student learning and development?

The essay allowed students to express themselves. I gave them the rubric up front. Some students were very specific. Overall, students were proud that they were able to give back to the community. They didn’t think that they could learn. At first, they were intimidated. But after doing some hands-on activities, they realized that they could participate. They were able to express themselves. If I hadn’t read the surveys, and especially the essays, I never would have known the depth of the students’ learning and development.

The prompt and rubric got me to wondering: what else might the students want to know about the service-learning activity? I asked the students, “What are you still puzzled about?” This gave rise to some quick lessons clarifying incomplete understandings. I really found this valuable.

I am going to work with the students next on follow-up activities, among other things, helping them get tax preparation ID’s.

If the writing prompt is open-ended and valuable, the survey measure is convergent and limited. It only has two open-ended items. But it does provide useful information. Why not use both tools?

Recommendations for AY19 and Beyond

1. The CCP pilot project demonstrated the value of co-curricular learning and development from the perspectives of Accounting students, participating in tax preparation, service-learning activities, and one instructor who demonstrated the potential of out-of-classroom learning and development. The bottom line: move forward with co-curricular programming at NTU. It is a compliance issue, in that the Higher Learning Commission expects it to be happening; but it is also the right thing to do to promote student learning and development consistent with NTU’s mission.
2. Consider having the Dean of Instruction and Dean of Student Services coordinate co-curricular learning and development. Assessment can be coordinated by the Assessment Director and the Assessment Committee. Thinking about the other major duties of the Assessment Committee – including the coordination of program assessment, general education assessment, and possibly academic professional development – consider a stipend for such services and/or release time, consistent with relevant NTU policies.
3. Finalize CCP policies and procedures (many of which are drafted in this report), next present them for review and approval by NTU’s Faculty Assembly, then by NTU’s academic administration, following the same steps for review and approval of any other new academic program.
4. Explore possibilities for including the co-curricular program in NTU’s general education program. The co-curricular outcomes, measures, and activities could constitute an eighth area of focus (there are currently seven such areas). This work could take place in summer, 2018, or in fall, 2018 prior to finalizing the CCP in 2018-19.

Appendix A: Reflective Essay with Rubric

How has your co-curricular project changed you? In an essay of at least 300 words, address each of the questions in the left-hand column of the table below.

Essay questions	Evaluative Criteria				
	4	3	2	1	0
What did you learn during your project that relates to your course?	Skillfully conveys perspectives from the course (and other courses, if able).	Adequately conveys perspectives from the course (and other courses, if applicable).	Conveys ideas and facts from the course (and other courses, if applicable) but doesn't explicitly explain their relationship.	Conveys ideas and facts that don't seem to be related.	Does not meet level 1 performance.
What challenge did you help solve? How did you accomplish this?	Skillfully explains the challenge(s), his/her intervention, the positive effects of that intervention.	Adequately explains the challenge(s), his/her intervention, and the positive effects of that intervention.	Explains most of these: the problem(s), his/her intervention, and the positive effects of that intervention.	Explains some of these: the problem(s), his/her intervention, and the positive effects of that intervention.	Does not meet level 1 performance.
How has your experience affected your thinking about the Diné Nation, its challenges, and solutions to those challenges?	Skillfully explains changes in thinking about the Diné Nation, its problems, and the solutions to those problems as a result of the project experience (and other related experiences).	Adequately explains changes in thinking about the Diné Nation, its problems, and the solutions to those problems as a result of the project experience (and other related experiences).	Explains changes in thinking about most of these: the Diné Nation, its problems, and the solutions to those problems as a result of the project experience (and other related experiences).	Explains changes in thinking about some of these: the Diné Nation, its problems, and the solutions to those problems as a result of the project experience (and other related experiences).	Does not meet level 1 performance.
How has the experience affected your thinking about personal, academic, or career goals? How will you serve the Diné nation in the future?	Skillfully explains what personal, academic or career goals were accomplished, how the student was changed, and what future service the student plans as a result of the experience.	Adequately explains what personal, academic or career goals were accomplished, how the student was changed, and what future service the student plans as a result of the experience.	Explains most of these: personal, academic or career goals that were accomplished, how the student was changed, and what future service the student plans as a result of the experience.	Explains some of these: personal, academic or career goals that were accomplished, how the student was changed, and what future service the student plans as a result of the experience.	Does not meet level 1 performance.

Appendix B: Survey

Name _____

Course & instructor _____

Date _____

Project type (check one):

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Research | <input type="checkbox"/> Service learning | <input type="checkbox"/> Environmental sustainability |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Civic engagement | <input type="checkbox"/> Diné cultural preservation | <input type="checkbox"/> Economic development |

Brief description of project: _____

Scale

5= Strongly agree; 4=Mildly agree; 3=Equally agree and disagree;
2=Mildly disagree; 1=Strongly disagree

	Circle one best response for each statement				
	5	4	3	2	1
1. The project improved my understanding of community needs.	5	4	3	2	1
2. The project improved my ability to study and report findings.	5	4	3	2	1
3. The project increased my empathy and respect for others.	5	4	3	2	1
4. The project advanced my knowledge of how organizations operate.	5	4	3	2	1
5. As a result of the project, I have improved my teamwork skills.	5	4	3	2	1
6. The project improved my appreciation for co-curricular learning.	5	4	3	2	1

What went well with the co-curricular project?

What can be improved with the co-curricular project (use other side)?