

Case Study 3

This case study describes how the Centre for Career Education created a strategy for evaluating the achievement of learning outcomes in their Volunteer Internship Program.

This case addresses the evaluation of:

Inputs	no
Processes	no
Outcomes	yes
• Learning outcomes	yes
• Personal attribute outcomes	no
• Impact outcomes	no

Evaluating Workshops in the Volunteers Internship Program, Centre for Career Education, University of Windsor

The learning outcomes project for the Volunteer Internship Program was meant to foster intentional program design. The program had already been running for more than a decade, but we decided that it was time for an overhaul to make the learning more meaningful for students and to improve program quality.

We collected this data in order to:

- inform quality improvement
- identify other potential areas for improvement to program design
- inform strategic decision making
- reporting (prove value)

The Evaluation Tools

We started out with an *Operationalization Plan* to outline the determined learning outcomes. For each learning outcome we identified the process flow and assessment plan as well as the list of new tools or changes to existing tools required to achieve and assess it. As a result, we ended up with more than 30 tools for the program divided into four categories:

- Assignments – Instructions for the independent assignments students work on
- Forms – Used to gather data from students and/or placement supervisors (for example, the Past Participant Follow Up Survey)
- Resources – Items handed out to the students in workshops or made available online in order to assist them with program requirements (for example, the Ongoing Reflection Workbook)
- Procedure – Instructions for the facilitator of the group-based workshops and sessions

Tools:

Past Participant Follow Up Survey



Ongoing Reflection Workbook



Materials were developed by the Applied Learning Coordinator with input from the Director on an ongoing basis. VIP is a unique program, so we didn't use anyone else's materials in particular for ideas. That said, research was done (mostly online), and articles and sample questions were sometimes looked at, especially when it came to using the "What? So What? Now What?" model of reflection to design the Ongoing Reflection Workbook. We also kept a select

few of the materials that were already being used in the program, or that were used in other areas of our office that we felt were working well, and made minor changes to them to fit the new program design.

Logistics

Who the tool(s) were used with	The tools were used variously with students, employers, and staff.
When they were administered	<p>The planning and design of the tools took place in the Winter and Summer of 2006, and the tools were introduced to the students in the program in Fall 2006. They have been used every semester since.</p> <p>Tools and data collection related to learning outcomes are used at several points in the program, starting in the application process right through to program completion. For example, students hand in a resume at their admission interview and an intake survey is administered during the orientation – both serve as a pre-test for learning outcomes. Student also work through an Ongoing Reflection Workbook (a collection of activities and journal industries) that addresses all of the desired learning outcomes of the program – this workbook is divided into “before you begin placement”, “after your first day” and then 10 hour increments until they finish the required 40 hours. There are also several other tools administered throughout the program.</p>
How they were administered	Mostly paper, but most forms and assignments are available online and can be submitted via e-mail as well.
Response rate	All tools that require submission are mandatory, so with respect to students that completed the program, you could say the response rate is 100%. However, our completion rate of students that confirm participation in the program averages about 75%.
Summarizing and analyzing data	Data is collected during each cycle of the program and tracked on a detailed semester tracking sheet. For some of the learning outcomes, a more time consuming qualitative review is needed, so a document set for a random sample of 25 students is selected each term. A summary of each semester’s data is entered onto another tracking sheet that allows us to make term over term or year or year comparisons.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The process 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By whom 	The Applied Learning Coordinator with help from a part-time student in the role of VIP Program Assistant.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using what software 	MS Excel

Our Results and Learnings

Using our results we have been able to identify which learning outcomes are being achieved more successfully than others. We haven’t yet made a lot of changes to the program as a result, but we anticipate doing a full program review in the next academic year and using that to identify areas for change and improvement.

At the moment, we track our results for internal use. We have shared pieces of it with other staff and included it in reports and articles. Now that the new design of the program has been in place for 3 full academic years, we plan on doing a more comprehensive review and using the results to guide changes and program improvements.

We have found the strengths of our approach have included:

- that it has been a great exercise to completely overhaul a program and make sure learning is intentional and meaningful – learning outcomes provided lenses to view each program component (existing or proposed) through.
- that we have been able to tie program components together and address multiple learning outcomes with a single tool.
- introducing one new program design, instead of multiple smaller changes made each cycle.

At the same time, the weaknesses of the approach we have taken are:

- this was a very large task. It is difficult to find time to plan and execute such an evaluation on top of regular duties.
- it seems daunting at first because it was such a large project.
- because components are so tied together and assessment tracking is all set up, it is sometimes difficult to make further changes to the program (because one small change to one component can initiate several other changes).

We have learned that when you are evaluating from the perspective of a program there are several elements and points of contact with the program's clients. Evaluation can then become a very complicated process, especially when the program is already in place and implementing evaluation requires an overhaul of the entire program. An existing program does present the challenge of working around constraints that are already in place. For example, in this case we tried to minimize how much the process and participation would change for the placement employers.

Given that we were looking at an existing program, we think it was a good decision to re-launch and introduce all of the changes at once rather than chipping away at it and constantly introducing small changes. This lent itself to integrating evaluation methods together, rather than having several stand alone teaching strategies and assessment tools to address one learning outcome at a time.

If we were to do this project over again, the only thing we might do differently is perhaps solicit more input from students about how the program might look (student input was minimal). While the program seems to be well-received as is, who knows what other interesting information or ideas would have come out of more formal or informal feedback from students?

A final reflection from our experience is that when a centre wants to evaluate learning, where possible, learning outcomes should be considered at the beginning when a program is being designed in the first place. Also, because a program is a sum of many parts, it may be necessary to revisit and rework the plan for learning outcome evaluation several times. Although we had come up with an overall plan, we found that we needed to tweak it as we started to design the actual tools and saw how they would work together with the timelines and processes involved in running the program. As things change, we continue to revisit and adapt our original plan that operationalizes our learning outcomes assessment.

This tool and overview were submitted by the Centre for Career Education at the University of Windsor.