

MEMO on Cocurricular Activities and Assessment [First Reading]

To	UCC
From	Cocurricular Assessment Working Group
Subject	Cocurricular Activities and Assessment
Date	November 5, 2024

I. Background

The student experience at OHIO includes many university-sponsored activities that are not part of the formal curriculum. This experience is enriched by these activities, all of which play a role in the education of our students. Such activities are often referred to as “cocurricular” and/or “extracurricular” in informal discussions, and this informal usage treats these two terms as loosely equivalent ways of referring to university-sponsored opportunities that occur outside of a formal class.

On the other hand, these terms also have precise technical meanings. The difference between our formal and informal usage of these adjectives becomes important when considering our obligations to assess student learning. In particular, the distinction is critical when it comes to the expectations of accrediting bodies such as the Higher Learning Commission (HLC).

UCC was tasked by Faculty Senate “to develop a definition for co-curricular activities requiring assessment that is consistent with HLC guidelines, relies on resources provided by Institutional Effectiveness & Analytics, and that sets forth both criteria for determining which co-curricular activities should be assessed, and a process by which UCC will make this determination.”

This memo provides a response to this charge by

- providing guidance on the formal meaning of these terms,
- laying out criteria for when a cocurricular activity needs to participate in assessment, and
- outlining a process that ensures our institutional obligations are met.

II. Meaning of Terms

Non-curricular university-sponsored student experiences at Ohio University are classified as either *cocurricular* or *extracurricular*, depending on their relationship with the formal curriculum.

Cocurricular activities comprise learning activities, programs, and experiences that *reinforce* the institution’s mission and values while *complementing* the formal curriculum¹. This means that these activities are aligned with the educational goals of the formal academic curriculum, which are defined as the OHIO Common Goals for general education together with the learning outcomes of specific academic programs.

Extracurricular activities comprise those student activities that are not directly connected to the educational goals of the formal curriculum. Although extracurricular activities may have learning goals, these do not align with the learning outcomes of general education or specific academic programs.

III. Criteria for Assessment

Any cocurricular activity that is **presented to students as providing an opportunity to achieve learning outcomes supporting those of the formal curriculum** needs to participate in a formal assessment process. These activities have at least one learning outcome corresponding to either the OHIO Common Goals for general education, or to the learning outcomes of a specific academic program. In such cases, the student learning arising from these

¹ The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) defines cocurricular activities as “learning activities, programs, and experiences that reinforce the institution’s mission and values and complement the formal curriculum.”

activities must be periodically evaluated according to some assessment plan, and the corresponding information used to guide decisions regarding the activity. With this distinction in mind, cocurricular activities fall naturally into three categories:

Category 1: No Assessment Required

Some activities for students may support the outcomes of the formal curriculum while not making specific claims for student learning, and these do not require assessment. These activities are cocurricular in the sense that they support the curriculum, but they do not have learning outcomes mapping to those of the curriculum. Examples of activities in this category may include lecture series offered to students on academic topics, or organizations designed to bring together students with similar academic interests.

Category 2: Assessed by Curricular Processes

Many cocurricular activities that do make claims about student learning are tied to associated curricular components (for example, credit-bearing courses associated with internships). These cocurricular activities are already assessed through standard curricular processes such as program reviews, general education assessment, or annual learning outcomes assessment for programs, and do not need to engage in further formal assessment.

Category 3: Assessed by Annual Process

Cocurricular activities outside of the first two categories are those that

- a) make claims about learning related to curricular outcomes, but
- b) are not currently assessed through standard curricular processes.

These cocurricular activities will need to have a formal assessment plan in place (including at least one relevant learning outcome supporting the formal curriculum), and the sponsoring unit is responsible for evaluating the claimed student learning and making use of the information to guide improvements.

IV. Annual Process

The assessment process for cocurricular activities in Category 3 will mirror the annual assessment process for program learning outcomes and will be documented in the Assessment Clearinghouse. Responsible units will need to submit the following information to the Assessment Clearinghouse in a standard format to be developed by and available from UCC:

- Any program learning outcomes that are aligned with curricular components together with the curricular outcomes to which they map, and
- An assessment plan that includes the following information:
 - Identification of experiences where students are provided the opportunity to achieve the learning outcomes identified above,
 - Identification of direct or indirect measures that will assess each such experiences, together with the frequency of such assessment.
 - Expected level of achievement for each assessment method.

Documentation associated with ongoing assessment of the activity should be submitted as part of the annual process in place for curricular programs.