Student Affairs Learning and Development Objectives (SALDOs) Content and Usage Survey Results

Introduction

In fall 2008, the Department of Student Affairs Assessment (DSAA) conducted a study regarding the use of the Student Affairs Learning and Development Objectives (SALDOs) within the Division of Student Affairs at the University of Georgia. The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the response data.

Method of Data Collection

DSAA conducted a series of informal focus groups with staff members from the Division. The focus groups took place during regularly-scheduled department meetings. Each focus group was facilitated by a DSAA staff member, followed a semi-structured focus group protocol, and lasted from 10 to 30 minutes. An additional DSAA staff member was present to take notes throughout the discussion. Along with the focus groups, DSAA also administered an online questionnaire to provide an opportunity for anonymous participation from all staff in the Division with access to the internet. The questionnaire followed a mixed-methods approach and allowed staff members to reflect on the same concepts on which those who participated in the focus groups reflected. A range of personnel, including directors, professional staff, administrative support staff, and graduate assistants participated in the data collection process.

Summary of Findings

The collected data revealed various levels of comprehension and utilization of SALDOs among Division staff. Three themes emerged from the data that relate to staff comprehension of SALDOs:

1. **Definition of SALDOs** - varying degrees of understanding of SALDOs exist within the Division
2. **Structure** - the SALDOs framework for assessment is perceived in various ways by the Division
3. **Accountability and Expectations** - members of the Division have varying degrees of understanding as to what they are expected to do with SALDOs and how they will be held accountable

The data also revealed four themes that relate to the Division’s utilization of SALDOs:

1. **Integration of SALDOs** - Division staff have integrated the SALDOs into their assessment practices to varying degrees
2. **Legitimacy** - some Division staff have endorsed the SALDOs curriculum, while others are hesitant to put forth their full support
3. **Assessment Training and Guidance** - Division staff reported that trainings held by DSAA are helpful and additional trainings would be beneficial
4. **Using and Reporting Assessment Data** - staff members expressed a desire for more guidance when analyzing data after conducting assessments with SALDOs
Findings

The following report is a more detailed summary of the findings but is not intended to be an exhaustive report of all the collected data. A selection of quotes are provided to help give context to the identified themes. Statements in quotations are direct quotes from the online questionnaire. Statements in brackets are summary quotes from the focus groups.

Comprehension of SALDOs

Definition of SALDOs

Staff comments indicated that there are varying degrees of understanding of the SALDOs that exist within the Division. When asked to describe their understanding of SALDOs, some staff articulated a clear understanding of the purpose and use of SALDOs, some staff expressed little understanding about the curriculum, and some staff revealed no prior knowledge of the purpose or use of SALDOs.

Selected Comments from the Division:

- “The division created SALDOs as a means to demonstrate learning that takes place in out-of-classroom experiences. Borrowed from FALDOs, SALDOs provide the framework for assessing some of the work that we do in student affairs. The SALDOs are broken up into eight areas. From those eight areas, departments can write specific learning objectives to demonstrate learning that takes place as a result of a particular program or service.”
- “SALDOs help us to be more purposeful in our jobs, making sure we keep [them in] account as we assess our programs and all that we do within the department.”
- “I do not know what SALDOs stands for.”

Structure

Structure can be defined as the framework for assessment that the SALDOs provide for Division staff. The data collected revealed that Division staff perceived the SALDOs as a framework in different ways. Some staff reported they believed that SALDOs provide a useful theoretical framework for assessing their programs and services. On the other hand, some staff believed that the SALDOs are too broad in scope and therefore difficult to use for assessment purposes. Conversely, other staff perceived the SALDOs as too restrictive to utilize for assessment purposes.

Selected Comments from the Division:

- “I use the SALDOs in my position, and it is helpful to use this foundation as I know they relate to both the division and the department.”
- “They [SALDOs] are broad at times, and I have difficulty placing my work into just one area.”
- “They do not fit with everything that we do. They are often narrow in scope, and we sometimes have to be creative to make them fit.”

Expectations and Accountability

According to the data collected, some staff expressed that a clear, standard expectation has not been articulated regarding the application of SALDOs to departmental work. Several
staff indicated that ambiguous expectations concerning the use of SALDOs raise the question of how departments are being held accountable for using them.

Selected Comments from the Division:
- “It does not seem like there is a definite push from supervisors to integrate [SALDOs] into our usual assessment styles.”
- “There needs to be more intentionality in educating staff members about [SALDOs] and how we are expected to reasonably implement them [into] the work we do.”

**Utilization of SALDOs**

**Integration of SALDOs**
Some staff members perceived SALDOs as an effort to improve professional practice, while some staff perceived them as an unnecessary add-on to their daily responsibilities.

Selected Comments from the Division:
- “I plan to use SALDOs to write better learning objectives, which will give me a more concrete way of evaluating my programs. I also would like to incorporate more of the eight main areas, not just the one that best fits with my program area (healthy behavior). I think this will help broaden and enrich the experience for students.”
- “[We are too busy in this office just trying to do the day-to-day work with students to have the luxury of gathering data about whether the students are benefiting from the program. I would love to be able to do assessment, but we just have more pressing issues to deal with.]”

**Legitimacy**
Data suggested that SALDOs have become a meaningful part of the daily operations of some departments and units. Some units reported using SALDOs to develop new programs and as a reference when working with students. On the contrary, data also suggested that some staff are resistant to fully support SALDOs because the objectives are still viewed as a new, and possibly temporary, curriculum.

Selected Comments from the Division:
- “As we designed action plans within the strategic areas, SALDOs were used as [a] foundation to evaluate where the unit wants to go in the next couple of years. I work with my graduate students in designing retreats/trainings/programs and even basic meetings with SALDOs…”
- “[Those of us who have been around a while have seen things come and go as phases, so how do we know this isn’t one of them?]”
- “[People do not naturally gravitate to assessment and SALDOs. First the directors have to buy into it and then they have to get their staff to buy into it. It needs to permeate the culture.]”

**Assessment Training and Guidance**
According to the data, the trainings that are currently in place within the Division to teach assessment principles, specifically the “Lunch and Learn” programs and the Assessment Team
(A-Team) are viewed as highly effective and valuable trainings to those staff members who have participated. The data revealed that several staff members believe that additional trainings from DSAA would help them gain a better understanding of SALDOs and how to effectively use them to assess their programs and services.

Selected Comments from the Division:
- “I am very knowledgeable of the SALDOs. This is due to my involvement [with] the A-Team.”
- “I never understood what SALDOs [were] until I [went to] the Lunch & Learn a couple of months ago.”
- “Provide more training and assistance in implementing the use of SALDOs.”
- “Create templates, guidelines, and websites that make [SALDOs] something other than a gigantic pile of extra work.”

Using and Reporting Assessment Data
Several staff members expressed a desire for more guidance from DSAA on the analysis and reporting of data after conducting assessments using SALDOs. The data suggested that some staff also want to understand how the data will impact their daily work and be used within the Division.

Selected Comments from the Division:
- “I think that people know that SALDOs are out there, but we don’t really know where we fit in with them…It would also be helpful to know what is going to happen after I incorporate SALDOs into my work. Is it just something that would be a nice idea but that’s all? What will the information be used for? While using them could certainly benefit students, I also don’t think we have been lacking in that area, so if there are more benefits beyond that, I’d like to know.”
- “[Make] it meaningful in my everyday work. Connect specific programs to SALDOs and [have] directors make decisions to eliminate programs that do not target the SALDOs.”

Conclusion
DSAA conducted this study to explore the level of comprehension and utilization of SALDOs within the Division of Student Affairs at UGA. This study has been useful in helping DSAA better understand the degree to which staff understand and have integrated SALDOs into their practice. DSAA has plans to use the findings of this study to enhance efforts to educate and train staff on SALDOs.

For additional information regarding the results of this study, please contact DSAA at 706.542.3564 or osaamail@uga.edu.