Overcoming Challenges in Co-curricular Tracking and Involvement Transcripts to Increase Student Success

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Breaking through assessment barriers to meet institutional goals

Tracking student participation in clubs & organizations, service learning, leadership, resident hall activities, and other co-curricular programs is a key element of developing holistic learning processes advocated in studies such as *Learning Reconsidered*. Accurate tracking of student participation can help universities re-allocate resources to optimize investments in programming that is most strongly associated with measures of student success, including higher levels of student engagement, increased rates of student persistence, and improved student learning outcomes.

The key barrier to comprehensive assessment is the lack of a tool to capture and report on student participation across the range of co-curricular programs. While every student's academic activities are carefully tracked in order to produce accurate academic transcripts, very few institutions have the ability to capture the same level of detail on co-curricular participation. Yet it is necessary, both to produce a complete student record that reflects out-of-the-classroom participation and competencies gained through these activities, and to continuously assess the whole student experience.

As Student Affairs divisions at colleges and universities across the country are increasingly expected to offer programming that helps drive student learning and development outcomes, the absence of a tool to generate a co-curricular record for every student poses a major challenge to the achievement of university objectives. To address this challenge, CollegiateLink, a Cambridge, MA based organization, has developed a solution called SA LINK in partnership with anchor clients Brown University, University of Baltimore, and Wentworth Institute of Technology.

SA LINK centralizes information on student involvement and co-curricular achievement in a way that supports assessment objectives and enables the attribution of learning outcomes to various programs and initiatives. It is implemented primarily within the Student Activities / Leadership office, with other offices such as Career Placement, Service Learning, and Alumni Relations / Institutional Advancement also benefiting through shared information and reporting capabilities to:

- Increase awareness of and participation in activities
- Increase retention, graduation rate, and student success
- Meet diversity goals in co-curricular programs and organizations
- Promote student satisfaction and engagement

How SA LINK addresses the challenge

SA LINK provides a strategic information system that improves the efficiency of data capture around student participation in clubs, activities, leadership development programs, residential hall programming, and experiential learning programs. SA LINK captures and validates information on these activities as part of the day-to-day utilization of the system by the end-user departments and student organizations. With SA LINK, offices are provided an easy to use online system that eliminates paperwork and facilitates communication between administrators, groups, and student participants. Each department also gains greater insight and oversight of their portfolio of

responsibilities, because records of events, participation, finances, and student surveys are centralized in one database with cross-reporting capabilities.

In addition to the efficiency and workflow benefits to individual units, SA LINK gives Student Affairs divisions as a whole the ability to manage their investments in student programming. By linking student participation to engagement, persistence, and learning outcomes, SA LINK gives Student Affairs divisions an empirical and evidence-based set of criterion for deciding on investments in programming.

Specific examples of SA LINK benefits – assessment, outcomes, and co-curricular transcripts

1) Quantitative assessment of student participation and satisfaction

By centralizing participation and activity data, SA LINK allows assessment to be done at any time to draw direct correlations between participation in specific programs and student success.

Reports can be generated at any time showing metrics such as:

- The breakdown of co-curricular programs and student leadership roles, sorted by participant demographics, GPA, retention and graduation rate

- Lists of current students or alumni who participated in programs or organizations, sorted by number of programs participated in, program types, and graduation rate

- The number of students participating in, or holding roles in various programs and organizations, including longitudinal trends of participation over time

2) Learning outcomes attribution through longitudinal self-assessment and verification

Quantitative and qualitative survey data are recorded from students prior to, during, and after they have completed programs, leadership roles, and other experiences to capture individual student outcomes. Advisors and program leaders provide verification of participation and competencies gained. Combined reports linking participation, reported outcomes, and student success help identify and refine programs that accomplish department and institutional goals.

3) Co-curricular transcripts and individual involvement records

Student records of involvement and out-of-the-classroom accomplishments are incorporated into verifiable co-curricular transcripts, which when tied together with their academic records, provides a complete portfolio of each student's achievements.

As opposed to asking students to self-report what they have done, SA LINK uniquely makes co-curricular transcripts feasible by capturing and validating involvement data on *all students* as part of the day-to-day utilization of the system. Outcomes and competencies assessed by each student and attributed to participation in specific programs may be made official and incorporated into this personal co-curricular record.