

Co-Curricular Activities and RPTA Department

Results are presented from a student focus group convened and facilitated by RPTA faculty in May 2010.

<http://www.rpta.calpoly.edu/files/accreditation/2010/7.0%20Documents/FocusGroupScript.pdf>

Eleven of the twelve RPTA students, chosen by the faculty as most representative of students engaged in co-curricular activities, participated in the focus group designed to assess the impact of co-curricular activities on student learning and development. More specifically, the interplay between Council of Accreditation on Parks, Recreation, Tourism and Related Professions (COAPRT) standards and Cal Poly's University Learning Objectives was examined.

The following COAPRT standards were targeted as relevant to co-curricular involvement:

7.01.03 Students graduating from the Program shall demonstrate the ability to apply knowledge of professional practice and the historical, scientific, and philosophical foundations of the relevant profession in decision making.

7.02.01 Students graduating from the Program shall demonstrate the ability to design experiences clearly reflecting application of knowledge from relevant facets of contemporary professional practice, science, and philosophy.

CAL POLY UNIVERSITY LEARNING OBJECTIVES (ULOs)

When students graduate from Cal Poly, they should be able to:

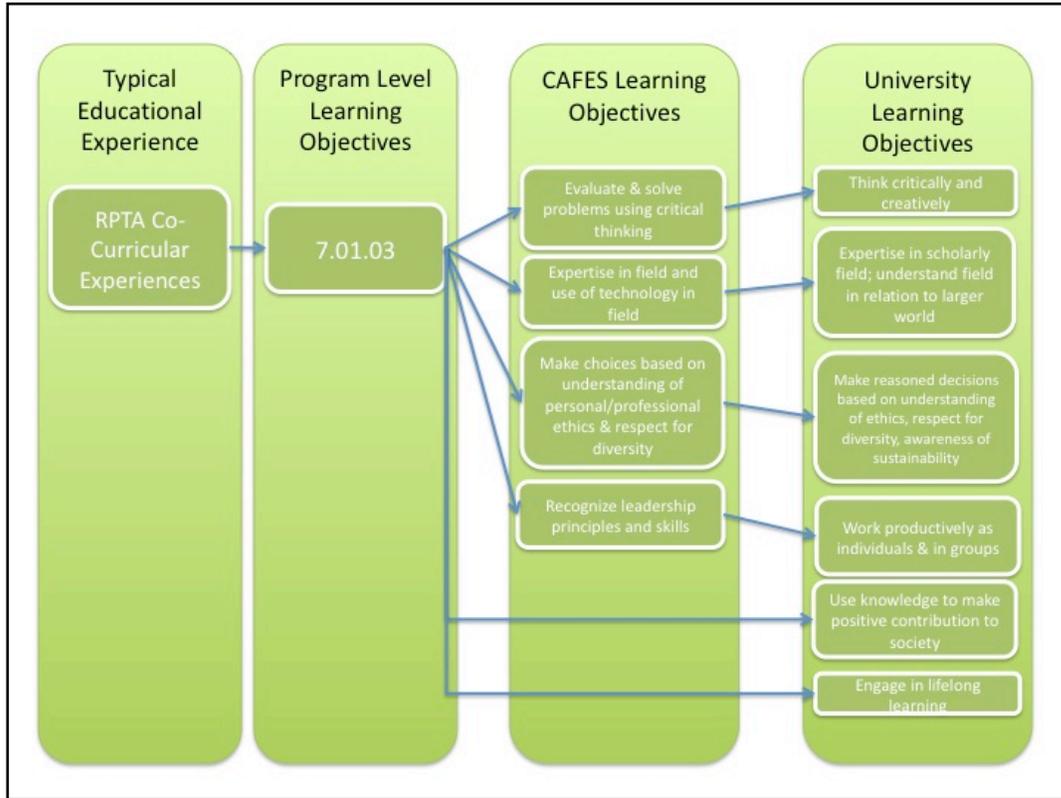
- ULO 1 Think critically and creatively
- ULO 2 Communicate effectively
- ULO 3 Demonstrate expertise in a scholarly discipline and understand that discipline in relation to the larger world of the arts, sciences, and technology
- ULO 4 Work productively as individuals and in groups
- ULO 5 Use their knowledge and skills to make a positive contribution to society
- ULO 6 Make reasoned decisions based on an understanding of ethics, a respect for diversity, and an awareness of issues related to sustainability
- ULO 7 Engage in lifelong learning

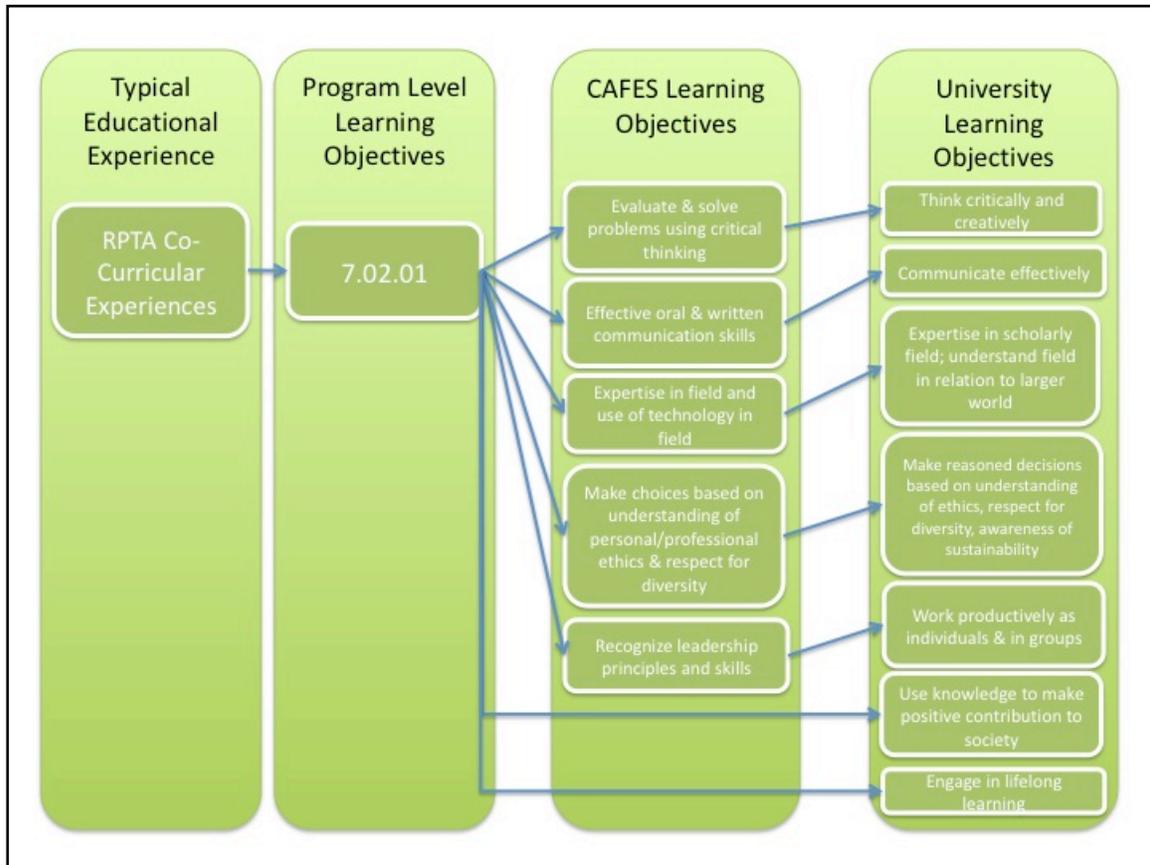
Co-curricular activities were defined for the students as extra-curricular activities that are sponsored in whole or in part by the department and result in an augmentation of classroom-based learning through the curriculum. Students were provided the following examples to represent co-curricular activities in the 2009-2010 academic year: service as an officer in the RPTA club (major's professional development/social club) or Rho Phi Lambda (major's honors fraternity), planning committee for the RPTA fundraising auction and dinner, attendance and engagement at the California Park and Recreation Society annual conference in Palm Springs, participation in the Professional Partners exchange through Rho Phi Lambda or RPTA Club, planning committee for the annual senior banquet, and/or attendance at the AT&T Park professional tour and Sustainability Panel on the Hornblower Hybrid yacht.

Through the focus group data, it was evident that several of the COAPRT standards and ULOs are either partially or fully fulfilled through participation in co-curricular activities. In addition, the very nature of our discipline and our commitment to "learn-by-doing" or active/experiential learning as a pillar for our department, creates an inferred fulfillment of ULOs 4 & 5 through not only involvement with co-curricular activities associated with our major but through required and elective coursework. Further, involvement alone in co-curricular activities shows a commitment

to lifelong learning, as these students demonstrate an understanding that learning does not end in the classroom.

The interaction between the standards (COAPRT) and objectives (ULO) was also highlighted through the data. This interaction is demonstrated visually through the following graphical matrices:





Several themes emerged from the focus groups including: (a) interpersonal communication skills with professionals; (b) application of classroom-based knowledge; (c) focusing upon ethical decision-making, the breadth of diversity, and sustainability principles; and (d) and included the COAPRT standards and/or ULOs that we believe are represented in parentheses after each quote.

Students commented repeatedly on how co-curricular activities allowed them the ability to **develop interpersonal communication skills with professionals** in our field. They discussed how valuable these communication skills are in furthering their professional development and allowing for confidence in venturing forth into the working world. This theme was exemplified by the following statements:

Student F - *“Through the professional partners exchange sponsored by the RPTA club, that experience was huge for me in communicating with professionals in our field. In helping to organize the exchange, I worked with younger professionals and simply realizing the differences in communicating with college students was valuable.”* (ULO 2)

Student D - *“The contact that is gained (through co-curricular activities) with professionals and professors who specialize in certain areas allows us to directly build our interpersonal communication skills.”* (ULO 2)

Another focal point for students related to co-curricular activity was the ability to **apply what is learned in the classroom**. With Cal Poly and subsequently our department’s commitment to a

“learn-by-doing” approach embedded within the curriculum, we believe that students found it difficult to navigate the divide between co-curricular and curricular. Despite reinforcement of *co-curricular* in questions, students several times slipped into examples of course-based service and community-oriented projects. We consider students blurring this line to be a positive development when reflecting upon the impact of our curriculum and co-curricular opportunities. Despite the blurred line, the theme was exemplified by the following statements:

Student H - *“The reinforcement of what you learn in class, leadership that you gain from actually doing it, and being able to communicate and develop those interpersonal skills with professionals is a huge in helping to get you engaged with the professional culture of our field.”* (COAPRT 7.02.01, ULOs 2, 4, & 5)

Student J - *“I catch myself thinking critically all of the time, like for example, the design of facilities. When I visit a baseball park, I always check to see if it is faced the wrong way (i.e., directionally due to rising or setting sun).”* (ULO 1)

Student H - *“When you are presented with a situation where you have a budget, you have to be both critical and creative in determining what you can and cannot do with that budget. We were presented with those situations on numerous occasions through co-curricular participation.”* (COAPRT 7.02.01, ULO 1)

Student A - *“We’re able to take the practical knowledge that we learn in the classroom and not only apply it through co-curricular involvement, but we will also then use it in our future career/internship. It is essentially building blocks for us.”* (COAPRT 7.02.01)

Another emergent theme from the focus group was related directly to ULO 6 in focusing upon **ethical decision-making, the breadth of diversity, and sustainability principles** encountered through co-curricular activities. This theme was exemplified by the following statements:

Student E - *“Outside the classroom allows you to see decision-making in real life situations, how others make decisions, and ethically how those decisions affect you and others.”* (COAPRT 7.01.03, ULO 6)

Student L - *“As an officer with the RPTA club, an example of maintaining ethics can be seen in dealing with ASI (Associated Students Incorporated). ASI requires that detailed e-plans be submitted for all events. At first, this step seemed unnecessary, and I was tempted not to complete them and hold events anyway. However, after talking to our advisor, I realized that choosing to do event plans is an ethical decision. By not completing an event plan, I realized that choice would potentially put our club and major in jeopardy. Ethics is a big part of leadership.”* (COAPRT 7.01.03, ULO 1, ULO 6)

Student D - *“Since we have a lot of group work, and we are used to working in groups, we must value the diversity of opinions. For example, when we visited Costa Rica (trip associated with RPTA 412: Adventure Travel and Tourism course), we were able to navigate the language and cultural differences more effectively, because we are so used to quickly forming groups in class and working together to accomplish our tasks.”* (ULO 1, ULO 2, ULO 4, ULO 6)

Student G - *“I think the CPRS conference is a good example of how co-curricular activities help teach us the value of diversity, as we interact with lots of different people who are mainly of a different generation than us. In addition, with the cruise to Mexico*

(RPTA 412: Adventure Travel and Tourism course), we interacted with the staff on a daily basis in learning about cruise operations and were able to see firsthand how people of many different ethnicities and languages successfully collaborate to manage programs and services in our field.” (ULO 6)

Student D: *“Co-curricular activities have helped to teach me that my philosophies are not always right; other people have different skills and unique ideas and opinions to contribute. I am more open to other people’s philosophies towards things now due in part to my participation through the major.” (ULO 6)*

Student C – *When we went on the trip to Chumash (professional development trip to Chumash Casino & Resort where we toured facilities, met and interacted with management, and held our department kickoff celebration in fall 2009), one of our fellow students asked the question from a sustainability perspective about what they were planning to do with all of the carpet, and it helped me to realize that, “Wow, even with a small casino, the impact is huge!” (ULO 6)*

Student L: *“With the RPTA club, we went on two outdoor adventure trips together where we tried to balance first and second-year students with third and fourth-year students. These trips were amazing for professional development in further learning how to cope individually with the elements and difficult terrain but also in doing your part with a small group. Through snowshoeing, it was ‘pack in-pack out’ all of your trash, and we learned about ‘leave-no-trace’ ethics and the impact on wilderness environments.” (ULO 4, ULO 6)*

Student D – *“In environmental ethics, you must look at the results of every decision to see how the decisions of different groups affect the environment, seeing how things play out and can potentially have different results depending upon the context and setting. Co-curricular activities allow us to be involved in these decisions, which is really important when we think about venturing forth into a career.” (COAPRT 7.01.03, ULO 1, ULO 6)*

The final thread that was evident through the focus group data was related to an understanding of and commitment to **lifelong learning**. This theme was exemplified by the following statements:

Student A – *“Through the Professional Partners exchange, I’ve learned that you don’t know what you don’t know. There can be a tendency to think that we have all of the knowledge, so why do we need to learn hear from someone else. Yet, through this co-curricular activity, I learned that every single venue, program, etc. is different, so you must be willing to continue learning and growing or you’ll be passed by.” (ULO 7)*

Student L – *“Everything is so situational that we learn from each and every experience, and the co-curricular activities help us to realize what we are good at and not so good at. Through these experiences, we can venture forth and begin the process of gaining enhanced knowledge of our weaknesses in an effort to improve and become a better professional.” (ULO 7)*

Although these data were collected from the “best and the brightest” in our major, we believe the themes and outcomes of co-curricular activities are similar for most students who take advantage of these opportunities. Our faculty is committed to providing and enhancing the professional development opportunities through co-curricular involvement for students, and we believe our

track record along those lines to be exemplary. As we reflect on the future, we recognize these activities as a strength of our department and aim to continue to offer or facilitate the offering of co-curricular opportunities.