CONFLICT RESOLUTION EDUCATION:
AN EXAMINATION OF STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Dr. Judy N. Rashid

North Carolina A&T State University
Greensboro, NC (USA)
jrashid@ncat.edu

Abstract
Learning should be a transformative activity that integrates academic learning and student development. Often students are expected to know how to handle conflict without being taught the skills; thus, student conduct could be affected. This paper describes quantitative student learning assessment results from an undergraduate course in Conflict Resolution. Results indicate changes in students attitude and learning toward conflict resolution and self-perception.

Keywords – conflict resolution education, learning outcome assessment, research projects

Students learn most effectively in a seamless learning environment where the lines blur between academic and non-academic experiences, thus affecting students' perception of building campus community.   Conflict management and resolution is an expected leadership skill and also serves to aid in knowledge and attitudes about the peaceful resolution of interpersonal conflict which could serve as a deterrent to misconduct.

In *__Learning Reconsidered__* {2} **learning is referred to as "a comprehensive, holistic,** transformative activity that integrates *academic learning and student development,"* and campus as a "learning system". Fried {2} further points out that in this "complex set of learning environments", the entire community must be embedded in efforts to achieve or inspire progress towards writing learning goals and assessing learning outcomes. Student Affairs Administrators recognize that   establishing student learning outcomes in student development and student activities help to identify strategies for reviewing student learning which complements the academic mission of the institution. The tools selected to measure learning outcomes might include focus groups, self reflection papers, journal writing, document analysis, service logs, etc. The assessment of student learning outcomes, however, is not program evaluation.

Two of the goals as articulated by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) are to :
- Guide practice by student affairs, student development, and student support service providers
- Establish, adopt, and disseminate unified and timely professional standards to guide student learning and development programs and services
(www.cas.edu)

Komives and Schoper {3} noted that in 2003 CAS identified the following 16 individual learning and development outcome domains:

1. Intellectual growth
2. Effective communication
3. Enhanced self esteem
4. Realistic self appraisal
5. Clarified values
6. career choices
7. **Leadership development**

8. Healthy behavior
9. Meaningful interpersonal relationships
10. Independence
11. Collaboration
12. Social Responsibility
13. Satisfying and productive lifestyles
14. Appreciating diversity
15. Spiritual awareness
16. Personal and educational goals

In addition, the following seven clusters of student outcomes was proposed by the National Association for Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) and the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and published in Learning Reconsidered (2004).

1. Cognitive complexity
2. Knowledge acquisition, integration, and application
3. Humanitarianism
4. Civic engagement
5. Interpersonal and intrapersonal competence
6. Practical Competence
7. Persistence and Academic Achievement

The sixteen (16) domains above served as the basis for establishing learning outcomes in a collegiate course in negotiation and conflict resolution. Furthermore, the use of the sixteen learning domains as identified by CAS*, the seven clusters as outlined in *Learning Reconsidered 2* (Table I, pp. 22-25), and Bloom's Taxonomy (www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/bloom.html proved to be great resources in developing learning outcomes in six areas of Student Affairs – Student Conduct, Greek Life, Multicultural Student Services, International Students and Scholars, Student Government, and Veterans and Disability Support Services.

The Study

Assessment is essential to student learning; assessment is a strategy for improving student learning and educational quality. Accreditation bodies want to know which strategies are used for reviewing student learning, how effective is the process, and what structures are aligned to achieve the results. The ultimate goal of assessment is to measure learning and improve instruction. Assessment impacts policy, programmatic decisions, human resources, and student retention. Assessment is not an interruption of our business, it is our business to see what our students are learning and how effectively they learn it. The focus in student affairs centers around engagement and learning as well as service delivery.

To demonstrate this approach in student affairs, the following research study was conducted by a Senior Student Affairs Officer whose primary area of supervision is student conduct.
The research centered around the assessment of student learning outcomes of an inaugural undergraduate course, entitled FOUNDATIONS OF NEGOTIATION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION.

The Problem

What do students learn after course completion of a conflict resolution class?

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to assess student learning outcomes after completion of a collegiate course entitled, *The Foundations of Negotiation and Conflict Resolution.*

Research Questions

The study examined the following questions:
1. What are the skill ability levels of students before and after course completion?
2. How did the course change students' perception of conflict management and resolution?

Population

Participants of this study were coed undergraduate students of all classifications and majors at a public 4 yr. university.

Methodology

- **RESEARCH DESIGN**

This assessment project used a **pre and post self assessment survey** designed by the professor and administered to the students before and after taking the course . In addition, using an **open - ended survey question,** the students were asked to answer this question in writing: "How has taking the course changed you?

- **DATA COLLECTION**

The nine learning outcomes of the course was used as items in the written pre-post survey to which the students responded using a skill rating scale of 1 (least ability) to 5 (most ability).

In addition, written responses to the question " how has the course changed you?" were collected and published in a class newsletter.

Data Analysis

- The first step in analyzing the data was to record the descriptive student responses from the pre-post survey of learning outcomes before and after taking the course. A bar chart was used to display the range of skill responses with 1 being the least to 5 being the most in terms of skill level acquisition of the learning outcome.
- The responses to the open ended survey question were examined for re-occurring themes.
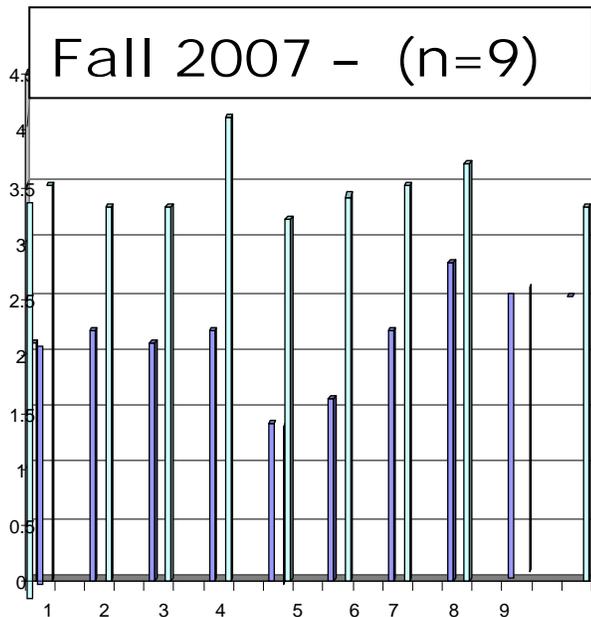
RESULTS

Fall 2007 – (n=9)

TABLE 1

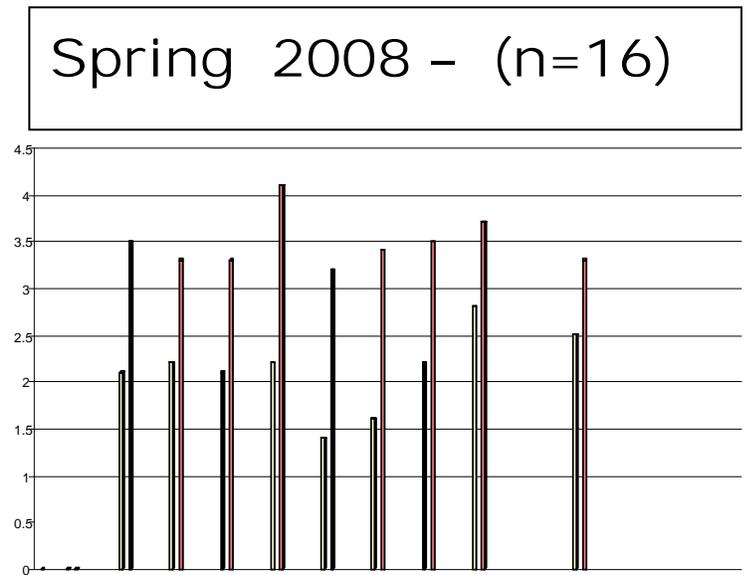## Spring 2008 – (n=16)

Table 2

Learning Outcomes Before Taking the course (left bar)
Learning Outcomes After Taking the Course (right bar)

In both Tables 1 and 2:

- The least skill level before taking the course was in the area of being able to name the types of conflict management styles {learning outcome (LO) #5} followed by the inability to relate the importance of assessing one's own conflict management style (LO #6).

- The most learning occurred after taking the course relative to the ability to articulate the components of negotiation and mediation (LO #4), followed by acquiring the ability to explain the importance of communications skills and the influence of gender and cultural differences (LO #8)………{see 9 student learning outcomes on next page}

4

The learning outcomes (LO) for the course were established as follows:

1. Understand the value of diversity in managing and resolving conflict

2. Demonstrate the basic elements of cooperative learning

3. Describe the nature of conflict

4. Articulate the components of negotiation and mediation

5. Know the types of conflict management styles

6. Relate the importance of assessing one's own conflict management style

7. Recognize the influence of personality on conflict management style

8. Explain the importance of good communication skills; the influence of gender and cultural differences, persuasion, perception, and power in conflict resolution

9. Explain the link between effective negotiation skills and effective leadership
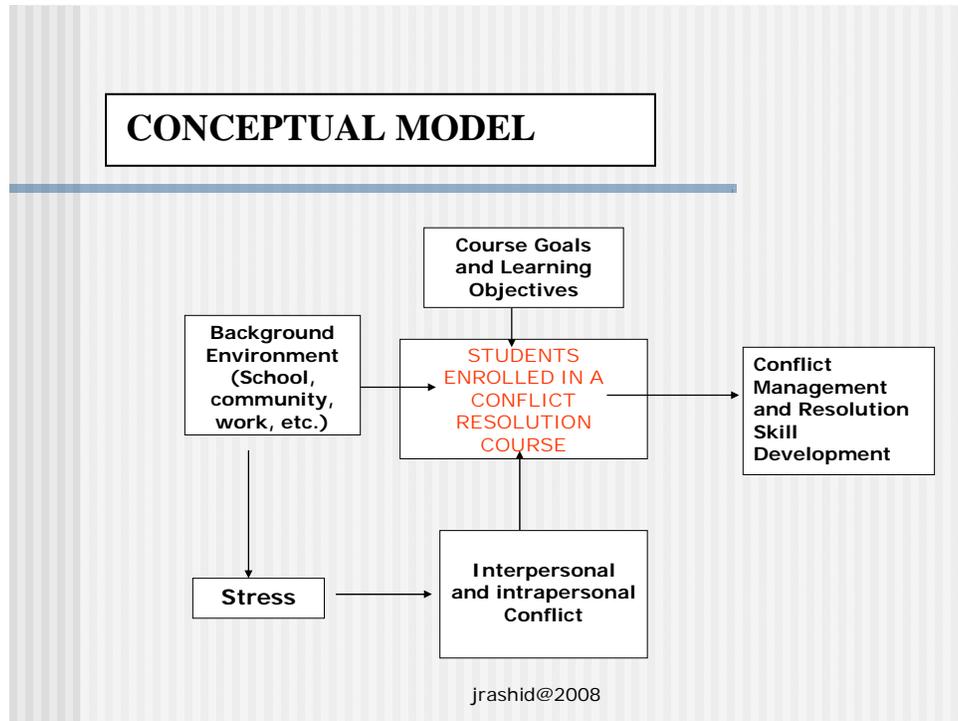
Conclusion

The use of individual learning and development outcome domains prove helpful in establishing and assessing learning outcomes which enable students to acquire new skills, knowledge, and/or attitudes in the practice of negotiation and mediation. Teaching students conflict management and resolution enabled this researcher, as a student affairs administrator, to demonstrate that academic learning and student development processes exist simultaneously and should be highlighted more in the academy.

It is vital for campuses to be engaged in building community through research, teaching, and civic engagement. Curricular and co-curricular experiences provide a forum for the student to acquire new skills, knowledge, attitudes, and enhance students' ability to work with people whose personality, background, expectations, and values differ from their own. Simultaneously, the assessment of student learning outcomes is equally vital in order to establish benchmarks for ultimate student achievement; thus, a stronger sense of community emerges and student engagement is enhanced. As a result, the academy is more able to provoke thought among its students.

Recommendation

More research is needed to identify strategies for reviewing student learning outcomes in conflict resolution education to complement the student disciplinary process.

CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Course Goals and Learning Objectives

Background Environment (School, community, work, etc.)

STUDENTS ENROLLED IN A CONFLICT RESOLUTION COURSE

Conflict Management and Resolution Skill Development

Stress

Interpersonal and intrapersonal Conflict

jrashid@2008

Figure 1
@Rashid, J.N. (2008). The perceived influence of enrollment in a conflict resolution class on skill development

References

Reference 1   {American College Personnel Association and National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (2004). <u>Learning Reconsidered: A Campus Wide Focus on the Student Experience.</u> Washington, DC: authors. Available at <u>www.naspa.org</u> and <u>www.acpa.nche.edu</u>}

Reference 2   Fried, J. (2006).   *Rethinking Learning.* In R.P. Keeling, (Eds.), <u>Learning Reconsidered 2: A Practical Guide to Implementing a Campus Wide Focus on the Student Experience</u> (pp. 3-9). American College Personnel Association, National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, Association of College and University Housing Officers – International, Association of College Unions - International, National Academic Advising Association, National Association for Campus Activities, and National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association.

Reference 3   Komives, S.R. & Schoper, S.S. (2006).   *Developing Learning Outcomes.* In R.P. Keeling, (Eds.), <u>Learning Reconsidered 2: A Practical Guide to Implementing a Campus Wide Focus on the Student Experience</u> (pp. 17-41). American College Personnel Association, National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, Association of College and University Housing Officers – International, Association of College Unions - International, National Academic Advising Association, National Association for Campus Activities, and National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association

Reference 4   Rashid J. (2008**,** September). *Conflict resolution education: Assessing student learning outcomes.* Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Association for Conflict Resolution, Austin, TX.

Reference 5   <u>www.cas.edu</u>. Retrieved August 2008.

Reference 6   <u>www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/bloom.html</u>. Retrieved August 2008.