

PROGRAM THEORY

A Guide to Getting Started



THREE COMMON PROGRAMMING STATES

There are 3 common states student affairs professionals find themselves in when asked to implement a program "new to them". Identify which state best represents a current program, strategy or intervention that you are looking to assess. The next few pages will outline a series of steps you can take to articulate why this program should be effective (i.e., Program Theory).

Inherited Program - Limited to No Control

You are inheriting a program that is already built. You may or may not have inherited program theory with this program.

New Program - Total Control

You are starting a new program and have total control over the programmatic aspects including the distal and program level outcomes.

New Program - Some Control

You are planning a new program that has some parameters - perhaps you are given a distal outcome that you must map your program towards

3 STEP PROCESS TO ARTICULATE PROGRAM THEORY

Whether you're starting a program from scratch, inheriting, or working within parameters, these three steps below will guide you in articulating program theory.

Step 1	Identify an appropriate, feasible and relevant distal outcome. Note: In some instances this may already be identified or provided for you.
Step 2	Specify intermediate outcomes to be achieved during the program. What do students need to know, think or do differently as a result of your program in order to achieve the distal outcome?
Step 3	Develop your programming components. What does research say will help the target audience achieve the distal and intermediate outcomes? What activities or strategies will you use?

PROGRAM THEORY FOR INHERITED PROGRAMS

You have inherited a program that has a distal outcome of increasing participants financial well-being.

Programmatic outcomes include:

- Students will increase their value in creating and maintaining a budget.
- Students will identify the steps to creating a budget
- Students will be able to create a budget

Programmatic Component (Activity)	IF students participate in this activity, THEN what should be the outcome?	WHY do you believe the activity will lead to the distal outcome	What empirical EVIDENCE do you have that the activity leads to the outcome?
Students listen to a lecture on the benefits of maintaining a budget.	Students will increase their value in maintaining a budget.	Students who value maintaining a budget are more likely to create a budget which will help them understand their financial state and where they can save money - thus a higher probability of decreasing stress related to financial concerns.	Student Loans, Financial Stress, and College Student Retention (Britt et al., 2017). College Student Financial Wellness: Student Loans and Beyond. (Montalto et al., 2018)
Students participate in a mock budget making activity	Students will identify the steps to creating a budget	Students who can identify the steps to creating a budget are more likely to feel empowered to create a budget for themselves which will help them identify where they can save money - thus a higher probability of decreasing stress related to financial concerns.	Financial literacy and the need for financial education: evidence and implications (Lusardi, 2019)
Students create a plan outlining their weekly anticipated budget and top priorities when budgeting.	Students will be able to create a budget	Students who are able to create a budget will have a better understanding of strategies to save money thus creating a higher probability of decreasing stress related to financial concerns.	Empowering Women in Finance through Developing Girls' Financial Literacy Skills in the United States (Park et al., 2021)

PROGRAM THEORY FOR INHERITED PROGRAMS - TEMPLATE

Distal Outcome:

Programmatic outcomes include:

Programmatic Component (Activity)	IF students participate in this activity, THEN what should be the outcome?	WHY do you believe the activity will lead to the distal outcome	What empirical EVIDENCE do you have that the activity leads to the outcome?

SEE THE CONNECTION!

Completing the above table will allow you to begin visually depicting your program theory. When filled out, this table gives us great information about how our planned activities should impact students and why, a logic model will allow us to see these connections visually.

3 STEP PROCESS TO ARTICULATE PROGRAM THEORY

Below are the steps to gathering program theory. These steps may look different depending on whether you are starting a program from scratch and have total control over the program outcomes and components, you are being asked to assess something in particular (a distal or programmatic outcomes has already been defined for you) or you are inheriting a program from your office.

STEP 1: IDENTIFY THE DISTAL OUTCOME

Institutional Outcomes	Divisional Outcomes	Program/Office Level Outcomes
<p>Outcomes that are large scale, high profile/priority - perhaps university wide goals.</p> <p>Examples: Impacting GPA or Retention</p> <p>(Common distal outcomes)</p>	<p>Outcomes that are more complex and overarching and may serve an entire unit or division.</p> <p>Examples: Intercultural Competence, Ethical Reasoning, Civic Engagement, Self-Authorship</p> <p>(Can be a distal outcomes, but often an intermediate outcomes as well)</p>	<p>Outcomes that can be achieved in a smaller scale and may be more department or program specific.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <p>seeking involvement with people different from self, engaging in reflection of values, identifying personal attributes of one's identity, understanding of power imbalances, list 3 leadership styles.</p> <p>(Less likely to be a distal outcome, more often intermediate or programmatic outcomes)</p>

Define your Distal Outcome:

Remember Outcomes should be:

Malleable & feasible - Is this an outcome that is shown to change and can I change this outcome given the length and strength of my program/strategy/intervention?

Valued by JMU/Student Affairs - tied to divisional strategic plan, mission, vision, values, divisional learning aims

STEP 1: IDENTIFY THE DISTAL OUTCOME

Distal Outcome:

- Is that distal outcome malleable? Is it feasible to obtain?
- What existing programming, strategies or interventions have been shown to effectively influence that outcome? Have you searched databases for evidence-informed programming shown to "work" before trying to build something from scratch?

What Works Clearing House



Campbell Collaboration



What Works For Health



Wise Interventions



Repositories of Effectiveness Studies to Guide Evidence-Informed Programming



Step 2: Specify the Intermediate Student Learning Outcome(s) Template

Distal Outcome:

- What knowledge, attitudes, skills and or behaviors will the program need to cultivate to achieve your distal outcome? What does the research say about what students need to know, think or do, in order to achieve your distal outcome?

STEP 3: DEVELOPING YOUR PROGRAM COMPONENTS

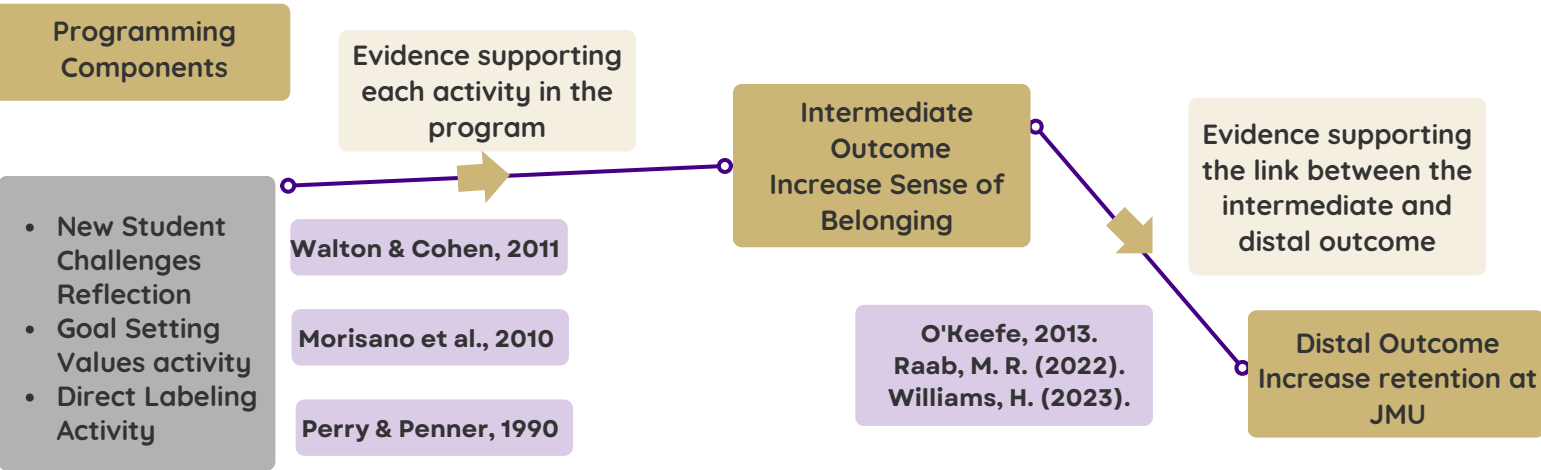
Knowing your intermediate outcome(s) and distal outcome(s) now allow you to develop theory-based and research-based programming components that will lead you to achieving your intermediate and distal outcomes.

Program Development

Activity/Strategy/Pedagogy	Description	Evidence to Support Choice of Activity/Strategy/Pedagogy

PROGRAM COMPONENT MAPPING

Below is an example of Program Mapping that includes an example of Program Theory and Evidence Informed Programming (EIP). The below map visually shows us how the programming components are linked to (and support) the intermediate outcomes and distal outcomes



PROGRAM MAPPING TEMPLATE

