

Aggies RISE

Fall 2012-Spring 2013

Pilot Results

Background

The Texas A&M Division of Student Affairs has had ongoing conversations about high impact practices and student learning. In particular, assessment and documentation of student learning for student employees is in the Division's Strategic Plan. Based on the University of Iowa's GROW (Guided Reflection on Work) program, the Division created Aggies RISE (Reflecting and Integrating Student Employment) to assess what students are learning from their student worker positions. The Division was composed of 17 departments during the pilot project, with varying numbers of student workers who perform a wide variety of tasks.

The Aggies RISE committee reviewed all learning outcomes and job descriptions for the student workers to find commonalities. Three major themes arose: communication, critical thinking, and social, cultural, and global competence in a group setting. Those aligned with several of the University's undergraduate learning outcomes. Those themes also provided the basis for the pre- and post-survey. The pre-survey was given in November, while the post-survey was implemented in April.

In addition, 38 supervisors volunteered to be part of the pilot project to have conversations with their student workers using a structured interview protocol. The purpose was to have students reflect on the learning that was occurring on the job that may have an impact on their academics and career choices. Following supervisor training in late fall and early spring, the interviews took place in the spring, 2013 (before Spring Break). Student employees were provided questions to answer prior to the meeting, then the interview expanded on the responses, and supervisors made notes about additional thoughts that the students raised and their own reflections about the students. All forms were returned to Student Life Studies.

Method and Sample

The 17-question survey was developed using Qualtrics[®], survey design software that creates web-based forms and databases. Three questions were qualitative. The data was analyzed using SPSS[®], a statistical software package. The Aggies RISE Committee did a formal content analysis to categorize the responses from the pre- and post-survey qualitative questions.

The Aggies RISE pre-survey was administered November 9, 2012 to November 30, 2012. Of the 1,098 student workers who were sent the survey, 376 completed at least part of it for a 34% response rate. The post-survey was administered April 15, 2013 to May 5, 2013 to the same 1,098 students. For both the pre- and post-survey, students were sent up to three reminders to participate. Supervisors also reminded students to respond. The post-survey response rate was 26% (n=315), although it is not known how many of the original sample were still employed by the Division at the end of the spring semester. There were 191 students who took both the pre-survey and the post-survey, and 30 students took both surveys and participated in the supervisor interview.

Results

Results will be reported as means, standard deviations (sd), and frequency percentages for the number of people (n) who responded to the question. For ease of reading, frequency percentages have been

rounded to the nearest whole percent, so totals may not add up to exactly 100%. Tables are in descending mean, frequency, or change order, unless otherwise specified. Qualitative themes are reported in this report; the entire list can be found in a separate document.

Student Worker Pre-Survey and Post-Survey

In the pre-survey, when asked how long they had been employed by a department in the Division of Student Affairs, 38% had been employed more than a year, while 30% had been employed 3-6 months, 21% less than three months, and 10% seven months to a year. About a third (32%) lived on campus. In the post-survey, 50% had been employed more than a year, and 42% had worked seven months to a year. About 8% had been in the position 3-6 months, and 1% said less than three months. Similar to the pre-survey, 31% lived on campus.

Respondents were asked to rate several questions related to their student employee experience. The scale was 5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=Neutral, 2=Disagree, and 1=Strongly Disagree. Table 1, in descending mean order by change, indicates that believe they improved the most in working in a diverse environment and making connection between work and life as a student. The item with the largest mean in the pre-survey (oral communication) showed slight improvement in the post-survey. The lowest areas in the pre-survey means (written communication and learning about career options) showed modest improvement.

Statement	Pre-Mean (sd) [n=368]	Post-Mean (sd) [n=293]	Change Post-Pre
Because of my job, I am more able to work effectively with individuals with a variety of backgrounds, experiences, and cultures.	4.08 (.87)	4.32 (.76)	+.24
My supervisor helps me make connections between my work and my life as a student.	3.66 (1.07)	3.84 (1.03)	+.18
My job has helped me develop conflict resolution skills.	4.02 (.88)	4.19 (.83)	+.17
My job has helped prepare me for the world of full-time employment.	3.71 (1.04)	3.88 (.94)	+.17
I recognize connections between my job and my academic major/coursework.	3.38 (1.16)	3.55 (1.14)	+.17
My job has helped me improve my written communication skills.	3.28 (1.04)	3.43 (.98)	+.15
My job has helped me learn more about career options.	3.28 (1.17)	3.39 (1.13)	+.11
My job has helped me develop more effective time management skills.	4.08 (.78)	4.18 (.76)	+.10
My job has helped me improve my oral communication skills.	4.19 (.83)	4.28 (.73)	+.09
My job has helped me improve my critical thinking skills to form opinions and solve problems.	3.91 (.91)	3.99 (.86)	+.08

Table 1—Impact of Student Employment on Their Development

There was a statistically significant difference ($p=.006$, $n=177$) for students who took both the pre-survey and post-survey for the statement, “Because of my job, I am more able to work effectively with individuals with a variety of backgrounds, experiences, and cultures.”

Both surveys also asked how often they have had formal and informal conversations with their supervisor about connecting their job and academics/coursework. Table 2 shows the increase in the number of conversations that occur. In terms of finding those connections, there was a statistically significant difference ($p=.004$) between fall and spring for those students who responded to both the pre-survey and post-survey (fall: mean=2.32, $sd=.94$, $n=181$; spring: mean=2.50, $sd=.95$, $n=181$). In addition, the 30 students who participated in the interviews increased their mean from 2.69 ($sd=.89$) in the fall to 3.00 ($sd=.65$) in the spring. On the other hand, the 161 students who did not participate in interviews also rose from slightly 2.25 ($sd=.94$) to 2.41 ($sd=.97$).

Students sometimes find connections between what they are learning in the classroom and what they've learned on the job. How often have you had formal or informal conversations with your supervisor about connections between your job and your academics/coursework?	Pre-Percent (n=365)	Post-Percent (n=291)	Change Post-Pre
Frequently (4)	9%	11%	+2%
Sometimes (3)	36%	45%	+9%
Rarely (2)	29%	25%	-4%
Never (1)	25%	18%	-7%

Table 2—Frequency of Conversations between Supervisor and Student Worker ($n=181$)

As an open-ended question, respondents were asked to describe one example of how they have applied learning from their classes to their job. As seen in Table 3, on the following page, for the pre-survey some students found no connection, while others were in positions that directly correlated between what they were learning in their classes and their job. The direct tie category indicates that students gave very explicit examples between a course/major and a task in their job. Within the direct tie category, students gave specific examples related to health (13), working with others (8), recreation/programming (4), construction (2), accounting (2), technology (2), communication (2), diversity (2), and training (1). Looking at overarching themes, some of categories were people oriented (working with others, customer service, communication [written, oral, and interpersonal], conflict resolution, and leadership), while others were more skill/task based (time management, technical skills, marketing, study skills, project management), or cognitive (critical thinking, work ethic, and ethics).

Pre-survey—Please describe one example of how you have applied learning from your classes to your job.	Number of Thoughts (n=245)
Does Not Apply	47
Direct Tie	36
Time Management	22
Working with Others	18
Customer Service	14
Technical/Computer Skills	13
Tutoring/Teaching	12
Communication	11
Written Communication	9
Critical Thinking	9
Conflict Resolution	8
Diversity	8
Interpersonal Communication	8
Oral Communication	8
Marketing	6
Work Ethic	6
Leadership	5
Study Skills	2
Ethics	1
Project Management	1
Indistinguishable Answer	1

Table 3—How Employees Have Applied Class Learning to their Job (Pre-Survey)

Examples from the pre-survey included: (classification, sex, ethnicity, academic college, length of employment)

- “I have applied basic anatomy knowledge learned in Biology 112 to identifying which muscle was affected on a patient.” (sophomore, male, White, Education, employed less than three months)
- “I’m an accounting major with a specific focus on auditing. So, I like to see the overall process of how decisions are made, and the internal control systems at the <department>. Knowing this background helps answer some questions coworkers have.” (senior, male, White, Business, employed more than one year)
- “I’m in a project management course and I connect it to my job all the time. I must manage my time and the items I currently am working on and I definitely apply my planning skills from this course to my job.” (senior, female, White, Business, employed more than one year)

In the post-survey, students were asked again about their application of classroom learning to their employment. Table 4 indicates that students were more focused in their answers and more students could make a direct connection. As in the pre-survey, some of the broader themes included interactions with people, specific skills, and cognitive areas. In the direct tie category, students were able to describe very specific instances in the following areas: working with others (21), health (10), communication (10), diversity (8), conflict resolution (6), career (4), accounting (3), risk management (2), marketing (2), computer skills (2), tutoring (1), and creative thinking skills (1).

Post-survey—Please describe one example of how you have applied learning from your classes to your job.	Number of Thoughts (n=184)
Direct Tie	70
Does not Apply	33
Working with Others	29
Conflict Resolution	9
Time Management	8
Communication	7
Oral Communication	7
Did not Answer the Question	5
Critical Thinking	5
Diversity	4
Budget	2
Technical/Computer Skills	1
Risk Management	1
Leadership	1
Interpersonal Communication	1
Written Communication	1

Table 4—How Employees Have Applied Class Learning to their Job (Post-Survey)

Post-survey examples of class application included:

- “I took a manufacturer and distributor relations class and it taught about the needs of different people based on their position at the time. It taught the importance of balancing those needs with and trying to figure out the best routes for different situations. This translates to my job as a supervisor at <department> because it opened my thinking to take into account of each party and their issues. Whether it being employee-customer, employee-employee, or customer-customer based.” (Senior, male, White, Engineering, employed more than one year)
- “I have used various communication techniques that I have learned as a Psychology major that has allowed me to develop my critical thinking and problem solving skills when helping people with <my job>.” (junior, male, White, Liberal Arts, employed seven months to a year)
- “International business courses teach you how to better effectively communicate with others from different ethnic backgrounds. I have continuously had to interact with various cultures at my job.” (Junior, male, Hispanic, Business, employed seven months to a year)

Respondents were asked to describe one specific skill, if any, they have learned as a student employee that contributes to their success as a Texas A&M student. As Table 5 indicates, in the pre-survey, time management and communication stood out as the most frequent responses. Many of these categories, too, could be aggregated into themes such as people orientation, task management, and cognitive skills.

Pre-survey—Please describe one specific skill, if any, you have learned as a student employee that contributes to your success as a Texas A&M student.	Number of Thoughts (n=293)
Time Management	73
Communication	37
Oral Communication	34
Diversity	17
Conflict Resolution	16
Technical Skills	13
Teamwork	12
Not Applicable	12
Written Communication	11
Customer Service	7
Critical Thinking	7
Professionalism	6
Leadership	5
Organizational Skills	5
Connection/Community	5
Work Ethic	4
Confidence	4
Interpersonal Communication	4
Responsibility	4
Positivity/Stress Management	4
Patience	3
Resourcefulness	3
Direct Tie	2
Financial Success	2
Flexibility	2
Crisis Management	1

Table 5—One Skill Learned as an Employee that Contributes to Success (Pre-Survey)

Examples of skills from the pre-survey included:

- “Being a student worker has helped develop my critical thinking skills. There is no official handbook that gives black and white instructions for how to handle every phone call, situation, or assigned project. I have to find solutions and answers to problems, and I know that I can’t constantly be asking my supervisor what I should do. Since becoming a student worker I feel more capable to handle difficult situations.” (senior, female, Hispanic, Liberal Arts, employed less than three months)
- “I’ve learned a lot about how to create educational moments with other students who may not be as sensitive to people’s differences (whether it be race, gender identity, sexual identity, class, etc.). Rather than get upset, and potentially create a negative experience for the both of

us---I've become great at navigating those situations and making a positive impact.” (senior, female, Black only+2 or more/1 Black, Liberal Arts, employed more than one year)

In the post-survey, students were asked the same question about skills that contributed to their success. The results in Table 6 are similar to the pre-survey results. Students believe the employment has provided them the opportunity to develop time management skills, as well as interact with others.

Post-survey—Please describe one specific skill, if any, you have learned as a student employee that contributes to your success as a Texas A&M student.	Number of Thoughts (n=193)
Time Management	64
Communication	28
Working with Others	19
Oral Communication	17
Conflict Resolution	11
Diversity	11
Not Applicable	8
Stress Management	6
Critical Thinking/Problem Solving	5
Written Communication	5
Adaptability/Perseverance	4
Work Ethic	4
Health	3
Resources	2
Respect/Value	2
Programming	1
Networking	1
Technical/Computer Skills	1

Table 6—One Skill Learned as an Employee that Contributes to Success (Post-Survey)

Examples of post-survey comments about a skilled learned:

- “I have learned how to communicate better. It is important to understand the protocols of the university but it also important to understand how to relay that information effectively to others. This has helped me in my classes where I've had to give presentations on topics that the audience may not be too familiar with.” (senior, male, White, Agriculture, employed more than one year)
- “Time management is a huge factor that I have learned through dealing with people and tasks on a daily basis. This skill will be extremely useful to me for the rest of my life.” (senior, male, White, Business, employed seven months to a year)

The last open-ended question asked respondents to describe one specific way their work as a student employee has influenced their overall experience at Texas A&M, summarized in Table 7, on the following page. Students noted that they have been able to meet people that they would not have met without their position. Once again, they indicated they learned time management, and some students summarized that their job contributed to a positive experience at Texas A&M.

Pre-survey—Please describe one specific way your work as a student employee has influenced your overall experience at Texas A&M.	Number of Thoughts (n=309)
Acquaintances	40
Time Management	30
Positive Experience	24
Diversity	23
Knowledge of Campus	22
Networking	22
Involvement	20
Friends	18
Sense of Belonging/Community	17
Career	16
Supervisor/Staff	15
Finances	13
Life Skills	11
Responsibility/Accountability	9
Not Applicable/Didn't Answer Question	9
Communication	8
Love of Texas A&M	5
Sense of Purpose	4
Teamwork/Leadership	3

Table 7—How Their Student Employment has Influenced Their Overall Experience (Pre-Survey)

Examples from the pre-survey include:

- “Becoming a student employee has really broadened my horizons of meeting new people and making more connections in the Texas A&M network which I believe will greatly influence my overall experience at Texas A&M.” (junior, female, Hispanic, Liberal Arts, employed less than three months)
- “Working as a student employee has made me push myself to manage my time. I feel I would not have this skill if I was only worried about managing classes.” (senior, female, White, Agriculture, more than one year)

Similar to the pre-survey, the students who took the post-survey described the relationships they had with people (Table 8). They also articulated close relationship to Texas A&M and more knowledge about university resources.

Post-survey—Please describe one specific way your work as a student employee has influenced your overall experience at Texas A&M.	Number of Thoughts (n=203)
Friendship and Support	45
Connection to the University	29
Diversity	19
Consciousness/Awareness	17
Time Management	14
Fun/Positivity	11
Career Ambitions/Job Experience	10
Networking	9
Responsibility	8
Finances	8
Convenience	7
Mentorship	5
Feedback about their Experience	4
Confidence	3
Customer Service	3
Conflict Resolution	2
Leader	2
New Experiences	2
None	2
Skill Development	2
Teamwork	1

Table 8—How Their Student Employment has Influenced Their Overall Experience (Post-Survey)

Post-survey examples:

- “I get the opportunity to see <students> progress through the year and transform into independent and successful adults. It is a rewarding experience to not only be able to witness this change, but to be active in mentoring students who come to me for help. This experience has shown me that the Aggie experience is not the same for every individual, but that it is a beautiful one nonetheless, and that is what makes it special.” (sophomore, female, White, Liberal Arts, employed seven months to a year)
- “I have been able to begin networking through the department I currently work for. In meeting with the advisers and staff in the office I am able to build work relationships that will help me in the future.” (senior, female, Hispanic, Agriculture, employed more than one year)
- “Before the <position>, I didn't like Texas A&M. But through it I was able to make connections and enjoy college.” (junior, female, 2 or more excluding Black, Veterinary Medicine, employed more than one year)

Respondents represented most of the departments in the Division of Student Affairs, shown in Table 9, on the following page. Not surprisingly, Recreational Sports and Residence Life together represented more than half of the student respondents since they have large student staffs.

Department	Pre-Percent (n=376)	Post-Percent (n=310)	All DSA Student Employees (N=1098)
Rec Sports	33%	31%	44%
Residence Life	22%	24%	19%
University Center Complex	6%	6%	7%
Student Health Services	5%	6%	5%
Office of the Commandant	7%	5%	6%
Memorial Student Center	4%	5%	3%
Student Life	5%	4%	3%
Office of the Vice President	3%	4%	2%
Rudder Theatre Complex	4%	2%	3%
Children’s Center	2%	2%	3%
Disability Services	2%	2%	2%
Department of IT	1%	2%	1%
Multicultural Services	1%	2%	1%
University Art	1%	<1%	1%
Student Life Studies	1%	1%	<1%
Student Counseling Service	0%	0%	<1%
Student Activities	0%	0%	2%

Table 10—Respondents’ Employing Department

In terms of demographics, classification and gender are show in Tables 11 and 12 respectively. Nearly half of the respondents were seniors, and over half were female (although the males outnumber the females in actual employment).

Classification	Pre-Percent (n=376)	Post-Percent (n=310)	All DSA Student Employees (N=1098)
U4	43%	47%	47%
U3	29%	28%	28%
U2	22%	21%	21%
U1	6%	4%	4%

Table 11—Respondents’ Academic Classification

Gender	Pre-Percent (n=376)	Post-Percent (n=310)	All DSA Student Employees (N=1098)
Female	56%	55%	46%
Male	44%	45%	54%

Table 12—Respondents’ Gender

In terms of academic college, the respondents closely reflected the distribution of all employees (Table 13). In addition the ethnicity of student employees was somewhat close to the respondents (Table 14). Table 15 illustrates that on campus student employees were slightly more likely to respond to the surveys.

College	Pre-Percent (n=227)	Post-Percent (n=310)	All DSA Student Employees (N=1098)
Liberal Arts	23%	23%	23%
Education	17%	18%	17%
Engineering	14%	16%	17%
Agriculture	12%	15%	15%
Business	14%	14%	11%
Science	6%	5%	5%
General Studies	6%	3%	4%
Veterinary Medicine	3%	4%	4%
Architecture	2%	1%	3%
Geosciences	2%	2%	2%

Table 13—Academic Colleges

Ethnicity	Pre-Percent (n=376)	Post-Percent (n=310)	All DSA Student Employees (N=1098)
White Only	69%	72%	68%
Hispanic or Latino of any Race	18%	16%	17%
Black only + 2 or more/1 Black	7%	7%	7%
Asian Only	3%	3%	4%
2 or more/excluding Black	1%	2%	2%
American Indian Only	1%	3%	<1%
International	1%	1%	1%
Unknown or Not Reported	<1%	<1%	<1%
Native Hawaiian Only	0%	<1%	<1%

Table 14—Ethnicity

Residence	Pre-Percent (n=376)	Post-Percent (n=310)	All DSA Student Employees (N=1098)
Off Campus	70%	69%	75%
On Campus	30%	31%	25%

Table 15—Residence

Supervisor Interviews

Thirty-eight supervisors were provided training on how to conduct an interview with student workers. They were provided with an introductory script that told students the purpose of the project, the questions, they were to answer ahead of the interview, and the interview process. The interviews were conducted from January 2013 to March, 2013 (to be completed before Spring Break). Students answered the following questions on a form provided:

1. How is this job fitting with your academics?
2. What are you learning here at work that is helping you in school?
3. What are you learning in class that you can apply here are work?
4. Can you give me a couple of examples of things you are learning here at work that you will be using in your chosen profession?

Students turned in their completed forms to their supervisor, who met with them for a deeper discussion. Supervisors then wrote further answers and their perceptions of the student and the process. Rather than looking at each question individually, the Aggies RISE committee members reviewed the forms by department for overarching themes. The common themes included time management, communication (including customer service), critical thinking, and working with others/teamwork. Less frequently, students cited diversity, links between academics and their job, technical skills, and risk management.

Supervisor Follow Up Meeting

The supervisors who participated in the interviews were invited to a “debrief” meeting on April 8, 2013, to talk about their experiences and any feedback about the process. Many of the 14 supervisors in attendance thought it was a positive experience that allowed for individual discussion that may not happen very often. Some students could clearly articulate the relationship between the job, academics, and career goals, while others needed a little coaching to see the connections. Some supervisors talked about seeing students in a different, more positive light, and are more intentional about having conversations with student workers about their development.

In terms of process improvement, supervisors suggested putting the students at ease before the meeting (explaining that this is not part of their performance review, and there are no right or wrong answers), waiting until students have at least a semester of experience before interviewing, and continuing to give the questions in advance.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Student employees in the Division of Student Affairs indicated they have developed skills and knowledge related to the institution’s undergraduate learning outcomes. In particular, both the quantitative responses and the qualitative comments indicated that students learned to work with others, had a better understanding of diversity, developed communication skills, and overall had positive experiences. Students also talked about critical thinking and problem solving on the job, although to a lesser extent. Almost all students could identify something they learned, and very few expressed having a negative experience in their position.

Although some students in the fall did not see connections between their job and their academics, that number decreased in the spring, potentially indicating that as students got more experience, they saw more parallels. Students in the “technical” majors (in colleges such as Engineering and Science) may

not as quickly see connections as the students in the "non-technical" majors (in Liberal Arts and Education, for example). Supervisors may need to overtly identify the skills that students are using (or should use) on the job.

The supervisors who interviewed students indicated an overall positive experience. While some supervisors knew their students fairly well, all of them learned more about how students connected their employment to other areas. Sometimes the supervisor had to prompt students to articulate their learning, but students then saw the relationship. Some supervisors indicated they could give students more or different responsibilities based on the results of the conversations they had with students.

In the future, the Division of Student Affairs should continue to train all student employee supervisors on the university learning outcomes, how to have developmental conversations with students, and how to document learning that has taken place so that it becomes the norm in Student Affairs. The task force that conducted this pilot project agreed that there should be a designated person/group to coordinate this effort, rather than this task force. Some of the student worker positions could also be considered high impact practices (or could be with some minor modifications). In the future, Aggies RISE may be more closely tied to the high impact practices committee and/or the Student Leader Learning Outcomes (SLLO) Project.

In addition, departments should be encouraged to revise job descriptions, as applicable, to reflect the expected learning that may take place. Describing the expected learning may also create a stronger match between students' (desired) skills and the job expectations.

All departments in the Division of Student Affairs are expected to have specific learning outcomes and assessment methods for their student workers, beyond the Aggies RISE pilot program. It may be helpful to develop supervisor training on how to write and assess learning outcomes, so they know the process and outcome. Each department should include these efforts in their departmental assessment plans.

Based on the results from the pilot program and potential continued training, it may be beneficial to do a pre-/post-survey every few years to determine changes over time and benefits of more overt interventions by supervisors. This information should be shared with the Division of Student Affairs staff.

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