

Assessing Student Learning in the Co-Curricular

Division of Student Affairs,
Texas A&M University





Overview of the Presentation

- History of the Project
- Use of Rubrics
- Research Project
- Student and Staff Experiences
- Staff and Advisor Assessments
- Lessons Learned



Texas A&M University

- Institution
 - Research Extensive, Public, 4-Year
- Student Body
 - 48,000 (39,000 undergraduates)
- Student Organizations
 - 70-80% undergraduates are involved at any given time
 - Over 800 student organizations
- Advisors and Advising Philosophy



Student Leader Learning Outcomes (SLLO)

Provide consistent methods and tools for staff to use with student leaders in student organizations, programs, or activities to help in the assessment and documentation of enhanced learning in relation to their leadership experiences



History of the SLLO Project

- Faculty Focus Groups
 - What do students need to know, beyond discipline specific knowledge, to be successful in their field?
- Student Organization Advisors
 - Are there common leadership skills that we want student leaders to have at the end of their experience?

History of the Project (cont.)

□ Brainstormed themes:

- Critical thinking
- Communication
 - Written
 - Oral
 - Interpersonal
- Diversity
- Project Management
- Teams and Groups
- Delegation
- Effective Meetings
- Fiscal Management
- Service
- Risk Management
- Vision/Mission/Goals
- Active Citizenship
- Membership Selection
- Reflection/Transference
- Critical Feedback



Structure of SLLO

- Involvement
 - Open membership
 - Not part of anyone's job description
 - Cross-functional and collaborative
- Organization
 - Subcommittees for rubric development
 - Subcommittee for marketing and outreach
 - Subcommittee for orientation and training
 - Subcommittee for meta-assessment
 - SLLO meetings once a month
 - Establishment of a leadership group

SLLO Membership

- Student Affairs
 - Student Activities
 - Leadership and Service Center
 - Risk Management
 - Extended Orientation
 - Student Government
 - Recognition
 - Memorial Student Center Complex (Student Union)
 - Greek Life
 - Residence Life
 - Student Health Services
 - Offices of the Dean of Student Life
 - New Student Programs
 - Adult, Graduate, and Off Campus Student Services
 - Multicultural Services
 - Student Life Studies
 - Recreational Sports
- Other Texas A&M units
 - Career Center
 - Honors Office
 - Freshman Learning Community
 - Study Abroad

Development and Use of Rubrics





Why Use Rubrics?

- ❑ Understood and often used by faculty
- ❑ Eliminate student confusion over expectations
- ❑ Provide timely, detailed feedback to students about performance and performance improvement in their co-curricular activities
- ❑ Encourage critical thinking about their own learning through self-assessment and reflection



Why Use Rubrics? (cont.)

- ❑ Prepare students to use detailed feedback
- ❑ Encourage students as peer mentors and in collaboration of rubric development
- ❑ Facilitate communication with others in academe
- ❑ Help us to refine our own advising skills
- ❑ Level the playing field for all students

Stevens, D. D., & Levi, A. J. (2004). *Introduction to rubrics*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.



SLLO Rubric Development Process

- ❑ Define the skill
- ❑ Identify outcomes
- ❑ Search for resources/theories
- ❑ Adapt existing resources or create a new rubric
- ❑ Ensure cohesion between outcomes and rubric
- ❑ Seek feedback on the rubric
- ❑ Pilot test the rubric
- ❑ Annual review of rubric

SLLO Research Project

Methodology

- 2 Organizations Using Rubrics, 3 Not Using Rubrics
 - 28 students, 5 advisors
- Instrument created based on available rubrics
- Three assessment points:
 - October 2007 (Beginning)
 - February 2008 (Midpoint)
 - April 2008 (End)
- Identify student proficiency with specific skills



Findings

- **What skills do student leaders come into their leadership positions with?**
 - Students had moderate to high proficiency at the beginning and end
 - Skills may need to be fine-tuned rather than developed from scratch, especially for high-level student leaders

Findings (cont.)

- **Are there differences between self-assessments and advisor-assessments on skill levels?**
 - Very few statistical differences found between students and advisors
 - Students and advisors tended to be further apart at the beginning of the year before coming closer together by the end of the year

Findings (cont.)

- **Is there change in assessed skill development during the year between those who used rubrics and those who did not?**
 - Advisors tended to increase steadily in their proficiency ratings for students regardless of whether or not they used rubrics
 - Rubric students tended to start high before adjusting down at the midpoint or end
 - Non-Rubric students tended to remain consistent throughout the year



Other Findings

- Advisors thought the process of rating students' skills was easier as the year progressed
- Advisors who used a rubric were more likely to say that their ratings on the instrument had been consistent during the year compared to the advisors who did not use a rubric

Experience with SLLO



Student Perspective

- Team Experience
 - Fish Camp context
 - Teams and Groups rubric
 - Results

- Personal Experience
 - Verbal and Written Communication rubrics
 - Personal improvement plan
 - One-on-one interaction with advisor
 - Results



Staff Perspective

- How we are using rubrics
 - Class Councils - freshmen and sophomores
 - Interpersonal Communication rubric
 - Electronic versus face-to-face communication
- Progress
 - Awareness of others
 - Conflict resolution is enhanced
 - Re-evaluating in April



Advice from a Staff Member

- Get to know your student organization
 - Southwestern Black Student Leadership Conference (SBSLC)
 - 18 Executive Leaders + 800 Conference Participants
- Select an area for group growth and development
 - Teams and Groups (1st year)
 - Project Management (1st year)
 - Active Citizenship (2nd year)
- Don't be afraid to fail first
 - Don't explain rubrics at the beginning



Advice from a Staff Member (cont.)

- Seek exciting methods of successful implementation
 - Videos and activities work
 - Individual or group commitment
- Compare data and make adjustments
 - Understood the purpose more in the second year
 - Advanced in several areas of citizenship
 - Global perspectives and social change
- Be creative about using your toolkit

Staff and Advisor Assessments



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Barriers/Non-Users

- **What were the barriers that prevented you from using the rubrics? (summer)**
- **Why are you not using a rubric/theme? (fall)**
 - Time/Priority (lack of)
 - Staff/organization issues
 - Plan to use in the future

“RAs found them to ‘not be a part of their position description—so many asked why care?...RAs were perturbed and viewed rubrics as extra work.’”

*“Just started advising an organization this fall, so I am still learning about the organization and the students involved.”
(fall)*



Initial Processes

- **Describe the process you used to get leaders to participate.** (summer)
- **What process did you use to select a rubric? How did you build support?** (fall)
 - Advisor chose/built into processes
 - Students chose
 - Looked at organizational needs/context
 - Evaluated/tracked progress

“Sat down with the director and associate director and shared why the rubrics would be a good idea. Gave them a list of different rubrics and then talked about project management. Guided them towards it based on what was needed for the group.”
(summer)

“I've had trouble getting buy-in from my groups so I informed the Spring Leadership planning team that they will be using the Project Management rubric and then sold them on the benefits.” (fall)

“Their eyes lit up when I talked about the e-portfolio and documenting the great things they were doing.” (fall)

Process During the Year

- **Describe the process you used during the year.** (summer)
- **What is the process you have used in working with the SLLO theme/rubric?** (fall)

- No rubric shared—group/individual discussion
- Rubric shared—individual discussion
- Rubric shared—formal, informal, no follow up

“Conversations were with the entire group, not individuals. Did team building activities during staff meetings.” (summer)

“First I introduced the rubrics. After the rubric was selected, I let the students self-assess themselves on that rubric. Since that point, I have asked the students to go through the rubric whenever they are working on projects. This has helped them become better skilled at planning and implementing events.” (fall)

Challenges

□ **What were the challenges?** (summer and fall)

- Time
- Student buy-in
- Advisor sense of competence
- Implementation/delivery

“Using it with graduate students who knew all about learning outcomes and theory, but needed practical knowledge.”
(summer)

“What media will be most effective in getting the [rubric] concepts across to student leaders?” (fall)

“Helping explain the effectiveness and usefulness of the rubrics to students in laymen’s terms.” (fall)



Changes in the Future

- **What would you do differently? (summer)**
 - Plan specific times
 - Work with individuals
 - Work with groups

“Work with students individually to build momentum for next year.”

“This year I plan to assess three times (pre – post – post) and do a ‘mid-semester self assessment’ with RAs.”



Resources Needed

- **What resources do you need?** (summer)
 - Sample resources and exercises
 - Tips from current users
 - Testimonials from student users

“What are successful ways to get facilitate this and get the students involved?”

“Show them end place – for example – ‘What’s it going to do for me?’”

Benefits

□ **What have been any benefits? (fall)**

- Individual development/improvement
- Advisor skills
- Program planning
- Group development/improvement
- Commitment

“...the rubric seems to have helped supervisors be more intentional in addressing specific job skills essential for student employment. It has also facilitated efficiency in supervisors’ ability to address both ‘under-performance’ and exemplary work.”

“I’ve seen more intentionality in my students, they are more purposeful in their actions and have been able to articulate what they learn through their involvement.”

Lessons Learned



Things We Have Learned from SLLO

- Learning community for advisors and staff
- Staff development
- Good practices
 - Flexible and organic process
 - Grass roots and top down
 - Supports institutional goals
- Challenges we encountered
 - Flexible and organic process
 - Staffing/responsibility
 - Training versus orientation
- Marketing to students
 - Resumé examples
 - Student testimonials



Research and Theory into Practice

- ❑ May provide a common language between advisors and students
- ❑ May provide an opening for ongoing feedback
- ❑ May help focus on a specific skill rather than general development
- ❑ May help students take control of their own learning
- ❑ Ongoing assessment (focus groups, interviews, journals)
- ❑ Interaction and overlap with rubrics

Discussion



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Assessing Student Learning in the Co-Curricular

Krista Bailey

Kathy Collins

Adrien DeLoach

Peggy Holzweiss

Merz Lim

Darby Roberts

Sandi Osters

*Texas A&M University * <http://sllo.tamu.edu> * 979-862-5624*