Student Life Studies
Staff Assessment Needs and Training
Spring 2021

Purpose of Assessment

To meet the needs of staff members, Student Life Studies conducts a survey every three years to understand division staff members' experiences and needs related to assessment. Student Life Studies uses this information to develop resources and training programs for the Division of Student Affairs. This is the fifth year Student Life Studies has conducted this survey; the previous surveys were completed in the summers of 2009, 2012, 2015, and 2018.

Key Findings with Recommendations

Student Life Studies identified several key findings and developed actionable recommendations the department may take based on the results.

- Overall, assessment within the Division of Student Affairs seems to be generally supported; however, staff reported that assessment being incorporated in the department and division and support for assessment has continued to decrease since 2015. Furthermore, respondents indicated support for having high-quality assessment efforts highlighted or celebrated.
    - o Student Life Studies staff could explore how to share assessment results and efforts more throughout the division. This could include possibly utilizing current systems or creating new opportunities.
    - o The department might also examine how data from different projects could be used together to tell the division's story or how to leverage division data to connect with institutional priorities or possibly with potential donors.
    - o Some comments shared by respondents provided suggestions for activities Student Life Studies currently does or offers. The department may also want to look at how it could advertise its services broader throughout the division.

- Almost two-thirds of staff members reported that they assessed what students were learning through their experiences or employment. However, staff members were not always able to describe how they assessed what students learn.
    - o Student Life Studies may want to offer new training or resources specifically focused on assessing student learning.
    - o Based on the limited descriptions provided by respondents on how they assess student learning, Student Life Studies might specifically address developing direct assessment methods.

- Student Life Studies is encouraged to share these results with stakeholders, such as the DSA Assessment Team, Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs, and department clients. Additionally, all Student Life Studies staff members should read all qualitative comments to gain a fuller understanding of the comments and themes.

Method and Sample

The survey was developed using Qualtrics®, a software program that creates electronic surveys and databases. The 25-question survey consisted of 17 quantitative questions, four qualitative questions, and four demographic questions; which was a decrease of 34 questions from 2018. Due to branching technology, not all respondents saw all questions. The data were analyzed using SPSS®, a statistical software package, and Microsoft Excel®.

The survey link was sent to a sample of all full-time staff members in the Division of Student Affairs, this was approximately one-third of the division, which represented all departments except Student Life Studies. The survey link was sent to staff members' email account on January 25, 2021; non-respondents received up to three reminders before the survey closed on February 22, 2021. Of the 189 staff members who received the survey, 123 completed at least part of the survey, yielding a 65% response rate (a 14% increase from 2018).

Furthermore, department representation for the sample and the respondents, as well as the response rate by individual departments can be found in descending order by the department response rate in Table 1. Respondents' departments are represented of the sample. Residence Life represented the largest percentage of the sample and respondents. Response rates of individual departments ranged from 100% by two departments to 25% by one department. Almost one-quarter of all the departments had less than a 50% response rate.

Departments	Sample Percent [n=189]	Respondent Percent [n=123]	Department Response Rate [overall=65%]
Becky Gates Children's Center	2%	2%	100%
Disability Resources	4%	6%	100%
Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs	5%	7%	90%
Memorial Student Center	7%	10%	86%
Music Activities	3%	3%	80%
Recreational Sports	7%	9%	79%
Veterans Resource and Support Center	2%	2%	75%
Multicultural Services	5%	6%	70%
Counseling and Psychological Services	5%	6%	70%
Student Activities	12%	11%	64%
Offices of the Dean of Student Life	13%	12%	63%
Residence Life	15%	14%	61%
University Arts	3%	2%	60%
Department of Information Technology	4%	2%	43%
Office of the Commandant – Corps of Cadets	8%	4%	33%
University Center and Special Events	4%	2%	29%
Student Health Center	2%	1%	25%

Table 1—Department Demographics

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%. The Not Applicable and Don't Know options were counted as missing data. Tables are in descending mean or frequency order for 2021 unless otherwise stated. Summary themes for the qualitative questions are included in this report; however, the entire list can be found in a separate document. Comparisons to previous years are made where appropriate.

Divisional staff members were provided the following definitions as they began the survey:

Assessment—collecting, analyzing, and using data to make decisions for continuous improvement.
Program/Unit—the area that the respondent oversees or works in; for small departments that may be the whole department and for larger departments that may be a smaller focus area.

Staff members were asked a series of questions to rate their level of agreement or disagreement on how assessment relates to their work and their thoughts about assessment within their department and the Division of Student Affairs. Table 2 illustrates that staff rated the highest level of agreement that assessment is supported in their department. Alternatively, staff members least agreed that assessment was talked about frequently in their department or that assessment results were used to make decisions in their department. All statements decreased compared to the results in 2018 and 2015.

	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	2021 Mean (sd) [n]	2018 Mean (sd) [n]	2015 Mean (sd) [n]	2012 Mean (sd) [n]
Assessment is supported in my department.	37%	51%	8%	3%	1%	4.21 (.77) [113]	4.28 (.85) [83]	4.35 (.61) [97]	3.97 (.82) [76]
My department incorporates assessment into our programs and services.	30%	56%	9%	4%	2%	4.09 (.83) [114]	4.18 (.80) [82]	4.41 (.80) [97]	3.82 (.83) [74]
Assessment is tied to our department's strategic plan.	28%	54%	13%	5%	--	4.06 (.78) [107]	4.24 (.89) [83]	4.24 (.80) [93]	3.79 (.79) [63]
The Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs has a strong commitment to assessment.	24%	59%	13%	5%	--	4.01 (.75) [106]	⌡	⌡	⌡
I use assessment to make decisions about programs and services.	25%	56%	17%	1%	2%	4.00 (.79) [110]	4.07 (.77) [82]	4.06 (.70) [97]	3.89 (.70) [72]
I incorporate assessment into the work I do.	23%	51%	21%	4%	1%	3.93 (.82) [111]	3.95 (.76) [83]	4.03 (.72) [99]	4.10 (.48) [72]
Assessment is pervasive in the Division of Student Affairs.	21%	56%	14%	9%	--	3.90 (.83) [103]	4.12 (.81) [81]	4.02 (.75) [90]	3.55 (.88) [69]
Assessment results are used to make decisions about programs and services in my department.	19%	58%	16%	5%	2%	3.88 (.83) [110]	⌡	⌡	⌡
My department frequently talks about assessment.	23%	48%	24%	4%	2%	3.87 (.87) [113]	4.01 (.93) [83]	3.92 (.97) [98]	3.46 (.98) [74]

Table 2—How Assessment Relates to Our Work
⌡ Question not asked

Additionally, staff members were asked a couple of questions regarding their program/unit specifically. When asked if their program/unit had developed learning and/or program outcomes, 92% reported they had developed outcomes and 8% said they did not have outcomes (n=97). Additionally, staff members were asked if their program/unit collected persistence or retention data. Of the 81 responses, 77% stated yes they collected this type of data and 24% reported they did not collect this data.

When asked if they assessed what their students were learning through their experiences with their program/unit, 61% indicated they assessed their students' learning, 19% reported they did not, and 20% shared that they did not work directly with students. This is similar to the results in 2018 when 63% of the 80 staff members who responded said they assessed student learning, while 23% said they did not, and 15% reported they did not work directly with students. Those who reported that they assessed what their students were learning (n=70), were asked a follow-up question to describe how they are assessing student learning. Of the 55 comments, staff mostly shared the assessment method they used, including surveys, reflection, rubrics, NACA Next, exit interviews, observation, learning contract, and focus groups. Some talked about whom they assessed, such as student employees, program attendees, and student leaders. Several commented in general about assessing processes, skill development, continuous improvement, High Impact Practices, training, and satisfaction; however, did not describe how they assessed these areas.

Using a select all that apply option, staff members were asked about how they shared assessment results within the Division of Student Affairs and separately asked if they shared assessment results at any level outside the division. Tables 3 demonstrates that department staff meetings were the most common method for sharing within the division; however, this option decreased compared to all previous years. Additionally, Table 4, on the following page, shows that conference presentations were the most common external methods selected; however, this option also decreased compared to previous years. These two areas may need to be assessed again in future years to determine if this decrease is due to the COVID-19 pandemic when most staff meetings were conducted virtually and many conferences were cancelled or held virtually. Staff who selected the "other" option reported sharing results internally through annual reports, with supervisors or department leadership, and during different meetings. Additional methods mentioned for sharing externally included advisory board or board of directors meetings and national organizations.

How do you share assessment results with any level within the division? (Check all that apply)	2021 Percent (n=111)	2018 Percent (n=81)	2015 Percent (n=57)	2012 Percent (n=64)	2009 Percent (n=57)
Department staff meetings	69%	80%	88%	88%	95%
Other	27%	17%	18%	24%	7%
Student organization meetings	23%	27%	40%	45%	51%
Department newsletter/brochures/marketing material	22%	27%	14%	27%	35%
DSA Update	20%	35%	⌡	⌡	⌡
I do not have assessment results to share	9%	6%	⌡	⌡	⌡
Do not share within my program/unit, department, or division	5%	5%	⌡	⌡	⌡

Table 3—Sharing Results Internally

⌡ Question not asked

How do you share assessment results with any level outside the division? (Check all that apply)	2021 Percent (n=105)	2018 Percent (n=78)	2015 Percent (n=57)	2012 Percent (n=64)	2009 Percent (n=57)
Conference presentation (state, regional, or national)	35%	53%	40%	45%	18%
Faculty/staff outside of the division	27%	46%	44%	53%	49%
Department/organization website	26%	27%	16%	20%	28%
I do not share outside the division	24%	8%	⅂	⅂	⅂
Department/organization social media	21%	21%	19%	22%	*
Student organization meetings	13%	14%	40%	45%	51%
Other	11%	12%	18%	24%	7%
I do not have assessment results to share	11%	9%	⅂	⅂	⅂
Press releases	7%	3%	11%	12%	2%
Professional association journal/magazine article	6%	19%	4%	8%	4%
University publication (digital or printed)	6%	15%	⅂	⅂	⅂
Professional association newsletter	6%	13%	⅂	⅂	⅂

Table 4—Sharing Results Externally

⅂ Question not asked

Staff who reported they did not share assessment results outside the Division of Student Affairs (n=25) were asked a follow-up question to explain why and 11 shared a comment. Some stated that the results were specific to their department or internal and others said they were not asked for the results or that they were not relevant.

Two new questions were included in the survey this year asking staff about their level of agreement or disagreement with how the division utilizes assessment institutionally. Table 5 reveals that almost three-fourths of staff agreed that the division leverages assessment data to connect with institutional priorities and just over half of staff agreed that the division uses assessment data to share its story with the institution.

	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	2021 Mean (sd) [n]
The Division of Student Affairs leverages divisional data to demonstrate its connection to institutional priorities.	7%	66%	21%	5%	1%	3.73 (.70) [89]
The Division of Student Affairs effectively utilizes assessment to share "its story" institutionally.	9%	46%	32%	12%	1%	3.51 (.86) [96]

Table 5—DSA Assessment Utilization

Using a select all that apply question, staff members were asked how Student Life Studies could help them in the assessment process. Table 6, on the following page, illustrates staff members look to Student Life Studies to provide general support in assessment efforts and analyze or interpret data the most. Staff reported needing less help from Student Life Studies in explaining relevance in quantitative data, identifying changes or improvements, and sharing assessment results. All options were rated lower than in 2018. Those selecting the "other" response option were given the opportunity to write a comment. One respondent reported that all of these points and the other said help with profiling on and off campus students.

How can Student Life Studies help you in the assessment process? (select all that apply)	2021 Percent (n=109)	2018 Percent (n=75)
Providing general support in assessment efforts	62%	72%
Analyzing or interpreting data	55%	73%
Developing assessment questions or prompts	48%	67%
Writing reports to summarize assessment results	46%	63%
Planning assessment projects – what should be assessed	46%	56%
Providing training and resources	36%	45%
Sharing assessment results	34%	47%
Identifying changes or improvements to make based on assessment results	32%	48%
Explaining relevance in quantitative data	31%	59%
Nothing	10%	⌿
Other	4%	4%

Table 6—Help from Student Life Studies
⌿ Question not asked

Staff members selecting the option for Student Life Studies to provide training and resources (n=39) were asked a follow-up question to share what topics they would like to see provided. A wide range of suggestions was provided from the 19 comments. Some ideas were focused on specific skills such as writing good survey questions, designing an assessment project, coding qualitative assessment, sharing assessment data with others, setting up a Qualtrics survey, and presenting data visually. A few comments indicated the audience they would like to see training for including workshops for supervisors on assessing student employees or student-friendly workshops on the importance of collecting and using data to make informed decisions. Some were more general such as trends in student affairs assessment, best practices, assessment method options, priorities for the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs, and available resources (general resources and those specifically for confidential services).

When asked how they would like to see high-quality assessment efforts from the division highlighted or celebrated if at all, 34 provided their feedback. Many staff members reported they would like to see assessment efforts and results shared in the DSA Update, at the DSA Awards Ceremony or staff development monthly program, on the Student Life Studies website, and through email communication. Other suggestions provided included creating an assessment of the month or year award, publishing an assessment newsletter, hosting a poster presentation event, encouraging others to share their results with identified stakeholders, and highlighting in the assessment reports what data to share with others. A few comments were about graphically sharing data or creating infographics of data.

The final series of questions were demographic to understand better the respondents. As seen in Table 7, on the following page in descending order for each category, a majority of the respondents were assistant/associate directors and staff who have been in the student affairs profession and the Division of Student Affairs at Texas A&M for more than 10 years. Furthermore, just under half of the staff had assessment responsibilities in their job duties. Those that selected the "other" option wrote administrative associate or coordinator, communications coordinator or marketer, senior administrative coordinator, counselor, and warehouse supervisor.

Demographics	2021 Percent	2018 Percent	2015 Percent	2012 Percent	2009 Percent
Job Titles	**(n=112)**	**(n=77)**	**(n=92)**	**(n=75)**	**(n=112)**
Assistant/Associate Director	44%	35%	34%	32%	23%
Program Coordinator/Manager	15%	21%	16%	17%	19%
SDS (I, II, III, IV)	13%	25%	25%	*	*
Director/Department Head	13%	14%	12%	12%	9%
Other	13%	5%	10%	7%	9%
Business Administrator/Business Coordinator	3%	--	3%	4%	6%
Assessment Responsibilities in Official Job Duties	**(n=113)**	**(n=77)**	**(n=90)**	**(n=76)**	**(n=112)**
No	50%	48%	39%	43%	40%
Yes	44%	52%	61%	51%	51%
Don't know	5%	--	⌐	⌐	⌐
Fulltime Years in Student Affairs/Higher Ed	**(n=110)**	**(n=77)**	**(n=94)**		
More than 10 years	59%	46%	47%	⌐	⌐
4 – 6 years	19%	18%	20%	⌐	⌐
7 – 10 years	13%	25%	17%	⌐	⌐
1 – 3 years	9%	12%	15%	⌐	⌐
Less than 1 year	--	--	1%	⌐	⌐
Fulltime Years in Student Affairs at Texas A&M	**(n=110)**	**(n=75)**	**(n=85)**	**(n=77)**	**(n=112)**
More than 10 years	44%	37%	47%	39%	32%
1 – 3 years	22%	24%	22%	22%	28%
4 – 6 years	21%	23%	15%	22%	15%
7 – 10 years	13%	12%	12%	13%	15%
Less than 1 year	1%	4%	4%	4%	10%

Table 7—Respondent Demographics
⌐ Question not asked
*SDS levels were asked separately

Student Life Studies Department Background

The Department of Student Life Studies provides quality assessment services, resources and assessment training for departments in the Texas A&M University Division of Student Affairs and student organizations. Services by Student Life Studies are funded, in part, by the Texas A&M University Advancement Fee. Results of this project and other assessment projects done through Student Life Studies can be found at https://studentlifestudies.tamu.edu/results/. Additionally, anyone can follow Student Life Studies on Facebook.