Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research
Client Focus Groups
Summer 2022

Purpose of Assessment

One goal for Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research (SAPAR) is to provide quality assessment services to facilitate client planning and decision-making. To measure this goal and associated outcomes, the department conducted focus groups with clients to understand the effectiveness and quality of the services offered. Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research conducts focus groups approximately every three years to learn about clients' experiences working with the department. Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research will use the data collected to improve services provided to the Division of Student Affairs (DSA). The department has been conducting focus groups every three years since the summer of 2009.

Method and Sample

Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research staff members designed the focus group protocol and questions; however, both focus groups were facilitated by staff outside the department. Additionally, the facilitators digitally recorded each focus group, and an outside company transcribed those recordings.

Two focus groups were conducted for division staff who utilized services from Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research in the past one or two years. One focus group was held on May 24, 2022, and was facilitated by Krista Bailey, Educational Administration & Human Resources Development in the School of Education and Human Development. The second focus group was facilitated by Stefanie Baker, Student Life, and was on June 2, 2022. Twenty-six division staff members were solicited to participate in one of these two client focus groups through email calendar invitations. Of those invited, 12 staff members participated in one of the two focus groups. Five attended the May 24 focus group and 7 attended the focus group on June 2.

Data were analyzed in content analysis conducted in August 2022 by four full-time Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research staff members.

Key Findings with Recommendations

Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research identified several key findings and developed actionable recommendations that may be taken based on the results. These results and any changes based on the results will be shared with various stakeholders including the focus groups participants and facilitators, the Assessment Committee, and the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs (OVPSA).

- Generally, focus group participants were positive about their experience with Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research. Most staff utilized the department for help with their assessment projects and general consultation. Clients reported several services by Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research as beneficial. Some included the summary reports, management of assessment projects to keep them on track, communication with clients and reaching out about upcoming assessment projects, and data analysis.

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- The timing of receiving results and delays in getting the summary reports were the most common frustration from clients. Sometimes the results come back too late to implement changes for the next year's programming. This was most common with the year-long projects.
  - Staff will continue to explore options for dispersing out report writing to others in the department, including student employees and Graduate Assistants.
  - Staff will also work with departments doing year-long projects to have all surveys returned earlier to be processed for the report to be written during the summer and prior to the next academic year.

- There were mixed responses when asked about the online assessment request form. Some felt it was straightforward to complete; however, others were less clear about how to request services from Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research and that they have trouble filling out the date portion for year-long projects.
  - Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research will change the name of the form on the website to be clearer that is where to go when requesting assistance.
  - Additionally, staff will update the form to explain filling out the dates, especially for year-long projects.
  - Additionally, staff will review the information on our website to clarify the process.

- Clients reported a high level of satisfaction in communication from Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research. Clients indicated that communication is timely and personable, as well as contains the right amount of detail without being overwhelming or confusing. Furthermore, clients reported that Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research were generous with their time and always willing to meet to discuss a project.

- The summary reports from Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research are considered extremely helpful by clients, especially the key findings and recommendations section and including tables or charts within the report. Clients appreciate the simplified interpretation and expertise provided. Additionally, they appreciate receiving all the data with the summary report, especially with the qualitative comments. Having a report that can be shared with others was also reported as helpful.
  - The department will continue to write reports as needed for clients, keeping a similar format to the current summary report. However, department staff will also look if data in tables could be presented using other data visualization options.

- Expectations related to assessment efforts varied between departments. Many shared that they were expected to assess programs and that good assessments would allow for more storytelling and credibility. Assessment efforts themselves were not rewarded within most departments; however, the positive outcomes that assessment often brings might be rewarded.

- Participants struggled and generally were unable to articulate the value, if any, disaggregated data provided them in making decisions or understanding the impact of their programs and services.
  - Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research is strongly encouraged to explore how to make this data more meaningful to clients and in a way that draws their attention to those results. Additionally, staff can discuss the disaggregated data with clients in follow-up meetings.

- Clients shared several ideas about services or processes that Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research could do help their department in using assessment results and move to the next level of assessment excellence. Some suggestions include providing more accountability for using assessment results, bridging the gap between the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs and departments – why does it seem the OVPSA wants seemingly useless "checkbox items," help connect data from multiple sources between departments, create a division dashboard, create a SAPAR onboarding for new division staff members, go further into making specific recommendations to clients in the summary reports, and develop collaborations between departments.
  - Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research will focus more on using assessment results during the follow-up meetings with clients, as well as ask about how results were used when division staff come back to re-assess a program or service.
  - SAPAR staff will be more intentional in connecting data from other sources between departments. The department will start by connecting results from the Wellbeing Improvement Survey in Higher Education Settings (WISHES) to student participation in different programs or populations.
  - Staff will discuss with the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs and departments what information would be useful in a division dashboard. As students' Universal Identification Numbers (UINs) are being gathered from departments as part of their annual reports, SAPAR could look at some student demographics for those engaged in programs within the division.
  - Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research will develop a short infographic handout explaining what the department does and how to engage with SAPAR. This will be shared with the Assessment Committee and any departments we go to. Additionally, staff will request to be on the agenda for the DSA New Staff Orientation offered three times a year. Furthermore, SAPAR will work with the Assessment Committee liaisons to also share information about SAPAR when new staff members are hired in their department.
  - Staff will continue to make specific recommendations to clients based on the results when writing summary reports and offer recommendations that are more than continuing what clients are currently doing. As department staff review reports prior to sending them to a client, all staff can offer suggestions or ideas for possible recommendations.
  - Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research staff will look at options to create collaborations between departments. Some of this effort may be easier as the Committee on Student Learning looks at re-establishing the High Impact Practices and student employment in the division. Staff may also look at departments working towards division priorities in the Division of Student Affairs strategic plan to explore collaborations between departments working on the same priority.

Results

This report presents the qualitative themes developed from the analysis of each question asked in the protocol. Questions concentrated on services provided by Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research, clients' experience working with the department, completing the online assessment request form, communication, summary report format, assessment expectations and rewards, disaggregated data, and using assessment results.

The first question asked clients about services they have utilized with Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research. Most talked about assessment projects or what they have assessed as well as different assessment methods such as surveys, focus groups, and existing data. The themes for this question included the following:

- Assessment projects:
  - Create and administer surveys
  - Provide analysis and disaggregate data
  - Create dashboards
  - Longitudinal projects and data
  - Provide demographics
  - Program assessment
  - Assess student learning
  - Tracking / RSVPs
  - Student success metrics (retention & persistence)
  - Provide information from the Student Experience in the Research University (SERU)
  - Facilitate focus groups
  - Research
- Consulting on assessment projects or questions being asked
- Follow-up meetings
- Providing recommendations and data to make changes
- Assessment planning and reporting in the Assessment, Evaluation, Feedback & Intervention System (AEFIS) platform
- Qualtrics knowledge
- Assessment Committee

Beneficial Services
Focus group participants were asked about the services from Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research that were most beneficial. The themes for this question included the following:

- Data analysis, including interpretation, highlights, and recommendations
- Reaching out about upcoming projects
- Being responsive and making the process easy
- Managing projects including communication with clients, giving timelines, and following through
- Summary reports, including key findings and recommendations
- Follow-up meetings
- Training and educational workshops
- Qualitative theming and coding
- Staff members are patient and knowledgeable
- Creating assessments, including Net Promoter Scores
- Assessment expertise
- Consulting
- DSA committee work

<u>Service Improvement</u>
Alternatively, participants were asked about what Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research could do to improve or help departments more. Timing for receiving results and delays in receiving summary reports were the most common themes mentioned. All themes for this question included the following:

- Next steps to improve their assessment efforts
- University timelines and processes
- Timing for year-long projects (results returned late to act on before the next academic year)
- Delays in summary reports
- Coordinating marketing and assessment
- Assessment collaboration between departments
- Sharing DSA assessment results
- Low survey response rates
- Marketing SAPAR resources, including website resources
- Not influencing or recommending specific changes

<u>Assessment Request Form</u>
In the focus groups conducted in 2019, clients expressed frustration in completing the online assessment request form (AQ form) and felt that it was repetitive. Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research made substantial changes to the form as well as communication about the form. The department wanted to ask clients about their experience in completing the form since the changes were made. The themes for this question included the following:

- Straight forward and to the point
- Makes you think and you need to know what you want
- Easy to use
- Confusing with the summer planning form
- The name (Assessment Questionnaire) is not descriptive of what it is
- Do one AQ form for all projects
- The lead time for requesting a new project
- Confusion about getting director approval for new projects
- Clarify the process to request an assessment project
- Trouble completing the data portion when it is an ongoing project

<u>Summary Reports</u>
Clients were asked what they found most beneficial when they receive a summary report after an assessment project. The themes for this question included the following:

- Provide a general interpretation of the data in a simplified manner
- Key findings and recommendations
- Still having all the data and not only the highlights, especially all the qualitative comments
- Tables and charts within the report
- Having reports to share with others

Alternatively, clients were asked what they felt was the least helpful when receiving a summary report. Most struggled to come up with anything that was least helpful. One person indicated that the excess white space on the page was the least helpful.

Communication

Communication was an area for improvement raised in the focus groups in 2016. Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research focused on and increased communication with clients. In the 2019 focus groups, clients expressed more satisfaction with communication from the department; however, in 2022 clients were again asked about the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with communication when working on a project with Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research. The themes for this question included the following:

- Very satisfied
- Timely
- Helps to hold them accountable
- Enough detail but not confusing
- Clear and concise
- Real and personal relationships
- Knowledgeable
- More communication out to the division
- Share information with others
- Reach out about upcoming projects
- Accessible and generous with our time and willing to meet with clients

Assessment Expectations and Rewards

To have a better understanding of expectations related to assessment within clients' departments, they were asked to share both expectations and how assessment is rewarded in their department. Clients could share expectations related to assessment, although these varied between departments; however, a few were unclear about any expectations within their department. Most participants shared that there were no rewards in their department for doing assessment work. The assessment itself was not rewarded; however, the positive outcomes assessment can bring might be rewarded. The themes for this question included the following:

- Evaluate programs
- Use results for improvement
- Use data to tell their story
- Share the student experience
- Use data for funding requests and award nominations
- Have a purpose for doing an assessment
- Sometimes assessment is viewed as a checkbox item
- Results used to support or justify programs and/or services
- Some high interest from departments for national climate data

Disaggregated Data

Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research have focused efforts on equity through assessment, and one way this is done is to disaggregate data, when appropriate. Clients were asked how valuable disaggregated data was in making decisions or understanding the impact of their programs or services. However, participants struggled to answer this question, or they said they did not know.

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Move to the Next Level of Assessment Excellence
Focus group facilitators asked clients about services or processes that could be improved or added to them and/or their department to move them to the next level of assessment excellence. The themes for this question included the following:

- Manage High Impact Practices (HIPs)
- Help hold staff accountable, especially with what clients are doing with their assessment results
- Connecting data from different areas or departments
- Develop an onboarding of SAPAR and share that with departments throughout the division
- Marketing ideas at a division level
- Share information with the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs
- Develop a division dashboard
- Develop some common marketing questions about how students hear about programs and services

Using Assessment Results
The last question of the focus group asked how Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research could support them in using assessment results or to be stronger with their assessment efforts. The themes for this question included the following:

- Use institutional knowledge to help guide the next steps
- Use our experience and expertise
- Share ideas to assess better and recommend alternative assessment methods to surveys
- Build collaborations between departments within the division
- Connect data between departments and the institution
- Continue asking clients what they want to know and how they will use the information
- Bridge the gap between departments and the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs
- Improve the annual reporting
- Offer more education on assessment and completing the assessment request form
- Promote the connection Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research has with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Evaluation
- Continue to make recommendations for specific changes
- Communicate about resources

Department Background
The Department of Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research provides quality assessment services, resources, and assessment training for the Division of Student Affairs departments and student organizations at Texas A&M University. According to its website (http://sapar.tamu.edu/about), Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research:

> "provides leadership in assessment and planning to the Division of Student Affairs and student organizations, maximizing program effectiveness and emphasizing student learning."

Furthermore, the vision of the department is to "create a culture in the Division of Student Affairs that values meaningful assessment, uses results to guide improvement, and articulates contributions to student success."

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To work with Student Affairs Planning, Assessment & Research for future assessment projects, please fill out the Assessment Questionnaire at https://sapar.tamu.edu/aqform/.

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