

Student Life Studies Assessment Training Series Fall 2015 – Spring 2016

Background

According to its website (<http://studentlifestudies.tamu.edu/about>), Student Life Studies “provides leadership in assessment and planning to the Division of Student Affairs and to student organizations, maximizing program effectiveness and emphasizing student learning.” Furthermore, the vision of the department is to “create a Student Affairs culture that values meaningful assessment, uses results to guide improvement, and articulates contributions to student success.” One goal for Student Life Studies is to educate and develop staff within the Division of Student Affairs about assessment. To accomplish this goal, the department coordinates a series of training workshops throughout the year for division staff members. The following assessment topics were covered during the 2015-2016 academic year:

- Using assessment results for program/service improvements
- Selecting the best assessment method
- Understanding quantitative and qualitative data
- Documenting student learning
- Sharing assessment results
- Using assessment results to create action plans

Student Life Studies wanted to assess the session participants to understand the effectiveness of the workshops and the intended learning outcomes. This is the second time Student Life Studies assessed all workshops scheduled for the academic year.

Method and Sample

Three surveys were developed using Qualtrics[®], survey design software that creates web-based forms and databases. The first survey covered the two workshops held in the fall semester; this survey consisted of 12 questions, six quantitative and six qualitative. The second survey was for the first two spring semester workshops scheduled in January and February 2016. This survey also contained 12 questions, six quantitative and six qualitative. The final survey had 14 questions, eight were quantitative and six were qualitative, and covered the two workshops scheduled in April and May. Student Life Studies evaluated the results of all surveys using SPSS[®], a statistical software package, and Microsoft Excel[®].

All three surveys had branching technology and not all respondents saw all questions. The survey links were sent out in December 2015, February 2016, and May 2016 to those staff members who had attended the workshops being assessed. Each survey was open approximately two weeks, and non-respondents received up to three email reminders before the surveys were closed. The survey link for the fall semester was sent to six staff members and four completed some part of it, for a 67% response rate. The early spring survey link was sent to 10 staff members and four completed some part, yielding a 40% response rate. Of the 10 staff members who were sent the late spring semester survey link, five completed some part of it, giving a 50% response rate.

Results

Results include 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 scale used for most quantitative questions was 5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=Neutral, 2=Disagree, and 1=Strongly Disagree. Qualitative themes are summarized within this report, the full qualitative responses can be found in a separate document. This report is broken up by each assessment workshop topic and an overall section. It should be noted that the number of respondents for some sections is small and that for some sections of the survey, only one person responded. Comparisons are not made to the previous year since workshop topics changed.

Using Assessment Results

The first workshop in the series held on October 8, 2015, discussed how to use assessment results specifically to make changes with programs and services. This was a similar topic for the last workshop in the training series, which was on May 18, 2016. This later workshop focused on using assessment results, or findings, to write an action plan. This topic was scheduled twice during the year because it was an area that rated as the most needed on a needs assessment that was conducted with staff from the Division of Student Affairs.

Using a check all that apply option, attendees were asked to select the key points to consider when using assessment results. All the provided options were correct options except for keeping the program/service the same to determine benchmark data. Table 1, in descending order for the October workshop, demonstrates that the October participants selected four of the correct responses. However, none of the October participants selected the option to reflect on the level of satisfaction, which was also correct. In May, all attendees accurately identified two of the correct responses. Additionally, 75% correctly identified two other accurate options: know the target and reflect on the results. However, in May only 25% selected the option to continue assessing the program/service, which was a correct answer. Furthermore, nobody from either workshop selected the incorrect response option about keeping the program/service the same.

Which of the following are key points to consider when using assessment results? Check all that apply.	October Workshop Percentage [n=2]	May Workshop Percentage [n=4]
Know the target prior to the program/service	100%	75%
Know if the target was met or not	100%	100%
Determine if any information is missing or if there is a need to dig deeper	100%	100%
Continue assessing the program/service	100%	25%
Reflect on level of satisfaction with the results	--	75%
Keep the program/service the same to determine benchmark data	--	--

Table 1: Key Points for Using Assessment Results

Table 2 shows that attendees from both workshops were positive in feeling confident to make changes based on assessment results and that they had either made a change or had a plan to make a change. On both surveys, 50% of the respondents strongly agreed and 50% agreed with each statement.

Statement	October Workshop Mean (sd) [n=2]	May Workshop Mean (sd) [n=4]
After attending this workshop, I feel confident to make changes to my program/service based on assessment results.	4.50 (.71)	4.50 (.58)
I have made a change or have a plan of what to change this academic year for a program/service.	4.50 (.71)	4.50 (.58)

Table 2: Using Assessment Results

The survey administered in May asked participants to give an example of a change they would make based on their assessment results. One person talked about changing the recruitment or marketing strategies for peer mentors. Another person shared that they changed a seven-hour training from one day to two days to break up the length of time at one block and that they adjusted the curriculum to better fit the training goals and outcomes. Furthermore, this respondent reported that the survey results after these changes were more positive.

The last question related to this workshop asked attendees what they learned. In October, the response included that approaching issues from a different perspective allowed him/her to understand how people respond. In May, respondents said they understood the structure for action plans, that action plans should be used more than just in WEAVEonline, the need to establish specific targets from the beginning, and the importance of having a well-documented assessment plan.

Selecting the Best Assessment Method

The second workshop was held on December 1, 2015. This workshop explored different assessment methods and how to determine which method would work best. Respondents were first asked to list three assessment methods that could be considered to measure an identified outcome. Responses included using a case study, survey, reflective paper, observation, and a rubric. Each response provided was a correct assessment method and was discussed in the training.

When asked to identify the assessment method that was the strongest direct measure of student learning, 100% of the respondents accurately identified the option “Students write a philosophy statement that is assessed using a rubric.” Additionally, attendees were asked which part of the student learning or program outcome should be focused on when determining the best assessment method. Half (50%) selected the verb, which was the correct option. The other half (50%) selected program or service, and nobody identified audience or timing.

The final question for attendees of this workshop asked them what they learned. One respondent reported keeping in mind what is needed to know from students and the other respondent defined the difference between a direct measure and an indirect measure.

Understanding Quantitative and Qualitative Data

January 13, 2016 was the first training in the spring semester and focused on the basic concepts of quantitative and qualitative analysis, and making meaning of this information. The first question asked respondents to identify the mean score for quantitative data. All respondents (100%) selected the average of all responses, which was the correct response. Furthermore, when asked what was true of qualitative data, 100% of attendees selected the correct option: qualitative data is used to describe experiences or opinions using words and images.

Workshop attendees were asked about their level of comfort in understanding data. Table 3 indicates respondents were positive in using both quantitative and qualitative data.

After attending this workshop, I feel more comfortable understanding and being able to use:	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Mean (sd) [n=3]
Quantitative data	33%	67%	--	--	--	4.33 (.58)
Qualitative data	33%	67%	--	--	--	4.33 (.58)

Table 3: Quantitative and Qualitative Data

Finally, participants were asked what they learned from this workshop. One person responded saying that the way information is used is important in showing the value of what is done in student affairs.

Documenting Student Learning

Learning various options for measuring and documenting student learning was the focus of the fourth workshop in the training series, which was held on February 8, 2016. Using a check all that apply question, respondents were asked to identify which methods could be used to measure student learning. Table 4, on the following page, illustrates that one of the two correct responses were selected. The respondent correctly identified the option about observing a student employee but did not select the other correct option of using a rubric to assess students’ philosophy statement. Additionally, the respondent selected two options that were incorrect: using a participant survey for satisfaction and a focus group to learn about students experiences.

Which of the following are methods to measure student learning? Check all that apply.	Frequency Percentage [n=1]
Observing a student employee completing a task and providing feedback	100%
Participant survey after a program or event to find out if they were satisfied	100%
Focus group with students about their experiences in an organization	100%
Students write a philosophy statement that is assessed using a rubric	--
Tracking attendance and demographics of participants	--

Table 4: Measuring Student Learning

Attendees were asked how they could provide opportunities for their students to document their own learning and what they learned from attending this workshop. However, no responses were provided for either question.

Sharing Assessment Results

This training workshop covered options to share data and assessment results with various stakeholders and was scheduled for April 5, 2016. The first question asked respondents to identify examples of internal audience members from a provided list. Table 5 reveals that supervisors and staff were selected correctly by all respondents and that students were selected correctly by half the respondents. Additionally, nobody selected the incorrect responses of legislators or former students. However, nobody selected the correct response options of faculty or administrators.

Which of the following are examples of internal audience members when sharing assessment data? Check all that apply.	Frequency Percentage [n=2]
Supervisor	100%
Staff	100%
Students	50%
Faculty	--
Administrators	--
Legislators	--
Former Students	--

Table 5: Internal Stakeholders

When asked, with a true or false question, if it was important to know the audience when determining the type of report to create, 100% answered correctly with true. Furthermore, respondents were given a list of tips for presenting data in PowerPoint and 100% of respondents successfully identified the detractor answer choice, which was to include all the data in the presentation.

Workshop participants were asked if they felt more comfortable knowing how to share assessment results after attending the training workshop. Half (50%) strongly agreed they were more comfortable and 50% agreed. Respondents were given the opportunity to write what they learned from the workshop; however, nobody wrote in a response.

Overall

Participants on all surveys were asked if they would recommend the assessment training workshops to other staff members, and 100% of respondents said that they would recommend the workshops. When asked to explain their response, some participants noted that the information presented was helpful and practical, that they learned something new, and that good examples were provided. Others talked about feeling motivated and being able to stay current with assessment topics. Additionally, some enjoyed the small group discussion from some workshops, the fun environment, and the timing of the topics.

Respondents were asked what topics they would like to see presented in the future. Answers included developing good questions, sharing results, choosing the proper design for an assessment, submitting an abstract or manuscript, and knowing what information other departments are collecting.

The final question asked participants what Student Life Studies could do for them. There were several responses that praised the department and expressed appreciation for the help from Student Life Studies with their assessment projects. One suggestion included continuing to offer training workshops.

Conclusions, Recommendations, and Action Plans

Overall, Student Life Studies can consider the Assessment Training Series a success. Generally, participants learned the intended outcomes and felt positive about the sessions. Additionally, workshop attendees stated the sessions were helpful and that they would recommend them to fellow staff members.

Student Life Studies may want to consider focusing more attention on the design aspect of the assessment process, specifically about asking quality questions. While it seemed the outcomes were generally met, the department may want to continue educating staff on using assessment results, documenting student learning, especially with direct assessment measures, and identifying multiple stakeholders.

Department staff may also want to consider conducting some assessment right at the end of the workshop session related to the learning outcomes. This could increase the response rate while also offering one final opportunity to correct any misunderstandings before attendees leave the workshop. Satisfaction about the training workshops or suggestions for future topics could be a separate survey after workshops.

Department staff members are encouraged to share the results from this assessment with stakeholders. While qualitative themes were summarized, staff are also encouraged to read all comments to have a complete understanding of responses.

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