

Division of Student Affairs
Aggies RISE
Student Employee Assessment
Spring 2016

Background

In 2012 the Texas A&M Division of Student Affairs had ongoing conversations about high impact practices (transformative learning experiences) 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 were learning from their student worker positions.

The Aggies RISE committee reviewed all learning outcomes and job descriptions for the student workers in the Division to find commonalities in 2012. The three major themes that arose included communication, critical thinking, and social, cultural, and global competence in a group setting. Those also aligned with several of the university's undergraduate learning outcomes. In 2012-2013 the Aggies RISE committee developed a pre- and post-survey to measure these identified outcomes. In addition, supervisors volunteered that year 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 how their on-the-job learning may have an impact on their academics and career choices.

Aggies RISE wanted to continue assessing the student employees throughout the Division to look at these common learning outcomes, as well as opportunities for student employees to reflect on their employment, connections between students' work and the classroom or their future careers, and how student employment positions fit the criteria for being considered a high impact practice. This is the second year Student Life Studies worked with Aggies RISE to assess student employment.

Method and Sample

The electronic survey was developed using Qualtrics[®], survey design software that creates web-based forms and databases. The 55-question survey contained 50 quantitative questions and five qualitative questions. Due to branching technology and embedded data, individual respondents did not receive all the questions. The data was analyzed using SPSS[®], a statistical software package.

Only one survey was administered for the 2015-2016 academic year, rather than the pre- and post-survey approach conducted in 2012-2013. The email invitation with the survey link was sent to all 1,392 student employees in the Division of Student Affairs on April 7, 2016. Non-respondents received up to three reminders before the survey closed on April 25, 2016. Additionally, supervisors reminded their student employees to respond to the survey invitation. When the survey closed, 314 students had responded, yielding a 23% response rate.

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 2016 mean, frequency, or change order unless otherwise specified. Comparisons to the post-survey conducted in April 2013 are made where appropriate. Summary themes for the qualitative questions are reported in this report; the entire list can be found in a separate document.

Student employees were asked to identify the department(s) they currently worked in, using a select all that apply option. Based on the department(s) selected, respondents were also asked to indicate how long they had been employed in that specific department. Table 1 displays the departments where students were employed and their length of employment for that department. While Veterans Resource & Support Center had student volunteers in their office, they were not included in the survey. Approximately half of the all the student employees responding to the survey worked in Recreational Sports or Residence Life.

| | Frequency Percentage in the Division | Length of Employment within Each Department | | | | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|---|--------------|-------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------|
| | | Less than 3 Months | 3 – 6 Months | 7 Months – 1 Year | 1 – 2 Years | 2 – 3 Years | More than 3 Years |
| Recreational Sports | 28% | 7% | 17% | 37% | 26% | 9% | 4% |
| Residence Life | 24% | 10% | 19% | 47% | 12% | 7% | 6% |
| Student Health Services | 7% | 17% | 22% | 22% | 26% | 13% | -- |
| University Center & Special Events | 7% | 18% | 5% | 14% | 41% | 18% | 5% |
| Memorial Student Center | 6% | 21% | 16% | 32% | 21% | 11% | -- |
| Becky Gates Children’s Center | 5% | 21% | 21% | 29% | 7% | 21% | -- |
| Disability Services | 5% | 39% | 23% | 39% | -- | -- | -- |
| Student Activities | 4% | 25% | 17% | 50% | 8% | -- | -- |
| Student Life | 4% | 39% | 15% | 23% | 23% | -- | -- |
| Office of the Commandant | 3% | -- | 11% | 56% | 22% | 11% | -- |
| Information Technology | 2% | -- | 33% | 33% | 33% | -- | -- |
| Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs | 2% | 14% | -- | -- | 14% | 57% | 14% |
| Multicultural Services | 1% | 50% | -- | 25% | -- | 25% | -- |
| Music Activities | 1% | 33% | -- | 67% | -- | -- | -- |
| Student Life Studies | 1% | -- | -- | 33% | 33% | 33% | -- |
| University Art Galleries | 1% | -- | -- | 50% | 50% | -- | -- |
| Student Counseling Service | <1% | -- | -- | -- | 100% | -- | -- |

Table 1—Student Employment by Department (n=312)

Student employees were also asked about any previous employment in another department within the Division and were provided the opportunity to indicate those departments. Almost all (92%) of the respondents reported they had only been employed by their current department(s). Additionally, 4% reported being previously employed by Recreational Sports, 3% said Residence Life, 1% said Disability Services, and 1% said Student Life. Furthermore, student employees were asked how long they worked for any department within the Division of Student Affairs. Table 2 shows a fairly even distribution with approximately one-third employed less than six months, between six months and one year, and over one year. Compared to the post-survey in 2013, there were more students who have been employed six months or less and fewer employed more than six months.

| How long have you been employed by any department within the Division of Student Affairs? | Spring 2016 [n=146] | Spring 2013 [n=306] |
|---|---------------------|---------------------|
| Less than 3 Months | 17% | 1% |
| 3 – 6 Months | 12% | 8% |
| 7 Months – 1 Year | 36% | 42% |
| 1 – 2 Years | 21% | 50% † |
| 2 – 3 Years | 10% | |
| More than 3 Years | 5% | |

Table 2—Student Employment in the Division of Student Affairs († Response option combined)

When asked if they supervised or managed other student employees in their current position, 12% of the student employees said yes. Those respondents (n=34) were given the opportunity to write in how many other students they supervised or managed. While the responses ranged from one student to over 100 students, about half reported supervising 10-20 other student employees.

Respondents were asked to rate several questions related to their student employee experience. Table 3 indicates student employees felt the most positive about their position helping them work effectively with individuals different from themselves and improve their oral communication skills. Student employees were least positive that their position helped them learn about career options or improve their written communication skills. All statements increased when compared to the 2013 post-survey.

| My job has helped me... | Strongly Agree (5) | Agree (4) | Neutral (3) | Disagree (2) | Strongly Disagree (1) | 2016 Mean (sd) [n=298] | 2013 Mean (sd) [n=293] |
|--|-------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|---|---|
| Work effectively with individuals with a variety of backgrounds, experiences, and cultures. | 57% | 37% | 5% | 1% | -- | 4.49 (.65) | 4.32 (.76) |
| Improve my oral communication skills. | 46% | 47% | 7% | 1% | -- | 4.38 (.64) | 4.28 (.73) |
| Develop more effective time management skills. | 46% | 43% | 8% | 2% | <1% | 4.33 (.74) | 4.18 (.76) |
| Participate effectively in a team. | 47% | 42% | 9% | 3% | -- | 4.32 (.76) | ‡ |
| Work with others to support a shared purpose or goal. | 43% | 48% | 8% | 2% | <1% | 4.31 (.71) | ‡ |
| Develop conflict resolution skills. | 47% | 50% | 12% | <1% | 1% | 4.22 (.72) | 4.19 (.83) |
| Acknowledge and address the consequences of one's own actions. | 35% | 52% | 11% | 2% | <1% | 4.19 (.73) | ‡ |
| Improve my critical thinking skills to form opinions and solve problems. | 39% | 43% | 14% | 2% | 1% | 4.18 (.81) | 3.99 (.86) |
| Reflect on my work experiences and what I am learning through my employment. | 35% | 51% | 11% | 3% | <1% | 4.17 (.76) | ‡ |
| Formulate a plan of personal goals for continued professional growth. | 31% | 41% | 21% | 5% | 1% | 3.96 (.92) | ‡ |
| Prepare for the world of full-time employment. | 28% | 44% | 21% | 5% | 2% | 3.91 (.92) | 3.88 (.94) |
| Improve my written communication skills. | 21% | 31% | 36% | 11% | 1% | 3.58 (.98) | 3.43 (.98) |
| Learn more about career options. | 23% | 29% | 31% | 14% | 3% | 3.54 (1.10) | 3.39 (1.13) |

Table 3—Impact of Student Employment on Their Development
(‡ Question not asked)

Student employees were asked about how often they had formal and informal conversations with their supervisor about connecting their job with their academics. Table 4 demonstrates that almost half of student employees either sometimes or frequently had these conversations with supervisors; however, this is a decrease when compared to 2013. Student employees indicating having some level of communication (rarely, sometimes, or frequently) with supervisors about these connections (n=180) were asked to describe one example of how they applied learning from their classes to their job. Most of these students provided a direct tie between a specific class or their major and applying that to their employment. Some of the examples were about science classes and working as a medic or in Student Health Services, studying to be an accountant and working with department budgets, and being a teacher or coach and working as a trainer in Rec Sports or at the Becky Gates Children’s Center. Many described skills they learned in class that they applied in their work such as communication (oral, written, and interpersonal), technical or computer skills, working with others or being on a team, project management, critical thinking, and marketing.

| 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? | Spring 2016 [n=298] | Spring 2013 [n=291] |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Frequently | 13% | 11% |
| Sometimes | 32% | 45% |
| Rarely | 15% | 25% |
| Never | 40% | 18% |

Table 4—Frequency of Conversations between Supervisors and Student Employees

Students were asked about how their student employment had contributed to their success as a student at Texas A&M, and to describe what they learned through their student employment experience. Student employees shared a wide range of contributions and examples. Students talked about learning to manage their time, improve their communication skills, work on a team or with others, be more professional, and interact with others who are different from themselves. Several student employees commented on being more connected to campus or others in their department, understanding what it meant to work in an office, and gaining confidence in themselves. There were a few students who discussed learning about office politics or losing their naïve view of Texas A&M; these students specifically mentioned the closing of Cain Hall and moving critical student services away from the main part of the campus, and watching backstabbing that occurred between staff members.

When asked to describe how a specific skill they learned as a student employee contributed to their future career goals, students talked about their careers in the medical field, teaching, marketing, and accounting; student employees provided examples of skills they learned to help in these fields. Communicating with others in a variety of methods (phone, email, in person) was mentioned the most, along with working with others or on a team, managing time, and thinking critically to effectively solve problems. Other skills discussed included working with people different than themselves, networking, gaining technical skills or learning specific software, and improving their leadership skills.

Furthermore, students were asked to describe how they have been able to reflect on their student employment. Student employees talked about processing real world experiences, thinking about their performance or growth, learning from mistakes, and having discussions with peers. Some talked about reflecting on their experience as they wrote their résumé or prepared for an interview, and through completing this survey. Others commented on formally reflecting on their performance and experience through evaluations, meetings with supervisors, and during training activities. One student talked about reflecting on the changes in his/her department as a result of a class discussion when a professor talked about the impact of technology in the world. Alternatively, many students stated that they had not reflected on their employment experience, or they expressed appreciation for their position or skills they have learned.

Student employees were asked about their supervisor and the connection they had with their co-workers. Table 5, on the following page, illustrates that student employees were positive about their relationships with their supervisor and co-workers. However, they were slightly less positive about their supervisor helping in making connections between their work and their life as a student.

| | Strongly Agree (5) | Agree (4) | Neutral (3) | Disagree (2) | Strongly Disagree (1) | 2016 Mean (sd) [n] |
|--|-----------------------|--------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| My supervisor is understanding of me. | 58% | 34% | 6% | 2% | 1% | 4.47 (.75) [274] |
| I feel supported by my supervisor and/or department. | 60% | 30% | 6% | 3% | 1% | 4.45 (.83) [274] |
| I am connected with my co-workers. | 46% | 46% | 6% | 1% | 1% | 4.34 (.74) [274] |
| My supervisor helps me make connections between my work and my life as a student. | 37% | 31% | 25% | 6% | 2% | 3.96 (.99) [271] |

Table 5—Supervisors and Co-Workers

When asked about how they spent time with co-workers outside of work, 56% said they spent social time (hang out, social events, etc.) with co-workers outside of work, 24% said in academic ways (study groups, classes, etc.), 22% said through student organizations, and 21% stated transportation (sharing rides together). Another 2% selected the “other” option and were provided the opportunity to write in a comment. Responses included living together as roommates, being in student organizations or programs in Student Affairs, eating meals, and texting one another. Alternatively, 35% reported they did not spend time with co-workers outside of work.

When asked if their supervisor served as a mentor for them, student employees were fairly split with 49% saying yes and 51% stating no. Those who reported their supervisor was a mentor (n=134) were asked to explain how their supervisor served as a mentor. Student employees talked about supervisors teaching them, answering questions, providing feedback, giving opportunities, listening, offering advice, asking about their academics or personal lives, challenging them, and preparing them for full-time work. Additionally, employees described these supervisors as caring, supportive, encouraging, and available.

The final series of questions asked student employees to rate their agreement to statements about their employment experience and the criteria developed for high impact practices or transformative learning experiences. Table 6, on the next page, reveals that student employees were generally positive about the high impact practice criteria. However, they were less positive about opportunities to connect their classes and employment or receiving feedback on their performance.

| I receive the following through my student employment... | Strongly Agree (5) | Agree (4) | Neutral (3) | Disagree (2) | Strongly Disagree (1) | 2016 Mean (sd) [n=266] |
|--|---------------------------|------------------|--------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Opportunity to experience diversity through contact with people who are different from myself. | 48% | 43% | 6% | 3% | -- | 4.36 (.73) |
| Tasks or responsibilities that are purposeful or meaningful. | 35% | 47% | 14% | 5% | -- | 4.12 (.81) |
| Opportunity to become aware of my values and beliefs and thus to better understand myself in relation to others and the larger world. | 35% | 44% | 15% | 5% | 1% | 4.09 (.87) |
| Interactions with staff, advisors, and peers about important matters. | 34% | 44% | 17% | 5% | <1% | 4.06 (.87) |
| Consistent time with my supervisor and/or other full-time staff members. | 32% | 47% | 13% | 7% | 2% | 4.00 (.93) |
| Interactions with staff, advisors, and peers over extended periods of time. | 29% | 49% | 17% | 5% | <1% | 4.00 (.83) |
| Frequent feedback about my performance. | 27% | 43% | 21% | 8% | 1% | 3.87 (.94) |
| Opportunity to integrate, synthesize and apply knowledge gained from my classes to my employment experience and vice versa. | 23% | 36% | 25% | 14% | 2% | 3.65 (1.05) |

Table 6—Criteria for High Impact Practices

Demographic information was gathered through student employment records when sending the survey out to Division of Student Affairs student employees and from the institution student information system to gain an understanding of all the student employees in the Division and the survey respondents. Table 7, on the following page, represents the employing department in the Division and student demographics. Not surprisingly, Recreational Sports and Residence Life comprise over half of all student employees in the Division. Nearly half of the respondents were seniors, and almost two-thirds were female, although the gender was split evenly for all student employees in the Division. Just over two-thirds were continuing generation students and over half were Top 10 Percent of their high school. The survey respondents closely matched the 2016 DSA student employee population in most areas, except for the increase in females responding to the survey. Additionally, there were fewer student employees from Recreation Sports responding to the survey compared to the population.

| | 2016 Survey Respondents (n=314) | 2016 DSA Student Employees (N=1,392) | 2013 DSA Student Employees (N=1,098) |
|--|--|---|---|
| DSA Department | | | |
| Recreational Sports | 28% | 41% | 44% |
| Residence Life | 23% | 19% | 19% |
| University Center & Special Events | 8% | 9% | 10% |
| Student Health Services | 8% | 8% | 5% |
| Office of the Commandant | 3% | 6% | 6% |
| Becky Gates Children's Center | 4% | 4% | 3% |
| Student Life | 5% | 3% | 3% |
| Memorial Student Center | 4% | 3% | 3% |
| Disability Services | 4% | 2% | 2% |
| Student Activities | 3% | 2% | 2% |
| Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs | 2% | 1% | 2% |
| Information Technology | 2% | 1% | 1% |
| Multicultural Services | 1% | 1% | 1% |
| University Art | 1% | 1% | 1% |
| Music Activities | 1% | 1% | -- |
| Student Life Studies | 1% | <1% | <1% |
| Student Counseling Service | <1% | <1% | <1% |
| Classification | | | |
| Senior | 43% | 46% | 47% |
| Junior | 28% | 26% | 28% |
| Sophomore | 19% | 18% | 21% |
| Freshmen | 6% | 6% | 4% |
| Masters | 3% | 4% | -- |
| Doctoral | <1% | <1% | -- |
| Graduated | 1% | 1% | -- |
| Gender | | | |
| Female | 64% | 50% | 46% |
| Male | 36% | 50% | 54% |
| Ethnicity | | | |
| White Only | 66% | 61% | 68% |
| Hispanic or Latino of any Race | 21% | 24% | 17% |
| Asian Only | 5% | 5% | 4% |
| Black only + 2 or more/1 Black | 4% | 5% | 7% |
| 2 or more/excluding Black | 3% | 2% | 2% |
| International | 2% | 2% | 1% |
| American Indian Only | <1% | <1% | <1% |
| First Generation | | | |
| No | 68% | 67% | |
| Yes | 27% | 28% | |
| Unknown | 5% | 5% | |
| Top 10 Percent | | | |
| Yes | 56% | 51% | |
| No | 44% | 49% | |

Table 7—Student Demographics

Conclusions and Recommendations

Student employees in the Division of Student Affairs indicated they have developed skills and knowledge related to identified common outcomes within the Division and 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, improved communication skills, and enhanced their critical thinking skills.

Furthermore, each of these areas was more positively rated than compared to 2013. Additionally, student employees could articulate examples of what they learned and connect that to their academics and future career goals. In 2016, 5% of the student employees felt that their employment experience did not connect with their academics, which was a decrease compared to 2013 when 19% did not see the connection.

While it would seem that the intentional work of the Aggies RISE committee with student supervisors has had some positive impact on student employees, there are still areas for improvement. The Aggies RISE committee is encouraged to look for opportunities to work with student supervisors in areas such as preparing student employees for full-time work, making connections between students' employment and their academics or future career goals, and providing meaningful feedback.

Additionally, the Aggies RISE committee may want to explore developing a supervisors' orientation for new supervisors throughout the Division. The orientation could train all student employee supervisors on the university learning outcomes, writing learning outcomes for their specific positions, having developmental conversations with students, and how to measure and document learning that has taken place so that it becomes the norm in Student Affairs. There also could be opportunities to provide training for student employees who also are supervisors to other students. The training could include similar aspects as an orientation for staff members supervising students, but also include skills in being an effective supervisor, giving feedback, and managing others.

Some of the student worker positions in the Division might meet the criteria for being a high impact practice or transformative learning experience. In the future, Aggies RISE might work with supervisors on being recognized in the Division as a high impact practice or what modifications may be needed to be considered one. The committee could look at workshops or resources to help supervisors wanting to go through this process.

The Aggies RISE is strongly encouraged to share the results of this assessment with stakeholders, including student supervisors, department directors, and the Division of Student Affairs Committee on Student Learning in the Co-Curricular.

Report prepared for: Division of Student Affairs, Texas A&M University
Report prepared by: Kelly Cox, Student Life Studies
Report prepared on: July 25, 2016
Analysis prepared by: Katie Reed, Student Life Studies
Survey designed by: Bettina Trejo, Student Life Studies

***Services provided by Student Life Studies are funded, in part, by Texas A&M University Advancement Fee.
Find Student Life Studies on Facebook!***