FYS Assessment Summary: Academic Year 2014-2015

Introduction

The overall approach for academic assessment of First-Year Seminars (FYS) consists of one indirect and one direct measure of student learning related to the University Undergraduate Learning Outcomes (UULOs). For the indirect measure, the Office of Undergraduate Education and Academic Assessment, in cooperation with FYS instructors, administered the Learning Outcomes Survey (see below). For the direct measure, units that offer FYS courses were asked to develop their own assessment of critical thinking (UULO 2) consistent with their existing assessment practices and could be implemented across multiple FYS sections without adding significantly to the workload of instructors.

Indirect Assessment: Learning Outcomes Survey

The Learning Outcomes Survey (LOS) was administered to students enrolled in (FYS) each semester. This is the third year that the LOS was administered to students. Results of particular interest to FYS instructors are summarized in the tables below. A comprehensive report is available at: link.

There was substantial participation (Mean = 59.53%, SD = 0.17%) among students enrolled in FYS courses, though the participation rate was variable by course. Response rates were typically higher for the fall semester than for spring. Response rates in EGG 101 and TCA 103 were lower than the average across all FYS courses. The total number of respondents increased by about 400 from the 2013-2014 survey (N = 2,016) to the 2014-2015 survey (N = 2,411). This increase was driven by increased response rates in many of the FYS courses, while total enrollments remained fairly stable.

There were not significant differences between courses in the amount of time spent on coursework, including labs. While the majority of respondents reported spending 6-20 hours per week on coursework, almost 20% reported spending little time on coursework (5 or fewer hours per week). There were significant differences by course in the time spent in paid employment. Students enrolled in COE 102 were most likely (18.64%), while those in CFA 100 were least likely (4.90%) to report full-time employment (more than 30 hours per week). Overall, half of the respondents reported no paid employment, and only 11% reported full-time paid employment. Hours spent in paid employment per week were higher in the Spring than in the Fall.

We asked students about their degree of satisfaction with 38 different aspects of their academic and overall student experience. Example items included “faculty respect for students”, “quality of instruction”, and “my sense of belonging on campus.” In general, students reported moderate satisfaction (range: 4-5 on a 2-6 Likert-type scale). “Faculty respect for students” received the highest overall rating (5.07), and “informal contact with faculty in non-academic settings” received the lowest rating (4.33).

We asked seven questions about the extent to which First-Year Seminars had increased students’ skills and abilities related to the University Undergraduate Learning Outcomes (UULOs). There were significant differences between courses for all seven of these questions. Overall, students reported most improvement in understanding of ethics and least improvement in written and oral communication. Average responses by course are shown in Table 1 for fall 2014 and spring 2015.
### Table 1. Student Progress on UULOs by Course – Fall 2014 & Spring 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fall 2014 Overall Mean</th>
<th>Fall 2014 Overall SD</th>
<th>Spring 2015 Overall Mean</th>
<th>Spring 2015 Overall SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improve my inquiry and critical thinking skills</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>3.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve my written communication skills</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve my oral communication skills</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>3.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase my global knowledge and awareness</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>3.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase my multicultural knowledge and awareness</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>3.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase my understanding of rights and responsibilities regarding citizenship</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>3.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase my understanding of ethics</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>3.78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. 1 = None, 2 - Little, 3 = Moderate, 4 = Much, 5 = Very Much; * There was no enrollment in TCA 103 for Fall 2014.*

**Direct Assessment: Inquiry and Critical Thinking**

In June, 2014, Coordinators and Instructors for all General Education Core Courses participated in the General Education Assessment Summit. The Coordinators and Instructors for FYS agreed to assess student mastery of inquiry and critical thinking skills (UULO 2), as demonstrated in samples of student work. Each unit created its own assessment instrument, many of which were adapted from the AAC&U Critical Thinking VALUE Rubric. Some units also worked with liaison librarians to design appropriate assessment methods and assist with the assessment process. FYS coordinators reported their findings back to the larger group at a meeting held in May, 2015. The methods, results, adjustments to the assessment plan, and actions based on assessment results are summarized below in Table 2.

**Table 2: FYS Assessment Methods, Results, and Actions by Course**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Method/Process</th>
<th>Results/Insights</th>
<th>Action/Adjustment</th>
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</table>
| BUS 103 | Committee scoring of sample of student papers (n = 25) from 5 sections using the AAC&U Critical Thinking VALUE Rubric | • Students demonstrated introductory level proficiency overall  
• Students performed best on “explanation of issues” and worst on “evidence”.  
• Committee found it difficult to apply a common rubric to a variety of assignments. | • Same basic approach and same rubric will be used for 2015-2016, but sample will be drawn from fewer sections whose assignments are more closely aligned. |
| COE 102 | Committee scoring of sample of student position papers (n = 21) from 7 sections using the AAC&U Information Literacy and Critical Thinking VALUE Rubrics | • Students demonstrated first-year proficiency in both areas  
• Students performed best on “applies information” and worst on “cites information”.  
• Students performed best on “explanation of issues” and worst on “evidence”. | • Results were used immediately in COE to stimulate discussions about how to improve teaching of critical thinking and information literacy  
• Same approach will be used for 2015-2016. |
| COLA 100E | Instructor grading? Of student position papers using rubric adapted from the AAC&U Critical Thinking VALUE Rubric | • Students demonstrated proficiency in the “developing” to “good” range. | • Results were used immediately in ASC to identify core critical thinking concepts to reinforce in class and to modify the assignment to require multiple perspectives and sources.  
• Same approach will be used for 2015-2016. |
| COLA 100LA | Instructor scoring of student critical thinking assignments (16 sections; all students) using rubric adapted from the AAC&U Critical Thinking VALUE Rubric | • Students demonstrated mid-range proficiency (approx. 2.5 on a 0-4 scale) overall  
• Students performed best on “stating the question” and worst on | • Results were used immediately in COLA to recommend that instructors work closely with University |
Students' ability to state positions and draw conclusions was quite variable. Libraries to help students find and analyze appropriate evidence to support their positions.

Same approach will be used for 2015-2016.

Committee scoring of sample (10%, n = 56) of student ethics posters using a custom rubric designed to assess all six critical thinking sub-UULOs on a 2-5 (Beginning-Mastered) scale.

Students demonstrated Beginning to Developing-level proficiency overall, with slightly higher scores in Fall than Spring. Students performed best on identifying problems and worst on analyzing and interpreting results.

Same approach will be used for 2015-2016.

Aggregate data from 2014-2016 will inform changes to content and/or delivery in SCI 101.

Faculty mentor peer instructor evaluation of student annotated bibliographies and canvas projects using a custom checklist (Met Expectations or Did Not Meet Expectations) designed to assess competency in using library resources (UULO 2.2) and exploring creative processes.

Overall, most students met expectations.

Students used multiple sources from different databases, but did not retrieve sources from two different UNLV libraries.

Results are being used to revise the assignment and assessment instrument to clarify the multiple libraries requirement.

Honors college is considering asking librarians, rather than peer instructors, to conduct the actual assessment.

Conclusions

Students enrolled in FYS, on the whole, appear to balance their time appropriately between academic work and other responsibilities. However, a minority of students report a school/work balance that is not consistent with academic success. We might consider strengthening the message of college as the first priority and work with Support Services to direct students to resources, such as on-campus employment, that may allow them to devote more time to their studies. Overall, students report being satisfied with their experiences during the first year at UNLV and report moderate achievement in their
FYS courses on all the UULOs. We may want to include written and oral communication skills in future assessment efforts, as these areas had the lowest perceived achievement ratings and may be an area of concern for students.

Overall, students enrolled in FYS courses at UNLV demonstrate a beginning or “Benchmark” level of proficiency in inquiry and critical thinking skills, which is what we would expect from first-year students. Some common findings emerged across courses, most notably that students performed best on outcomes related to identifying or explaining issues and worst on outcomes related to interpreting, evaluating, and citing evidence to support their claims. These specific skills could serve as targets for instructional interventions and continued assessment efforts. It will also be important to determine whether students make gains in inquiry and critical thinking and skills as they progress through the General Education Core, including the Second-Year Seminar, Milestone and Culminating Experiences. Some units are already using their assessment results to revise instruction in their FYS courses. Beyond the findings related to student learning, many units were able to identify limitations in their assessment procedures or instruments and make adjustments that will hopefully streamline assessment efforts and provide more usable data in future years.