

English Learning Outcomes Pilot Study

Introduction:

The following are the results of the pilot study for English in gathering indirect evidence of student learning; that is student self-perception of their level of learning in outcomes associated with general education, active learning, mission of the college, and department specific goals. In addition, student survey data was compared to Faculty Information Form (FIF) data to assess students' perceptions of their learning compared to how well faculty felt they addressed particular goals in their courses. Student data was collected from 290 surveys submitted by students who were taking English classes in the spring of 2008. Faculty data came from Faculty Information Forms, which asked similar questions to those being asked of the students. Seven faculty members responded to the FIFs, providing a much smaller data set. When reviewing the faculty data, the small survey set should remain in mind.

In order to present the data in a concise and familiar format, the model is based on the output of the Course and Instruction Evaluation Forms the faculty receive at the end of each semester. However, the reporting scale on this survey differs from the evaluation forms. The ranks used on these evaluations were: rank 5 for students who felt they significantly improved in a particular learning goal, rank 4 for above average improvement, rank 3 for average improvement, rank 2 for somewhat, rank 1 for students feeling as if they did not improve at all in a particular area, and rank 6 for a question not applying to the course.

Report Organization:

The frequencies of responses for each rank are reported on the data sheets under the Course Evaluations sections. Some surveys had blanks or multiple bubbles filled in, while not included in this report, they are counted toward the total of n=290. In order to reflect the Course and Instruction Evaluation forms which contain data on percent (%) below good, included on this report are percent below average ($\% < 3$), and percent above average ($\% > 3$) for comparison. These percentages do not take into account rankings of 6, or 3 (average.)

The means of the students' responses and the means of the faculty's responses are also included in order to compare these values to see how well the students felt they were learning in particular classes in relation to how well the faculty felt they incorporated certain learning goals into their courses. (Please note: Our faculty sample was very small, so the data on faculty means is fairly limited.)

There are two sections to this report; the first includes all of the frequencies of responses, % above and below average, and student and faculty means. The second section compares student means to faculty means by showing the difference between the two means. Each section is broken into the following sub-sections: General Education Learning Goals, Active Learning Goals, College Mission Goals, and English course goals. These sub-sections represent all forms of learning pedagogy valued by the college.

In the first section, all percentages reported at 50% or more above average are shaded. In the "Differences between student and faculty means" section, means with a difference of 0.25 or less are

shaded. The last section highlights the differences between what learning goals the students feel were incorporated in a course versus what the faculty felt they taught.

Summary:

In general, the perceptions of students and faculty exist on par with one another, though there are a few places where the data shows inconsistency. For instance, on the question about creative writing, the average student score for improvement was 3.87, which is more than one and a half times greater than the faculty mean of 2.20. This discrepancy could be due to the small sample size of faculty compared to students, and that of those faculty sampled only half of them taught creative writing. When examining the data, keep in mind that all English classes were analyzed together. However, the number of faculty surveyed who teach creative writing classes may not be the only explanation for the discrepancy because only 20% of students felt that the creative writing question did not apply to the course they were taking. Another possible justification could be that the term creative writing could be interpreted differently between faculty and students. While faculty may have a strict discipline focused definition of creative writing, students may feel that most English classes that require writing also require creativity.

According to the data, students felt that 40% of the General Education Learning goals were being met by the English courses they were in. While some of the learning goals, like improving quantitative ability, do not apply to English courses, there are some areas where there can be development. For example, 45.86% of students felt that they improved in their understanding of the multicultural dimensions of the world. Again, this could be students misinterpreting the term multicultural; not taking into account historical writings from other cultures, but low averages should be acknowledged and if possible addressed.

The college is shifting its focus toward more student centered learning, but there are some disconnects between the students and faculty on these goals. Out of all of the active learning pedagogical goals set forth by the college, students felt that discussion was the only area that was being addressed in their courses with 68% of students feeling they improved in that area. However, while this percentage is high, the difference between the means of the students and the faculty is large (0.82), which is almost a 20% difference of opinion. The faculty feels they are placing great focus on discussion in their classes, but the students do not agree. Beyond discussion, less than half of the students surveyed felt they improved in oral presentation and working with others. The students and faculty did not agree about how much oral presentations are emphasized in the classroom, with the faculty feeling they addressed this learning goal well, while the students barely ranked their improvement above average (a difference of 0.38.) The faculty and students were more in sync on the goal of working in collaboration with others, and the difference between the faculty and student means was only 0.16. However, both means are near the average range of the scale, so more stress could be placed on this goal going forward.

Students felt that over half of the college mission goals were well addressed in their classes. The area where the most improvement is needed is in addressing the goal of improving leadership ability. Most (40%) students felt the leadership goal did not apply to their class. In general, students felt the college mission goals were accomplished in their classes, and the differences between the means of the

students and faculty were minimal, meaning they agreed as to how heavily the mission goals featured in English classes.

Overall, more than half of the students surveyed felt they had achieved a greater than average improvement in all five of the English specific learning goals. While there is some room for improvement in this data (4 of the 5 were near 50%), the fact that most English courses are content specific and do not address every English department learning goal could result in a reduced number of students feeling like they improved in areas not directly addressed by their course. “Best Expectations” is another area which shows great results. In all three categories relating to course expectations, students felt they knew what to anticipate before taking the course. The only area where the difference between the student and faculty means was above the 0.25 threshold was in communication of grading standards. However, the difference was only 0.01 points over, so the students’ beliefs about grading expectations matched fairly well with faculty’s standards.

Further analysis of the data presented on the following sheets is the providence of the English department at Mills. Since this is our pilot study, and we plan to do an analysis for all departments in the future, we likely cannot do such complete reports in the future. Therefore, we would like to request feedback on what data and information you found valuable. What was useful and how? What do you wish we had included in the report? Do you like the structure? Please, e-mail aknuksen@mills.edu with feedback on this report. Thank you.