SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- "...inner core courses received favorable ratings with regard to…" (p. 5)

- "I hope that in five years that the various departments and schools in the college think of assessment as …" (p. 14)

- "...about 71% of all students reported that their courses emphasized…" (p. 17)

From the Director

Greetings!

It is my pleasure to introduce the Spring 2012 edition of *Progressive Measures*, UAS's newsletter for highlighting the assessment of student learning outcomes! This is our 15th newsletter, after being introduced in Fall 2005.

Over twenty years ago, the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) developed a list of nine principles of good practice for assessment. One of these principles focused on the idea of change, noting that "assessment alone changes little. Its greatest contribution comes on campuses where the quality of teaching and learning is visibly valued and worked at." A lot has changed in the last twenty years, but the core principle remains the same: assessment works best when used in decision making, reflects an institution's and program's core values, and is made meaningful by focusing on teaching and learning.

The articles in this edition reflect those principles. In 'Developing Engagement, Sociological Imagination, Identity, and Autonomy,' Dr. Kathleen McKinney and Naghme Naseri describe an assessment of students' identities as sociologists and how that information can be used to help student engagement with their program. Interviews conducted by UAS graduate assistant, Kelly Whalen, with Drs. Cooper Cutting and Sally Parry provide valuable insights about assessment. A report from the Council on General Education (CGE) describes the results of the current general education assessment process

and provides ideas on how to improve general education assessment at ISU. An article by Michelle Stover shows how the Up Late @ State program not only provides students with programming but also contributes to their development. Finally, an article by UAS Coordinator Derek Herrmann outlines the differences between faculty perceptions of student engagement and what students report.

Many assume that assessment is about finding the right *answer*. However, one of the most valuable features of assessment is the development of new *questions*. As demonstrated by the contributions to this newsletter, ISU faculty and staff see the value of assessment in answering important questions and in developing new ones.

I wish everyone a wonderful summer and congratulations on another successful academic year!

Ryan Smith

Ryan Smith, Ph.D.
Director, University Assessment Services
Illinois State University

The Mission of UAS:

"University Assessment Services is responsible for conducting a variety of assessment activities related to student learning outcomes using qualitative and quantitative research techniques, providing support services to other units engaged in such assessment, and sharing best practices for and results of assessment activities."

Assessing General Education at ISU: Public Opportunity & Critical Inquiry and Problem Solving

Reported by the Council on General Education

Summary

The Council on General Education was charged with using results from the Institutional Artifact Portfolio (IAP) review to determine areas of strength and identify potential areas for improvement within the General Education Program at ISU. This report provides our summary and interpretation of this third wave of reviews, focusing for the second time on *Public Opportunity* and *Critical Inquiry and Problem Solving*. Inter-rater reliability issues precluded sound interpretation of Public Opportunity. Analysis of Critical Inquiry and Problem Solving revealed somewhat limited, but growing, evidence of student learning outcomes, though lack of consistency across primary traits complicates interpretation. Given that the IAP process focuses on the General Education program as a whole and does not link specific assessments of learning outcomes to sets of courses, we are unable to determine the locus of these results. We encourage additional dialogue about assessment methods for General Education. Moreover, we recommend that the current IAP process be suspended so that resources can be devoted to designing, implementing, and assessing our forthcoming, revised General Education program.

Background

General Education at ISU provides students with a broad, common foundation of study upon which to build an undergraduate education. ISU students complete a total of 14 courses (42 credit hours), that map onto **four Shared Learning Outcomes.** These courses are designed to develop their capacity (1) to critically think and solve problems, (2) to comprehend and contribute to diverse and global perspectives, (3) to be stewards of life-long learning, and (4) to advance public opportunity. The **Institutional Artifact Portfolio** process provides a comprehensive method to evaluate our progress in accomplishing the four Shared Learning Outcomes of General Education. Each is assessed one semester every two years as part of this ongoing assessment process. Instructors teaching courses that map onto the particular Shared Learning Outcome are asked to submit artifacts that are related to these outcomes. An artifact is any form of tangible student work; it is a product of the students' learning experience that their instructor indicated may address at least one of the identified traits of the four Shared Learning Outcomes. Possible examples of artifacts include essays/papers, written assignments, exams, speeches, presentations, posters, artwork, performances, or music recitals.

Method and Procedures

As part of the third wave of IAP reviews, University Assessment Services invited instructors of General Education courses related to **Critical Inquiry and Problem Solving** (Fall 2010) and **Public Opportunity** (Spring 2011) Shared Learning Outcomes to participate in the review. In Fall 2010, 238 instructors were invited to submit artifacts from 352 classes offering 19,547 seats in courses in 23 departments/schools. Thirty instructors volunteered 3,058 artifacts from 4,000 students in 21 courses (6 inner core, 8 middle core, 7 outer core; 8 in the College of Applied Science and Technology, 10 in the College of Arts and Sciences, 1 in the College of Business, 2 in Interdisciplinary Studies) related to Critical Inquiry and Problem Solving, yielding a 13% instructor response rate and representing 16% of total enrollments in Critical Inquiry and Problem Solving courses. Among participating instructors, 3% were Administrative/Professional staff with teaching responsibilities, 33% were Non-tenure Track faculty, 7% were

Assessing General Education at ISU (cont'd)

Assistant Professors, 17% were Associate Professors, and 30% were Professors. In Spring 2011, 158 instructors were invited to submit artifacts from 221 classes offering 10,182 seats in courses in 17 departments/schools. Forty-five instructors volunteered 2,200 artifacts from 2,900 students in 18 courses (2 inner core, 9 middle core, 7 outer core; 5 in the College of Applied Science and Technology, 12 in the College of Arts and Sciences, 1 in Interdisciplinary Studies) related to Public Opportunity, yielding a 28% instructor response rate and representing 22% of total enrollments in Public Opportunity courses. Among participating instructors, 47% were graduate students, 7% were Administrative/Professional staff with teaching responsibilities, 11% were Non-tenure Track faculty, 11% were Assistant Professors, 11% were Associate Professors, and 13% were Professors.

We note that response rates have been declining as the IAP process continues (though not for Public Opportunity reported here). As a result, we urge careful consideration of the process, helping instructors and students understand the value of assessment by ensuring the process yields data that can be used to generate recommendations to strengthen our program. We also encourage additional dialogue about assessment methods for General Education, especially with regard to alignment with goals.

For each Shared Learning Outcome, 300 artifacts (selected randomly from submitted artifacts for each course) were assessed using rubrics developed for the General Education Assessment Task Force. Three interdisciplinary review teams (each consisting of two faculty members) carried out blind reviews in which

members were asked to come to consensus regarding the extent to which each primary trait (and self-reflection and disciplinary knowledge) was developing, established, or advanced using the established rubrics. Reviewers also had the option to note if primary traits were not present in a given artifact. Not present ratings should be interpreted broadly because it is possible that the assignment for which the artifact was created did not incorporate particular aspects included in the rubric. It is also possible that students did not show evidence of an aspect when requested by the assignment. Inter-rater reliability for Critical Inquiry and Problem Solving was acceptable (i.e., the intraclass correlation coefficients were significantly greater than 0, indicating agreement between raters), given the applied nature of this research project. Reliability was low for Public Opportunity (e.g., only 3 of 6 intraclass correlation coefficients were significantly greater than 0, indicating no agreement between raters), precluding interpretation of these results.

Results and Discussion

In the IAP process, **Public Opportunity** is described with the following statement: "Students will identify the resources and articulate the subsequent value of civic and community engagement." It includes six primary traits: (1) critically informed position on civic life; (2) influence of civic participation on the social and collaborate nature of knowledge; (3) contributions to the public affecting individual life aspects such as family, religion, business, and/or the state; (4) contributions to the public affecting social and community life such as family, religion, business, and/or the state; (5) resources for civic engagement; and (6) civic participation in the social, economic, technological, and/or political dimensions of community development. In an effort to simplify the presentation of data, an overall public opportunity composite score based on these six dimensions was created, evincing adequate internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.81). Finally, the assessment of all artifacts includes details about self-reflection and discipline knowledge. General trends for each **Public Opportunity** primary trait, the composite measure, self-reflection, and discipline knowledge can be observed in Table 1.

In the IAP process, **Critical Inquiry and Problem Solving** is described with the following statement:

Assessing General Education at ISU (cont'd)

"Students will develop and communicate a range of interests and curiosities, engaging those interests and curiosities through critical thinking, reasoning, and problem solving." It includes nine primary traits: (1) variety of ideas evaluated, (2) quantitative reasoning used to address a problem, (3) critical analysis expressed through writing or speaking, (4) the context of other viewpoints in developing arguments, (5) consideration of potential moral and ethical issues, (6) theories to resolve moral issues, (7) forces and consequences that influence life, (8) development and use of technology as it relates to society/environment, and (9) uses information from outside resources responsibly. In an effort to simplify the presentation of data, exploratory factor analysis was used to determine whether an overall critical inquiry and problem solving composite score based on these nine dimensions was feasible. Such a composite score was not feasible, so we interpret the primary traits individually. This is the second time (amidst our six reviews) that composite scores have not been suitable, again raising caution about interpretation overall. We urge additional dialogue regarding the extent to which the primary traits are suitable measures of our goals and learning outcomes. Finally, the assessment of all artifacts includes details about self-reflection and discipline knowledge.

General trends for each **Critical Inquiry and Problem Solving** primary trait, self-reflection, and discipline knowledge can be observed in Table 2. Examination of overall patterns for native and transfer students revealed broad similarities across student samples, so this factor is not considered further. Examination of patterns based on student designation (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior) was similar to the overall trends described below, though it is important to note general improvement from freshman through senior years. In general, ratings of

discipline knowledge were **very positive**, and ratings of variety of ideas evaluated, critical analysis expressed through writing or speaking, and forces and consequences that influence life were **positive.** Quantitative reasoning used to address a problem and consideration of potential moral and ethical issues yielded **neutral** ratings. The context of other viewpoints in developing arguments, theories to resolve moral issues, development and use of technology as it relates to society/environment, uses information from outside resources responsibly, and self-reflection yielded **relatively low ratings**. This pattern was similar to the first wave of reviews (from Spring 2009) . **In general, ratings for 7 primary traits showed improvement (quantitative reasoning, critical analysis, moral and ethical issues, theories, forces**

Table 1: Artifact Rating Distribution for Public Opportunity

Primary Traits	# of Reviews	% Not Present	% Developing	% Established	% Advanced
Critically Informed Position	300	28.7	8.0	8.3	55.0
	300	39.7	47.7	7.0	5.7
Knowledge	300	48.7	18.3	20.3	12.7
	300	33.3	43.7	22.0	1.0
Individual Life	300	35.3	26.7	26.7	11.3
	300	15.3	37.7	45.7	1.3
Social & Community Life	300	24.0	32.3	28.0	15.7
	300	14.6	41.7	43.0	1.0
Resources	300	59.0	15.7	19.7	5.7
	300	11.3	54.7	31.7	2.3
Civic Participation	300	47.0	26.3	10.3	16.3
	300	29.7	46.0	21.0	3.3
Public Opportunity Composite	1800	40.4	21.2	18.9	19.4
	1800	10.0	55.0	33.4	1.3
Self-Reflection	300	60.3	16.7	18.3	4.7
	300	50.0	27.3	18.7	4.0
Discipline Knowledge	300	20.7	42.0	28.7	8.7
	300	23.0	56.3	18.7	2.0

Note. To facilitate comparison across time points, Fall 2008 review values are listed in the top row in each cell, and Spring 2011 review values are listed in the bottom row in each cell. Values in blue represent improvements in performance over time, whereas values in red represent decrements in performance over time.

Assessing General Education at ISU (cont'd)

and consequences, technology, and dis-
cipline knowledge), 2 remained the
same (variety of ideas, self-reflection),
and 2 showed some decrement over
time (context of other viewpoints, re-
sources, see Table 2). Overall, ratings of
outer core courses were more positive
than were ratings for inner and middle core
courses, with the exception that inner core
courses received quite favorable ratings
with regard to quantitative reasoning. This
pattern differs from the strong ratings for
middle core courses evident in the first re-
view and warrants further investigation.
This overall pattern evinces <u>somewhat
limited, but growing,</u> **evidence of stu-
dent learning outcomes related to criti-
cal inquiry and problem solving.** It is
possible that this limited evidence is, in
part, a result of the divergent courses that
address critical inquiry and problem solving
from unique perspectives. That is, only a
subset of courses focuses primarily on
quantitative reasoning, another subset on
technology, another subset on argumenta-
tion, and so on. Given that the IAP review
focuses on the General Education program
as a whole and does not link specific assess-
ments of learning outcomes to sets of
courses, we are unable to determine the lo-
cus of these results. Additional assessment
of particular courses and course categories
would provide helpful details regarding pos-
sible strengths and limitations related to
Critical Inquiry and Problem Solving.

Recommendations

We encourage additional dialogue about
assessment methods for General Education.
Moreover, we recommend that the current
IAP process be suspended so that resources
can be devoted to designing, implementing,
and assessing our forthcoming, revised
General Education program.

* It is essential that assessment methods
  align with program goals and structure.

We urge the General Education Task Force and campus commu-
nity to continue their thoughtful consideration of this important
issue.

* Careful consideration of learning outcomes, primary traits, and
  their measurement is needed, given the lack of consistency across
  samples and reviewers. The reliability and validity of the rubrics
  must be established more formally. The Association of American
  Colleges and University's Liberal Education and America's Prom-
  ise (LEAP) assessment methods are one alternative strategy for
  consideration. Consideration of quantitative methods is warrant-
  ed.

Table 2: Artifact Rating Distribution for Critical Inquiry and Prob-
lem Solving

Primary Traits	# of Reviews	% Not Present	% Developing	% Established	% Advanced
Variety of Ideas	297	43.8	29.0	14.5	12.8
	300	41.3	39.3	10.0	9.3
Quantitative Reasoning	297	66.3	5.1	4.7	23.9
	300	53.0	19.7	3.3	24.0
Critical Analysis	297	58.2	10.1	13.1	18.5
	300	42.3	16.3	31.0	10.3
Context of Other Viewpoints	297	66.0	13.5	10.4	10.1
	299	74.6	10.0	8.4	7.0
Moral & Ethical Issues	297	70.0	15.5	9.1	5.4
	299	50.2	28.8	13.7	7.4
Theories	297	87.9	6.1	2.4	3.7
	299	75.3	14.7	5.4	4.7
Forces & Consequences	297	42.1	7.7	31.3	18.9
	297	31.6	32.3	26.6	9.4
Technology	297	89.6	3.0	4.4	3.0
	299	74.9	13.0	4.0	8.0
Resources	297	63.6	18.2	5.4	12.8
	299	84.9	5.0	1.0	9.0
Critical Inquiry & Problem Solving Composite	2673	65.6	11.9	10.5	12.0
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Self-Reflection	297	82.8	8.1	5.1	4.0
	299	78.9	7.0	8.7	5.7
Discipline Knowledge	297	31.6	38.7	18.2	11.4
	300	11.0	64.0	14.3	10.7

*Note. To facilitate comparison across time points, Spring 2009 review values are listed
in the top row in each cell, and Fall 2010 review values are listed in the bottom row in
each cell. Values in blue represent improvements in performance over time, whereas
values in red represent decrements in performance over time.*

Assessing General Education at ISU (cont'd)

* Additional training of reviewers is needed to ensure satisfactory inter-rater reliability. As a case in point, interpretation of Public Opportunity findings was not feasible given unacceptable reliability in this round of reviews.

* Careful attention to curricular mapping of courses with respect to program goals, learning outcomes, and sequencing of courses in each core is needed, both in program design and in assessment.

* Assessment of outcomes specific to particular course categories within each core would provide helpful details regarding possible strengths and limitations of segments of our current General Education program. Recent analyses pooled across two waves of assessment highlight both consistency and uniqueness in the profiles of learning evident in each course category (e.g., inner core critical inquiry, inner core science, middle core individuals and societies, outer core social sciences) using our current assessments that focus on the four Shared Learning Outcomes. This level of detail is necessary (i.e., assessing trends by course category) and could be augmented by in-cluding outcomes specific to these course categories.

* Consideration of analysis strategy is needed. Perhaps asking instructors to identify one primary trait for the set of artifacts provided would facilitate meaningful interpretation. This would reduce ambiguity in interpreting traits that are "not present." This method seems more straightforward than the post hoc maximum review value analyses added in recent reviews.

* In response to declining response rates, we urge careful consideration of the assessment process, helping instructors and students understand the value of General Education and its assessment by facilitating and making use of recommendations garnered. Broad dissemination of assessment findings is needed, and perhaps annual reports published in *Progressive Measures* are not sufficient in this regard.

* We encourage efforts to provide professional development opportunities related to General Education teaching and learning, especially in making use of student learning evidence.

Register now for CTLT's Summer Institute for the 21st Century Educator!

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And mark your calendars for the **CTLT Summer Institute Kick-Off**
Wednesday May 16 from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.
There will be food, mini-massages, on-site registration,
prizes, and more!
(No registration is required for this event)

The Up Late @ State Survey: An Assessment of the Late Night Events at Illinois State University

Michelle Stover, Specialist, Late Night Programs, Dean of Students Office

According to the American Journal of Health Education, late night programs at Big Ten universities offer college students "multiple forms of free social entertainment as a means of reducing the prevalence of high risk drinking. Its mission is to provide quality leisure entertainment programs every weekend during the young-adult prime social times of 9 p.m. through 2 a.m…Alcohol-free options…are a leading force in these culturally and institutional changes." (Maney et. al., 2002, p. 226). With this in mind, Illinois State University offers late night events in multiple fashions. For example, University Housing offers programs for students in residence halls, University Programming Board offers late night movie nights once a month along with Reggie Nites on Thursday nights, and the Bone Student Center offers Late Night at the Bone during the fall. Up Late @ State is another form of late night events offered to Illinois State University students through the Late Night Programming unit of the Dean of Students Office.

Table 1: Demographic Information

Demographics	#	%
Sex		
Male	289	25.4
Female	848	74.4
Other	1	0.1
Year in school		
First Year	294	25.8
Sophomore	204	17.9
Junior	257	22.6
Senior	294	25.8
Other	89	7.8
Residence during academic year		
University housing	553	48.8
Off campus	581	51.2
Grade point average		
Less than 2.0	7	0.6
2.0 – 2.99	276	24.4
3.0 – 3.49	432	38.2
3.50 – 3.99	414	36.6
4.00	1	0.1

Method

The survey for Up Late @ State was developed in October 2011 with the purpose of collecting student feedback on late night event details. Questions included time preferences, location preferences, and activity preferences, as well as if the students knew of Up Late @ State, if they had attended any events, and if they enjoyed the events. Feedback on the questions was provided by staff members from University Assessment Services and Health Promotion and Wellness. The survey was administered by University Assessment Services, using Select Survey, and was sent to all undergraduate students who have agreed to participate in campus research. An invitation e-mail was sent in mid-November 2011, and a reminder email was sent during the last week of November. A total number of 1,140 students responded (see Table 1 for demographic information for the sample). The high response rate possibly could be due to offering a free t-shirt to the first 50 students who responded. Further, with the reminder e-mail, the e-mail body was also used to remind students of the Pajama Party that was on December 3rd.

Results

The survey indicated that students of all years both equally responded to the survey and equally attended an event. The majority of students had heard of Up Late @ State, although 67% had not attended an event. Eighty percent of students were moderately or highly interested in late night events, and more than 90% of students who had heard of the events and/or had attended an event found the late night events to be either fun or moderately fun.

Other findings included details about students' preferences for the events. Five interesting results were found. First, the majority of students preferred the event hours to run from 9pm to 12am, with 8pm and 1am following close behind as start and end times. Second, 75.5% of students preferred the Bone Student Center as the location of the event. Third, nearly half

The Up Late @ State Survey (cont'd)

of the students preferred Friday as the day of the week for events with Thursday being the next day of choice. Fourth, 60.6% of students would like to see monthly Up Late @ State events. And fifth, 67% and 66.8% of students preferred to hear about events through facebook and posters, respectively, with chalking and passing out materials at 43.2% and 37%, respectively.

Discussion

Up Late @ State put these findings into practice for Spring 2012 in five ways. First, Up Late @ State strives for its events to start at 8 or 9pm and end as close to midnight or 1am as possible, depending on the venue. Second, there was one event at the Bone Student Center this semester; however, with the time limitations, the other venues include the Bowling and Billiards Center, Horton Field House, the Marriott Convention Center, and the Quad, with Braden Auditorium as the rain site. Third, all of the events but one this semester were on Friday night. Fourth, Up Late @ State aimed for one major event each month, with the exception of two in February. Fifth, social media were more heavily used this semester, and more posters were put up in the residence halls and academic buildings. Also, materials were passed out that include both a paper with information and a fun item related to the event.

The findings from this survey were consistent with what other research has found. The Campus Activities Programming magazine from the National Association for Campus Activities also provides valuable trends and advice that Up Late @ State follows. First, the events have a strong student element, and partnerships with other campus entities have been fashioned. While Stover is the primary planner of the events, her student staff members are integral in the ideas, marketing pieces, spreading the word, implementing the event, and assessing it afterward. Also, relationships between departments such as Health Promotion and Wellness, University Housing, and Campus Dining, as well as with student groups such as The Kollege Experiment and APAC, have been most fruitful in the success of Up Late @ State events.

Second, the nights are themed, and the Up Late @ State wordmark is put on as many things as possible. Brian Dietz, director of Student Activities at Kalamazoo College, wrote, "Several campuses have discovered great success with themed events…This theme approach can help provide creative promotional opportunities and give attendees something to look forward to with a change of pace." (2008, October, p. 8). Staff members at University of Connecticut-Storrs agree that themed events and putting the name on materials creates hype (Frank & Toczydlowski, 2008, October). Third, Stover has taken the tip to try different locations, times, and activities to figure out what works best for the students on ISU's campus (Dietz, 2008, October). Fourth, Stover has twice utilized relationships built with off-campus community members, an idea also supported in the Campus Activities Programming magazine (Lansing, Ramos, & Schaefer, 2009). The Poetry, Open Mic and Movie night in October 2011 was in Uptown Normal, and the event in March 2012 was held in the Marriott in Uptown Normal. And fifth, Up Late @ States takes part in assessment through the Up Late @ State survey, event review after each event, student feedback at the event, and an evaluation that was conducted in March 2012 during the event at the Marriott.

In conclusion, as Up Late @ State strives to serve students at Illinois State University with fun, entertaining and relevant programming, it also strives to assess events, stay current on trends, and add to the alternative options to drinking on campus.

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Developing Engagement, Sociological Imagination, Identity, and Autonomy: A Longitudinal Study

Dr. Kathleen McKinney, Cross Chair in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) and Professor, Sociology

Naghme Naseri, ISU Alumna, Sociology, and Doctoral Student, University of Colorado at Boulder

In this scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) and assessment project, we conducted a longitudinal, multi-method descriptive study of a subgroup of one cohort of sociology majors at Illinois State University. We followed these students through their careers as majors from the first to the last required courses in the major. Our main objectives were to describe the students' development of an identity as a sociologist, their ability to use their sociological imagination, their engagement in the discipline of sociology, and their sense of being an autonomous learner. A focus on sociology majors and their development and learning over time is rare in past empirical work. Empirical studies on teaching and learning in sociology have most often investigated the following: outcomes of a specific teaching strategy or class assignment within a particular course, usually not a majors-only course; learning by mostly non-majors within introductory level sociology courses over one term or less; assessment in the discipline that has focused on learning outcomes at the aggregate level usually without determining critical experiences or significant correlates; and cross-sectional studies which have focused on the learning outcomes of sociology majors.

The participants in this study consisted of 18 sociology majors. These 18 students were the members of one section of our first required major course in the discipline in the spring of 2008. Thus, they are a purposive sample within one cohort of our majors. IRB approval for the project was received, and informed consent was obtained from the participants. Participation in all phases of the project was voluntary and confidential. Multiple methods and measures were used in this study. A self-administered questionnaire was used at both Time 1 and Time 4; an open-ended question on a simple and brief application of the sociological imagination was used at Time 1 and Time 4; an open-ended question about learning was used at Time 2 and Time 4; and face-to-face interviews were used at Time 3.

We found some evidence of both consistency and of small changes in the students' experiences and development in the major from Time 1 to Time 4. We view these results with caution, however, given the small number of students in the study, the potential impact of attrition between Time 1 and Time 4, and the differing contexts of Time 1 and Time 4 (see below).

Based on mean scores on the self-report items related to motivation, engagement, confidence in learning, identifying as a sociologist, attributions for doing well, and seeing self as an autonomous learner, there was no change from Time 1 to Time 4 (the sample size is too small for a statistical test but the differences are small and not in a consistent direction of higher means at Time

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Note. **This article is a summary of:**

McKinney, K. & Naseri, N. (2011). A longitudinal, descriptive study of sociology majors: The development of engagement, the sociological imagination, identity, and autonomy. *Teaching Sociology*, *39*(2), 150-164.

Developing Engagement, Sociological Imagination, Identity, and Autonomy (cont'd)

4). Students completed these measures at Time 1 fairly soon after declaring sociology as a major and starting the first required course. That course is a very small class of sociology majors in which there is a strong sense of community. At Time 4, students took these measures during the senior capstone course (a time-consuming, demanding, and often stressful senior thesis experience) and when students may have been thinking about graduation and trying to obtain a job with a Bachelor's degree in sociology in today's job market. Students at Time 4 may have also had a better understanding of these concepts and been harder on themselves in their self ratings. These differing times and contexts are possible explanations for the lack of an increase, even small decreases, in some of these variables.

At all time points students reported interest in the subject matter of sociology as one of the main reasons why they chose sociology as a major. However, helping others, a common reason given at Time 1, drops out at Time 4 and is replaced by the desire to simply finish college. Perhaps, by this time, students have a better understanding of what most sociologists do (teach and research, not social work or clinical psychology) and some are more interested in the discipline, while others have lost interest but feel it is too late to change majors. Again, the timing of the final data collection may have also played a role in the responses about simply finishing college.

Students reported an increase in their frequency of participation on many of the study/academic activities from Time 1 to Time 4. This makes sense in terms of increases in various opportunity structures such as time (more semesters in school and in the major), interpersonal connections (to more faculty and academic peers), and possible situations for such participation (more classes, clubs, etc.). In addition, it may be that socialization into the academy, the major, and the discipline plays a role in the small increases in these behaviors, but future research would have to verify this explanation. One variable decreased from a mean of 3.9 to 3.6 from Time 1 to Time 4 and that was "coming to class prepared." Perhaps students are involved in different types of courses at Time 4 (e.g., senior experience, internships) where much work is done in class and collaboratively and may not involve as much traditional homework. Students may also realize or are more honest with themselves about what it means to come to class prepared at this point in their academic careers. Finally, students may feel they do not need to spend as much time preparing for classes during the later stages in their academic careers, as a consequence of having acquired basic sociology-specific knowledge and skills.

Student responses related to using their sociological imagination at Time 1 were expected. The students had recently started the first required majors-only course and had only just begun to be exposed to this idea in any great detail or have the opportunity to use it. At the same time, the sociological imagination is a main focus of that first course. During the interviews at Time 3, students were able to remember and indicate parts of a definition of the sociological imagination, but none gave strong or complete definitions or a concrete example or application. At Time 4, the handful of students was also able to give more elaborate pieces of or paraphrased definitions, and some gave partial examples. The limited data, however, do not indicate any significant increased understanding of, or ability to use, the sociological imagination over time in these few students. There are numerous possible reasons for this finding. Students may not have had the motivation to take sufficient time and effort to respond adequately to

Developing Engagement, Sociological Imagination, Identity, and Autonomy (cont'd)

the open-ended question on the questionnaire or to the prompt in the learning reflection essay. We also acknowledge that our various measures of understanding the sociological imagination were limited as we were focusing on numerous outcomes in this study and, thus, each measure was brief and simple. We also used somewhat different measures of their understanding of the sociological imagination at different time points both due to using different methods and in an effort to prevent students from simply remembering and repeating what they wrote or said earlier.

Another possibility is that students forgot the name of this idea ("sociological imagination") because, though they have materials, ideas, and assignments in their course work involving the use of the sociological imagination, instructors may not be explicitly referring to this way of thinking by that label. Thus our prompts using that term may not have elicited much response or may have caused confusion. Students' open-ended responses about how they learned the sociological imagination partially support this idea. By far, the most commonly mentioned response was that they learned it via our first, required majors-only course/teacher. Interestingly, students do report learning the sociological imagination. That is, in terms of student self-report of learning, results from open-ended questions on the questionnaires and essays show that students state that they have learned sociological theories and concepts, the sociological imagination, sociological critical thinking and ana-

lyzing, and related types of learning. A possible implication of our results is that instructors, with student peers and the students themselves, need to be doing more to help majors acquire deep and lasting learning about the sociological imagination, as well as the ability to recognize when they are hearing about or using the sociological imagination.

Students did not fully identify as sociologists at any point in time. At least some students, however, seemed to identify more strongly as a sociologist at Times 3 or 4 than earlier. Students focused on two types of reasons why they did not see themselves as a sociologist: first, not being or planning to be a professional sociologist was noted at Time 1 and Time 4 and, second, lacking something important (expertise, knowledge, contributions to the field, a degree) which was noted at all three time points. They focused on one type of response for why they did identify as a sociologist or 'junior' sociologist—asking certain types of questions and being able to think and analyze like a sociologist. At the three time points, most students thought they were somewhat autonomous in their learning in terms of working on their own but knowing when and how to seek help. There was also some confusion about this concept. Finally, the importance of both the role of others (faculty, TAs, peers) and of application was a consistent theme over time and across measures in the students' responses related to what is important for their development and learning.

Thus, changes in the variables of interest were few and small overall, though in the direction of some positive change and development. The limited time-frame of the study may help to explain this general trend. Many students declare our major late and can take all the required major courses (except Introduction to Sociology) in a fairly short period of time (two semesters plus summer), though up to five semesters is preferred. Despite the methodological limitations of this study, we believe it makes a useful contribution to the SoTL literature in sociology. It is one of a very few published studies that looks at the learning and development of sociology majors, specifically, over time and using multiple methods/measures.

Two Perspectives on Assessment

Kelly Whalen, Graduate Assistant, University Assessment Services

The Assessment Advisory Council (AAC) is an organization on campus that convenes throughout the academic year to review processes related to the assessment of student learning outcomes and various reports regarding the utilization of assessment results. The twelve AAC members represent each of the colleges on campus, as well as specific campus units. Council meetings are focused on the advancement of quality student learning through recommendations for modifying the assessment processes employed on campus. In addition, the AAC strives to ensure that the appropriate resources are available for University assessment activities.

The following interview takes place with two members of the AAC: Dr. Sally Parry, who is the Associate Dean for Student and Curricular Affairs in the College of Arts and Sciences, and Dr. J. Cooper Cutting, who is an Associate Professor and the Associate Chair in the Department of Psychology.

Whalen— *To begin, what does "assessment" mean to you?*

Dr. Parry—Assessment means that there are methods in place to figure out how your department or school is doing. Often we think that if things are going well, we should just be happy with that. Bringing assessment into common use helps faculty and chairs learn about what is working and what could be done better, whether it's in the curriculum or in terms of preparing students for jobs and life after college. The value is first, learning more about what works and what doesn't, and making sure that there is a feedback loop, so that once a department finds out information, they are able to address concerns and make the program even better.

Dr. Cutting—Assessment means somewhat different things to me depending on the context in which assessment is being done. For example, in the classroom I use exams to assess how well my students know the material. Near the end of a semester student evaluations are used to assess the course and the instructor (me). The assessment that the AAC is involved with is

Dr. Sally Parry,
College of Arts and Sciences

Dr. J. Cooper Cutting,
Department of Psychology

assessment at an entirely different scale. It attempts to assess entire programs, rather than individual courses or instructors. It requires thinking about goals and objectives at a very different level and also may require very different kinds of measures for that assessment. Generally the ultimate goals are the same: finding out whether the goals and objectives are being met, and if not, identifying areas of weakness such that may be addressed in some way (e.g., a different teaching method at the class level, a different curricular structure at a program level, etc.).

Whalen—*When a faculty or staff member in your department/college engages in an assessment project, what do you hope they experience or come away with from the project?*

Dr. Cutting—One of the difficulties that I think faculty and staff may have with program assessment is a feeling that they are being evaluated, rather than the program. This may reflect the fact that they are familiar with that level of assessment but not as familiar with assessment at a larger scale. Another issue is whether faculty/staff come away with a sense that the program-level assessment is intended to have a positive impact (and isn't 'just something that somebody said that they have to do'). So a critical part of the process should be evidence that the process has beneficial effects.

Two Perspectives (cont'd)

Dr. Parry—I hope that they learn how valuable it can be. Often assessment is seen as something you have to do, not something you ought to do. One of the departments in the college put off creating a meaningful assessment plan for quite some time, and now they have finally done so. They were very energized to find out that after all their hard work that it could now serve as a model for others. In that case, they realized how assessment could help their department.

Whalen—*How have you seen the field of assessment change over the course of your career?*

Dr. Cutting—Not long ago I was pretty much unaware of program-level assessment. Within the last 10 years, our department underwent a sweeping undergraduate curricular change. Rather than come from a formal assessment process, the impetus for it seemed to be a general sense that we wanted to change the program, in particular do something to encourage that students experience the breadth of the discipline. I think that program assessment was going on to some extent, but it was done at a more implicit level, rather than at a formalized explicit level. Over the last 10 years or so, our department has slowly begun to move to a more formalized process. We began by handing the assessment tasks to program/sequence directors, asking each to identify goals and objectives for their programs. It soon became clear that, at least for the larger programs (e.g., undergraduate), it was too large a task for a single individual. The department then formed a standing assessment committee. But even with greater involvement and lists of goals and objectives, there wasn't always a coherent plan. In recent years (as we have approached the end of our 8-year program review cycle) our assessment plan(s) have become more and more concrete. Recent participation in the PRAAP process was very beneficial, helping to identify and structure/organize our current ongoing assessment activities, as well as identifying potential gaps in those activities. In general, I think that our programs have shown slow, but steady growth in program-level assessment activities/plans as well as increased faculty/staff buy in. That said, we've still got room to go.

Dr. Parry—I've seen it become more important to evaluating the overall health of a unit whether it's through a program review, a strategic plan, or accreditation. It's also something that everyone is more aware of than they used to be. There are various constituencies to answer to, not only within the college and university, but also at the state and national levels. If a unit has good assessment in place, it makes it much easier to demonstrate the excellence of a program and sometimes to ask for extra resources because of that.

Whalen—*If you could change one thing about the process of assessment, or the assessment field in general, what would it be?*

Dr. Parry—I wish the means by which various constituencies were surveyed were easier. I'm not sure it's something that can be done, but it would be lovely if more students and alumni were willing to respond since I think that higher response rates are much more meaningful.

Dr. Cutting—I think that for full faculty/staff buy in to formal program-level assessment, they need to see the positive outcomes that result from the process. Their buy in is critical, because their input into the assessment process is a key component (both in terms of the opinions and information that they provide and in terms of their potential role in collecting relevant data). So making the "feedback loop" a more visible part of the process is important. Secondly, I think that the assessment procedures need to be part of the standard operating procedures. As long as assessment feels like "extra work" that is outside of "normal" duties, then it will be harder for individuals to buy in to the processes.

Whalen—*Five years from now, what do you hope your college/department is or is not doing in terms of assessment?*

Dr. Cutting—Related to the point above, I hope that program-level assessment is part of the standard operating procedure of the department. I hope that faculty view it as an integral part of their teaching and service

Two Perspectives (cont'd)

activities. Furthermore, I hope that the faculty value the activities, seeing them as ways to help monitor and maintain excellent programs.

Dr. Parry—I hope that in five years the various departments and schools in the college think of assessment as part of what they do each year, rather than something they work on for program review. To a great extent this change in attitude is already taking place.

Whalen—*Are there any other comments you'd like to include about assessment in your department, college, the university, or higher education?*

Dr. Cutting—I'd like to see an increase in university and college level infrastructure for assessment. At present, program assessment is handled by programs in a wide variety of ways, sometimes shared by all faculty, sometimes handled by a small set (or even single individuals). I recommend that each program have a committee level of organization for assessment (either a standing assessment committee or perhaps rolling assessment into curriculum committee charges) with rotating faculty and staff membership. The more people involved, the more distributed the workload. Additionally, I suspect that the increased involvement leads

to a more informed faculty/staff base, which in turn will lead to a higher level of buy in to program-level assessment. At present, I don't think that college units typically have standing assessment committees. I think that the development of these (or perhaps having curriculum committees involved more in assessment plans) would help to encourage a more active participation in program-level assessment activities.

Finally, I suspect that we need to find ways to encourage (the above suggestions might help with this) that program assessment be a continuous, on-going process. I imagine that currently, a lot of the formal program assessment activities are closely tied to the 8-year program review cycle (with greater levels of activity linked to the proximity to the end of a cycle).

Dr. Parry—I'm looking forward to the new assessments being discussed in the General Education Task Force. I think that having an assessment on the structural level as well as a program-wide one will do a lot to help us think of ways that we can reform General Education and make it even more meaningful to both students and faculty.

Thank you both for sharing your opinions and insights about assessment at ISU!

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A Comparison of Student Perceptions and Faculty Perceptions of Student Engagement

Derek Herrmann, Coordinator, University Assessment Services

During the Spring 2010 semester, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) was administered to all first-year and senior students at Illinois State University. This instrument is used to measure students' levels of engagement in the classroom, on the campus, and in the community. A total of 1,777 students completed the survey, giving a response rate of 22%. Respondent characteristics for this study can be found in Table 1. During the Spring 2011 semester, the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE) was administered to all full-time faculty members who taught at least one undergraduate course during the 2010-2011 academic year at Illinois State University. This instrument is used to measure faculty expectations and perceptions of educational activities and practices connected with student learning and development. Respondents were asked to answer the questions based on one particular undergraduate course that they had taught for a lower (mostly first-year and sophomore students) or upper (mostly junior and senior students) division course for the current school year. Many of the items on the NSSE and FSSE are similar, which allows for a rough comparison of students' and faculty members' perceptions of student engagement.

The following responses to several of these items are compared between first-year students (FY) and faculty members who taught lower division courses (LD) and between senior students (SR) and faculty members who taught upper division courses (UD). In these comparisons, 'important' includes the survey response options of 'important' and 'very important;' 'often' includes the response options of 'often' and 'very often,' and 'agreed' includes the response options of 'quite a bit' and 'very much.'

Table 1: Respondent Characteristics

Respondents	#	%
Students (2010 NSSE)		
First-Years	869	48.9
Seniors	908	51.1
Faculty (2011 FSSE)		
Lower-Division Course	63	20.1
Upper Division Course	226	72.0
Other/No Specified Course Level	25	8.0

Frequency/Importance of student activities

Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources
- 83.4% of FY often did this, and 64.6% of LD said this is important that students do this in their course (difference of 18.8%)
- 87.1% of SR often did this did this, and 83.6% of UD said this is important that students do this in their course (difference of 3.5%)

Discussed ideas from readings with others outside of class
- 52.0% of FY often did this, and 36.1% of LD said this is important that students do this in their course (difference of 15.9%)
- 59.5% of SR often did this, and 45.1% of UD said this is important that students do this in their course (difference of 14.4%)

Examined the strengths and weaknesses of their own views on a topic or issue
- 41.5% of FY often did this, and 66.1% of LD said this is important that students do this in their course (difference of 24.6%)
- 54.0% of SR often did this did this, and 67.6% of UD said this is important that students do this in their course (difference of 13.6%)

Learned something that changed how they understand an issue or concept
- 62.9% of FY often did this did this, and 90.4% of LD said this is important that students do this in their course (difference of 27.5%)
- 68.6% of SR often did this did this, and 90.7% of UD said this is important that students do this in their course (difference of 22.1%)

Student/Faculty Perceptions (cont'd)

Course structured to learn and develop

Acquiring job or work-related knowledge or skills
- 65.1% of FY agreed, and 54.2% of LD agreed (difference of 10.9%)
- 79.6% of SR agreed, and 83.2% of UD agreed (difference of 3.6%)

Thinking critically and analytically
- 83.0% of FY agreed, and 86.7% of LD agreed (difference of 3.7%)
- 87.3% of SR agreed, and 92.8% of UD agreed (difference of 5.5%)

Learning effectively on their own
- 71.4% of FY agreed, and 83.3% of LD agreed (difference of 11.9%)
- 75.4% of SR agreed, and 83.4% of UD agreed (difference of 8.0%)

Frequency of course activities

Work with other students on projects during class
- 47.9% of FY often did this, and 44.5% of LD often did this (difference of 3.4%)
- 54.0% of SR often did this, and 58.8% of UD often did this (difference of 4.8%)

Receive prompt written or oral feedback on performance
- 58.0% of FY often did this, and 93.6% of LD often did this (difference of 35.6%)
- 73.6% of SR often did this, and 87.7% of UD often did this (difference of 14.1%)

Have serious conversations with students who were very different in terms of religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values
- 52.8% of FY often did this, and 24.2% of LD often did this (difference of 28.6%)
- 50.2% of SR often did this, and 22.8% of UD often did this (difference of 27.4%)

Emphasis of mental activities

Making judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods
- 68.7% of FY agreed, and 66.7% of LD agreed (difference of 2.0%)
- 73.1% of SR agreed, and 73.9% of UD agreed (difference of 0.8%)

Analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory

- 77.7% of FY agreed, and 84.8% of LD agreed (difference of 7.1%)
- 82.7% of SR agreed, and 88.0% of UD agreed (difference of 5.3%)

Memorizing facts, ideas, or methods from courses or readings to be repeated in pretty much the same form
- 79.3% of FY agreed, and 30.0% of LD agreed (difference of 49.3%)
- 63.4% of SR agreed, and 23.3% of UD agreed (difference of 40.1%)

Institutional emphasis

Attend campus events and activities
- 69.7% of FY agreed, and 60.3% of LD agreed (difference of 9.4%)
- 66.1% of SR agreed, and 66.6% of UD agreed (difference of 0.5%)

Providing support needed to help succeed academically
- 80.0% of FY agreed, and 79.3% of LD agreed (difference 0.7%)
- 76.9% of SR agreed, and 82.6% of UD agreed (difference of 5.7%)

Providing support needed to thrive socially
- 53.5% of FY agreed, and 42.7% of LD agreed (difference of 10.8%)
- 40.6% of SR agreed, and 38.8% of UD agreed (difference of 1.8%)

Encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds
- 58.8% of FY agreed, and 50.0% of LD agreed (difference of 8.8%)
- 51.0% of SR agreed, and 42.0% of UD quite agreed (difference of 9.0%)

In looking at these percentages, there are seven items where the difference between the perceptions of first-year students and faculty members who taught a lower division course was greater than 15% (chosen as an arbitrary cutoff). These items are:

- Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas of information from various sources,

Student/Faculty Perceptions (cont'd)

- ☐ Discussed ideas from readings with others outside of class,
- ☐ Examined the strengths and weaknesses of their own views on a topic or issue,
- ☐ Learned something that changed how they understand an issue or concept,
- ☐ Receive prompt written or oral feedback on performance,
- ☐ Have serious conversations with students who are very different in terms of religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values, and
- ☐ Memorizing facts, ideas, or methods from courses or readings to be repeated in pretty much the same form.

There are three items where the difference between the perceptions of senior students and faculty members who taught an upper division course was greater than 15%. These items are:

- ☐ Learned something that changed how they understand an issue or concept,
- ☐ Have serious conversations with students who were very different in terms of religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values, and
- ☐ Memorizing facts, ideas, or methods from courses or readings to be repeated in pretty much the same form.

All three of these items are the same as three of those from the differences between first-year students and faculty members who taught lower division courses. One reason for the large differences for 'Have serious conversations with students who very different in terms of religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values' could be due to a slight variation between the NSSE and the FSSE; the NSSE contains the item as it appears above, but the FSSE includes 'in your course' as part of the item. Although faculty members did not report these conversations occurring in their courses, students reported doing so, which could mean that they are engaging in these conversations outside of the classroom. Other reasons for the differences related to these items are more open to speculation. For example, the difference between first-year students and faculty members who taught lower division courses regarding receiving prompt written or oral feedback on performance could be a difference in the definition of 'prompt.' Although 83.4% of first-year student and

87.1% of senior students reported that they often worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas of information from various sources, 64.6% of faculty members who taught lower division courses and 86.3% of faculty members who taught upper division courses said that this was important. So the main source of this difference is in the faculty members' level of importance, which makes sense given that upper division courses are typically taken by students later in the curriculum and can place more emphasis on this activity as students near the end of their degree program.

In addition, about 71% of all students reported that their courses emphasized memorizing facts, ideas, or methods so they could be repeated in the same form, but only about 25% of all faculty members reported that their courses emphasize this activity. Although memorization is an important component of learning and occurs as a part of any course (consistent with the students' report), repeating it back in the same form is not always desired (consistent with the faculty members' report). Other considerations to make are that these are two very different populations (students and faculty members) who were surveyed during two different academic years. There was almost an equal number of first-year and senior students; the same was not true for the number of faculty members who taught lower division or upper division courses. And the first set of items presented above was based on slightly different items; students were asked 'how often,' but faculty members were asked 'how important.' Thus, these comparisons do have their limitations. But despite these, it is clear that students are engaged both in and out of the classroom, and perhaps even more importantly, that learning is occurring outside of the classroom as well as inside the classroom. Examining student and faculty perceptions of student engagement (and specifically, where the large differences are in those perceptions) is interesting and can be used as yet another way to examine student engagement at Illinois State University.