

PEAW 1300 Assessment
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The assessment protocol for the PEAW 1300 courses included the administration of the Freshman Demographic Survey (FDS), Freshman Attitude Survey (FAS), evaluation of the service-learning experience, and evaluation of a course portfolio prior to the development of the assessment process. The researcher met with the PEAW Curriculum Committee to establish the learning objective for the PEAW 1300 courses. The resulting six learning objectives were:

1. Awareness of the university:
 - a. Understood the characteristics of college life
 - b. Understood the organizational structure of the university
 - c. Recognized the responsibility of the student to the university.
 - d. Recognized the responsibility of the university to the students.
2. Awareness of learning partnership:
 - a. Demonstrated critical thinking skill in the artificial chosen or in the Reflective essay
 - b. Examined personal learning attitudes, habits, and learning style
 - c. Developed memory techniques
 - d. Recognized the importance of, and utilized, textbook in college classes
 - e. Improved reading, writing, listening, and note taking skills
 - f. Developed test-taking sophistications
3. Active involvement in the community:
 - a. understood the purpose and goals of the service-learning activity
 - b. Demonstrated active participation in the service-learning activity.
 - c. Recognized the responsibility if the service agency to the student
 - d. Recognized the responsibility if the student to the service agency
 - e. Understood the learning expectations of the service-learning activity
4. Strategic planning for the personal development and growth:
 - a. set personal and professional goals
 - b. Developed time management skills
 - c. Recognize and understood their personal value system
 - d. Recognized the appropriate use of the passive, assertive, and aggressive behavior
 - e. Developed inclusive relationships with others
 - f. Developed stress management techniques
 - g. Developed a plan for holistic wellness.

5. Sense of academic community and sense of belonging because of an awareness of an how to use
 - a. All academic support service at UALR; Ottenheimer Library, Academic Advising, Center of Development Skills, Career Links, Computer labs, e-mails, UALR Web Page, mathematics lab, Tutorial services, writing center, Office of Admissions and Records, Office of Testing Services, and the Department of Speech Communication Interactive Skills Center.
 - b. All personal support services at UALR; Bookstore, Cashier, Counseling And Career Planning Service, Disability Support Service, Food Services, Health Services, Parking, Student Financial Services, Donaghey Student Center, Office of the Campus life and University Police.
 - c. All community resources; Office of Campus and Community Partnerships, Cooperative Education Program Linkage and Volunteer Office.
 - d. All UALR publications; University Life Planner, Undergraduate Catalog, Schedule of Classes ,New Students Handbook ,Solution Finder ,and The Forum
6. Preparing for the future:
 - a. Understood their interests, skills, and personality traits as related to selecting a career
 - b. Understood how to use the information available at UALR to help them choose a career.
 - c. Explored career possibilities during the semester.
 - d. Learned how to make informed career choices.

The purpose of the FDS was to develop demographic and satisfaction profiles of freshmen enrolled in a PEAW 1300 courses during the assessment period and compare that with a profile of freshmen in the general UALR student population. To accomplish this comparison, the researcher administered the FDS in Composition I classes each semester. Student enrolled in both the PEAW courses and Composition I were allowed to complete only one survey. The purpose of the FAS and course portfolio was to assess the achievement of six learning objectives for the PEAW program. The FAS was a home grown survey developed specifically for the learning objectives .The course portfolio provided student with the opportunity to self-select artifacts that best demonstrated their achievement of the learning objectives .Finally the service-learning evaluation procedure was established to assess the 12 service –learning objectives for the PEAW program.

A detail discussion of each assessment method and the assessment findings are located in the following Tab sections:

- Tabs #2-11: Freshman Demographic Survey
- Tabs#12-18: Freshman Attitude Survey
- Tab #19: Course Portfolio.

The assessment findings located behind each tab section present the result of the data analysis from a research perspective and are not directly linked to the six learning objectives. Therefore, the following narrative in this executive summary discussion connects the findings with the primary goal of this study –to assess the achievements of the six learning objectives for the PEAW 1300 courses.

Freshman Profile

The FDS was administered during the 4th and 5th week of each semester to the students enrolled in a PEAW 1300 course and freshmen enrolled in a Composition I course. All students were requested to put their student identification number on the survey to allow the researcher to discriminate between ‘PEAW’ freshmen and ‘General Population’ freshmen. In Addition, the student identification number allowed the researchers to pair the data from the FDS with the FAS. Prior to data analysis, the researcher cleaned the database removing any duplicate surveys and survey responses from students other than freshmen.(For more details on the FDS method and findings, See the narrative behind Tab#2).

Based on the findings from those students that chose to respond to the background question in the FDS ,the typical PEAW freshman was an African American female, single ,and approximate 20 years old. The majority of these PEAW freshmen worked (63%) with close to one fourth of the students working 21 to 30 hours week .Added to that workload,89% of them were enrolled in 12 or more hours at UALR and 48% planned to study 6 to 10 hours per week. Twenty five percent pf the PEAW freshmen hailed from household with a parental income of greater than \$50,000 per year with at least one fifth pf their parents holding a bachelors degree or higher .Approximately 71% were attending college to earn a bachelor’s degree.

The typical composition I freshman was a White ,female ,single, and approximately 22 years old .The majority of these composition I freshmen worked (76%) with 29% wprking 21 to 30 hours per week .In addition ,75% were enrolled for 12 or more hours at UALR with 45%planning to study 6 to 10 hours per week .Approximately 36% pf this freshmen came from the families earning \$50,000 or more per year with approximately one –fourth of their parents holding at least a bachelor’s degree. Similar to the PEAW freshmen, 71% of the composition I freshmen planned to earn at least bachelor’s degree.

Both sample sets felt well prepared for college in all areas with exception of foreign language and time management skills with more of the composition I freshmen expressing a lack of confidence in their foreign language skills .Interestingly, when asked about their satisfaction level with the variety of services and offices at UALR, by the week 4th to 5th week of each semester week of each semester, The PEAW freshmen were

generally more satisfied than their composition I peers. In addition, when asked question about their overall satisfaction level, a statistically significant difference did exist between the PEAW and composition I freshmen related to overall satisfaction, the belief that UALR is worth the tuition paid, and the willingness to recommend UALR to a friend with composition I freshmen expressing more negative attitudes.

Recognizing that the composition I freshmen were slightly older and carrying a greater workload than the PEAW freshmen, this difference in satisfaction level is understandable. Composition I freshmen may have spent less time on campus due to work and family commitments, therefore leading to great level of frustration and alienation. In fact, Composition I freshmen expressed more negative attitudes about the helpfulness of administrative personnel, The appeal of the social life on campus, and the hospitable nature of UALR climate as compared with the PEAW freshmen. In addition, more composition I freshmen described themselves as 'very bored' to 'somewhat bored'. However, it is also reasonable to conclude that by the 4th week of the semester, the PEAW freshmen had experienced enough of the PEAW classes to have a statistically significant difference in satisfaction levels. This freshmen have already spent four weeks in a course specially designed to help them transition in to college. The Composition I freshmen did not have that treatment.

Related to satisfaction levels, there were a few variables that both the PEAW and Composition I freshmen ranked their satisfaction level as 'neutral'. For example, 24% of PEAW freshmen and 29% of the Composition I freshmen ranked their satisfaction with New student Orientation as neutral. It is reasonable to conclude that this ranking of 'neutral' was directly correlated to the percentage of these freshmen that did not attend the New student Orientation and was not a reflection of their attitude about orientation.

Assessments Results for the Six Learning Objectives

The following narrative is based on the findings from the FAS, service-learning evaluation, and Course portfolio Evaluation (See Tabs #13 and #19, respectively, for a more detailed discussion of the findings)

Awareness of the University

Of the six objectives, the evaluators of the PEAW course portfolios (N=161) believed that students provided the most significant amount of evidence to demonstrate their learning for this learning objective. Based on the findings from the FAS, most PEAW freshmen ranked their understanding of professor expectations and the responsibility of the university student as closer to a "clear" understanding as compared with "unclear". Since these variables did not indicate a statistically significant change in understanding from the pre-to the post-administered survey, it is reasonable to suggest that most of the PEAW freshmen entered the university with the perception that they did have a clear awareness of the university.

Whether did indeed have the level of awareness desired by the PEAW faculty is questionable. As mentioned earlier, the evaluation did find strong evidence to support the conclusion that these students demonstrated learning as related to this objective based on the artifacts in the course portfolio .However ,it is difficult to conclude with much confidence that this objective was achieved when a solid 82% of the students agreed in the post-administered survey with the statement, ” It is professor’s job to teach the course content so that I can easily learn new material ”. Or, that when given a choice between the importance of being treated with respect, studying with other students in my class ,accessibility of administrative offices ,and convenience of faculty office hours ,the later two received only 4% and14% ,respectively ,of the votes .Finally ,significantly fewer students agreed that they could imagine themselves as a professor teaching a college course by the end of the semester as compared with the beginning of the semester.

It is important to keep in mind that the evaluators of the course portfolio had the opportunity to review the artifacts chosen by students and read their reflective essays .It may be that the students did experience learning as related to this objective and that learning was best evaluated through the course portfolio measurement as compared with an attitude survey.

Awareness of the Learning Partnership.

Based on the findings from the FAS, a statistically significant difference did exist between the pre- and post –administered survey with more students expressing confidence in their writing skills, academic ability, and reading skills. perhaps related to the significant increase in confidence, by the end of the semester more students indicated that learning time management skill is more important than learning study skills .In addition, more students by the end of the semester indicated that their preferred teaching method was class discussion .Also, more students described themselves as a scholar by the end of the semester as compared with describing themselves simply as a “students” at the beginning of the semester.

Interestingly ,by the end of the semester ,a significant movement had occurred in attitudes from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘agree’ as related to (a) the importance of applying learning in one class to another class, (b) the importance of sharpening reading and writing skills, and (C) using understanding of personal learning to find learning to find the most productive method to study.

Whereas a statistically significance difference did not exist, pre-versus post-administration, by the end of the semester more students used the word ‘friend’ to describe their favorite teacher as compared with using the word ‘advisor’ at the beginning of the semester .In addition, approximately 47% described college as a place to go to “get involved in class activities and activities outside of class”. In addition, 49% of the students agreed that they learn the most when studying with other students, 89% agrees that they were looking forward to taking more college courses, and 81% indicated that

they were attending college because they enjoy learning .Interestingly, by the end of semester, 53% of the PEAW freshmen agreed that they rely on class notes when studying for an exam because they do not read the course textbook.

Apparently the value of this learning objective for these PEAW freshmen was found in their increased confidence in their ability to succeed in college and the transition from defining themselves simply as ‘students’ to recognize their worth as ‘scholars’ .As related to the shift from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘agree’ on several variables these students still agreed to the with this attitude statements. However, the strength of that agreement became more moderate in attitude was a result of their increased confidence in their ability to succeed .Finally, it is obvious from the finding that these students perceive a love for encourages them to ‘get involved’ in, and outside of, class .Unfortunately, however, that involvement does not appear to include reading the course text .Perhaps, this finding is more closely related to time management issues instead of lack of interest

Active Involvement in the Community

In collaboration with the senior staff of University College and the director of the office of Campus and Community Partnerships, the researchers developed the following learning goal and objectives specifically for the service –learning activity.

The overarching learning goal for the students to participating in the service-learning component of the PEAW 1300 assessment was to encourage students to recognize the “power of one” in making a global difference. Related to this learning goal, the objectives for the service-learning component were to:

1. Prepare university students to become responsible citizens in their community.
2. Help students open their eyes, and their hearts to community problems and challenges.
3. Introduce students to the rich cultural social and economic tapestry of their community.
4. broaden the students definition of “community” to embrace a “global”
5. Guide the students towards recognition of the talents and skills they have to offer their community.
6. Acquaint students with the opening structure and resource challenges of not-for-profit organization.
7. Provide students with an opportunity to examine their career goals in light of their understanding of the opportunities available within the not-for-profit sector.
8. Enhance in-class learning with an experiential link between theory and practice.
9. give students the opportunity to strength oral and written communication skills
10. facilitate students awareness of time management techniques and the importance of life planning
11. Provide students with an opportunity to examine their learning and to develop a better understanding of self.

12. Encourage students to foster a team approach to problem-solving.

In a self-evaluation of the service-learning activity, the students believed they had made the most progress as related to developing a better understanding of the rich cultural, Social and economic tapestry of their community with the least progress in broadening their definition of “community” to embrace a “global” perspective. The PEAW instructors, on the other hand, believed that the students had made the most progress in opening their eyes, and their hearts, to community problems and challenge with the least significant progress in enhancing in-class learning with an experiential link between theory and practice. Finally, the site agency supervisors, ranked learning the greatest for these PEAW students in fostering a team approach to problem solving. On the other hand, they ranked the least amount of progress in the improvement of oral and written communication skills.

It is apparent in reviewing the site agency evaluations that many of the supervisors scored only those objectives that were easily observable. That would explain the lower ranking of an improvement in oral and written communication skills and the higher ranking in taking a team approach to problem solving. Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that the student self-evaluations and instructor evaluations are perhaps the most valid in determining student learning. It is important to note that the top two learning objectives that were achieved based on the perception of the students and their instructors related to broadening the students’ understanding of cultural issues and community problems. This is further evidenced by the significant change in student attitudes about volunteerism by the end of the semester. At the beginning of the semester most students described themselves with the label “student”: however, by the end of the semester at least 13% described themselves as a ‘volunteer’. In addition, at the end of the semester significantly more students indicated that they volunteer because “it makes me feel good to know that I am helping others”.

It is obvious from the evaluations and FAS that students did recognize the value of the service-learning experience. The experience opened their eyes, their hearts, and helped them to truly understand the ‘power of one’. Unfortunately, the service-learning experience did not help students realize the learning potential in volunteerism. By the end of the semester, only 17% of the students agreed that they had learned a lot from the service-learning experience.

Strategic Planning for Personal Development and Growth

By the end of the semester, a significantly greater number of students had developed a list of short-term and long-term goals. Many of them reduce the importance they attached to finding strategies to manage stress as compared with their attitudes at the beginning of the semester. In addition, more students recognized by the end of the semester that they needed advice on time management. In fact, time management seemed to be the primary concern of students as they neared the completion of the semester with 26% concerned

about finding time to study and 48% wanting to learn time management strategies to avoid last minute assignments

Sense of Academic Community and Sense of Belonging

Based on the findings from the FAS, the students demonstrated the most significant change in attitude on this learning objective. BY the end semester, the majority of PEAW freshmen had used all of the UALR services included in the objective and had visited the bulk of UALR offices .Even though, their understanding did not approximate 100% .In addition, statistically significant improvement did exist in the number of freshmen that received and understood UALR publication by the end of the semester.

Statistically speaking ,more students describe themselves as a “member of community” by the end of the semester with the vast majority of students indicating that it was important to them to be treated like a respected member of that community .In addition ,by the end of the semester a significant number of students agreed that it was easier for them to find their way around the UALR campus . Finally, by the end of the semester, more PEAW freshmen agreed that they were comfortable on the UALR campus and felt a sense of belonging when on campus. Perhaps this comfort level was a direct result of the fact , that by the end of the semester ,students had an increased understanding of academic support services ,personal support services ,and publication at UALR, The most telling evidence of this increased sense of belonging was the statistically significant movement to me to have a sense of belonging on the college campus” .With the achievements of a sense of belonging ,the importance of that objective had diminished

Preparing for the Future

Based on the course portfolio assessment, the student provided the least amount of evidence to support the achievement of this learning objective. In support of this conclusion, by the end of the semester 22% of students indicated that they were still ‘uncertain’ about their future career. On the other hand, 64% indicated that they had a clear career plan and, more importantly,84% of the PEAW freshmen knew where to find information on career planning. By the end of the semester significantly fewer students needed advice on choosing a major (35%).Finally, by the end of semester a significant number of students indicated that they were attending college to prepare for a life as opposed to preparing for a career and more students agreed that ‘job satisfaction’ was more important than ‘money’ when choosing a career.

As with the first learning objective, the findings on this learning objective are mixed. Again,it is possible that these mixed findings are due to the nature of the course portfolio measurements .Given that the evaluators only had artifacts to judge learning ,it may be that students simply did not choose wisely when adding artifacts to their portfolio to represent their preparation for the future . Even with that said, it is important to recognize that evaluators ranked approximately 50% of the students as making ‘very good’ or ‘excellent’ progress on this objective. This compares with 54.8% of students that earned

very good' or 'excellent' on this first objective .This is only a difference of approximately 5 percentage points. With that in mind, it is reasonable to suggest that the attitude changes best reflects student learning for this objective. By the time these students exited the PEAW course at the end of the semester, they were more focused on the preparation for life and job satisfaction.

Conclusion

Overall, change did occur in the PEAW freshmen during the semester. The course portfolio evaluations, results of the Freshmen Attitude Survey, and general satisfaction levels measured on the Freshmen Demographic Survey all serve as evidence that learning did occur as related to the six learning objectives .As a quasi-experimental research design, it is difficult to assess if the learning was a result of the PEAW treatment only, or was some combination of the entire educational experience and simple maturation. The one piece of evidence that points strongly to the positive influence of the PEAW treatment are the result of the FDS in the 4th to 5th week of the semester .Quite simply, the PEAW freshmen were more satisfied than their Composition I peers. The primary difference between the two sample sets were the PEAW 1300 class and student workload. Arguably, it is difficult to determine which of the two variables had the most influence on satisfaction level. However, even the most seasoned critic of the PEAW experience must at least acknowledge that the PEAW treatment is part of the equation.

Regardless of the argument, the PEAW freshmen finished the semester more confident in their ability to succeed, more comfortable in their environment, and more focused on their short-term and long-term goals. By any account, these students should have a better than average chance for completing their college goals after taking a PEAW 1300 course.

For more information about this study, you may contact:

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