

UALR Assessment Report

2005 FYEC Report: Student Learning in 2004

Survey Administration

This survey was conducted on the campus of the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR). In Fall 2004, eleven sections of the freshman seminar, which included 290 undergraduate students, were invited to participate in the FYI study. Of these eleven sections, ten were PEAW 1300 courses and one was a PEAW 1124 course. The FYI survey was distributed to the students enrolled in the course. The survey was given prior to the completion of the freshman course (one week before the Thanksgiving Holiday). A total of 187 surveys were completed from the eleven sections yielding a 65% response rate.

In Fall 2004, fifteen factors were evaluated. They are listed as follows:

1. Course Improved Study Strategies
2. Course Improved Academic/Cognitive Skills
3. Course Improved Critical Thinking
4. Course Improved Connections with Faculty
5. Course Improved Connections with Peers
6. Course Increased Out-of-Class Engagement
7. Course Improved Knowledge of Campus Policies
8. Course Improved Knowledge of Academic Services
9. Course Improved Managing Time/Priorities
10. Course Improved Knowledge of Wellness
11. Sense of Belonging/Acceptance
12. Usefulness of Course Readings
13. Satisfaction with College/University
14. Course Included Engaging Pedagogy
15. Overall Course Effectiveness

Respondent Demographics

Demographics for the 187 students who participated in the Fall 2004 FYI survey are listed as follows:

Gender:	Female	67%
	Male	33%
Ethnicity:	African American	51%
	White Non-Hispanic	40%
	Multi-racial/Other	8%
	Hispanic American	2%
Hours Worked per Week (paying job):	Do not work	25%
	1-10 hours	11%
	11-20 hours	23%
	21-30 hours	26%
	31-40+ hours	16%
Current Residence:	Campus residence halls	24%
	Off-campus w/family	59%
	Off-campus w/o family	17%
High School GPA	Mostly A	15%
	A and B, Mostly B	48%
	B and C, Mostly C	35%
	Lower than C	2%
Highest ACT/SAT Score:	19 or less	57%
	20-26	34%
	27 or more	4%
	N/A	6%
Current Academic Performance at UALR:	Mostly A	13%
	A and B, Mostly B	54%
	B and C, Mostly C	32%

Lower than C	2%
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It is important to note that this survey is based on a different pool of students every year. Such variability in a dependent variable would seem to decrease the reliability of the data; however, for this particular situation, this is not the case. Just as the makeup of the student body is ever changing, so are their requirements for overall course satisfaction. The tracking of this kind of data allows for the documentation of almost real-time trends in the requirements for overall course satisfaction.

Priority Matrix

The Priority Matrix is a statistically based analysis involving t-tests and regression analyses. Upon the interpretation of this matrix, one can determine the degree to which these factors are predictors of overall satisfaction. The value calculated as Cronbach's Alpha then provides a reliability coefficient for each factor.

The major predictors (impact factors) have the greatest impact on overall satisfaction, while the minor predictors (no impact factors), regardless of their performance, are unlikely to have an impact on the predictability of overall satisfaction. The prioritization of each factor should be assigned accordingly. The Priority Matrix Table (see Table 1) below denotes which factors should be improved and which should be monitored. The factors that are bolded are directly related to UALR's learning objectives for the First Year Experience course.

The top priority factors for Fall 2004 are as follows: Factors 14 (Course Included Engaging Pedagogy), Factor 6 (Course Increased Out-of-Class Engagement), Factor 3 (Course Improved Critical Thinking), Factor 12 (Usefulness of Course Readings), Factor 10 (Course Improved Knowledge of Wellness), Factor 9 (Course Improved Managing Time & Priorities, and Factor 8 (Course Improved Knowledge of Academic Service). These factors were found to have the most impact on the student's overall satisfaction with the course. For five of the top priority factors, UALR's performance was rated as 'Good,' while two top priority factors were rated as 'Fair.' Since all of the top priority factors were deemed to have a 'Moderate Impact' on the Overall Course Effectiveness, efforts should continue to support the factors that had the lowest performance ratings -- Factor 6 (Course Increased Out-of-Class Engagement) and Factor 10 (Course Improved Knowledge of Wellness). Special emphasis should be placed on Factor 6 (Course Increase Out-of-Class Engagement) since it ranks as the 2nd most important predictor of Overall Course Effectiveness. Since Factor 14 (Course Included Engaging Pedagogy) was the top predictor of Overall Course Effectiveness, subsequent efforts should then focus on the improvement for this factor followed by the improvement of the rest of the factors in the order of which they are listed as a predictor. It is also notable to mention that a negative correlation was found between Factor 8 (Course Improved Knowledge of Academic Services) and Factor 15 (Overall Course Effectiveness). Although this does not indicate the strength or causation of the relationship, it does indicate that if the mean for Factor 8 (Course Improved Knowledge of Academic Services) decreases, then the mean for Factor 15 (Overall Course Effectiveness) would increase and vice versa. The Cronbach's Alpha value for this factor was 0.86 meaning that there was an excellent degree of internal consistency for the answers that were provided in this category and that this data is psychometrically sound.

Factor 13 (Satisfaction of College/University) has a Moderate impact on overall course effectiveness. Although this factor does have an impact, it is not considered a Priority because the performance for this factor was rated as Excellent. For this reason, it is only necessary to maintain or improve upon this factor.

Factor 7 (Course Improved Knowledge of Campus Policies), which provides a slight impact on overall course effectiveness, received a performance rating of 'Good.' Since there are so many other factors to focus on, efforts to improve upon this factor would yield limited results. As indicated in Table 1, Factor 7 should simply be monitored for progression.

Table 2 - Longitudinal Comparison of Factors for Fall 2004

	Impact on Overall Satisfaction	Statistical Level	% Difference from previous Year
Top Priority for Fall 2004			
Factor 14. Course Included Engaging Pedagogy	Moderate Impact	*	6.9% decrease
Factor 6. Course Increased Out-of-Class Engagement	Moderate Impact	No Diff	-----
Factor 3. Course Improved Critical Thinking	Moderate Impact	**	8.1% decrease
Factor 12. Usefulness of Course Readings	Moderate Impact	*	5.5% decrease
Factor 10. Course Improved Knowledge of Wellness	Moderate Impact	**	8.8% decrease
Factor 9. Course Improved Managing Time & Priorities	Moderate Impact	No Diff	-----
Factor 8. Course Improved Knowledge of Academic Services (Negative Correlation)	Moderate Impact	No Diff	-----
Maintain or Improve			
Factor 13. Satisfaction with College/University	Moderate Impact	No Diff	-----
Monitor			
Factor 7. Course Improved Knowledge of Campus Policies	Slight Impact	No Diff	-----
Factor 1. Course Improved Study Strategies	No Impact	*	6.2% decrease
Factor 2. Course Improved Academic & Cognitive Skills	No Impact	*	7.0% decrease
Factor 4. Course Improved Connections with Faculty	No Impact	No Diff	-----
Factor 5. Course Improved Connections with Peers	No Impact	No Diff	-----
Factor 11. Sense of Belonging & Acceptance	No Impact	No Diff	-----
Dependent Variable: Overall Satisfaction			
Factor 15. Overall Course Effectiveness	-----	No Diff	-----

*** = p<0.001, ** = p<0.01, * = p<0.05

Of the Top Priority factors, factors 6, 3, 12, 10, 9, and 8 were directly related to the learning objectives for the First Year Experience course. UALR performed above average in Priority factors 14, 3, 12, 10, 9, and 8. A look at the table above (see Table 2), indicates that the performance mean in factors 6, 9, and 8 did not significantly change from that of the previous year. Significant decreases, however, were noted in factors 14, 3, 12, and 10. The significant decrease for factor 10 was also accompanied by a drop in performance from good (in 2003) to fair (in 2004). Regardless of the score decreases for the aforementioned priority factors, prioritization of these factors should be based on the overall performance rating (i.e. excellent, good, fair) of each factor, and not on whether or not the mean for the factor increased or decreased. Keeping this in perspective provides the most direct route to better impact the overall course effectiveness. Any significant increases or decreases in the performance mean should simply be used as an indicator that efforts for improvements of this factor should be more focused. There were also significant decreases in factors 1 and 2, but since these are no impact factors, it is unlikely that an increase of performance in these areas will have any impact on the overall course effectiveness.

PEAW 1300 and PEAW 1124

In summation, the First Year Initiative Survey was completed by 187 students taking PEAW 1300 and PEAW 1124. In this survey, students ranked their level of satisfaction in fifteen different categories, or factors. These factors were assessed in 70 questions. The factor means for the University were statistically compared to the average factor means of a peer group ('Select Six'), of structurally similar schools ('Carnegie Class'), and of all the participating institutions ('All Schools'). A statistical analysis of the factors also provides a longitudinal comparison since Fall 2001, which is when the First Year Initiative Assessment began. An analysis of the data obtained from this study presents the results of the overall course effectiveness, factors with the greatest impact, areas to maintain and monitor. Overall Course Satisfaction (Factor 15) was the dependent variable. Precedence should be given to the Top Priority factors since they will yield the most significant results.

The top priority factors which produce the greatest impact in overall course effectiveness and student satisfaction and its ratings are listed as follows:

Top Priority for Fall 2004	
Factor 14. Course Included Engaging Pedagogy	Good
Factor 6. Course Increased Out-of-Class Engagement	Fair

Factor 3.	Course Improved Critical Thinking	Good
Factor 12.	Usefulness of Course Readings	Good
Factor 10.	Course Improved Knowledge of Wellness	Fair
Factor 9.	Course Improved Managing Time & Priorities	Good
Factor 8.	Course Improved Knowledge of Academic Services (Negative Correlation)	Good

With the exception of Factor 10, this data indicates that the Freshman Experience course at UALR has maintained its performance, in areas of impact from the previous year. With the exception of Factor 2, this data also indicates that the course has also maintained its performance, in areas of no impact, from the previous year.

The data suggests that research should be initially focused on methods to ‘Include Engaging Pedagogy’ (Factor 14), even though it is not directly aligned with UALR’s learning objectives. Any improvement in this area will create the greatest impact on the overall course effectiveness.

Efforts should then focus on ‘Increasing Out-of-Class Engagement’ (Factor 6) since it only received a fair rating. Factor 6 was comprised of included the following questions: course increased volunteering time for worthwhile causes; course increased participation in campus-sponsored organizations, course increased contributing to the success of campus-sponsored organizations, and course increased attending campus cultural events. Although it is difficult to determine why UALR only received a fair rating for Factor 6, there are several notable statistics which should be mentioned. A look into the sample population, however, shows that 76% of the students who took this survey live off-campus. Additionally, 39% of the same population were commuters that spent 5 or fewer hours on campus out of class.

Subsequent efforts should focus on improving the critical thinking (moderate impact), followed by the usefulness of course readings (moderate impact), improving knowledge of wellness (moderate impact), and improving managing time and priorities (moderate impact). These aforementioned factors were listed in the order of which they are a predictor.

As previously mentioned, a negative correlation was also found between improving knowledge of academic services (moderate impact) and overall course effectiveness. Such relationships are rarely found, but when they are, they tend to occur as minor predictors (predictor is in the Monitor or Maintain quadrants) of overall effectiveness, where the contribution to the overall variance is less than 5%, if the factors are educating students on topics that they do not want to know about; or if they are caused by a segment of the survey population. If this was the case, then, Factor 8 should simply be monitored and if the problem persists, then future changes may need to be instituted. Factor 8 was also deemed as a Top Priority factor. The results for Factor 8 suggest that UALR may consider studying the factors (i.e. through focus groups) to identify if there is a segment of the population that is less satisfied. The instructors should also be informed of this, so that an internal solution may combat the matter. The student’s satisfaction with the college/university (Factor 13) should simply be maintained and monitored for progression.

An initial look at the data indicates that the overall course effectiveness may have significantly declined. A further look at the data, however, reveals that the overall course effectiveness for UALR’s PEAW still received a performance rating of good with no significant difference in the courses’ performance mean from 2003. Since there was no significant change in the mean for overall course effectiveness, but there were significant decreases in several top priorities factors, UALR should monitor its progress in the top priority areas for the PEAW course more closely.

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