

UALR Assessment Report 2010 FYEC Report: Student Learning in 2009

Survey Administration

This survey was conducted on the campus of the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR). In Fall 2009, sixteen sections of the freshman seminar, which included 259 undergraduate students, were invited to participate in the FYI study. Of these thirteen sections, fifteen 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 197 surveys were completed from the sixteen sections yielding a 95% response rate.

Comment on Course Offerings. During the years 2006, 2007, and 2008, about half of the sections of PEAW 1300 were offered as linked, meaning that students were required to complete this course if they were enrolled in any developmental course. The other PEAW sections were offered as non-linked courses. During the year 2009, fifteen sections were offered as link and one section was a non-linked course. For the purposes of this study, *Overall Course Effectiveness* will be evaluated to include all PEAW courses – linked or non-linked. Additionally, comparing the enrollment for Fall 2008 and Fall 2009, the number of students enrolled remained consistent but more sections were offered in Fall 2009; resulting in a decrease in the average class size from 15.8 students to 12.3 students. The impact of the smaller class size is not known.

Comment on University Policies. For Fall 2009, the placement scores for the core mathematics courses was raised from an ACT score of 19 to an ACT score of 21 resulting in more incoming freshmen being placed in developmental math courses.

Student Learning Goals & Core Competencies Addressed. Fifteen learning goals, or factors, were evaluated. These goals and the core competencies addressed are listed as follows:

- 1. Course Improved Study Strategies**
- 2. Course Improved Academic and 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 and Priorities**
- 10. Course Improved Knowledge of Wellness**
- 11. Sense of Belonging and Acceptance**
- 12. Usefulness of Course Readings**
13. Satisfaction with College/University
14. Course Included Engaging Pedagogy
15. Overall Course Effectiveness

Note, the **factors that are bolded** are directly related to UALR's learning objectives for the First Year Experience course.

Respondent Demographics

Demographics for the 197 students who participated in the Fall 2009 FYI survey are listed as follows:

Gender:	Female	66%
	Male	34%
Ethnicity:	African American	56%
	White Non-Hispanic	34%
	Multi-racial/Other	3%
	Hispanic American	2%
	Asian American	2%

Hours Worked per Week (paying job):	Do not work	40%
	1-10 hours	9%
	11-20 hours	19%
	21-30 hours	17%
	31-40+ hours	15%
Current Residence:	Campus residence halls	25%
	Campus apartment	1%
	Off-campus w/family	54%
	Off-campus w/o family	18%
	Other	2%
High School Grades:	Mostly A	8%
	A and B, Mostly B	57%
	B and C, Mostly C	35%
Highest ACT/SAT Score:	19 or lower	65%
	20-24	21%
	25 or more	5%
	Don't know/Didn't take	8%
Current Academic Performance at UALR:	Mostly A	13%
	A and B, Mostly B	55%
	B and C, Mostly C	31%

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, provides a reliability coefficient for each factor.

The major predictors (impact factors) have the greatest impact on overall course effectiveness, while the minor predictors (no impact factors), regardless of their performance, are unlikely to have an impact on the predictability of overall course effectiveness. The prioritization of each factor should be assigned accordingly. The Priority Matrix Table (see Table 1) below denotes which factors should be improved, maintained, and monitored along with their Performance Rating.

Table 1 – Priority Matrix Table for Fall 2009

Top Priority for Fall 2009		Impact on Overall Satisfaction	Performance Description
Factor 12	Usefulness of Course Readings	Extreme Impact	Good
Factor 6	Course Increased Out-of-Class Engagement	High Impact	Good
Maintain			
Factor 11	Sense of Belonging and Acceptance	No Impact	Excellent
Monitor			
Factor 1	Course Improved Study Strategies	No Impact	Good
Factor 2	Course Improved Academic and Cognitive Skills	No Impact	Good
Factor 3	Course Improved Critical Thinking	No Impact	Good
Factor 4	Course Improved Connections with Faculty	No Impact	Good
Factor 5	Course Improved Connections with Peers	No Impact	Good
Factor 6	Course Increased Out-of-Class Engagement	No Impact	Good

Factor 7	Course Improved Knowledge of Campus Policies	No Impact	Good
Factor 8	Course Improved Knowledge of Academic Services	No Impact	Good
Factor 9	Course Improved Managing Time and Priorities	No Impact	Good
Factor 10	Course Improved Knowledge of Wellness	No Impact	Good
Factor 14	Course Included Engaging Pedagogy	No Impact	Good

The top priority factors, which were found to have the most impact on the student's overall course satisfaction, for Fall 2009 are Factor 12 (Usefulness of Course Readings) and Factor 6 (Course Increased Out-of-Class Engagement). In both of the top priority factors, UALR's performance was rated as 'Good.' The top priority Factor 12 (Usefulness of Course Readings) continues to be a factor in overall course effectiveness but, for the first time, it was ranked to have the highest impact rating (Extreme Impact). The other top priority Factor 6 (Course Increased Out-of-Class Engagement) has been identified as a top priority for the first time and ranked to have a high impact on overall course effectiveness. By focusing efforts to improve these two factors, improvements should be seen in overall course effectiveness.

Factor 11 (Sense of Belonging and Acceptance) was rated as 'Excellent,' but has little impact on overall course effectiveness. For this reason, it is not a priority and efforts should only be maintained for this factor.

The remaining factors were found to have 'No Impact,' meaning that they were not predictors of overall course effectiveness. It is notable that all these factors that should continued to be monitored received 'Good' performance ratings.

The Longitudinal Comparison of Factors table below (Table 2) indicates the change in the performance mean for the major predictors on overall satisfaction. Any significant increase in the performance mean should be used as an indicator that efforts for improvement of this factor have had an effect, but prioritization of factors should be based on the overall performance rating (i.e. excellent, good, fair).

Table 2 – Longitudinal Comparison of Factors for Fall 2009

Top Priority for Fall 2009		Impact on Overall Satisfaction	Statistical Level
Factor 12	Usefulness of Course Readings	Extreme Impact	No Statistical Difference
Factor 6	Course Increased Out-of-Class Engagement	High Impact	No Statistical Difference
Factor 11	Sense of Belonging and Acceptance	No Impact	No Statistical Difference
Factor 1	Course Improved Study Strategies	No Impact	No Statistical Difference
Factor 2	Course Improved Academic and Cognitive Skills	No Impact	No Statistical Difference
Factor 3	Course Improved Critical Thinking	No Impact	No Statistical Difference
Factor 4	Course Improved Connections with Faculty	No Impact	No Statistical Difference
Factor 5	Course Improved Connections with Peers	No Impact	No Statistical Difference
Factor 6	Course Increased Out-of-Class Engagement	No Impact	No Statistical Difference
Factor 7	Course Improved Knowledge of Campus Policies	No Impact	No Statistical Difference
Factor 8	Course Improved Knowledge of Academic Services	No Impact	No Statistical Difference
Factor 9	Course Improved Managing Time and Priorities	No Impact	No Statistical Difference
Factor 10	Course Improved Knowledge of Wellness	No Impact	No Statistical Difference
Factor 15	Overall Course Effectiveness	-----	No Statistical Difference

Both of the Top Priority factors, Factors 12 and 6, were directly related to the learning objectives for the First Year Experience course. A look at the table above (Table 2) indicates that these factors did not significantly change from that of the previous year. Since Factor 12 continues to appear as a Top Priority since the 2003 FYEC Report and it has the highest potential to improve the Overall Satisfaction for the Course, efforts should continue to improve performance in this area. Factor 6 hasn't appeared as a Top Priority since the 2004 FYEC and it has

a high potential to improve the Overall Satisfaction for the Course. New efforts should be investigated to improve in this area. Notice that the opportunity for a significant improvement exists because there are only two factors that have been identified as having an “extreme” or “high” impact on the Overall Satisfaction for the Course.

To this end, a pilot project is planned for the Fall 2010 semester to directly target improvement of Factor 12 – Usefulness of Course Readings. Five sections of the PEAW 1300 course will be taught by a full-time PEAW instructor using a different textbook. The impact should be seen in next year’s FYEC report.

PEAW 1300 and PEAW 1124

In summation, the First Year Initiative Survey was completed by 197 students enrolled in 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 2004. An analysis of the data obtained from this study presents the results of the overall course effectiveness, factors with the greatest impact, and areas to maintain and monitor. Overall Course Effectiveness (Factor 15) was the dependent variable.

In Fall 2009, the average PEAW student had the following characteristics:

- Gender: Female (66%)
- Ethnicity: African American (56%)
- Hours Worked per Week (paying job): Do not work (40%)
- Current Residence: Off-campus with family (54%)
- High School GPA: A and B, Mostly B (57%)
- Highest ACT/SAT Score: 19 or lower (65%)
- Current Academic Performance at UALR: A and B, Mostly B (55%)

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 of Fall 2009		
Factor 12	Usefulness of Course Readings	Good
Factor 6	Course Increased Out-Of-Class Engagement	Good

The data suggests that research should be focused on methods to improve the ‘Usefulness of Course Readings’ (Factor 12), ‘Course Increased Out-Of-Class Engagement’ (Factor 6) since any improvement in these areas will create the greatest impact on the overall course effectiveness.

To move the performance of these impact factors from ‘Good’ to ‘Excellent,’ UALR should continue to provide a tailored approach to determining the educational demands of the unique set of students that enroll in this course. This can be done by obtaining student recommendations, via a focus group or other more interactive methods. The data from these students may provide additional insight into which approaches are more effective for this subgroup.

Since Fall 2001, the results of this study have consistently indicated that UALR’s Freshman Experience course has benchmarked relatively well when compared to programs run throughout the nation. In fact, UALR ranked 1st in overall course effectiveness among the ‘select 6’ institutions and ‘Carnegie Class’ and 14th among all 59 institutions in the study. A look at the previous data for UALR’s PEAW Course further indicates that the program and its performance have been relatively standardized. The only exception in its performance is the year 2006 where a decrease in overall performance was detected and attributed to several changes in the 2006 program: implementation of Gateway Communities and initiation of a full-time UALR PEAW instructor. But the performance has returned to the level before the 2006 program indicating that the program changes have not had a negative effect on the overall course performance. In fact, they provide an opportunity to further enhance the program and move the overall course performance in a positive direction.

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