

Inquiry/Research-Based Education Project  
Student Leader Learning Outcomes  
Progress Report of 2007-2008  
Request for Continued Funding for 2008-2009

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## *Part II: Summary of Activities*

The Student Leader Learning Outcomes (SLLO) project continued into the third year of its operation. A leadership team was established to help guide the activities of this large group of interdepartmental student affairs professionals and to provide vision for the future. A Vista Blackboard was initiated for SLLO project team members. All assessment tools and toolkits are now online.

As many as twenty-eight individual advisors used one of the SLLO themes and assessment rubrics during the 2007-2008 academic year. This included individuals who used the themes to develop specific assessment rubrics for student workers.

A special initiative was undertaken with the Career Center to develop a SLLO group within the AggieEfolio program. The SLLO project team believes that one of the most relevant assessments of the impact of student learning in co-curricular experiences will be evidenced through student use of their co-curricular work in e-portfolios. This project continues.

Several working subcommittees provide training for advisors and marketing for information sharing with advisors and students. An integrative learning subcommittee is working to reinforce the project's mission statement with specific reference to integrative learning and the power of reflection for life long learning.

A meta-assessment plan was developed for SLLO, and several major assessment projects took place during the year. (See Sections IV and V)

Several members of the SLLO project team made peer-reviewed presentations about the project at the annual conferences of the American College Personnel Association (ACPA), the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), the Texas Association of College and University Student Personnel Administrators (TACUSPA) and Southern Association of College Student Affairs (SACSA), and the Texas A&M Assessment Conference. Five members of the leadership team have co-authored a chapter in a Jossey-Bass publication on student learning edited by Dr. Marilee Bresciani which will be published in 2009.

A SLLO project team retreat was held during the summer and resulted in the rewriting of all assessment rubrics for consistent structure and language. The retreat also generated training modules for five of the thirteen rubrics.

## *Part III: Restatement of Outcomes*

The Student Leader Learning Outcomes (SLLO) project provides consistent methods and tools for staff to use with student organization leaders to assist in the assessment and documentation of enhanced learning in relation to students' leadership experiences.

### Program Outcomes

- Develop, implement and employ learning outcomes for student leadership experiences in the co-curricular for use by advisors across the Division of Student Affairs and in academic departments
- Develop and make accessible assessment tools and methods for learning outcomes
- Develop infrastructure to train staff in the use of outcomes, assessment methods, and use of the results
- Prepare student leaders to be peer developers and intentional learners
- Provide evidence of and publish on the value added by students' participation in co-curricular leadership experiences to the University community. Also for use in program review, accreditation, recruitment, fund raising and development

## Learning Outcomes

The SLLO project directly aligns with the articulated goals of inquiry/research-based education of undergraduates. Because the SLLO project is not a course or a curriculum, the components of inquiry/research-based education are found to varying degrees within the themes and learning outcomes and in varying degrees in the mission and goals of the various student organizations that utilize them.

The development of learning outcomes is an evolutionary process. To date, thirteen themes have been developed with attendant learning outcomes and assessment rubrics. Theoretical frames of reference have been selected in order to ground each theme and outcome in literature and research. Some of the outcomes are based on a single theory/model while others are a combination of several congruent theories and models. Samples of a complete learning outcome theme and rubric for critical thinking and citizenship are attached as appendices. Following are the learning outcomes associated with each theme.

*Citizenship:* Students will be able to

- identify one's role within the organization
- develop behavior congruent with organizational mission
- translate role within organization to larger community
- develop a global perspective on issues related to organization

*Written Communication Learning Outcomes:* Students will be able to

- Effectively communicate in writing for a wide variety of purposes and audiences.
- Write a document using correct grammar and spelling.
- Effectively adjust their writing styles to appropriately address the audience.
- Present their information in a variety of formats.
- Create documents that accurately reflect their purpose.
- Clearly and accurately convey the intent of their message.
- Enhance the visual appeal of their written documents.

*Verbal Communication Learning Outcomes:* Students will be able to

- Effectively communicate verbally for a wide variety of purposes and audiences.
- Maintain self confidence when speaking to an audience.
- Accurately convey the intent of their message when speaking.
- Structure a speech that is clear and easy to follow.
- Select appropriate audio/visual support methods and materials.
- Use at least one popular software program to create a presentation.

*Interpersonal Communication Learning Outcomes:* Students will be able to

- Exhibit effective interpersonal communication in a variety of settings.
- Effectively apply active listening skills.
- Perceive the listeners interpersonal needs.
- Gain information about other individuals through communication.
- Build a context of understanding through communication.
- Establish and identify when using interpersonal communication.
- Demonstrate respect for others' viewpoints.
- Maintain proper eye contact while communicating interpersonally.
- Exhibit de-escalatory behaviors in situations of conflict.
- Mediate between other conflicting parties.
- Give critical feedback effectively (non-threatening).

- Receive, and reflect on, critical feedback from others.
- Demonstrate acknowledgment and validation of the feelings, opinions, and contributions of others.

*Critical Thinking Outcomes:* Students will be able to

- Identify a problem
- Analyze the elements/facts of a specific situation/problem
- Communicate the important elements/issues
- Gather relevant situational information
- Interpret information effectively relative to the problem
- Establish relevant criteria and standards for acceptable solutions
- Develop alternatives to address criteria
- Clarify assumptions
- Predict implications and consequences
- Construct well-reasoned solutions/conclusions
- Support conclusions with fact
- Communicate decisions (and throughout the process)

*Delegation Outcomes:* Students will be able to

- articulate the reasons to delegate to others
- be able to successfully delegate projects and tasks to others

*Diversity Outcomes:* Students will be able to:

- Differentiate between individual differences, cultural differences, and universal similarities
- Empathize and connect with individuals different from themselves.
- Use knowledge of similarities and differences between people to make sensitive and appropriate decisions

*Effective Meetings Outcomes:* Students will be able to

- Effectively and efficiently run a meeting (executive, general, committee, one on one)
- Take appropriate actions/complete needed tasks before, during, and after meetings

*Fiscal Responsibility:* Students will be able to

- Demonstrate integrity and competence in fiscal activities
- Articulate financial responsibilities of the individual and the organization
- Demonstrate competence in fiscal procedures
- Demonstrate knowledge of fiscal policies
- Demonstrate critical thinking with regard to financial issues (understand the consequences of their actions)
- Identify organizational needs and the fiscal resources necessary to fulfill those needs
- Communicate financial information thoroughly in both written and verbal formats
- Demonstrate autonomy in financial decision making and dealings

*Membership Selection:* Students will be able to

- Describe the significance of membership growth and selection to the longevity of the organization
- Identify members to serve as selection committee

- Formulate membership selection timeline and process
- Evaluate membership criteria and create appreciable outreach material
- Set up review and screening processes
- Evaluate potential new members based upon aforementioned membership criteria
- Identify potential members to receive extension of membership and offer formal invitation to membership
- Identify those potential membership who failed to meet criteria and informing them of committee action/decision
- Introduce new membership to organization membership and customs

*Project Management Outcomes:* Students will be able to

- Articulate the series of steps/processes & strategies to achieve end results
- Determine, procure, optimize all resources (human, material, & financial) needed
- Define and appraise task
- Calculate time on task
- Initiate the task
- Perform the task
- Manage the task and the performance of all involved
- Complete the task
- Evaluate the task (pre & post analysis)
- Forecast and set procedures for subsequent years

*Risk Management Outcomes:* Students will be able to

- Conduct a comprehensive assessment of associated physical, reputation, emotional, financial, and facilities risks
- Provide a realistic assessment of those risks along the risk management matrix (probability and severity)
- Conduct a comprehensive exploration and examination of options for mitigating actions
- Select the most appropriate mitigating actions for each risk
- Develop contingency and crisis response plans
- Consult with “campus experts” in planning
- Communicate risk management plan to other constituents of event
- Implement event according to pre-established risk management plans
- Document and evaluate outcomes of risk management plans
- Internalize the value of risk management
- Articulate the value of risk management

*Service:* Students will be able to

- Analyze service and service projects in a broader context.
- Recognize the relationship between philanthropy, volunteerism, community service, and service learning.

*Teams and Groups Outcomes:* Students will be able to

- Recognize a model and identify stages of group development according to the Tuckman and Jensen model
- Demonstrate the ability to facilitate a group through each stage of the Tuckman and Jensen model

*Part IV: Restatement of the Assessment Methods for Each Outcome*

1. Each student who participates in an organization that is using a theme and its learning outcomes may be provided the assessment rubric as an initial self-assessment tool and as a map to guide their learning. Advisors and in some instances, trained peers, provide feedback on a student's growth through the rubric using various additional assessment measures such as observation, document review, peer and advisor evaluations, and reflection papers. Advisors often will use experiential learning games and case studies to further the learning of a student organization executive team.
2. During 2007-2008 a meta-assessment plan for SLLO was initiated to include assessment of learning for students, advisors, student organizations, supervisors of advisors using assessment rubrics, and members of student organizations whose leadership teams are using rubrics.
3. Also in 2007-2008 six student organizations, their advisors and their leadership teams were selected for an experimental study. Half the organizations served as a control group while the other half received a rubric-based learning outcome intervention. Nine criteria were established to assist in the selection of the organizations. First, the organizational missions contained in both conditions had to be similar in nature including the type of skills required to fulfill the missions. Second, all organizations had to have an established budget for their activities. Third, all organizations had to have a full-time advisor. Fourth, all organizations had to be classified as a "sponsored" organization which means they have a significant tie to the institutional reputation or had risk management issues contained within their activities that warranted greater oversight by the institutional administration. Fifth, all organizations had to have at least eight to ten student leaders to cover a variety of responsibilities. Sixth, organizational members had to be selected through a competitive application process. Seventh, the organizational leaders were chosen through an election or selection process. Eighth, all leaders had to be serving a term that covered the fall and spring semesters of the school year. The ninth criterion was that the student leaders and full-time advisors of the identified organizations agreed to participate in the study.

The selection of and process for using rubrics was left to the discretion of the advisors. The advisors selected three different rubrics to use with the variety of leaders in their organizations: project management, critical thinking, and public speaking. A total of 27 students and three advisors were recruited for the rubric group and 31 students and three advisors for the non-rubric group. One organization did not complete the project requirements. In addition, students and advisors could discontinue their participation in the project at any point during the year, and some did elect to stop participation. By the end of the project, there were 19 student leaders and three advisors in the non-rubric group and 9 student leaders and two advisors in the rubric group. Their responses form the basis for a full report on this assessment which can be obtained through Student Life Studies.

During the initiation of the research project, ten rubrics were available for staff and student use. A content analysis was conducted on all rubric statements so themes could be identified. A total of 41 skill statements and eight skills groups emerged from the content analysis. The skill groups were information management, appraising a situation, group dynamics, organization mission and goals and procedures, self management, delegating, communication, and time management. Two different versions of the instrument were designed—one for student leaders and one for advisors. Both contained the same set of skill statements but had different instructions. There were two measurements for advisors and three measurements for students. Both advisors and students were asked to rate how proficient the student was on each skill. In addition, advisors and students were asked to indicate the

importance of each skill to the organizational responsibilities required of the student. A third question asked the students how important each skill was to their future career and educational goals.

Three web based surveys of participants occurred during the study. The instruments were sent via email at three data collection periods during the year – October 2007 (“Beginning”), February 2008 (“Midpoint”), and April 2008 (“End”). These specific times were selected in order to capture the natural evolution of an organization at the beginning, middle, and end of the year.

In addition to the standard instrument questions, student leaders were asked to indicate their agreement to some statements regarding activities within organizations. These statements were posed to the students at the beginning and midpoint data collection periods in order to understand the value they placed on specific issues. During the final data collection period, both student leaders and advisors were asked qualitative questions regarding the process of using the instrument and assessing skills during the year, the nature of the developmental conversations between student leaders and advisors, and what was gained from those conversations.

For the qualitative data, a formal content analysis was conducted for each of the questions. Participants in the analysis process were members of a SLLO subcommittee formed for the purpose of assessing all aspects of the rubric usage.

Students from both the control and intervention group will be asked to participate in individual interviews to gather qualitative data on what they learned in their student organization and if they have been able to transfer learning between the organization and their classroom experiences or new organizational involvement in 2008-2009. This qualitative study will occur in 2008-2009.

The responsibility for the assessment of SLLO is with Student Life Studies. Oversight is provided by the Division’s QEP/Assessment Team and the Vice President for Student Affairs. In addition, the department directors in Student Affairs are included in the training opportunities and will be provided project reports on an annual basis.

4. All student organization advisors who used SLLO outcomes and rubrics in 2007-2008 or said they would use them but did not were interviewed during May 2008 to understand their experiences using the rubrics.

### *Part V: Summary of Results*

#### 1. Results of the experimental research project with six student organizations

The purpose of the study was to answer three questions: (1) What skills do student leaders come into their leadership positions with?, (2) Are there differences between self-assessments and advisor-assessments on skill levels?, and (3) Is there change (either direction) in assessed skill development during the year with student leaders using the rubrics and those who were not using the rubrics?.

#### **Skills of Student Leaders at the Beginning of a Leadership Position**

All project participants believed students had moderate to high proficiency in each skill set at the beginning of the year. It does appear that for the students in this project, they had the depth and breadth of skills needed to perform their leadership responsibilities—by their own judgment and the judgment of their advisors. This may indicate that at this kind of leadership level, skills may need to fine-tuned rather than developed from scratch.

### **Differences Between Student Self-Assessments and Advisor-Assessments on Skill Levels**

Very few statistical differences were found between student and advisor proficiency ratings on any of the skill groups. When significant differences were found, they were likely to be a random variation in time rather than a true difference between groups. However, one pattern did emerge from this study that might have some impact on the work of student organization advisors. Students and advisors tended to be further apart in their assessment of skill proficiency at the beginning of the year before coming closer together by the end of the year. In many cases, students would rate themselves high at the beginning of the year before adjusting down either at the midpoint or end. Advisors, on the other hand, consistently increased their ratings during the year in a slow and steady trend. By the end of the year, students and advisors had almost identical ratings.

When translated to the practice of an advisor, this trend might indicate that students could use some feedback on their skills at the midpoint of the year. After a few months of holding a leadership position and dealing with responsibilities, they may be ready to absorb the information advisors can provide regarding their skills. It may be a prime opportunity to create a “teachable moment.”

### **Differences of Skill Levels Between Rubric and Non-Rubric Use**

Very few statistical differences were found between rubric and non-rubric use. The few that were found did not indicate any true differences between groups. However, there were a few response trends that were worthy of highlighting. It was noted earlier that advisors had similar response patterns for proficiency ratings throughout the year. Namely, they increased steadily during the year regardless of whether or not they used rubrics. Students, however, differed by what group they were in for the study. The Rubric Students generally had an upward trend with their proficiency ratings but in four of the eight skill sets their ratings went down at the midpoint before coming back up or remained the same at the midpoint before increasing at the end. The Non-Rubric Students did have some minor changes (both up and down) in their ratings but overall these students remained fairly consistent and steady in their proficiency ratings throughout the year and across skill sets.

These patterns are important to note because the Rubric Students seemed to have more adjustment occurring in their ratings during the year than did the Non-Rubric Students. At the beginning of the year, students may be confident in their abilities to perform well in their positions. Indeed, students and advisors were in agreement that a high level of proficiency was already in place at the start of the year for the participants of this project. However, as the year progressed, it could be that Rubric Students recognized that they still had further development to do in the various skills highlighted by their rubric use. It is also important to note that the Rubric Students only used one skill rubric during the year. That rubric, regardless of which one was selected, only covered a small set of skill statements used in this project. The research instrument was based on the skill statements of ten rubrics so it covered more skills than one student would focus on using a singular rubric. However, the Rubric Students had an overall pattern of responses that seemed to indicate they were adjusting their ratings for a number of skills, not just the ones covered by their selected rubric. While more research should be conducted to determine if rubrics for one skill set impacts how a student views other skill sets, this study might be one indication of that possibility.

Further emphasizing the possibility that rubric use does have a positive impact on the learning process were the qualitative responses from both advisors and students. When advisors were asked to explain key points from their conversations with the students during the year, they described focusing on skills and application of those skills. There were no discernible differences in the topics they described regardless of whether or not they used a rubric. However, when it was the students' turn to recall those same discussions, a difference emerged.

The comments from the Rubric Students described many of the same things advisors did—focusing on individual development and what they could do to improve their skills. The Non-Rubric Students, however, described mainly broader concepts dealing with organizational business or feeling like they were generally being encouraged and supported by their advisors.

It is possible that the Rubric Students were just more descriptive in their comments for this project and that the Non-Rubric Students also had similar experiences they did not mention. However, it is interesting to compare the responses of the two groups and have only one group echo the same language that their advisors used. Both groups had advisors who obtained educational degrees in the field and had similar work experience and responsibilities. In addition, both groups came from well established organizations that were competitive in their membership. Taking those criteria into account does potentially point to rubric use as a way to share a common language and help students focus more on their individual growth and development.

In conclusion, while rubric use does not seem to significantly change the learning process for student leaders, it may provide enough of a change to begin shifting how students view learning outside of a classroom. Rubrics may be a valuable tool to assist advisors in working smarter, not harder. Instead of having numerous informal conversations with students during the school year and hoping to influence development, an advisor could use a rubric to help establish a common language about the skill in question. Then, formal meetings could be scheduled to review the skill development throughout the year, especially at the midpoint of the year when students might be more receptive to the feedback on their development. Rubrics also could help both students and advisors in focusing on one important skill at a time rather than trying to generally improve development. Using a rubric and following this process may help a student focus on where skill development might be needed and guide him or her into taking control of the learning process. In addition, the advisor could do more than hope development is occurring; it could be formally documented.

## 2. Interviews with all users and intended users of the themes/rubrics

During the month of May, interviews were conducted with users of the SLLO outcomes and rubrics as well as with those who expressed an interest in using them in the 2007-2008 academic year but did not. Following are the themes that emerged from those interviews.

- We (project and profession) are about student learning. Emphasis should be on learning not the assessment tools. Rubrics are a means to that end.
  - Student learning should be on staff personnel evaluations
  - There are different ways to “document” learning – resumes, e.g. – besides rubrics
  - Advisors used rubrics in the following order of greatest use: project management, effective meetings, critical thinking
  - Need big picture discussion of the project and its purpose before presenting an outcome and assessment rubric to anyone
- Context matters
  - Student affairs department, student organization mission and stage of maturity, student leadership affect how rubrics are used
- Peer to peer mentoring is needed
  - Student to student
  - Supervisor to advisor
- Student workers, student leaders, and classroom environments have been and can be impacted
  - Many different experiences and approaches to generating student buy-in
    - Getting students to use the rubrics or see their value. They were more interested in the organizational mission, event, etc. As articulated by a

member of the meta-assessment team: (5/21/08 – “Students don’t see the importance of individual rubrics because they are worried about the group and what it needs to accomplish. How do we communicate that they need to be healthy as leaders first, in order to develop a healthy organization?”)

- Many different processes used by advisors throughout the year. Most prevalent in order of greatest use: student self-assessment tool; student checklist without follow up; use by advisor to advise group but not to share with individual students
- Marketing/outreach is needed for supervisors, staff and students
  - Need to market it as for advisor development – time it takes, value and goals it represents and understanding of life long, integrated learning
- There are many staff/advisor training needs in the concepts of student learning and how to use the rubrics as assessment tools
  - Use dependent upon individual advisor’s comfort/knowledge of student learning, applying theory to practice
  - Map or curriculum needed for training
  - What are the strengths and skills that made some of us take an outcome and a rubric and work it successfully with a student organization? How do we teach, understand and help others to learn? Who are advisors that are really good at this and how can they help design our next steps?

#### *Part VI: Closing the Loop*

The SLLO project now has a meta-assessment plan that will build assessment measures into all aspects of the project: assessment rubric development and use; student leader learning outcomes; student organization (group) outcomes; student organization member outcomes; advisor outcomes; orientation and training outcomes for advisors; and SLLO program outcomes. Each of these units is defined by what we want to know about that aspect (its purpose and utilization) and suggested measures for collecting the data. Yet to be added are timelines for each assessment.

New orientations are being conducted in the fall of 2008 to introduce SLLO to new employees and others who want to know more about the project. Focused ninety-minute training sessions will occur on four of the rubrics with more to follow in the spring.

Student Life Studies will be tracking advisors who use rubrics in 2008-2009 and begin to track students who are in their second and third years of using rubrics with their organizations to understand the longitudinal impact of SLLO.

2008-2009 will be the year to use qualitative measures more effectively. SLLO project team members will be trained in interviewing and focus group techniques and will be utilizing one or the other methodology with student organizations and their leaders and members in the spring of 2009.

Results from new assessment methodologies will continue to build on what we know and understand about student learning in the co-curricular.

Work with the Career Center will continue and finalize the SLLO learning community in AggieEfolio. New themes and assessment rubrics will be tracked to the Mays Business School learning outcomes so that students in Mays can use their co-curricular experiences to provide evidence to satisfy those learning outcomes.

QEP funds will be used exclusively to fund a GA. When funds are gone, Student Life Studies will build the expense into its budget – specifically with a request to the Student Service

Fee Board for permanent GA funding for SLLO in 2010-2011. Until then, Student Life Studies will provide all matching funds.

*Part VII: Budget*

**Expenses 2007 – 2008\*\***

Resource	Description	Cost
Graduate student or intern	Graduate student from June – September who was paid for 10 hours a week and received practicum credit for another 10; joined by another newly entering graduate student in July who was paid student worker wages until the fall 08 semester began	\$1200
Training supplies	Training materials for 3 sessions of 30 participants (notebooks, copying, certificates of completion, name badges, pens)	\$2600
Refreshments	Snacks for three 4-hour training sessions; must use Food Service when booked in University Center Complex; lunch for SLLO retreat	\$1000
2 Tape recorders	One time expense to have enough tape recorders for interviews and focus groups	Deferred purchase
Tapes	For 24 qualitative interviews and 6 focus groups; 2007-2008	Deferred purchase
Transcriptionist	For 24 qualitative interviews and 6 focus groups; dependent on number of pages generated; 2007-2008	Deferred need
Web page development	All outcomes, rubrics, and training materials made available electronically; a Vista Blackboard website for advisors	0
<b>Totals</b>		<b>\$4,800</b>

\*\* Totals are approximations; final year end accounting not available until October, 2009.

**Projected Expenses 2008-2009**

Resource	Description	Annual expenses
Graduate student	A twelve-month graduate student with benefits	\$18,000
Training supplies	Orientation to SLLO materials for 3 - 5 sessions annually of 30 participants each (cost reduced because all resource materials are now online in Vista Blackboard).	\$500
Food	Snacks for any session exceeding two hours; must use Food Service when booked in University Center Complex; off site SLLO project team retreat once a year	\$750
2 Tape recorders	One time expense to have enough tape recorders for interviews and focus groups	\$540
Tapes	For 24 qualitative interviews and 6 focus groups; 2008-2009	\$60
Transcriptionist	For 24 qualitative interviews and 6 focus groups; dependent on number of pages generated; 2007-2008	\$1000 - \$2000
Blackboard	All outcomes, rubrics, and training materials available electronically; an interactive website for advisors	\$0
<b>Totals</b>		<b>\$20,850- \$21,850</b>

All expenses not covered by the \$10,000 funding or reserves will be covered by Student Life Studies.