PARTICIPATE RESULTS

Assessment Times
Spring 2023
HWCAC

From the Chair (Dave)

In Fall 2021, HWC's Assessment Committee conducted a General Assessment we refer to as the "Participate Assessment," and this semester's edition of *Assessment Times* is dedicated to sharing what we learned from it.

Inside you will find details about the survey and the sample, as well as what we found out regarding our investigation questions, which included:

How Do Students Perceive Their Opportunities to *Participate*?
Do they self-report abilities to:
~Contribute individually
~Contribute as a member of a group/team
~Facilitate contributions of others
~Foster a constructive climate
~Respond to conflict

What Do Students Do When Asked to *Evaluate*?
Do they:
~Provide an evaluation when requested
~Reference evaluative criteria
~Defend a coherent position (including use of examples)

What is the climate like for Participation?
What do students report regarding their perceptions of:
~Their sense of community and where/when they have it, if they do
~The racial climate of the college
~Equality of participation opportunity in classrooms across varied identity groups
~The impact of different types of participation on their understanding of race/ethnicity

If you find any of those interesting, then you're in luck. We hope you learn as much as we did!

Survey and Sample Details

The Fall 2021 assessment was a survey that featured 13 questions of different types, including three open-ended questions at the end. The survey was a mixed-methods measure of multiple Institutional Learning Outcomes, but with a primary focus (as you may have guessed) on student experiences and perceptions related to their participation activities and opportunities. We describe it as "mixed-methods" because the assessment was mostly an indirect measure of learning outcomes via student perceptions, but also featured a direct measure of students' ability to "Defend a coherent [evaluative] position," one of the learning outcomes under "Evaluate," another of our institutional objectives.

The survey was created on Qualtrics and shared by faculty volunteers over Brightspace and email starting November 12th, staying open through the end of the semester. Altogether we drew 1000 responses, and 864 of those were validated as current students. Given the Fall 2021 headcount of 9,810 students, that amounts to 8.8% of the student population, a sample size that meets the "gold standard" for aggregate population representativeness—less than 5% margin of error at the 95% confidence level.

When we disaggregated the results, we found no significant difference between the ethnicity breakdown in survey results and the expected ethnicity breakdown (based on χ^2 with α level of 0.05). The same proved true for gender, meaning the sample was proportionally representative for both ethnicity and gender; however, it was <u>not</u> representative in two other dimensions: age and full time or part time status. In our sample, we were missing a lot of our youngest students (17 and under), with an oversampling of 20-21 year-olds as well as 40-49 year-olds, and we had a higher proportion of full-time students in our sample (55.95%) than in our general student body (43.69%).

Investigation Questions

How Do Students Perceive Their Opportunities to *Participate*?
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       ~Contribute as a member of a group/team
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       ~Foster a constructive climate
       ~Respond to conflict

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Findings & Recommendations

Part I: Student Perceptions Regarding Participation–Phil, Matthew, Erica, Farah

Students reported participating widely and in varied forms, and their responses suggest that they do not find it difficult to do so. 54% of responding students agree that they have tried "new forms of participation" during their time at Harold Washington, with 19% disagreeing. 61% strongly agree that they have worked cooperatively with people from racial and ethnic backgrounds different from their own, with another 21% somewhat agreeing, and only 6% in disagreement (Somewhat: 3%; Strongly 3%).

Types of reported participation varied. For a full breakdown of the ways students reported participating, both inside and outside of the classrooms at HWC, check out our "Participate Findings" Report on the Assessment Committee website.

Only 3% strongly agreed that they *avoid* participating, while nearly 65% of students report that they *do not avoid* participating. When students *do* participate, the most popular forms were individual, private, low-stakes options such as "active listening" or asking clarifying questions. These results in combination with some others suggest that students' perceptions of their own activity in the classroom are that of someone who is "participating" without "contributing."

Over 95% of students reported practicing active listening, with about 80% reporting that they engage in active listening often or always. Similarly, although 65% of students said they do not avoid participating, they are less frequently initiating the completion of tasks to support a group effort. When they do initiate tasks, students don't seem to perceive it as contributing to the group's overall progress.

Only 41% of students reported that they advance work or projects "sometimes" or "often." This is not consistent with what most of us experience in our courses. There may be a mismatch of what students are considering advancement and what faculty consider advancement. It also concerns us that many students don't believe their contributions are advancing projects. In fact, the correlation between responses regarding "active listening, carefully observing, and/or taking notes as forms of participation" and "advancing the work or project by offering new suggestions, solutions, or ideas" was the lowest–basically, non-correlated–among the various options for participating.

Even fewer students reported facilitating the contributions of others or responding to conflict within a group environment (a little over 25% of surveyed students say they "never" facilitate others' contributions, while a little less than 45% of surveyed students say they "never" help smooth over conflicts or disagreements). Perhaps that's because there are very few conflicts; alternatively, it might mean students are reluctant to get involved when they arise.

Notably, over 50% of students self-reported meeting with instructors multiple times per month (about 75% report having such a meeting at least once a month). Fewer students self-reported using campus support services (such as tutoring, the Wellness Center, and Veterans services)— about 40% reported using support services multiple times per month, and about 55% at least once a month). There is a moderate correlation between the students who meet with instructors and students who access other support services.

Recommendations:

Instructors should consider defining roles and responsibilities for students in group projects, and explicitly state how each of these roles contribute. There should also be opportunities for students to list the responsibilities they took on in the project. The goal of this would not be for accountability, but to reinforce students' perceptions of the value they add to projects.

Possible roles for small groups in class work include: time keeper, facilitator, note taker, investigator (i.e the one who uses a device to look up difficult new vocabulary words or to search for needed information), reporter.

Students should be made aware that their classmates are able and willing to participate but perhaps struggling to initiate an interaction. Sometimes, all it takes is one person courageous enough to ask a question, offer a suggestion, demonstrate a way to approach a problem, invite a classmate to add their thoughts, etc. to get the ball rolling toward more members of the class engaging more actively. Students should take advantage of opportunities to recognize their classmates' positive contributions to discussion, a group project, etc..

Faculty can offer students more opportunities to exert control over class discussions and/or activities so that students are working primarily or exclusively with each other rather than going through the instructor for most interactions. Additionally, more emphasis can be placed on teaching students to acknowledge their own contributions and those made by their peers.

We also recommend that faculty provide students with more opportunities to build on their active listening skills by asking students frequently to paraphrase someone else's observation or idea and then either offer an alternative idea or suggest next steps in relation to their classmate's concept. With more opportunities to practice generating constructive dialogue and academically respectful disagreements, we expect more students will become able to recognize and implement ways to foster a constructive climate and respond to conflict appropriately.

We recommend faculty emphasize that office hours are intended for students to use—not a burden or inconvenience to the faculty member—and develop more opportunities for students to practice attending office hours. It is up to individual faculty members how they want to do this, whether they prefer to just issue invitations to their office hours on a regular basis, implement a mandatory low-stakes assignment around a one-on-one meeting, or incentivize it in connection to an assignment.

Because there is moderate correlation between office hours visits and accessing other support services, we encourage faculty to familiarize themselves with the campus resources available to students and take the opportunity provided in office hours conversations to encourage students to explore other campus services and events. Faculty can also consider inviting representatives from relevant services to provide brief classroom presentations or link a low-stakes assignment to a visit to a student service provider (e.g. a quiz retake after engaging in tutoring).

Finally, we recommend providing an active learning environment where students take control of their learning and actively (not passively) participate by listening *and* offering solutions and sharing new ideas.

POINT/COUNTERPOINT

Point -- Juanita
Students indicate they are unlikely to, temporarily or permanently, shift their perspective on a topic based on insight or questions from other students.

Recommendation: Faculty and students should challenge the traditional perspective that instructors are authorities on a subject and students are novices. We should encourage students to understand and take on an active role in their own learning. This would include accepting other students as peer instructors. We should encourage students to consider ideas from their peers, as much as they consider the information they receive from instructors.

Counterpoint -- Todd
As someone who studies cognition and implicit bias, and who has read more than a few articles and studies about oppositional media hostility, the most striking thing about these results is how often students report changing their views. Changing our minds goes against our very biology; we actively and autonomically try to avoid the feeling of cognitive dissonance. And looking casually at our survey results may at first seem to back this up. For instance, 55% of our students report never or rarely changing their minds permanently about a topic due to a classmate's perspective. Moreover, we don't seem to have clear support for the idea that our students are engaging in spirited debate with one another. For instance, only 30% of our students report helping to smooth over a conflict at least once a month. But looking past categories and at actual percentages and instances actually paints a fairly encouraging picture about student participation and its impact on student beliefs and perceptions.

There is evidence here that significant changes may be happening right under our noses, though the construction of this survey may make it hard to see at first. First, when we see "rarely" as a category, we dismiss it as insignificant, as something that happens infrequently enough that we shouldn't focus on it, or maybe even as an indictment or fault. Second, if we use the number of times someone participates in a group activity as the most important metric, we may miss the importance of the quality or impact of a single interaction. So, when we see the statistic that 80% have conveyed ideas to a group member or classmate at least once a month, we may at first dismiss it as reaching a pretty low bar. But I really doubt that I am alone in not participating as actively in a discussion that doesn't interest me as one that does. Not all topics are going to be as compelling as others to our students, but that doesn't mean that they aren't grand-slamming the topics that do interest them, even if that only happens once a month.

I start from the place of thinking that we learn the most from people who are not like us, and our survey shows that we are giving students ample opportunity on this front: 80% have worked cooperatively with people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds at least once per month. Moreover, 95% of our students report that they have engaged in active listening, careful observation, or taking notes at least once a month. Though, again, these may seem like low bars, there is evidence that this participation and group work is bearing fruit. When we consider how hard it is for people to change their perspectives, we find something really striking:

85% of our students report having shifted their perspectives on a topic at least once per month and 70% report that they have *permanently* shifted their perspectives at least once a month. Changing your mind about a social issue is a pretty heavy cognitive lift, and to imagine that it is happening to our students at least once a month would seem to be evidence of exactly the kind of critical thinking and learning we hope for.

Recommendation: Keep doing what we're doing!

Part II: Environment Findings—Erica, Dave

Equality of Participation

15% of students perceive unequal participation across racial/ethnic groups, genders, ages, and (dis)ability status within their courses while the remaining 85% of students surveyed do not notice such inequalities.

Racial Climate Evaluation

Of those who provided an evaluation, most (43.8% of total), evaluated the climate positively. 17.4% said they "didn't know", 12.8% were mixed or neutral, and 1.08% provided a negative evaluation of the racial climate. Many students explained that they felt like they couldn't answer this question since they didn't have any in-person experience at HWC yet. These were coded "Other" and account for a large portion of the second biggest response group. It should be noted that the survey included a definition of racial climate from Dr. Christy Byrd ("Norms, curricula, and interactions around race and diversity within the school context") and also specified that the question "includes all dimensions of the school environment, not just those limited to in-person classes." So, clearly many students missed, or misread, that portion of the question.

Sense of Community

76.77% of students answered in a way suggesting they "felt a sense of community in their time at HWC" in Fall 2021, which is in line with the findings in the following semester's Spring 2022 Query Project (in which 80.24% of respondents agreed that they felt a sense of community), showing a slight increase from fall (week 10-12) to spring (week 4).

Recommendations: Faculty should consider whether it is in fact true in their classrooms that students participate equally across identities, as well as form a sense of community or if they can make adjustments to ensure more equal participation by a diverse array of students. Faculty should not claim colorblindness but strive to recognize their implicit biases and develop methods to ensure equitable learning for all members of their class, including learning students' names. Part of these efforts entail reviewing resources on universal design for learning (UDL) and making appropriate changes to materials and/or assignments for the benefit of *all* their students, not just those with a documented disability.

Part III: Evaluation Skills (Position-taking, Criteria, Defense – Dave & Phil

When asked to evaluate the "racial climate" at HWC, 57.7% of the students provided a recognizably evaluative response, while 17.4% said they "didn't know." The other 25.5% did something *other than* provide an evaluation, making that the second biggest group.

Among the evaluations, student responses frequently included explicit references to evaluative criteria, though the percentages of students who did so varied by the quality of the response (see table below), with references to their evaluative criteria being highest among those who evaluated the climate positively or negatively.

Students also showed a broad willingness to defend their responses, for the most part, with the percentages of those who provided positive or negative evaluations coming in on the high end. Interestingly, the *highest* rate of response defense was for those who said they "didn't know."

Racial Climate Evaluation	Total % of Respondents	% of those that Make Explicit Reference to Evaluative Criterion	% of those that Defend Response
Positive Eval	**43.8%** (n=324)	84% (n=273)	72% (n=233)
Mixed/Neutral	**12.8%** (n=95)	55.8% (n=53)	61.1% (n=58)
Negative	**1.08%** (n=8)	89.5% (n=7)	75% (n=6)
"Don't Know"	**17.4%** (n=129)	0% (n=0)	77.5% (n=100)
Other	**25.5%** (n=189)	0% (n=0)	27% (n=51)

Use of Examples/Support in Elaboration

In addition to the quantification of students' sense of community, those responses were rated for the presence of examples in the elaboration of the response, and 70.84% of the respondents provided an example/event in support of their response. Of those examples, 74% specified an interaction with a person and 72% specified a curricular context, while 25.9% specified a cocurricular context (e.g. SGA, student services) and 7.8% specified a physical space such as the library or other communal space.

72.7% of the answers included the student's definition of "Community," but in most of those (70.1%) the definition was implicit. 9.7% of the students referenced an example or moment with a connection to their identity positionality (e.g. race, ethnicity, gender, (dis)ability status, religion, age, sexuality), and most of those (7.35%) were explicit about it.

As a result of these findings, we find ourselves wondering what is hindering students from explicitly defining their terms, and whether it is something about the question, the survey, student assumptions or expectations, or something else.

Possible Recommendation: Cross curricular focus on "defining the terms" of student responses to questions when invoking or responding to questions about contested (or variably understood) concepts like, "sense of community."

Give students a chance/space to explicitly state what they think community is. Maybe this could be a focus group, a community wall, or some other way that is not a survey

Open-Ended Opportunity

The survey closed with an invitation for students: "Before you go, are there any responses you would like to clarify, or anything you would like to share about your experience taking this survey?" 623 students responded in some way. Those responses were coded as expressions of Clarification, Satisfaction, Complaint, and Suggestion (please note that responses may have included more than one of those expressions and also more than one of the sub categories; for example a single response may have included a suggestion about HWC as well as a complaint about HWC and the survey).

	% of Responses	Of those, Re: HWC	Of those, Re: Survey	Of those, Re: Other
Clarification	**27.8%** (n=173)	44% (n=76)	60.1% (n=104)	6.9% (n=12)
Satisfaction	**23.4%** (n=146)	37% (n=54)	63.7% (n=93)	4.8% (n=7)
Complaint	**8.8%** (n=55)	52.7% (n=29)	41.8% (n=23)	14.5% (n=8)
Suggestion	**7.9%** (n=49)	65.3% (n= 32)	34.7% (n=17)	6.1% (n=3)
Other	**32.1%** (n=200)	n/a	n/a	n/a

The HWC Assessment Committee dedicates the Spring 2023 edition of the Assessment Times to honor the memory of Dr. Cecilia Lopez. Dr. Lopez's vision and advanced understanding of the need for and power of assessing student learning was fundamental to creating a strong, vibrant committee and culture of assessment at HWC. Dr. Lopez taught and inspired us, pushed us to be our best, and advocated fiercely for assessment. We would not be the committee that we are today without her influence and tremendous support. Although not all current Assessment Committee members have a "Dr. Lopez story," we have all been directly touched by her tireless work on our behalf, and we remain indebted to her dedication and vision.

Dr. Cecilia Lopez (3/14/41 - 3/21/23)

HWC Assessment Committee

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