

Social and Applied Sciences Department

Unit-Level Assessment Liaison Report

Spring 2018

Liaison Project Start Date: **SPRING 2018**

Liaison Report prepared by **Domenico Ferri**

I. Department Buy-In and Outcome Definition

The Social and Applied Sciences Department (SAS) is one of the largest departments at Harold Washington College and within the total City Colleges of Chicago system. To be sure, we offer more courses and serve a larger population of students than the entirety of Olive Harvey College. I believe that fact is something of which we all can be proud, but at the same time, the sheer enormity of a department such as ours can present challenges in terms of pinpointing a chief emphasis. Prior to absorbing the Applied Sciences department during the summer of 2015, the previously-named Social Sciences Department housed Anthropology, Economics, Education, Geography, History, Political Science, Psychology, and Sociology. When we combined into one unit, the Applied Science Department brought into our fold Child Development, Criminal Justice, and Social Work.

As all of our talented and wonderful colleagues continue growing into this massive and awesome cohort, many conversations developed and were aimed at identifying a common conceptual thread that unites such a diverse array of disciplines. Out of this ongoing self-analysis and dialogue, we arrived at the realization that our courses, colleagues, and content - in their own innovative and time-honored ways - pursue some form of social justice and a broader dynamic of equality as we analyze and address countless domestic and international social problems. With the enormity and importance of these shared goals in mind, I recently learned that HWC's Assessment Committee had begun prioritizing civic engagement as a new category for General Education SLOs. Seeing how this dovetailed with the very core of the Social and Applied Science Department's mission, I began reflecting on how course completion can lead to the tangible and individualized actualization of the aforementioned goals, eventually landing upon civic engagement as a kind of cumulative result. That is to say that on some level and in a wide variety of ways, all of our courses inspire, require, or explore civic engagement in conjunction with content exploration.

Hoping that SAS learning outcomes mobilize students within their respective communities and beyond, our esteemed colleagues aspire to provide students with the knowledge and tools needed to positively impact the world around them in myriad ways, ideally channeling the various skills

they learn in our classes into a career path that they find fulfilling or toward a career that's specifically geared toward social justice or simply serving the greater good as an educator, activist, politician, lawyer, social worker, community organizer, economist, geographer, counselor, therapist, law enforcement agent, parent, etc.. In essence, all of our colleagues prioritize civic engagement as a key course component in both the short and long-term sense. With an existing consensus, it was not difficult in the least to establish buy-in due to the fact that the entire department is keen on both enhancement and quantifying/qualifying this pre-existing dynamic. Reaching out to the entire department, each full-time colleague with whom I discussed this project offered enthusiastic support and displayed a level of curiosity with what might be revealed. Moreover, there seemed to be a collective awareness of and appreciation for student learning outcomes aimed at stimulating civic engagement. As a department co-chair, I knew that having all departmental course syllabi at my fingertips would enable me to have fast and easy access to these SLOs and that their exploration would represent the first phase of this project.

II. Assessment Research and Design

Seeking to measure civic engagement by way of student learning outcomes, my research on the subject led me to a variety of definitions and programs with a community-minded emphasis. For example, Carrie Nepstad encouraged me to take a look at Indiana University, Purdue University's interesting assessment program focused on "Civic Minded graduate." Their indirect assessment is extensive and a useful reference point for my own research and tool development. Resources on civic engagement in higher education abound, but these five works, in particular, were helpful in terms of exploring practical applications in assessment:

Ehrlich, Thomas. *Civic Responsibility and Higher Education*. Westport: The American Council on Education and Greenwood Publishing, 2000.

Hartley, Matthew and Saltmarsh, John eds. *"To Serve a Larger Purpose": Engagement for Democracy and the Transformation of Higher Education*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press 2011.

McCartney, Alison Rios Millett; Bennion, Elizabeth A; Simpson, Dick W. eds. *Teaching Civic Engagement: From Student to Active Citizen*. Washington D.C.: American Political Science Association, 2013.

Olson, Gary A. and Worsham, Lynn eds. *Education as Civic Engagement: Toward a More Democratic Society*. New York: Macmillan Press, 2012.

Woolard, Chad. *Engaging Civic Engagement: Framing the Civic Education Movement in Higher Education*. London: Lexington Books, 2017.

Ultimately the civic engagement model that I consider to be most relevant, concise and comprehensive is Thomas Ehrlich's, which can be found in *Civic Responsibility and Higher Education*. Ehrlich notes that "civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes." With an invigorated sense of how this concept aligns with the hundreds of courses that SAS offers, I began compiling our existing SLO's, highlighting those I regarded as "civic engagement-oriented."

This left a massive list of well over two-hundred student learning outcomes, all of which in some way speak to civic engagement, which in itself was an encouraging discovery. Trying to introduce some semblance of organization, I established three categories and corresponding "Departmental" SLO's to help make better sense of what our students are learning across a dozen disciplines:

1. Reflection and Awareness (Examination of Self and Society)
 - a. Departmental SLO: Compare and contrast one's cultural identity with local, national, and international paradigms.
2. Examination and Critique (Deconstructing Policy and Power)
 - a. Departmental SLO: Analyze how and the extent to which activism has led to social and/or institutional change.
3. Public Activity and Engagement (taking action and interfacing beyond the classroom)
 - a. Departmental SLO: Interact with community members in order to reveal chief concerns and to develop appropriate action.

III. Pilot Assessment Tools and Processes

In an effort to create a pilot assessment derived from select course-level SLOs, I used the aforementioned threads to categorize accordingly and formulate corresponding survey questions. Herein, the sage advice of Erica McCormack and Jeff Swigart inspired a more manageable adaptation that could utilize Likert Scale-based questions on an indirect assessment. In doing so, I felt that we could establish the starting point for a multi-tiered Civic Engagement Assessment as a preliminary step prior to expanding our assessment efforts toward more direct measurements of students demonstrating their civic engagement learning. This strategy led to the framing of questions suitable for an indirect assessment surveying students' perceptions related to three dimensions of Civic Engagement:

1. Reflection and Awareness (Examination of Self and Society)
 - a. Popular depictions (TV, movies, news, and social media) of my racial and ethnic identity are accurate.
 - b. Yours and the well-being of your friends and family is supported adequately by government, related agencies, and their associated outreach.

2. Examination and Critique (Deconstructing Policy and Power)

a. In my Social and Applied Science course(s), I learned about how protest and activism have led to improved living conditions.

b. I have the power and ability to influence and improve living conditions within my own community.

3. Public Activity and Engagement (Action and Interface)

a. My Social and Applied Science courses have led me to interact with community members in order to understand their most pressing concerns.

b. My Social and Applied Science courses have inspired me to contribute to an organization's ongoing efforts to enhance living conditions in a local community.

Each of these inquiries is followed by an open-ended question asking students to elaborate or provide an example in response to their answer.

IV. Administer Specific Assessment

On May 4th, 2018, I sent the following invitation to circulate the google form survey to all full-time instructors in the Social and Applied Sciences Department:

Dear Full-Time Colleagues,

Writing to tell you about how I've spent a significant part of this semester working with the HWC Assessment Committee as the Social and Applied Sciences Department's liaison. In short, my ongoing project therein has been devoted to exploring the link between civic engagement and our courses' student learning outcomes. For the full explanation and rationale of this project, please feel free to read the attachment.

At this juncture, I am rolling out an indirect assessment to gather a basic data set. My hope is to learn more about the extent to which our courses collectively stimulate and illuminate civic engagement. To that end, I ask that you please send the following link to as many of your students as you can:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeAPjul71gh_WrYYltUdK0efNHsGzmtFteToYx-bs4JZ_-Z0g/viewform?c=0&w=1&usp=mail_form_link

A simple email blast to your students with the above survey link sent to your students through blackboard would be immensely helpful for this project. The assessment is only six questions long, so it will not be burdensome in the least and yet would produce valuable data that I can use for a more extensive survey down the road. If you have further questions or would like to discuss this project as it pertains to our wonderful SAS department, please don't hesitate to contact me!

Best regards,

Domenico

The survey closed on May 25th with what I regard as a sizeable enough pool (74 students). I deployed this pilot tool/survey derived from the questions noted above to all full-time SAS faculty. I also used my own students to help establish the first sample set for the assessment pilot (noted below). Last but not least, my intention is to feature these Civic Engagement SLO's on our department's website with departmental consent. Moreover, if any instructor would like to

include them alongside required course- level SLO's, they would be welcomed to do so. At our next department meeting, I will present the results and discuss with colleagues whether we would like our civic engagement acumen to be advertised officially on our homepage.

V. Data Analysis

The first phase of the indirect assessment deployment ended in May 25th with 74 respondents. I intend to deploy it once again toward the end of the summer 2018 semester, and begin a full analysis of these results at the beginning of the spring 2018 semester. Conclusions drawn from the analysis will inform the development of a larger, direct assessment tool that will be deployed throughout the entire department (over 240 courses), both face to face and online in the final weeks of the fall 2018 semester.

VI. Supporting Evidence-Based Change (Use of Findings)

Work on this phase will begin during the fall 2018 semester by examining the data accumulated from the indirect survey. The indirect pilot assessment also will run in the summer, accumulating more data, and I eventually will have amassed a larger number of responses that will better inform the development of a more detailed tool to be deployed across an even broader number of courses. I also hope to “close the loop” by using relevant data to create new SLOS, assignments, and introduce new course content, perhaps even a new civics crash course, if possible.

Success Factors

Once I am able to engage in a full on analysis of the indirect tool's results and their significance, one category at a time, I intend to enhance the precision and clarity of the tool. I also intend to calibrate a concise report of the findings that will buttress more direct follow-up questions, still aligned with the aforementioned civic engagement SLO's. Any vague language that may have misled or skewed student responses can be modified to better illustrate the extent to which civic engagement factors into SAS course completion.

Recommendations

Continue into Stage IV with a through data analysis of the indirect survey. Develop a full-scale implementation of a new and improved tool for the fall 2018 semester. For this more detailed tool, it has been recommended that we add to the beginning of the survey form a field for entering student id numbers that we can use to capture demographic data moving forward. Also, the intention is to utilize OpenBook for more thorough analysis.