

OIR Assessment Tool
ES USAT Summary, Fall 2011-Spring 2012
Fall 2012

Purpose of Survey: *The purpose of the Essential Studies USAT Summary is to consolidate end-of-course evaluation information from courses designated as part of Essential Studies (ES), creating a program-wide snapshot of student perceptions of learning related to ES goals.*

1. The data collected addresses information relating to what university group or situation? (I.e., from whom is the university collecting this information? Whose perceptions are we reading?)
Student perception information is collected.
2. How often is this tool used and analyzed? What time of year?
Students complete the form at the end of every semester, and the compiled ES information is posted on the OIR site after forms are processed.
3. To whom does the assessment group believe that an analysis of this report would be beneficial? In other words, what individuals, departments, or programs need this information in order to have reliable information to 'close the loop' on their assessment process?
The information is used by the Essential Studies Committee members and the Essential Studies Director. It is also used by faculty teaching individual ES courses and by their departments. Since information is broken down by breadth area, it would be possible for faculty divided into areas (i.e., Arts & Humanities, Communication, Social Science, and STEM) to review data relevant to their own area and draw conclusions about student perceptions of ES learning in those courses.
4. What UND student learning goals are assessed?
 - a. Use Y, N, ? to indicate whether the instrument collects data relevant to each of the following Institutional and/or General Education goals:

___Y___ 1 Communication – written or oral (“able to write and speak in various settings with a sense of purpose/audience”)

___Y___ 2 Thinking and reasoning – critical thinking (or “be intellectually curious”; analyze, synthesize, evaluate)

___Y___ 3 Thinking and reasoning – creative thinking (or “be intellectually creative”; explore, discover, engage)

___Y___ 4 Thinking and reasoning – quantitative reasoning (“apply empirical data...analyze graphical information”)

___Y___ 5 Information literacy (“be able to access and evaluate...for effective, efficient, and ethical use”)

___Y___ 6 Diversity (“demonstrate understanding of diversity and use that understanding...”)

___N___ 7 Lifelong learning (“commit themselves to lifelong learning”)

___N___ 8 Service/citizenship (“share responsibility both for their communities and for the world”)
 - b. Additional goals

No additional goals for learning are addressed.

5. What are the findings/results of this tool?

- a. From Question 4a above: For the goals with a Y or ?, describe the relevant findings/results from this survey:

Mean scores are usually in the 3.0 to 3.5 range (on a 1-4 Likert scale), regardless of breadth area and regardless of goal. This indicates that students perceive a reasonably strong degree of improvement in their ES skills. It is worth noting that the skills which most students indicate as areas of learning during their ES courses are skills which make sense given the breadth area (e.g., quantitative skills in the Math/Science/Technology breadth area).

- b. Other findings/results

We noted that students seemed to be unclear about which goal was intended to be addressed (e.g., not necessarily identifying the Communication goal within the Communication breadth area – and yet all courses counting within that area do have oral or written communication as the intended learning outcome). There is also confusion about capstones, judging by the fact that a far greater proportion of respondents chose to answer the capstone questions than would statistically occur (i.e., students typically take one ES capstone course during their time at UND, but they must complete 12 non-capstone ES courses).

6. Is this tool a direct measure, an indirect measure, or a non-measure of student learning?

This is an indirect measure of student learning as it elicits student perceptions about the effectiveness of their own learning.

7. Does this tool empower individuals or the university to better understand and assess student learning at the university? If so, how?

Yes. Information about student perceptions contributes to a clear understanding of learning.

8. Are there recommendations for changes (e.g., additional or better tools, different means of analysis, etc.) that might improve the university's ability to use this information?

As noted, it appears that students are misunderstanding aspects of the ES program (i.e., which courses are capstones, which goals are addressed in the courses they're taking) and/or misunderstanding instructions for answering the questions. It would be good to convene a subcommittee including representatives from assessment, Essential Studies, and OIR to reconsider the language used on the forms.

9. What value does the committee place on this tool for helping to achieve the university's assessment plan?

Student perceptions are definitely valued within the assessment plan. It is important to continue collecting them.

10. Review Summary (one or two sentences).

Findings are generally positive in terms of student perceptions of their ES learning. However, the questions on the form don't appear to be working exactly as originally intended.

11. What might faculty want to know about this survey? *(Please provide one to two paragraphs describing some findings from this survey. These paragraphs will be forwarded to academic departments as a means of keeping them informed about the existence of information that might be useful to them.)*

Summary totals from the Essential Studies questions on the Fall 2011-Spring 2012 USAT forms show a positive picture of student perceptions of their learning around ES goals. Regardless of breadth area, students typically scored their learning above the mid-point of 2.0 (typically scoring themselves in the 3.0 to 3.5 range). However, that leaves some room for improvement on the learning outcomes emphasized in the various ES courses.

Two findings related to breadth areas are particularly of interest. First, it's clear that in many cases, the goals most frequently identified as well-learned within an ES course make sense given the breadth area of the course. One example is the clear emphasis on quantitative reasoning and critical thinking indicated within the Math/Science/Technology area. Second, it was good to see that Social-Cultural Diversity, an area which had been identified as far too weakly learned within the old GE program, is one of two frequently identified goals cited as emphasized in courses within the Social Science area. Furthermore, students score their learning in Diversity quite highly (3.5 in Fall 2011, 3.4 in Spring 2012).

However, the summary information also suggests that a substantial number of students are not fully understanding the questions or perhaps not understanding the ES program generally. For example, courses in the Communication breadth area are required to address the communication goal, but students often identify a different goal (most often critical or creative thinking) as the ES goal addressed in a communication course. Another example of student confusion occurs in students misidentifying courses as capstones. If these issues can be addressed through form revision or through greater attention to clarity and explanation on the part of faculty, information generated through the ES questions on the USAT form will be more useful both for the ES program and for faculty in individual ES courses.

12. What results about this survey would students find interesting? *(Please provide a few sentences or bullet points of highlights, written in student-friendly language. This will be posted on the assessment website and distributed to students via other means as well.)*

What do student responses to the end-of-course evaluation form questions about Essential Studies tell their faculty about the program?

- Most student respondents in 2011-12 believed they are improving on the Essential Studies skills, especially in the area of critical thinking.***
- Students in Social Science classes see themselves learning a great deal about Social-Cultural Diversity.***
- A number of students score their learning of ES skills at the top level of 4.0 (on a 1.0-4.0 scale), although 3.0 is the mostly commonly selected score.***

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