



Indiana State University  
Division of Student Affairs  
Office of Research and Assessment

***Report of General Student Learning Outcomes  
as Measured by Student Employees' Site Supervisors***

*October, 2008*

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Student learning outcomes are rapidly taking center stage as the principal gauge of higher education's effectiveness.  
*-Council for Higher Education Accreditation, 2001*

With increasing frequency, calls for institutions of higher education to effectively measure student learning are being heard from multiple constituencies; from governmental units to employers to students as well and insistence for "concrete evidence" from multiple sources to report learning outcomes results in an understandable format (ACHE, 2003) is well-intentioned but extremely difficult to design. To be sure, college student development is a "complex, holistic, multi-centric activity that occurs throughout and across the college experience" (Keeling, 2004). As such, the measurement of holistic student growth, learning, and development (GLD) must be made in a multitude of ways to assure a comprehensive understanding of the ways in and the degree to which GLD is occurring, but it's reporting can be done in an "understandable format" as is the case with the Student Employee Assessment at Indiana State University. But more so for purposes of placating external demands for accountability, colleges and universities should engage in meaningful assessment activities to assure they are "making good" on their tacit promise that students, as a result of studying at a given institution, will be "better" than they would have been had they not studied at a particular college or university.

Unfortunately, precise and universally- accepted definitions of general learning outcomes have not been articulated. Rather, definitions of learning outcomes seem to be culturally-based in a variety of models, from a traditional apprentice or "trade school" model focusing on "readin', writin', 'rithmetic" approach employed by those holding to a philosophy that higher education is tasked only with guiding content-based academic learning, to broader philosophies that consider a holistic understanding of growth, learning, and development (GLD) along broad domains of human development, often seen in liberal education models. The more traditional "3-R's" approach to education is embraced by vocational and technical programs and prepares students to function within narrow parameters of performance after graduation, while more holistic approaches task themselves with supporting the development of content-based knowledge along with broader constructs of development.

The Division of Student Affairs at Indiana State University embraces a holistic philosophy of student development, believing that a competitive advantage will be held by graduates possessing advanced

skills of critical thinking, self-awareness, communication, appreciating diversity, membership and leadership, citizenship, and relationship management; domains that have been identified as critical to successful management of life after graduation (Barratt & Frederick, 2006). To that end, the current research project has been designed to measure student GLD along broad domains of behavior as opposed to perception or affective responses to the collegiate experience holding to the belief that it is what students “do” as opposed to what they “think or feel” that is more important as they navigate through their lives.

Empirical research of working college students has revealed disparate results, ranging from finding a positive correlation of working with academic, social, and interpersonal growth, to employment being negatively correlated with overall performance (McCartan, 1988, Noel, 1995). Yet, general findings suggest that students employed in a university or college setting for a limited number of hours per week do experience positive results in terms of their overall GLD (Astin, 1993).

One of the ways in which Indiana State University is beginning to measure student GLD is through the evaluation of student employees. Student employees find themselves working in an environment that acknowledges their other obligations, including attending class and studying, and are responsive to student’s having other commitments. Yet, student workers find themselves in settings that very much reflect the same expectations found in the broader world of work. As their student employment experience reflects those same expectations, it is appropriate to observe students’ “outputs” as reflective of their application of internal skills that can be developed as a result of their work experience.

## Instrument

To assist in the collection of data, a survey instrument was designed through collaboration of Indiana State University’s Student Affairs Office of Research and Assessment, the Office of Assessment and Accreditation, and the institution’s Career Center. The survey was designed to be completed by ISU-based supervisors of student employees and consists of 24 items designed to measure general learning and 4 items that allow demographic analysis of raw data. The general learning questions were designed to complement ISU’s General Education Learning Outcomes along with the University Learning Outcomes Assessment (UniLOA) domains (Barratt & Frederick, 2006).

Each of the survey’s items provide five possible answer choices, with narrative consistent with the wording of the item, but asking supervisors to measure performance as 1) not good at all, 2) not very good, 3) average, 4) good, or 5) very good. The language used for the items as well as answer options was selected as it was easily understandable and direct to anyone completing the form. The items and answer choices were highly consistent with a like survey of workplace-based student internship supervisors to assure consistency between the two surveys and to allow reliable comparisons to be drawn between results.

## Method

The survey designed for this project was made available to student employee supervisors online. An email was sent through the ISU email system with an invitation to participate and a timeline for completion of all forms and follow-up phone calls were made to remind supervisors of the request for information. Raw data was stored on a secure server maintained by the ISU Career Center. Specific

instructions to supervisors included a note that results would be used only in an aggregate form and that no reporting would be formalized for any individual department or supervisor completing the form.

Analysis of the raw data was conducted to establish simple mean averages for each item. No instructions were provided to supervisors regarding definitions of any of the items. Assuming that there are no existing templates or precise definitions of such terms in the general world of work, variance was introduced to the data to replicate a “real world” setting by allowing each supervisor to employ his or her own definition of the individual item.

## Results

Simple means were calculated for each of the survey’s 24 items. A small number of responses were generated reflective of the rather limited number of student employees working over the summer months. Because of the small sample, only simple means were calculated. As this project is anticipated to be long-term, with new data being collected at the end of each academic term (semesters and summer), future analyses will include demographic analysis of year in school, gender, grade point average, and others, to allow for longitudinal studies to measure holistic growth.

Item means and standard deviations for each variable are presented in the table that follows.

<b>Item</b>	<b>n=95</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
Attitude (application to work).....		3.8	.90
Dependability.....		4.1	1.10
Ability to Learn .....		4.3	.86
Quantity of Work.....		3.7	.77
Quality of Work.....		4.1	.83
Relations with Others.....		4.1	.83
Maturity/Poise.....		4.0	.89
Finding New Ways to Think About Problems or Topics.....		4.2	.90
Ability to Think Independently.....		3.8	.82
Evaluating Opposing Options or View Point.....		3.9	1.31
Capacity for Critical Analysis.....		3.0	1.89
Communicating Ideas by Writing Effectively.....		3.1	1.85

Capacity for Reasoned Inquiry.....	3.2	1.67
Communicating Ideas by Speaking Effectively.....	4.1	.90
Making Informed and Reasonable Choices.....	3.3	1.70
Solving Complex Problems.....	4.0	1.10
Learning Effectively on his/her Own.....	3.6	1.50
Working with Others on Projects.....	3.2	1.80
Understanding that Learning is a Lifelong Process.....	4.0	1.10
Understanding and Respecting the Cultures, Attitudes, and Customs of Others.....	3.9	1.50
Ability to Adapt to Change.....	3.4	1.90
Reading Ability.....	3.5	1.50
Demonstrates Pride in ISU.....	3.9	1.60

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## Discussion

Critical to any behavioral assessment is the need to understand “where students are” in sweeping terms, and to design training and intervention programs designed to bolster areas of weakness while at the same time, to acknowledge areas of strength which can be exploited for students’ well-being. Results from the Student Employee Assessment suggest that ISU’s student employees are generally motivated and dedicated and possess a high “work ethic” which is commendable. At the same time, some essential skills appear to be lacking and can be categorized into “precise” and “general.” Precise skills that have been identified as weak include general reading and writing and weakness in general skills can be identified as adaptability to change, working with others on projects, and a capacity for both reasoned inquiry and critical thinking.

In reviewing the data, it is important to observe not only the mean scores, but the standard deviations as well. The first seven questions of the survey sought information of broad, sweeping behaviors, while the last 16 questions were far more precise. As such, higher scores were awarded to student employees resulting in lower standard deviations, while the more precise measures represented in the latter questions generated far wider variance in scores reported by supervisors.

## Future Research

The sample size in this investigation was fairly low, and as this is merely the first report of a long-term investigation, it was decided that merging results with specific student demographics was inappropriate at this time. As the sample size increases over time, as the same information will be collected at the end of each semester and summer, analysis will focus on demographic variables to assist in the measurement of growth, learning, and development over time.

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