

Psychology 101: Introduction to Psychology

Learning Outcomes Assessment Project

Executive Summary

Stage 1: Designing and Proposing a Learning Outcomes Project

Following up on the pilot studies done on the Catonsville Campus alone, a system wide Psychology (PSYC) 101 LOA was designed and proposed. The first study on the Catonsville campus had shown that a faculty created cumulative final correlated highly with the College Level Proficiency Exam (CLEP) designed by the Educational Testing Service. Grades earned by students on the CLEP, the College Final and their final course grades showed a high degree of consistency. This confirmed that the grades earned by Catonsville students were in line with national norms. In the Fall of 2003, the entire psychology faculty was polled as to what they considered the most important areas covered in Introduction to Psychology. By the Spring of 2004, a 50-item standardized final was developed to measure students' knowledge of seven key areas of psychology based on the key components as listed in the common course outline. External feedback on the validity of the assessment instrument was sought and obtained from several psychology professors who teach Introductory Psychology at four-year institutions.

Stage 2: Implementing the Design and Collecting and Analyzing the Data

In May of 2004, the test was given to 324 students at CCBC Catonsville, 119 students at CCBC Dundalk, and 381 students at CCBC Essex. In an attempt to control for motivational factors, it was agreed that all instructors should weight the results of the test as 10% of the student's final course grade. The mean student score was 37.97 questions answered correctly out of the total 50 items on the exam. Overall scores on the three campuses were found to be very similar. Students taught by part-time instructors were found to have very similar scores to students taught by full-time instructors. This finding affirmed the quality of the courses taught by our Psychology Adjunct Faculty. Minor differences between the campuses were found on four of the seven topics measured by the test. The overall mean for Caucasian/white students was 39.03 while that of African-American/black students was 36.77. While an issue of concern, it should be noted that this gap was smaller than differences obtained in many other CCBC course LOAs. An item analysis was done on each of the 50 test items to identify particular areas in which students seemed to have knowledge deficits.

Stage 3: Redesigning the Course to Improve Student Learning

As a result of the findings reported in Stage 2, strategies were developed in an attempt to improve the overall performance of all the students in this course. Particular attention was focused on the approximately 30% of enrolled students who received final course grades of D and F and the approximately 8% of enrolled students who withdrew from the course. It was agreed that all students who received a D or an F on a test during the semester should be required to complete a study skills questionnaire designed to identify specific deficiencies in their study strategies. In the event a student received a second D or F on an exam, they would be required to have a conference focused on their study skills with their instructor before being permitted to take any additional tests. In addition to these strategies, numerous meetings of the psychology faculty were held to discuss closing the gap and other issues relating to student performance in Psyc 101.

Stage 4: Implementing Course Revisions and Reassessing Student Learning

With the various interventions in place, 487 CCBC Catonsville and Dundalk students were administered the same 50-item assessment instrument during the Fall 2006 semester. In the Fall 2007 semester, the same test was given to 303 students at CCBC Essex. The data indicated that there was a significant improvement in student performance at all campuses. Out of the possible score of 50, CCBC Catonsville students increased from 38.41 to 40.17, CCBC Dundalk students increased from 37.39 to 39.59 while students at CCBC Essex increased from 37.77 to 40.29. The difference between Caucasian/white and African-American/black students decreased from 2.26 items in Spring 2004 to 1.26 items on the Catonsville and Dundalk campuses in the Fall of 2006 and 1.73 items on the Essex campus in the Fall of 2007. Although this still indicates a gap, it should be noted the gap appears to be shrinking.

Stage 5: Final Analysis and Summary of Results

It is clear that overall student performance increased from Spring 2004 to Fall 2007. Although this type of experimental design makes it difficult to determine precisely which variables contributed to this significant improvement, the data was in the preferred direction. Overall, Psyc 101 students showed an increase in test scores and the gap between Caucasian and African American students decreased. It is clear that mean student performance in Psychology 101 is very strong whether taught by full time or adjunct faculty on all campuses. Further, this performance correlates highly with National expectations for course outcomes. It should be noted that the success of this LOA project was due to the cumulative efforts of many individuals. We hope that CCBC students will be the ultimate beneficiary of the collaborative efforts of the assessment team.

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