

2007-2008

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University

2007-2008 CLA INSTITUTIONAL REPORT

Contents

This report presents Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) results for colleges and universities that tested freshmen and seniors over the 2007–2008 academic year. We hope that you find the new features in this report useful: condensed findings for ease of reference; increased diagnostic information with which to examine patterns of performance across CLA task types; and language designed to communicate your outcomes to institutional researchers, faculty and trustees alike.

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II Attachments

Technical Appendices

The *Technical Appendices* report CLA outcomes in detail and technical information underpinning your results.

PowerPoint Presentation

A *PowerPoint Presentation* accompanies this report to help you communicate the CLA approach and your institution-level results to campus constituencies.

Architecture of the CLA Tasks

Architecture of the CLA Tasks provides a closer look at the actual tasks students take and how they are scored. It includes (1) basic descriptions of CLA task types; (2) the document library and questions for a Performance Task; (3) a detailed examination of one Performance Task question, including what it measures, applicable parts of the scoring rubric and sample student responses at different levels; and (4) examples of one Make-an-Argument and one Critique-an-Argument task and sample student responses at different levels.

Introduction

The Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) offers a new approach to assessment and improvement of teaching and learning in higher education. Over 370 institutions and 110,000 students have participated to date. Growing commitment on the part of higher education to assess student learning makes this a good time to review the distinguishing features of the CLA and how it connects to improving teaching and learning on your campus.

The CLA presents realistic problems that require students to analyze complex materials. Several different types of materials are used that vary in relevance to the task, credibility, and other characteristics. Students' written responses to the task are graded to assess their abilities to think critically, reason analytically, solve problems, and communicate clearly and cogently. The institution—not the student—is the initial primary unit of analysis. The CLA is designed to measure an institution's contribution, or value added, to the development of these competencies, including the effects of changes to curriculum and pedagogy.

The CLA is intended primarily to assist faculty, department chairs, school administrators and others interested in programmatic change to improve teaching and learning, particularly with respect to strengthening higher order skills. The CLA approach also assumes that multiple assessment indicators are required; no single test to benchmark student learning in higher education is feasible or desirable. This, however, does not mean certain skills judged to be important by most faculty and administrators cannot be

measured; the higher order skills the CLA focuses on fall into this measurable category.

The CLA uses detailed scoring guides to accurately and reliably evaluate student responses. It also encourages institutions to compare their student learning results on the CLA with learning at other institutions.

The signaling quality of the CLA is important because institutions need to benchmark (have a frame of reference for) where they stand and how much progress their students have made relative to the progress of students at other colleges. Otherwise, how do they know how well they are doing? Yet, the CLA is not about ranking institutions. Rather, it is about highlighting differences between them that can lead to improvements in teaching and learning. While the CLA is indeed an assessment instrument, it is deliberately designed to contribute to the improvement of teaching and learning. In this respect it is in a league of its own.

Methods

The CLA tests groups of your freshmen and seniors to measure improvement in higher order skills: critical thinking, analytic reasoning, problem solving, and written communication. One way to measure improvement would be by comparing the average CLA scores for your seniors and freshmen. *Appendix A* in the attached *Technical Appendices* includes this type of information.

However, the students you tested may not perfectly represent their respective freshmen and senior classes. For example, participating freshmen may have higher or lower abilities compared to their freshmen classmates or participating seniors. Unadjusted comparisons across schools are also problematic because colleges employ different admissions standards and serve students with different academic abilities. Thus, to make meaningful and fair comparisons among schools, it is first necessary to level the playing field by adjusting scores to control for preexisting differences among schools in their students' academic abilities

To do this, we compute a mean expected CLA score for the freshmen at your school and a mean expected CLA score for the seniors at your school. These expected values are based on two factors, namely: (a) the general academic ability of your students prior to matriculation and (b) the typical relationship between CLA scores and general academic ability at other colleges.

The difference between how well the freshmen performed (relative to expectations) and how well the seniors performed (relative to expectations) is your institution's value-added estimate.

We convert all three scores (freshmen relative to expectations, seniors relative to expectations, and the value-added estimate) to percentile ranks (for ease of understanding). We then assign performance levels. The table on the next page illustrates the process.

Appendix E details our scaling procedures and history. *Appendix H* documents our regression equations. Please consult our website for additional methodological and policy information on the CLA.

Results

Western Carolina University contributes more to the learning gains made by students than 56 percent of the 176 four-year undergraduate institutions participating in the 2007–2008 CLA. Western Carolina University performed At Expected.

	Freshmen		Seniors		Value-Added Estimate	
	Percentile Rank	Performance Level	Percentile Rank	Performance Level	Percentile Rank	Performance Level
<i>Total CLA Score</i>	44	At	53	At	56	At
<i>Performance Task</i>	30	At	66	At	88	Above
<i>Analytic Writing Task</i>	66	At	30	At	19	Below
<i>Make-an-Argument</i>	62	At	25	Below	17	Below
<i>Critique-an-Argument</i>	67	At	43	At	30	At

Moving Forward

We encourage institutions to (1) communicate results across campus, (2) link student-level CLA results with other data sources, (3) pursue in-depth sampling, and (4) participate in CLA in the Classroom.

A PowerPoint presentation accompanies this report to help you communicate your results. While institution-level CLA results operate as a signaling tool of overall institutional performance, student-level CLA results are provided for you to link with other data sources (e.g., course-taking patterns, grades, portfolio assessments, student satisfaction and engagement, major-specific tests, etc.). These internal analyses can help you generate hypotheses for additional research, which you can pursue through CLA in-depth sampling in experimental areas (e.g., programs or colleges within your campus) in subsequent years.

Finally, CLA in the Classroom is a new curricular and pedagogical program that complements the CLA as it shifts the focus from general assessment to the course-level work of faculty. It provides an opportunity for faculty members to learn to diagnose their individual students' work and to receive guidance in creating their own performance tasks, which are designed to supplement the educational reform movement toward a case and problem approach in learning and teaching.

Indeed, through the steps noted above we encourage institutions to move toward what we intend to become a continuous system of improvement in teaching and learning stimulated by the CLA. Without your contributions, the CLA would not be on the exciting path that it is today. We look forward to your continued involvement!

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