

Student Survey Results – Summer 2012 Student Assessment of Instruction (SAI)

To: Carl Creasman, Professor, History
The members of the working group on the SAI
From: Laura Blasi, Director, Institutional Assessment
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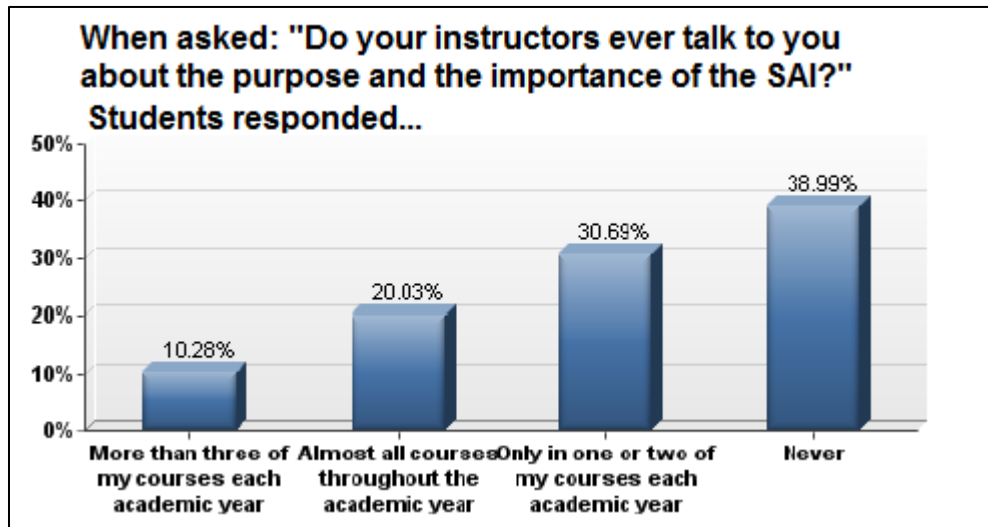
Overview

Launched on June 18th a survey of students regarding their experience of the Student Assessment of Instruction (SAI) was sent to all students enrolled in the summer term* (25,700.) Within a week the survey had 1,323 responses (or 5%.) This number of student responses is adequate for us to learn from the students and to document their perceptions of the SAI. The survey was developed by Carl Creasman and Laura Blasi working with Jessica King for the purpose of providing faculty with more information about the student experience of the SAI.

Summary of Observations

1. A majority of responses were submitted returning students – 46% (not beginning 21% or graduating 33%)
2. Just over 55% of all responding reported they took the SAI frequently in their classes.
3. 40% reported that their instructors had never explained the purpose of the SAI (see Graph I below.)
4. Regarding possible incentives, students suggested better communication about the purpose and the process; evidence that the results have meaning and that there is an impact; and compensation in the form of bonus points or prizes.
5. Overall students report accessing ATLAS once a day or more (44%) or a few times a week (47%.)
6. Only 3% (37) of all of the students noted that they had a problem taking the survey.
7. Of those who never complete (228 or 17% of all responses) most report they have never been asked.
8. Those who have not completed it report being too busy, forgetting, and point to a lack of importance.

Graph 1. Instructor Explanation of the SAI



A little over half of those responding (56%) report taking the survey in all of their classes. Compare that percentage with the percentage of responses received to the SAI spring of 2012 – ranging from 38% to 25% depending on the campus (see Table 1 below.)

Table 1: Response Rates for Class Climate Student Assessment of Instruction Spring 2012 (J. King)

Campus	Participated	Enrollment	Response Rate
East Campus Total	10007	40617	25%
Lake Nona High School Total	521	1379	38%
Osceola Campus Total	7768	20522	38%
West Campus Total	10811	36686	29%
Winter Park Total	1257	4213	30%
Grand Total	30380	103550	29%

We may assume that these 56% are the most likely to respond to survey invitations from the college and that we are hearing from them more often in our overall results. We can also assume that some of these students responded because they are interested in the Student Assessment of Instruction and already want to be part of the process of improving it.

In one of the final questions of the survey students reported that they are more likely to complete a learning styles survey than they are a political poll, a marketing survey, or a magazine quiz (Question 13.) We can speculate that there is something about learning about themselves and how they engage the world that appeals to them. If that is the case, a question remains: How can the process or the outcome of the SAI tap into that student interest? How can we make the SAI experience more compelling to complete – or more engaging overall – so that they see themselves having an active impact within a larger process?

Summary Tables for Discussion

Beyond these observations the data has been aggregated for further analysis and discussion among the working group members. A copy of the survey instrument is attached and the data has been aggregated into one set of tables (N=1323) of all responses with additional sets for certain subgroups including:

1. students who report they have just begun taking classes at Valencia college (N=273) and
2. students who report they are about to graduate (N=419.)

A subset of tables is also provided focusing on the students who report:

3. they never complete the SAI in their classes (N=228) and
4. those who most often report they are completing the SAI in their classes (N=736)

The full listing of individual comments (600+) is available through Qualtrics online. These comments are also accessible through links embedded in the PDFs of the aggregated tables that accompany this overview. If you have questions about this overview, please contact Laura Blasi (lblasi@valenciacollege.edu.)

A Side Note about Sampling and Validity for Those Who are Interested...

We did not sample. We contacted everyone – so... we did a census. Of all of the invitations we sent out, within 7 days we had 1,323 responses (about 5% of those contacted responded.) Did we need to be concerned that we only had 5%? No.... no need for concern. Knowing that a wide range of students (25,000+) were invited to take the survey, you can review even 100 survey responses and learn from them without concern for the sample size and statistical reliability. No need for formal calculations for our survey of student opinions designed to better help us understand their perspectives because of the kind of survey, our purpose in developing it, and because of how we plan to use the findings.

Consider this if someone tells you should have 10% responding before you can use the results... For most of our questions there are four or five choices possible -- there are a limited number of responses possible each time we ask students about their opinions. Even the open-ended questions are asked in such a way that we will not have a limitless number of responses. Adding more students from the same population will grow the number of responses but it should not change the overall pattern. At a certain point with every sample the impact of adding more respondents becomes negligible and can even waste energy and resources.

Our questions were carefully designed and refined. We did not use directions that were unclear or language that was unfamiliar. We also had working knowledge of the SAI and related research as we designed it. So, given a limited number of questions and one student population, the answers we received from 5% of respondents should reliably represent the population. Keep in mind that we are asking about student opinions for relatively low-stakes reasons. Our concern with validity is not as demanding as if we were looking to validate test scores or to validate the results of an experiment showing the impact of a new drug trial.

A Side Note about Sampling and Validity for Those Who are Interested... (continued)

When we discuss the validity of the construction of a survey of student opinions in our program assessment work we should question: 1) “face validity” or the logic and the wording of the questions (for example using familiar language); and 2) “content validity” or what we know about the topic we are studying (for example drawing on our working knowledge of the SAI and related research.) 3) “Consequential validity” is also something important to consider – considering what may be (or are) the intended and unintended consequences of the interpretation and use of the survey.

When we discuss the validity of the responses as shown by sample size you are looking for an adequate number of responses to gather the information you need to make decisions. “Why do we always hear about sample size and margins of error in the newspaper?” – you may ask. Using methods employed in political polls a researcher may say: “I want a confidence level of 95%” (This means the researcher wants to predict how often the population would pick an answer by chance.) He or she is saying: “I want a sample size that will produce a response that is 95% certain.” Notice that concern for picking an answer by chance (randomly) does not acknowledge that people responding to surveys pick answers according to their preferences – not by chance. In program assessment we are thinking about the participants and their preferences – we do not expect answers to be random at all. But in the method used by pollsters in determining the sample size they are thinking of the instrument and not the users or the content of the survey.

So the pollster says, I want a 95% confidence level and a margin of error of $\pm 4\%$ – that is the responses may be a little higher or a little lower than the actual possible if everyone in the population were to take the poll. Given those expectations and – for example - a population of 25,700 for this poll -- a sample of 587 or higher is desirable (following a pre-established formula available through the links below.) We would contact 587 at least and see how many responses we could get. We would “over sample” or invite more than needed to compensate for people who do not reply. If our SAI student survey were a poll being published in the *Orlando Sentinel* for the population of 25,700 we have replies from over twice that suggested sample number – with 1,323 responding.

To summarize – (a) consider whether you are contacting the population (a census) or a representative group (sample); (b) look for adequate information to learn from and to help in decision-making as you create surveys focused on documenting opinions and experiences for program assessment (don’t get overly concerned about the technical aspects of the sample size, but be pragmatic); (c) consider face, content, and consequential validity as you design a survey; (d) think about how you define and reach out to people who will take your survey as a another step in assuring you will have more reliable and valid responses; (e) know that there are tools such as tables and online calculators to help determine sample size if you need them.

For more information on the technical aspects of sampling... please see Glenn Israel’s 2009 article online: *Determining Sample Size* (<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pd006>) In addition to the sample size tables shown in his article there are also sample size calculators online (for example: <http://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm>.)