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INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND REPORTING

ASSESSMENT OF PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY USING AN AAC&U VALUE
RUBRIC AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON

SPRING **2016** REPORT

Assessment of Personal Responsibility Using an AAC&U Value Rubric
at The University of Texas at Arlington

The word responsibility fuses the words response and ability to combine their meanings into a new word that implies the intersection of an individual's abilities as they react to current surroundings. It has been defined as "the ability to respond wisely at each fork in the road... " (Downing, 2012). The Texas Core Curriculum focuses on what college graduates should know and be able to do and *Personal Responsibility* is one of the six Texas Core Curriculum Objectives required by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB, 2013). They define *Personal Responsibility* as "the ability to connect choices, actions and consequences to ethical decision-making."

Employers of college graduates agree that *Personal Responsibility* is an essential skill. Indeed, surveys of employers (Hart Research Associates, 2013, 2010, 2008, 2006) consistently reveal that ninety percent of hiring managers rate ethical judgement and integrity as important qualities they look for in job candidates. Further, they look for intercultural skills and ability to respond to new situations by acquiring whatever knowledge is needed. The findings from these surveys reflect that beyond content knowledge, the college experience needs to build a student's sense of *Personal Responsibility* (e.g., ethical reasoning and intercultural understanding).

The typical mechanism that educators use to assess *Personal Responsibility* involves having the students write a response to an ethical dilemma. In this study, the presence of *Personal Responsibility* was measured in such student essays using a well-vetted rubric developed by the Association of American Colleges and Universities ([AAC&U](#); Rhodes, 2010). At UT Arlington, a cyclical rotation plan is followed whereby the complete set of six Texas Core Curriculum Objectives are assessed every three years. Requirements, defined by THECB, vary for each of the

eight Foundational Component Areas (FCA), making the multi-year cycle ideal. The assessment of *Personal Responsibility* is required within four FCAs: Communication, Language Philosophy and Culture, American History, and Government/Political Science. Of the four, two FCAs participate in the university's communal assessment method (e.g., Communication, Language Philosophy and Culture) and two conduct assessment using an individual department method (Government/Political Science, Social and Behavioral Sciences). This report summarizes *Personal Responsibility* data collected from the Language Philosophy and Culture FCA.

Method

Participants

Written samples of the Signature Assignments from courses that were designated as part of the core curriculum at UT Arlington were collected from forty-eight enrolled undergraduates. Each written essay was rated by a team of trained faculty. Half of the student participants were female (50%; $n = 24$). The racial and ethnic composition of the participants was diverse, which also characterized the overall campus student population (see Table 1). By class level, 21% of the students were freshman, 35% were sophomores, 29% were juniors, and 15% were seniors. A majority (80%) represented four colleges and schools (e.g., Business, Liberal Arts, Nursing, and Health Innovation, and Science), but overall, seven UT Arlington colleges and schools were represented (see Table 2).

Table 1
Student Ethnicities

Ethnic Description	Number of Students	Percent
Asian	6	13
Black, African American	6	13
Foreign, Non-Resident Alien	2	4
Hispanic, All races	1	29
Multiple Ethnicities	1	2
Unknown or Not Specified	2	4
White, Caucasian	17	17

Table 2

Students by College/School

College/School	Number of Students	Percent
College of Architecture, Planning & Public Affairs	1	2
College of Business	8	17
College of Education	0	0
College of Engineering	6	13
College of Liberal Arts	8	17
College of Nursing and Health Innovation	8	17
College of Science	13	27
School of Social Work	0	0
University College or Major Intended	4	8

Procedure

Undergraduate students who were enrolled in sections of Language, Philosophy and Culture courses during the spring 2016 semester completed a Signature Assignment approved by the UT Arlington Core Curriculum Committee. The Signature Assignment directed the students to write an essay that described their response to a moral dilemma using specified ethical frameworks. After completion, student samples for the assignment were collected from the department. Papers were assigned a tracking number and then any personal identification information (e.g., the student's name) was removed from the paper in preparation for the UT Arlington Scoring Day.

Assessment Instrument

Evidence of *Personal Responsibility* within the Signature Assignment was assessed using the AAC&U Ethical Reasoning Rubric (AAC&U, 2015; see Figure 1). A team of faculty representing institutions across the United States developed the rubric for use across academic disciplines, as part of a national initiative called Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE; AAC&U, 2015). The AAC&U Ethical Reasoning Rubric is organized into five dimensions: 1) *Ethical Self-Awareness*, 2) *Understanding Different Ethical Perspectives-/Concepts*, 3) *Ethical Issue Recognition*, 4) *Application of Ethical Perspectives/Concepts*, and

5) *Evaluation of Different Ethical Perspectives/Concepts*. The rubric contains a matrix that provides a narrative description of the expected quality of work and corresponding point values for scoring the five measures. The point values ranged from 1 - 4 with 4 representing the highest mastery of *Personal Responsibility*. Raters assigned a score for each measures.

ETHICAL REASONING VALUE RUBRIC

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Definition

Ethical Reasoning is reasoning about right and wrong human conduct. It requires students to be able to assess their own ethical values and the social context of problems, recognize ethical issues in a variety of settings, think about how different ethical perspectives might be applied to ethical dilemmas, and consider the ramifications of alternative actions. Students' ethical self-identity evolves as they practice ethical decision-making skills and learn how to describe and analyze positions on ethical issues.

Evaluators are encouraged to assign a zero to any work sample or collection of work that does not meet benchmark (cell one) level performance.

	Capstone 4	Milestones		Benchmark 1
		3	2	
Ethical Self-Awareness	Student discusses in detail/ analyzes both core beliefs and the origins of the core beliefs and discussion has greater depth and clarity.	Student discusses in detail/ analyzes both core beliefs and the origins of the core beliefs.	Student states both core beliefs and the origins of the core beliefs.	Student states either their core beliefs or articulates the origins of the core beliefs but not both.
Understanding Different Ethical Perspectives/Concepts	Student names the theory or theories, can present the gist of said theory or theories, and accurately explains the details of the theory or theories used.	Student can name the major theory or theories she/ he uses, can present the gist of said theory or theories, and attempts to explain the details of the theory or theories used, but has some inaccuracies.	Student can name the major theory she/ he uses, and is only able to present the gist of the named theory.	Student only names the major theory she/ he uses.
Ethical Issue Recognition	Student can recognize ethical issues when presented in a complex, multilayered (gray) context AND can recognize cross-relationships among the issues.	Student can recognize ethical issues when issues are presented in a complex, multilayered (gray) context OR can grasp cross-relationships among the issues.	Student can recognize basic and obvious ethical issues and grasp (incompletely) the complexities or interrelationships among the issues.	Student can recognize basic and obvious ethical issues but fails to grasp complexity or interrelationships.
Application of Ethical Perspectives/Concepts	Student can independently apply ethical perspectives/ concepts to an ethical question, accurately, and is able to consider full implications of the application.	Student can independently (to a new example) apply ethical perspectives/ concepts to an ethical question, accurately, but does not consider the specific implications of the application.	Student can apply ethical perspectives/ concepts to an ethical question, independently (to a new example) and the application is inaccurate.	Student can apply ethical perspectives/ concepts to an ethical question with support (using examples, in a class, in a group, or a fixed-choice setting) but is unable to apply ethical perspectives/ concepts independently (to a new example).
Evaluation of Different Ethical Perspectives/Concepts	Student states a position and can state the objections to, assumptions and implications of and can reasonably defend against the objections to, assumptions and implications of different ethical perspectives/ concepts, and the student's defense is adequate and effective.	Student states a position and can state the objections to, assumptions and implications of, and respond to the objections to, assumptions and implications of different ethical perspectives/ concepts, but the student's response is inadequate.	Student states a position and can state the objections to, assumptions and implications of different ethical perspectives/ concepts but does not respond to them (and ultimately objections, assumptions, and implications are compartmentalized by student and do not affect student's position.)	Student states a position but cannot state the objections to and assumptions and limitations of the different perspectives/ concepts.

Figure 1. AAC&U Ethical Reasoning VALUE Rubric

Attainment targets (numerical ratings) were set in concordance with recommendations gleaned from AAC&U research (Greenhoot & Bernstein, 2012). As such, the attainment target was set at a value of two (Milestone2) which reflects that the student demonstrated skills above the Benchmark level.

Raters, Rater Calibration, and Scoring

We recruited raters for scoring the Signature Assignments from among the UT Arlington academic community. The ratings were completed in a group setting during the UT Arlington Scoring Day. Assignment of a code number to each rater allowed us to track the papers rated by each person and ensured their anonymity in the final dataset. Using the rubric, student work samples were rated by faculty and staff with advanced degrees. The faculty were predominantly female (80%, $n = 12$), not Hispanic or Latino (87%, $n = 13$), and almost half had earned their Ph.D. (47%). On average the group had 10 years of teaching at the university level and represented the College of Education, College of Liberal Arts, College of Nursing and Health Innovation, the Office of the Provost, and the English Language Institute.

Two steps were followed before rating the student essays. First, the raters gathered on Scoring Day and completed a facilitated rater-calibration process. For example, after listening to a facilitator present the rubric and operationalize the levels for each skill measure, two samples of student work were used as anchor papers in the hands-on rater calibration process. During this step, based on the five skill measures of the rubric, all of the raters read and scored the anchor papers to identify exemplars. Afterwards, the facilitator led a group discussion aimed at reaching a common understanding of *Personal Responsibility*.

Next, the actual scoring process began. Each paper was assigned to a minimum of two raters and each one scored the paper using the rubric. If the values of the skill measure scores for a paper from the two raters were identical or within two points, then the two scores were averaged. For example, if Rater A scored the Ethical Self-awareness measure with a value of 2 and Rater B scored Ethical Self-awareness with a value of 4, then the score for that dimension was averaged, resulting in a score value of 3. If the scores from the two raters differed by more than two points, then a third

rater was assigned the paper. In that case, the two most similar scores were averaged together and the third was dropped. Figure 2 contains the rater score sheet.

	Rater Number: <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/>				Rater Number: <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/>			
	4	3	2	1	4	3	2	1
Ethical Self-awareness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Understanding Different Ethical Perspectives / Concepts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ethical Issue Recognition	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Application of Ethical Perspectives / Concepts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Evaluation of Different Ethical Perspectives / Concepts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Figure 2. Rater Score Sheet

Analysis and Results

Inter-rater Agreement

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the assessment process, inter-rater agreement analysis was conducted to see how frequently the two raters agreed on scoring. The inter-rater agreement level was determined by calculating the intra-class correlation coefficient (ICC). High ICC values indicate more agreement between rater scores. Commonly accepted guidelines were used to interpret the ICC results. These suggest that the range of 0.40 to 0.74 is considered fair to good inter-rater agreement, with results above 0.74 classified as excellent inter-rater agreement, and results lower than .40 considered poor inter-rater agreement (Fleiss, 1986; Shrout & Fleiss, 1979).

The dimensions with the highest ICC values: *Ethical Self-awareness* (ICC= 0.82) and *Influence of context and assumptions* (ICC= 0.73), showed excellent inter-rater agreement. The ICC values for three measures, *Understanding Different Ethical Perspectives/Concepts* (ICC= 0.43), *Ethical Issue Recognition* (ICC= 0.57), and *Evaluation of Different Ethical Perspectives/Concepts* (ICC= 0.42) were within the range for fair to good inter-rater agreement.

This high level of agreement suggests that the application of the rubric to the assignment was accomplished with sufficient reliability and that the evidence of student attainment of the skills can be evaluated with confidence.

Student Attainment

Frequencies were used to examine students' *Personal Responsibility* (see Table 3). Scores from both Rater1 and Rater2 were counted, resulting in a total of 96 scores/row, which represented the skill measure across the 48 papers. The small sample size prevented inferential statistical analyses, however several highlights emerged from the scores. Students scored highest in *Understanding Different Ethical Perspectives/Concepts*, *Ethical Issue Recognition*, and *Evaluation of Different Ethical Perspectives/Concepts*. Using mean skill measure scores, attainment targets (scores greater than or equal to a value of two) were met for all *Personal Responsibility* measures.

Table 3

Skill Measure scores for Personal Responsibility from the Ethical Reasoning VALUE Rubric

Skill Measure	Mean (SD)	Score Frequency (n, %)			
		4	3	2	1
<i>Ethical Self-awareness</i>	2.43 (0.93)	12 (13%)	35 (36%)	24 (25%)	25 (26%)
<i>Understanding Different Ethical Perspectives/Concepts</i>	3.10 (0.36)	15 (16%)	76 (79%)	5 (5%)	0 (0%)
<i>Ethical Issue Recognition</i>	2.88 (0.49)	10 (10%)	65 (68%)	20 (21%)	1 (1%)
<i>Application of Ethical Perspectives/Concepts</i>	2.39 (0.92)	14 (15%)	34 (35%)	23 (24%)	25 (26%)
<i>Evaluation of Different Ethical Perspectives/Concepts</i>	2.96 (0.64)	25 (26%)	46 (48%)	21 (22%)	4 (4%)

Summary

The current assessment of Signature Assignments used the AAC&U Ethical Reasoning VALUE rubric. Results revealed a pattern of strengths and weaknesses for a sample of undergraduate students. The student scores were strongest for the dimensions of *Understanding*

Different Ethical Perspectives/Concepts Explanation of issues and Evaluation of Different Ethical Perspectives/Concepts. On average this group of UT Arlington undergraduates met or exceeded Milestone 3. The scores for *Ethical Issue Recognition* were also strong, exceeding Milestone 2 by a wide margin and only one student in the sample was scored at the minimum benchmark level. While students were weaker for two dimensions, *Ethical Self-awareness* and *Application of Ethical Perspectives/Concepts*, scores may have been lower for the first because the assignment did not prompt the student to reveal the ethical framework to which they personally ascribe, making it difficult to score many of the essays above the benchmark value (1).

Two possible limitations are important to note. One involved the size of the sample; the small number of participants limited the analytical approaches that could be used to examine this assessment. That said, despite the size, the sample was representative of the rich diversity of the campus population at UT Arlington. In addition, sample essays were drawn from one FCA and that could have limited the scope of the summary report. However, students represented seven of nine schools and colleges and thus characterized the academic community at large. Conceptually, each FCA should contain a representative sample of the academic community because all students regardless of their major must take forty-two hours of approved Texas Core Curriculum courses. That said, plans are in place for future studies to sample *Personal Responsibility* in the other FCAs.

Overall, this initial assessment of *Personal Responsibility*, a THECB Core Objective, was very positive. On average, the student scores met and exceeded attainment targets. The high levels of inter-rater agreement suggest that the rater calibration activities were helpful and that the scores obtained are reliable measures of *Personal Responsibility*. Future studies will continue to examine trends in student performance related to these measures among undergraduate students at UT Arlington.

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