



Office of Institutional Research

To: Scholarship Action Group
CC: Curriculum Committee; Stephen Siciliano
From: Darby Hiller
Date: March 1st, 2005
Subject: Student Perceptions Survey Results (Fall 2004)

Key Findings.

On average about 90% of the students reported that their skills had improved on the general education outcomes as a result of the class they were in. Disappointingly, a large percentage of students believed identifying a problem or parts of an argument was not applicable in their Critical Thinking supporting courses.

Administration Overview.

In Fall 2004, 43 instructors administered the Student Perceptions Survey in 54 courses to 867 students (Table 1). The Perceptions Survey indirectly measures achievement on our general education outcomes. The measures for this semester's survey were revised to better reflect an update on the rubrics, particularly for Communications. Additionally, in a change for previous semesters, the surveys contained only those skills from an outcome for which the course supported. So students responded to skill statements from Communications in courses that supported Communications, and so on.

The Instruments.

The surveys were revised this year to better reflect changes made to the wording of the rubrics. Also, only those skill statements that described the outcome supported by the course were included on the survey (i.e., the critical thinking outcomes statements were only offered in the critical thinking supported courses, as identified by instructors). These changes improved the measurement of student perceptions of achievement. It is clear that students were less confused with the rewording and took the survey more seriously, as evidenced by the greater percentage of students who reported that the skills were applicable to their class.

Comparative Results.

In Communications, between 88 and 96% of students reported that their ability to perform the respective Communications skills had slightly or greatly improved (Graph 1). The skill showing the least improvement was #3 (My ability to express ideas appropriately using correct grammar and mechanics) (see Table 2 for skill statements of all the outcomes). Also, of the five skill statements the greatest percentage of students (6.3%) reported that #3 was not an applicable part of the course. Where students perceived the skills applicable, skill #5 (My ability to communicate with a sense of my audience), showed the least improvement.

These results continue the trend from previous semesters (See "What We Have Learned (9_04)" document). The ability to understand and express ideas appropriately using correct grammar, usage, and mechanics, remains the perceived weak area of the Communications skills. Not surprisingly, this finding is echoed in our direct method of scoring student work. On the positive side, the percentage of students perceiving that skill was not applicable to their course dropped significantly from about 20% in previous semesters to 6%. This is probably due to the rewording of the measure, giving us confidence that we are closer to measuring the concept that we intend to measure.

In Critical Thinking, between 83-95% of the students perceived improvement in their ability to perform the skills of critical thinking (Graph 2). The weakest area was skill #1 (the ability to identify the parts of an argument or problem), but that was because a relatively large percentage of students (12%) perceived it as inapplicable to their course. Moreover, 5% believed that the ability to draw conclusions was not part of their course. From the skills the students believed were most applicable the least improvement was in the ability to evaluate different ways to solve a problem (skill #2). This result continues the trend established in previous semesters. Like before, the ability to identify the parts of an argument or problem is perceived as not applicable to the course by many.

The Cultural Perspectives outcome showed the greatest improvement as perceived by students, a similar finding as in past semesters. In most cases, students recognized that these skills were applicable to the course and perceived gains in their abilities. Interestingly, the statements referring to culture received the highest marks for improvement (skills 2, 3, 4, and 5). The statement about the ability to be open to opinions other than one's own was not only marked as not applicable by a greater percentage of students but where it was applicable was marked as not improved by a greater percentage of students.

This is interesting because of the current discussion around the College about either dropping Cultural Perspectives as an outcome or broadening it to include "open-mindedness about 'otherness'," removing reference to difficult-to-define culture. Though while we as faculty and assessors of learning struggle to define culture in a way that we can support in courses, our students seem to know when they are exposed to content and skills pertaining to culture. This is in contrast to their belief that the ability to express ideas using appropriate language conventions is not applicable to communications or that their ability to identify the parts of an argument is not applicable to critical thinking.

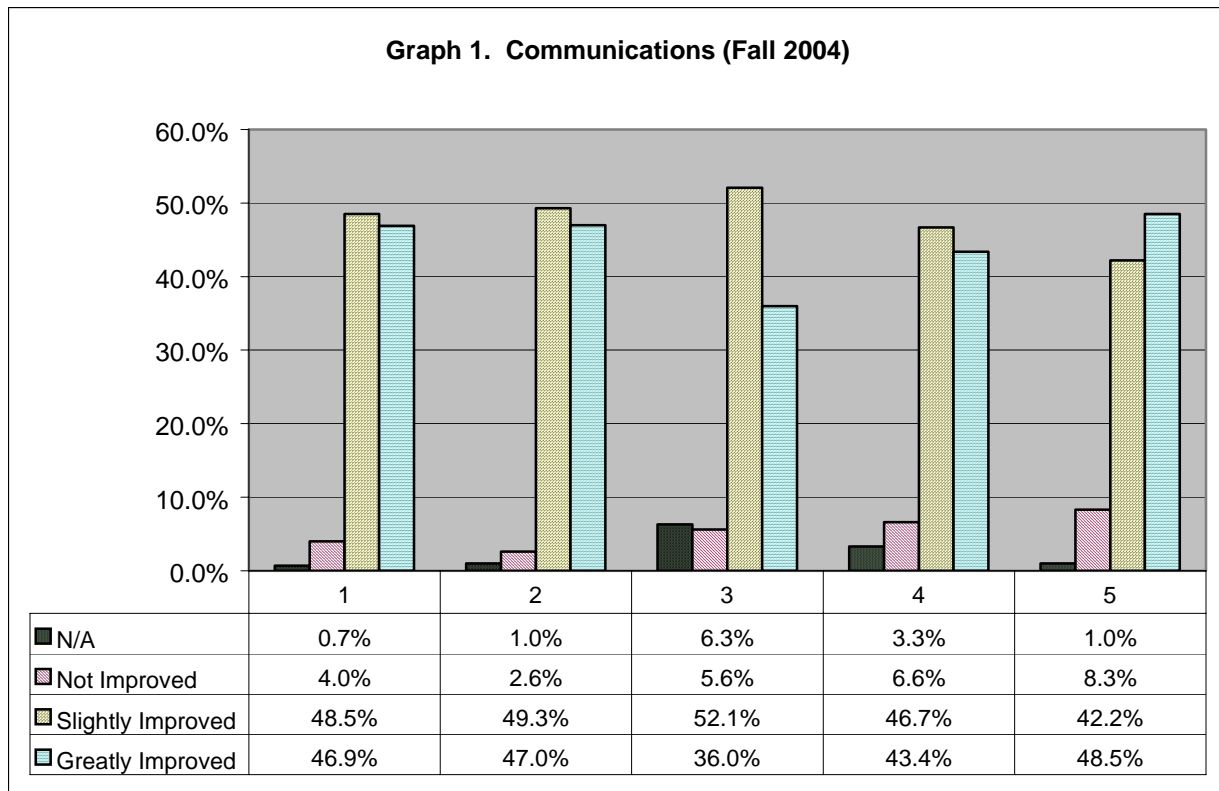
If we do broaden the Cultural Perspectives outcome to encompass the idea of open-mindedness then these results show we will need to convince students that we are trying to facilitate that and then do it. It was perceived as the weakest area in terms of performance improvement.

As we work to improve the extent to which our assessment results can be generalized and used in reviewing the curriculum, we anticipate the continued use of this indirect method of assessment. For questions or comments about the data or these results contact the Office of Institutional Research.

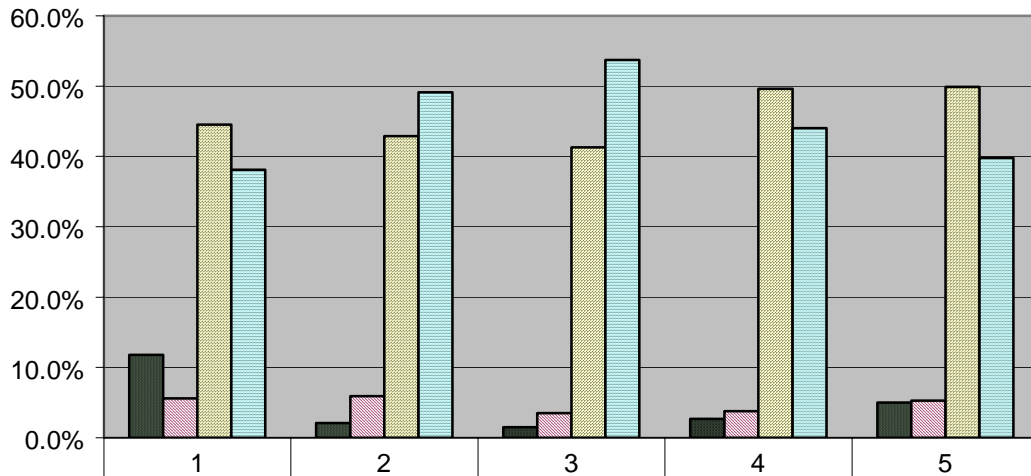
Tables and Graphs

Outcome	No. Of Students	No. Of Instructors	No. Of Courses
Communications	303	18	19
Critical Thinking	339	16	22
Cultural Perspectives	225	9	13
Total	867	43	54

Table 2. Communications Outcome	Critical Thinking	Cultural Perspectives
1. My ability to present and support an idea I am trying to convey has:	1. My ability to identify the parts of an argument or problem has:	1. My ability to be open to opinions other than my own has:
2. My ability to organize information to support an idea has:	2. My ability to evaluate different ways to solve a problem has:	2. My awareness of different cultural viewpoints has:
3. My ability to express ideas appropriately using correct grammar and mechanics has:	3. My ability to use information in solving a problem has:	3. My ability to understand the contributions and influences of different cultures and people has:
4. My ability to use sources appropriately in supporting my ideas has:	4. My ability to reason clearly and to draw conclusions based on information has:	4. My ability to talk about the economic, historical, political or social aspects of a culture has:
5. My ability to communicate with a sense of my audience has:	5. My ability to draw conclusions has:	5. My ability to evaluate how different cultures affect each other and the world has:

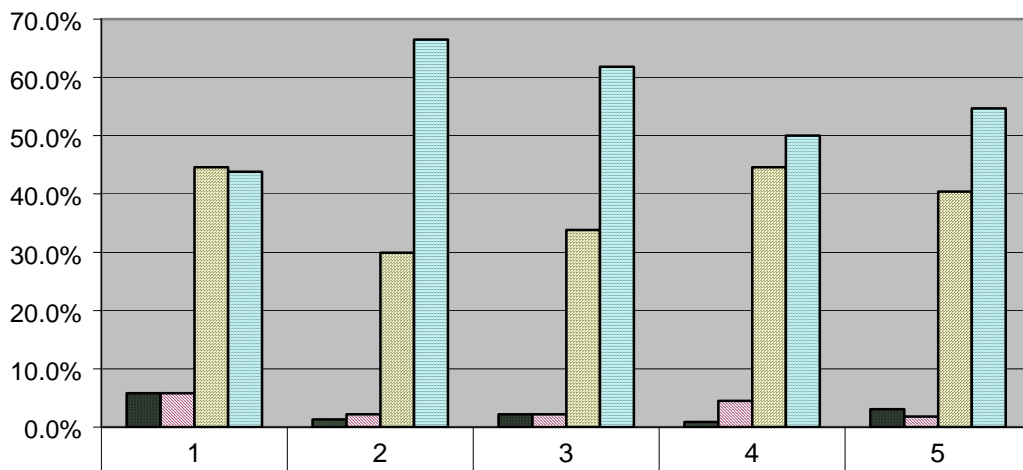


Graph 2. Critical Thinking (Fall 2004)



■ N/A	11.8%	2.1%	1.5%	2.7%	5.0%
■ Not Improved	5.6%	5.9%	3.5%	3.8%	5.3%
■ Slightly Improved	44.5%	42.9%	41.3%	49.6%	49.9%
■ Greatly Improved	38.1%	49.1%	53.7%	44.0%	39.8%

Graph 3. Cultural Perspectives (Fall 04)



■ N/A	5.8%	1.3%	2.2%	0.9%	3.1%
■ Not Improved	5.8%	2.2%	2.2%	4.5%	1.8%
■ Slightly Improved	44.6%	29.9%	33.8%	44.6%	40.4%
■ Greatly Improved	43.8%	66.5%	61.8%	50.0%	54.7%