

Critical Thinking & Communication Report - Psychology Department, Fall 2016

The method of assessment of student mastery for the Texas Core Objectives related to the Communication and Critical Thinking Area of Social and Behavioral Science¹ utilized a number of multiple choice questions². The questions were developed to target “Communication” and “Critical Thinking.” Depending on the course section of Introduction to Psychology, the questions that were part of the assessment were integrated into regular course assessments during the semester, or occurred as a single assessment at the end of the semester.

The demographics of the student population are shown in the Excel spreadsheet³. Due to the nature of the assessment, a sample of n=194 students were included in the final analysis. The sample consisted of student respondents from Psyc 1315 sections 006, 700, and 701. Visual inspection of the student population indicates that the sample is most likely not an appropriate representation of the entire population of students that would have completed the assessment. Regardless, the outcome of the assessment can be used as a starting point to assess achievement towards our threshold of student mastery.

The threshold for determining student master for the Texas Core Objectives related to the Communication and Critical Thinking Areas of Social and Behavioral Science was set at 70% of students scoring, on average, 70% or higher across the questions within each of the core areas. This threshold was determined based on the historical use of similar thresholds for the Department of Psychology’s ongoing Unit Effectiveness Plan which assesses student learning outcomes across a number of domains. The outcomes for each core area was calculated as the total number of students achieving greater than 75% performance divided by 194. We are pleased to report that on the dimension of Critical Thinking, 128 of 194 (66%) of the students achieved greater than 75% performance level within the domains of Critical Thinking and Communication. We recognize that the result of the performance assessment did not meet our threshold criteria. Moving forward we plan to evaluate the items within each of the core objective areas to make sure that they are appropriate to evaluate the objectives. In addition, we will continue to monitor our core curriculum and instructional approaches to ensure that the material is being appropriately conveyed within the core areas.

Notes:

¹ The report, above, was furnished to the university by Psychology Department Chair, Dr. Perry Fuchs.

² A list of the multiple-choice items used to assess two of the six Texas Core Objectives (11 items related to Critical Thinking and 9 items related to Communication) is available by permission; please contact the department directly.

³ The Psychology Department provided Excel files containing roster information to generally describe the students enrolled in Fall 2016 Introduction to Psychology course sections. The UTA Institutional Effectiveness and Reporting Department prepared the tables and figures that follow, however, individual outcome data was not tracked by the department, thus comparisons are not available related to trends in student attainment (e.g., means by classification, ethnicity, gender, or college major), nor to provide historical (e.g., year-to-year) comparisons.

Student Characteristics in UTA Introduction to Psychology courses for fall 2016

Almost two-thirds of the students who enrolled in Introduction to Psychology courses in the fall of 2016 ($N = 993$) were female (65%) and the rest were male (35%). Most attended class on campus (85%); the rest received class instruction online. Figure 1 illustrates that they represented a wide range of student levels (48% freshmen, 26% sophomore, 11% junior, 14% senior). While *U.S. News & World Report* ranked UTA the third-largest destination in the nation for transfer students based on its 2015 survey of undergraduate programs, the majority of PSYC 1315 students were currently in their first two years of college. Less than 25% of the students were classified as upper division (for example, having completed at least half of the credit hours required for a baccalaureate degree).

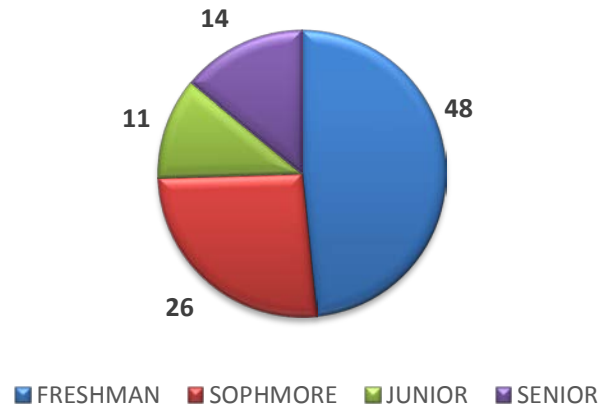


Figure 1. Percent of students by classification level

Representation by ethnic category was as follows: 14% Asian, 15% Black/African American, 6% Foreign-born, 6% Hispanic/Latino, 27% White. (Note: 4% reported multiple categories and 1% declined to specify their ethnicity).

In terms of college majors, the Intro to Psychology student enrollment also drew a multi-disciplinary sample (see percentages in Figure 2). Almost a third were from the College of Nursing and Health Innovation. The current representation from nine of the ten schools and Colleges would likely be an adequate sample from which to gather evidence and examine trends in student attainment of Critical Thinking and Communication at The University of Texas at Arlington.

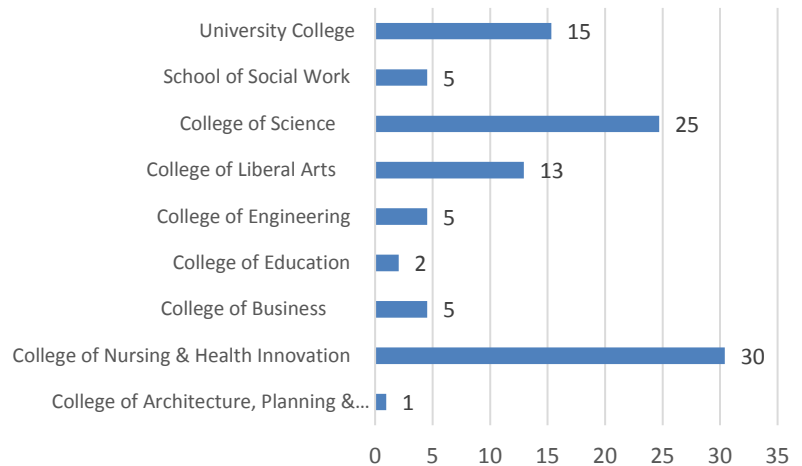


Figure 2. Percent of students by college or school

Characteristics of student scores in the subsample represented in the departmental analyses

In contrast, most of the subsample of students included in departmental analyses ($n = 194$, 22%) were female (75%), classified as upper division (70%) and received instruction in dynamically dated online courses (65%). Representation by ethnicity was as follows: 7% Asian, 21% Black/African American, 1% Foreign-born, 22% Hispanic/Latino, and 46% White. (Note: 2% reported multiple categories and 2% declined to specify their ethnicity). On a 100-point scale, students in this subsample averaged 80 points for Critical Thinking and 76 points for Communication.