

**Applied Learning Status Report**  
**Academic Year 2006-07**  
**August 1, 2007**  
**Kelly Henry**

*Purpose:* To report on Applied Learning assessment data for the 2006-07 academic year

*Background on Applied Learning at Western*

- Applied Learning is one of the signature programs at Missouri Western State University. In general, this refers to the learning experiences we provide to students in contexts that reach beyond the traditional classroom. Credit-bearing forms of Applied Learning on campus are:
  - Internships/Practica
  - Independent Research/Project
  - Service-learning
  - Study Away and Outdoor Semester
- These credit-bearing experiences provide an important element to Western student development, as they push students to take knowledge and skills gained in the classroom, and put them to work in the “real-world.” As such, Western has developed an assessment program to measure the quality of these experiences. Department chairs and faculty completed qualitative assessments during 2005, and during the 2005-06 academic year, students enrolled in credit-bearing Applied Learning experiences completed a quantitative assessment tool measuring their perceptions of the quality of their Applied Learning experiences.
- The quantitative assessment tool was designed around three elements of quality that should be present in an Applied Learning program guided by best practices. Those elements of quality are:
  - *Application:* The degree to which the academic connections faculty expect students to make on site are made explicit to the student through both syllabi and assignments. This focuses on what are the applications to be made, and how the student comes to understand that.
  - *Reflection:* The degree to which the student engages in thinking about, and evaluating, his/her own work in the applied learning context in light of the academic content to be used in that setting. The process of analyzing the work done, why it needed to be done, how it could have been improved, what went well and what failed are all part of the reflection process, which can be accomplished through discussion, journaling, and other written and oral forms.
  - *Diversity:* The degree to which the applied learning experience exposes students to a variety of novel ideas, viewpoints, and people.

*Response Rates*

- All assessments prior to July 2007 have been previously posted to the Applied Learning website ([www.missouriwestern.edu/AppliedLearning](http://www.missouriwestern.edu/AppliedLearning)). The present document reports the data collected from students enrolled in Applied Learning experiences during the 2006-07 academic year. During Fall 2006, a total of 1320 credit-bearing Applied Learning experiences were identified and surveys were distributed to those students through supervising faculty members. Of those distributed, 638 were returned, yielding a response rate of 48.33%, above typical survey response rates (though lower than the 2005-06 response rates). In Spring 2007, 1211 surveys were distributed and 868 returned (71.67% response rate), well above previous years.

*Quality Results*

- As indicated above, three elements of quality guided the assessment reported here. The subscale scores for these elements are reported in the tables below. Students responded to items regarding Application, Reflection, and Diversity on a 5-point Likert-type scale, and before subscale scores were formed, reverse-scored items were inverted so that for all items a rating of 5 indicated high quality and a rating of 1 indicated lower quality.
- *Successes:* Overall, campus means across subscales were at parity within semesters and above the scale midpoint, suggesting most students feel that they had a quality experience. Outdoor Semester and Study Away ratings were exceptionally high compared to other forms of Applied Learning. Additionally, Internship/Practica ratings have

risen this year in comparison to the previous academic year's assessment, reaching parity with Independent Research/Project quality ratings. Particularly notable is the smaller standard deviation for Internship/Practical Reflection scores—noted as an area in need of improvement in a previous report. That declined from a high of 1.0 to .74 and .82 for the Fall and Spring, respectively. This decline in combination with the increase in the mean suggests a more consistent, higher quality experience was perceived by students during this academic year than in previous years.

- *Opportunities:* Service-learning lags behind the other forms of Applied Learning in quality ratings more markedly during this year's assessment. Though the ratings are comparable to those reported in previous years, they are notably lower than other forms in this year's assessment on every dimension rated. In addition, Spring ratings are substantially lower than the ratings given during the Fall term. This pattern is consistent with that observed in previous years, as well. This may be a result of the increased response rate observed this Spring (the previous Spring the response rate was only 59%). Data from the past two years, however, suggest that the Spring does generally show a decline in ratings (see Figure below)

*Means for Subscales by Type of Applied Learning for Common Items*

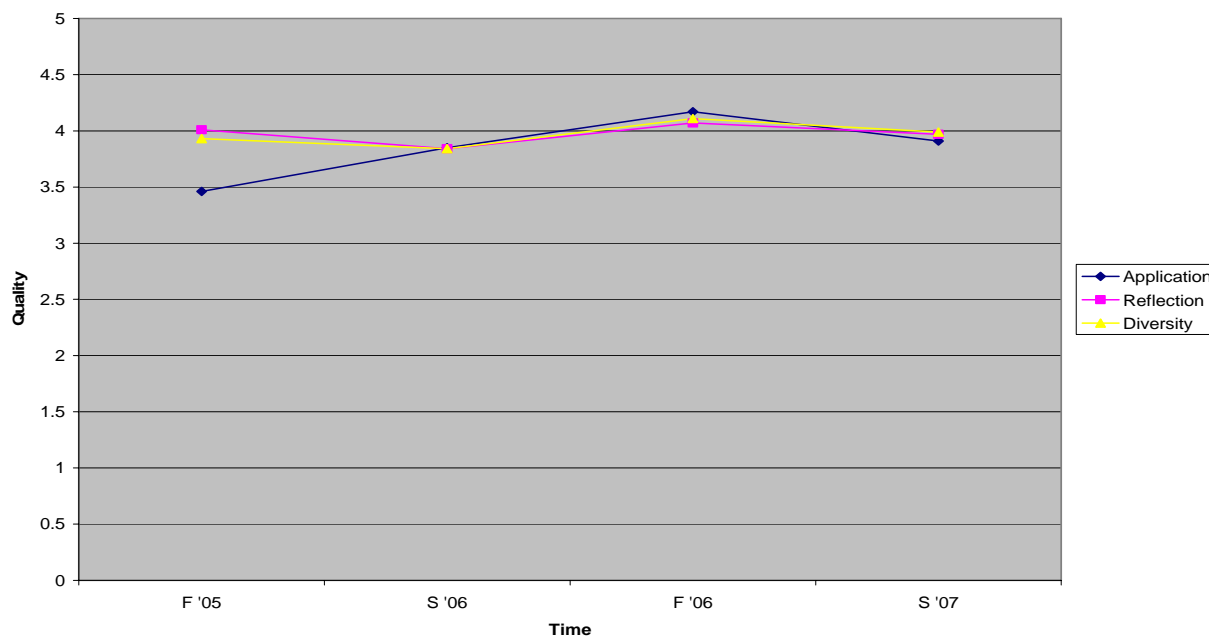
**Fall 2006**

Subscales	Independent Research/Project Means ( $\sigma$ )	Internship/Practicum Means ( $\sigma$ )	Service-Learning Means ( $\sigma$ )	Outdoor Semester Means ( $\sigma$ )	Overall Campus Means ( $\sigma$ )
<i>Application</i>	4.21 (.97)	4.26 (.70)	3.99 (.71)	4.63 (.35)	4.17 (.73)
<i>Reflection</i>	4.34 (.77)	4.11 (.74)	3.92 (.80)	4.89 (.33)	4.07 (.77)
<i>Diversity</i>	4.18 (.80)	4.21 (.63)	3.91 (.74)	4.83 (.28)	4.11 (.69)

**Spring 2007**

Subscales	Independent Research/Project Means ( $\sigma$ )	Internship/Practicum Means ( $\sigma$ )	Service-Learning Means ( $\sigma$ )	Study Away Means ( $\sigma$ )	Overall Campus Means ( $\sigma$ )
<i>Application</i>	3.99 (.79)	3.96 (.85)	3.76 (.79)	4.16 (.76)	3.91 (.84)
<i>Reflection</i>	4.00 (.88)	4.05 (.82)	3.81 (.86)	4.06 (.85)	3.97 (.84)
<i>Diversity</i>	3.93 (.73)	4.08 (.74)	3.76 (.78)	4.41 (.53)	3.99 (.76)

**Applied Learning Quality over Time**



- Beyond the three subscale scores reported in the tables above, the 2006-07 assessment also included items that faculty felt were important to assess, but that were unique to each form of applied learning. As with the subscale items, these were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale such that a rating of 5 indicated higher quality and 1 lower quality. Student responses to these items are summarized in the table below.
- *Successes:* As with the subscale data, all ratings were above the scale midpoints. This was true in previous years' assessments, and suggests stability over time for these high ratings. Additionally, in a previous report Internship/Practica ratings on these items were notably lower in comparison to other forms of Applied Learning. This is no longer the case.
- *Opportunities:* As with last year's assessments, service-learning respondents tended to have lower mean ratings of their unique items than enrollees in other forms of Applied Learning. Student comments on their assessment forms anecdotally suggest that some service-learning experiences fail to achieve a "learning" goal (e.g., "Its not so much what I got out of my service-learning project but how it meant so much to \_X\_ and how he was benefited by this program.") These sorts of comments were not unusual, and indicate students may experience community service without connecting to learning objectives. This hypothesis is consistent with the lower Reflection ratings observed for service-learning in the analysis above. The Spring decline is observed here, as well.

*Means for Unique Items by Type of Applied Learning  
Fall 2006*

Type of Applied Learning	1 <sup>st</sup> Unique Item		2 <sup>nd</sup> Unique Item		3 <sup>rd</sup> Unique Item		4 <sup>th</sup> Unique Item		5 <sup>th</sup> Unique Item	
	Item Text	MEAN	Item Text	MEAN	Item Text	MEAN	Item Text	MEAN	Item Text	MEAN
<i>Outdoor Semester</i>	Communicated Effectively with Natives	4.56	Gained Unique Knowledge	4.89	Questioned Point of View	4.33	Interacted Outside My Western Group	4.44	Confident to Travel on Own in Future	5.00
<i>Service-Learning</i>	Project Relates to Community Need	4.31	Site Valued My Work	4.09	Discuss Project with Classmates	3.90	Interacted in Professional Environment	4.05	Frequent contact with Site Supervisor	3.71
<i>Indp. Research/Project</i>	Contributes Something New to Field	4.47	Project Relates to Community Need	4.13	Analyzed Data or Sources	4.44	Drew Conclusions Based on Data/Sources	4.38	Communicated Results in Professional Setting	4.34
<i>Internship/Practicum</i>	Site Supervisor Valued My Work	4.58	Was Aware of Ethical Issues on Site	4.05	Interacted with Professnls. at Work	4.44	Intern/Prac. Related to Need in Workplace	4.33	Was Part of Decision-Making	3.95

*Spring 2007*

Type of Applied Learning	1 <sup>st</sup> Unique Item		2 <sup>nd</sup> Unique Item		3 <sup>rd</sup> Unique Item		4 <sup>th</sup> Unique Item		5 <sup>th</sup> Unique Item	
	Item Text	MEAN	Item Text	MEAN	Item Text	MEAN	Item Text	MEAN	Item Text	MEAN
<i>Study Away</i>	Communicated Effectively with Natives	4.42	Gained Unique Knowledge	4.73	Questioned Point of View	3.97	Interacted Outside My Western Group	3.97	Confident to Travel on Own in Future	4.73
<i>Service-Learning</i>	Project Relates to Community Need	3.95	Site Valued My Work	3.88	Discuss Project with Classmates	3.72	Interacted in Professional Environment	3.92	Frequent contact with Site Supervisor	3.63
<i>Indp. Research/Project</i>	Contributes Something New to Field	4.03	Project Relates to Community Need	3.87	Analyzed Data or Sources	4.16	Drew Conclusions Based on Data/Sources	4.09	Communicated Results in Professional Setting	4.09
<i>Internship/Practicum</i>	Site Supervisor Valued My Work	4.30	Was Aware of Ethical Issues on Site	4.12	Interacted with Professnls. at Work	4.36	Intern/Prac. Related to Need in Workplace	4.22	Was Part of Decision-Making	3.97

### Contact Hours

- Certainly an essential component of the Applied Learning experience is the faculty-student interaction. The 2006-07 assessment queried students about the amount of contact time they received with faculty, and for internship/practica enrollees also their site supervisors. Ratings could range from 5 (weekly contact) to 1 (never had contact). Data are summarized in the tables below.
- As in previous years, Independent research/project students show high levels of reported faculty contact across both semesters. Study Away respondents for Spring 2007 report a greater level of faculty contact than respondents from the previous Spring. Outdoor Semester has always shown high levels of reported faculty contact. Service-learning faculty contact appears to have declined in comparison to the previous year's assessments, as well as from Fall to Spring. Internship/Practica students report a greater level of faculty contact than respondents in previous years. Faculty contact responses correlate significantly at the  $p < .001$  level with Application and Reflection scores in both semesters, and with Diversity scores in the Spring only.

#### Fall 2006

	<b>Internship/Practicum Means (<math>\sigma</math>)</b>	<b>Independent Research/Project Mean (<math>\sigma</math>)</b>	<b>Service-Learning Mean (<math>\sigma</math>)</b>	<b>Outdoor Semester Mean (<math>\sigma</math>)</b>
<b>Faculty Contact Hours</b>	4.23 (1.22)	4.48 (.87)	4.08 (1.02)	4.78 (.44)
<b>Site Supervisor Contact Hours</b>	4.18 (1.25)	--	--	--

#### Spring 2007

	<b>Internship/Practicum Means (<math>\sigma</math>)</b>	<b>Independent Research/Project Mean (<math>\sigma</math>)</b>	<b>Service-Learning Mean (<math>\sigma</math>)</b>	<b>Study Away Mean (<math>\sigma</math>)</b>
<b>Faculty Contact Hours</b>	3.89 (1.40)	4.28 (.88)	3.95 (1.13)	4.03 (.98)
<b>Site Supervisor Contact Hours</b>	4.04 (1.38)	--	--	--

### Actions Recommended

- The persistent lower ratings from service-learning respondents in nearly all dimensions are troubling. This should be addressed this year by integrating Applied Learning faculty development with the Critical Thinking Workshops. The Fall Workshops are general in nature, but the Applied Learning Director should collaborate with the Deans of LAS/PS to offer a Workshop focused on integrating Critical Thinking into Applied Learning experiences. This more precise focus should improve reflection in all applied learning experiences, and hopefully help service-learning in particular.
- The decline in ratings from Fall to Spring has persisted over the past two years of assessments. To better understand the underlying causes of this pattern, a different assessment strategy should be employed during the 2007-08 academic year. A focused study that assesses community or alumni perspectives might help identify underlying causes of this pattern, with particular focus on the Spring enrollments.