

**Applied Learning Status Report  
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*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
  
- 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 does the student come 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.

*Spring 2006 Response Rate*

- All assessments prior to Spring 2006 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 Spring 2006 semester. A total of 1,190 credit-bearing Applied Learning experiences were identified and surveys were distributed to those students through supervising faculty members. Of those distributed, 709 were returned, yielding a response rate of 59.6%, well above typical survey response rates. Response rates by form of Applied Learning are in tabular form below:

<b>Applied Learning Type</b>	<b>Distributed</b>	<b>Returned</b>	<b>Response Rate</b>
Internship/Practicum	788	468	59%
Independent Research/ Project	72	26	36%
Service-Learning	264	178	64%
Study Away	66	35	53%

*Spring 2006 Quality Results*

- As indicated above, three elements of quality guided the assessment reported here. The subscale scores for these elements are reported in the table 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 and above the scale midpoint, suggesting most students feel that they had a quality experience. Independent research/project and Study Away enrollees reported markedly high scores, suggesting that in spite of the lower enrollment seen in these forms of Applied Learning (see response rate table above), the quality is perceived by students as exceptionally high.
- *Opportunities:* One potential area for improvement is the larger standard deviation observed in Reflection scores, particularly for Internship/Practicum experiences. This form of Applied Learning has the highest enrollment, but the largest variability for Reflection. Although many internship/practicum students may experience high-quality reflection, the variability suggests a substantial portion of them are reporting lower quality reflection activities.

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

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>	4.26 (.71)	3.79 (.90)	3.82 (.76)	4.25 (.83)	3.85 (.86)
<i>Reflection</i>	4.18 (.68)	3.79 (1.0)	3.85 (.83)	4.00 (.96)	3.84 (.98)
<i>Diversity</i>	3.70 (.74)	3.85 (.80)	3.70 (.89)	4.67 (.43)	3.85 (.82)

- Beyond the three subscale scores reported in the table above, the Spring 2006 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. Given that these items were developed in conjunction with faculty who teach these experiences, such high ratings are not surprising, but still the number of mean scores exceeding “4” is exceptional.
- *Opportunities:* Both service-learning and internship/practicum respondents tended to have lower mean ratings of their unique items than study away or independent research/project enrollees. Service-learning coordinators might consider collaborating more closely with site supervisors so that the on-site contact is more frequent. Internship/practicum coordinators might consider working with site supervisors to develop student experiences that involve more decision making opportunities. However, whether a specific service-learning or internship/practicum experience would benefit from these recommendations is unclear as the mean score may not reflect a particular experience. A final potential opportunity these data might suggest is for independent research/project faculty to consider developing projects that relate more closely to community needs, although the same caveat cited applies to this consideration, as well.

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	M E A N	Item Text	M E A N	Item Text	M E A N	Item Text	M E A N	Item Text	M E A N
<i>Study Away</i>	Communicated Effectively with Natives	4.26	Gained Unique Knowledge	4.91	Questioned Point of View	3.81	Interacted Outside My Western Group	4.46	Confident to Travel on Own in Future	4.43
<i>Service-Learning</i>	Project Relates to Community Need	4.12	Site Valued My Work	3.85	Discuss Project with Classmates	3.88	Interacted in Professional Environment	3.87	Frequent contact with Site Supervisor	3.30
<i>Indp. Research/Project</i>	Contributes Something New to Field	4.41	Project Relates to Community Need	3.67	Analyzed Data or Sources	4.04	Drew Conclusions Based on Data/Sources	4.23	Communicated Results in Professional Setting	4.07
<i>Internship/Practicum</i>	Site Supervisor Valued My Work	4.29	Was Aware of Ethical Issues on Site	3.79	Interacted with Professnls. at Work	4.04	Intern/Prac. Related to Need in Workplace	3.91	Was Part of Decision-Making	3.60

### Contact Hours

- Certainly an essential component of the Applied Learning experience is the faculty-student interaction. The Spring 2006 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 table below.
- Independent research/project and service-learning students report the highest amount of faculty contact. Given that these enrollments are often structured more like a typical classroom experience—with weekly meetings—this is not surprising. The lower score for study away respondents may simply align with faculty goals to promote independence in students on study away experiences. The lowest scores again were for internship/practicum experiences, although they, too, remain near the scale midpoint (meetings every other week).

	<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>	3.72 (1.5)	4.44 (1.0)	4.05 (.98)	3.96 (.88)
<b>Site Supervisor Contact Hours</b>	3.82 (1.5)	--	--	--

### Actions Recommended

- The variability in reflection scores will be addressed by providing faculty workshops on Reflection practices in Applied Learning as part of the Conference on Applied Learning in Higher Education that Western will host this Feb. 23-23, 2007. The workshop fee will be waived for all Western faculty, which should provide a training opportunity for faculty interested in addressing this element of quality in their Applied Learning offerings.
- All of the opportunities identified via responses to the “unique items” center around coordination with external entities (coordination with site supervisors regarding contact hours or content of experience). The center directors at the Western Institute may provide an untapped resource to faculty interested in addressing these specific concerns. Faculty who feel that they may benefit from these sorts of targeted interventions should contact a center director whose focus area might best benefit them as they work to develop these sorts of external relations.
- The present assessment has focused entirely on student perspectives on credit-bearing applied learning. The coming year should involve turning to focus on how Applied Learning fits with co-curricular activity to allow for the development of the co-curricular transcript, which is a strategic plan initiative. Paul Shang and Kelly Henry will chair a committee charged with addressing this issue during the 2006-07 academic year.