

ASO SLO Assessment Focus Group Summary (Spring 2013)

A focus group was conducted on May 24th, 2013 of a variety of students from ASO, Athletics, and different categorical programs. The focus group consisted of 10 students. Focus group assessments were conducted to collect qualitative data to assess any potential trends with technological competence and civic engagement..

ASO Focus group

Student engagement has been an important goal for West LA College and Student Services. A smaller focus group assessment was conducted with ASO students to get a sense of how engagement in ASO impacted the two SLOs: Technological Competence and Civic Engagement.

While technological competence is an outcome that most Student Services areas attempt to address, it has been difficult to address civic engagement. However with ASO, the majority of students all seemed ready to be engaged with some kind of activity prior to their involvement with ASO, either by being involved with their categorical programs, by their CTE programs, or by searching out opportunities because of experiences they had earlier like in high school. It also seems that faculty, staff, students, and administrators can really encourage even active and engaged students to participate in ASO. All of the ASO students indicated that it was someone from the college who made them take the leap.

In terms of technological competence, ASO members were asked how they like to communicate with their constituency. The most common response was “texting”. When asked how they like to receive information, they responded “email”. ASO Senators may be using quick messages like texting to get information out quickly to students but to remain informed, they preferred email. It’s something that staff struggle with in Student Services in terms of the best way to communicate with students.

Main focus group

In looking at the broader group of students for the focus group, there was a mix of students with the majority of students participating in services offered by the Counseling Office, followed by ASO, EOP&S, the Transfer Center, and Athletics. Here is a summary of the results for technological competence and civic engagement:

Technological Competence

- When asked what online services they use, half of the students mentioned Etudes as the online service they used the most frequently. The athletes mentioned the career café because of a counselor who showed them how to use the site. Other

students noted that the library and learning lab tools were and the district's registration system, SIS.

- When asked how often they use online services, only four students mentioned everyday, two mentioned as needed, and the others were varied in their responses.

- When asked where they access the online services, at home or computer and whether they use a computer or mobile device, they all mentioned access on cell phones and they all mentioned accessing a computer on campus mostly in the library.

- When asked where they would prefer to have access, all students mentioned they wanted easy access to online services wherever they were, be it on campus or home.

- When asked if they wanted assistance from staff to help them access online services, most students indicated they would like to have personal assistance using online services

- When asked if they would prefer a service to be in person, Counseling is the service most requested.

- When asked if staff or faculty prepared them to use the online service, faculty and staff in Counseling, Transfer, Athletics and the library provided the most assistance on how to use the online resources.

- When asked if they use social media like FB and Twitter and if they use the college's Facebook page, half of the focus group said that they don't utilize social networking sites and if they did, most indicated that they didn't use the college's Facebook page.

- When asked if they use the LACCD email account where they can access important communications from the college particularly Admissions, A strong majority of students indicated that they in fact do use the LACCD email account.

- When asked what was the most useful services, the SIS system and Etudes came out to be the most useful online services

- When asked what online services could be improved, the major complaint was that all student services should be online and clearly accessible on the WLAC website.

- When asked what type of online service would they like to see offered at West, students had a variety of responses including a 24-hour online tutoring site, online faculty hours, online assessment, and online chat.

- When asked what obstacles were there for online services, the prevailing comments centered on technical issues with Etudes, not having enough open lab

access at the college, and the website being too complex with too many link to find the information.

Civic Engagement

- When asked if the students were involved with volunteering or community service , only two said no. When asked why they didn't participate, one was a caretaker and the other's schedule did not permit it.

- When asked who or what influenced you, the majority of students indicated it was a family member, faculty, or other students who encouraged them to participate in community service.

- When asked what benefits there were for participating in community service, they all indicated that there was a benefit primarily personal satisfaction and networking.

- When asked how many hours a week they devote to community service, there was a range with the least being three hours a month with the most being more than twenty hours a week.

- When asked what were the challenges with community service, it was their schedule, and not having time to study and feeling exhausted

- When asked how did community service help them be a better student, the majority said that they were better focused and that they learned leadership and responsibility.

- When asked if they would volunteer in the future, all want to volunteer in the future

- When asked if they would participate if there were credit, only two said no. Two said no, one thought that volunteering should be for its own sake and shouldn't be compensated and the other said they already have too many units. The two students who said that they don't participate in community service said that they would participate if they could get college credit.

- When asked what are the pros and cons they would tell other students, all of the students said that the pros included helping others and the cons were staying organized and having time for study.

Summary of findings and next steps

Even though the data was analyzed very recently, it still provides interesting clues about how to improve our websites and online services. This is something that we have begun discussing with the deans in student services. We get many complaints

about our phone responses but the managers in the areas say that most of what students need can be delivered and provided online. But the feedback from this focus group mirrors behaviors we are seeing in the main student population. It's not enough to have an online presence. There has to be personal support to go along with this. This requires staffing which is very hard to get with our resources.

Also some of our services may not be best served in an online environment such as counseling. Almost all of the students indicated that they thought it best to see a counselor face to face vs. online.

All of the students had a mobile device and can access services using a mobile device. We may need to develop online services that are actual "apps" that are conducive to viewing and accessing in a mobile environment.

Surprisingly, most of the students in this focus group used the district email but this has been a problematic issue for the majority of students who don't check the district email account and then complain that they were not notified of important information from the college. However the majority of these students knew about the email system and used it. Perhaps because of the strong engagement with college faculty and staff in which they were encouraged to use the system accounts for the high use. Perhaps we need to do more training with students on how to use the system.

Interestingly, if it was online and provided some benefit, it was considered by students to be a service such as Etudes and Plato. Students didn't make the distinction between what qualifies as a service and what qualifies as instructional tools.

In terms of civic engagement, students, particularly ASO students, seem so engaged that they may need help learning to prioritize their activities so that they don't get so involved that their activities interfere with their study habits. Also ASO students seem to exert an influence on other students and they seem to be able to get them engaged. The power of students as peer mentors and ambassadors are areas that we in Student Services need to explore and utilize in a more organized manner.