

Selecting the Outcome and Approach

At the CAC's September 2015 meeting, members reviewed the assessments done over the prior 10 years. The candidate outcomes considered were those with the most distant history of direct measures: Critical Thinking, Quantitative/Scientific Analysis, and Social Justice. It was noted that math department faculty had done major work on Algebra in the last few years, and that some assessment material should emerge on critical thinking from the upcoming QEP writing focus. Given the recent release of the Pope's encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, which emphasizes social justice and the environment, CAC agreed that we should focus on Social Justice for the coming year.

Recent initiatives in the Ettlign Center for Civic Leadership (ECCL) guided the choice of approach. Dr. Barbara Aranda-Naranjo (Associate Provost for Civic Engagement), Dr. Connelly (CAC member) and ECCL Director, Monica Cruz, were co-teaching the Social Justice Leadership course that Fall for that year's cohort of Cardinal Community Leaders students. That course provided the perfect venue to develop an appropriate rubric to measure student learning in UIW Social Justice, and to develop direct measures of student work.

Rubric Design

A working group was formed with the three faculty instructors and Dr. Glenn James (CAC co-chair), to prepare a Social Justice (SJ) rubric, and to identify student work to evaluate. They began by reviewing the NILOA VALUE rubric for Civic Engagement, and examined SJ measures of student attitudes that had been used with multiple cohorts of Cardinal Community Leaders students.

This working group met from October 2015 through April 2016 to refine a proposed update for the SJ learning outcome statement, and to finalize a rubric that could be used to measure the elements of that outcome. The group agreed on the following proposed update to the published UIW outcome for Social Justice:

Students will be able to identify causes of social injustice and use ethical values to formulate possible solutions.

The working group then built a general-use rubric with four levels of achievement for four learning outcomes (rubric attached):

Identify: current social injustice issues and practices/policies that seem to cause them

Identify: ethical values, including elements of the UIW Mission that relate to current social justice issues

Analyze: ethical arguments that defend and oppose current practices/policies and draw a conclusion about social injustice

Devise: actions/strategies to reduce social injustice in society

Assignments Collected

The working group decided to test the rubric by applying it to an assignment in LEAD 1350, Social Justice Leadership, a non-Core, elective, service-learning course. The portfolio assignment was due at the end of the course in December 2015.

Sophomore students in the course were selected to be Cardinal Community Leaders by ECCL to participate in this specific course, but they also committed to meet as a group until graduation. Those regular meetings are also open to earlier cohorts of Cardinal Community Leaders.

The SJ Leadership Portfolio was one of the most structured and summative assignments in the course and was due on 12/3/15 (see attached for the revised version of the assignment, a grading rubric, and a list of 11 easily identifiable ethical values the instructors assembled). An earlier portfolio draft was submitted at the end of October, but students seemed somewhat unclear about the overall assignment and how to identify ethical values. They did a Strengths Finder questionnaire at the beginning of the course and some of the language in this tool did refer to easily identifiable ethical values but other terms were somewhat different. After evaluating the October drafts, the instructors revised the assignment slightly, added a list of easily identifiable ethical values to select from, and attached a 2-page version of principles from Catholic Social Teaching plus the original Leadership Model, both of which had been explained at the beginning of the course and cited during the semester (see attachments).

The students did not have the in-course grading rubric for information before they prepared their final assignments. The rubric was drafted after a preliminary review of the assignments clarified how students generally had handled the revised portfolio assignment. Then the assignment was graded and was worth 15 points towards the final grade in the course.

The entire class of fifteen student portfolios was evaluated with the Social Justice rubric.

Findings

For this first-ever direct measure of learning in the Social Justice outcome, student work was evaluated with the SJ rubric (developed in April 2016), and results were compared to the in-course grading rubric (developed in December 2015) to help assess the validity of the new rubric.

In the SJ Core Rubric—the student will:

1. Identify: current social injustice issues and practices/policies that seem to cause them.
2. Identify: ethical values, including elements of the UIW Mission that relate to current social injustice issues.
3. Analyze: ethical arguments that defend and oppose current practices/policies and draw a conclusion about social injustice.
4. Devise: actions/strategies to reduce social injustice in society.

In the rubric used to grade the portfolio—the student:

a. Identifies/explains 5 ethical values related to leadership (10 pts)
b. Explains how values relate to Catholic Social Teaching (2 pts)
c. Follows template; checks grammar/spelling (1 pt)
d. Addresses how to improve 3 values over the next year (2 pts)

Comparing #2 and items (a) and (b)

SJ Rubric #2 asks students to identify ethical values (and those in the UIW Mission Statement) related to social injustice issues. Item (a) asks about ethical values that relate to leadership in SJ and then (b) asks students to make a connection to Catholic Social Teaching, which is referred to in the UIW Mission Statement.

In other words, both rubrics are asking students to identify ethical values that could be applied to making society better, and including Mission in the discussion.

On these two related outcomes, all 15 students in the course earned maximum credit of 12 points. Therefore on the SJ Rubric, all students would have scored a 2 or 3, on the scale with a maximum of 3.

Comparing #4 and item (d)

SJ Rubric #4 asks students to devise ways to reduce social injustice in society. Item (d) asks students to see how they could improve personally as agents of SJ in society.

In other words, both rubrics are asking students to think specifically about how they can be agents in making SJ more of a reality in current society.

On outcome (d), 2 students received no credit; 6 each earned 1 point; 6 earned 2 points; and 1 earned 3 points. Those who earned less than the 2 points were generally vague or not focused about how they could make improvements in their ethical value systems.

Therefore, on the SJ Rubric, half the students would have been scored as “minimal” or “no” learning, with the others as showing “progress” or “strong” for element #4. The working group concluded, then, that scores on the rubric blocks correlate well to students achieving (or not) the various levels of learning.

The measure of learning in this particular course also showed that student learning was definitely achieved for the element of “identifying ethical values”, but was only achieved by 50% of the class for the element of “devising strategies to reduce social injustice”.

Those direct assessments will allow faculty members to establish target achievement levels in the four rubric elements, to be used in subsequent assessments that use the rubric.

Overall, the SJ Rubric – and the proposed update to the SJ learning outcome – proved to be much more measureable than the previous outcome statement. Based on this review of the applicability of the Core outcome rubric to the portfolio assignment in the course, the instructors concluded that the SJ Rubric could serve as a viable assessment tool for this course and courses in other disciplines across campus.

Recommendations, Next Steps

It is important to note several limiting factors in this assessment cycle. First, the student samples were collected from a cohort of self-selected students interested in SJ issues. This fact skews the measured learning toward the high end of the rubric.

Also, the portfolio assignment itself was designed before the Social Justice Core Outcome Rubric was initially drafted. With that rubric now in mind, a modified portfolio assignment could easily be developed for the next time the course is offered, to measure all four elements noted in the SJ rubric. In particular, the SJ rubric asks students to think mostly about social injustice. In contrast, the 2015 portfolio assignment puts the emphasis on how to be leaders of social justice. In some sense the different emphases may be related as two sides of the same coin. Because of that, there is some comparability on two of the four outcomes in the SJ Core rubric with 3 outcomes in the Portfolio grading rubric. At the same time, some slight adjustment to the portfolio assignment will allow a closer alignment to the rubric instrument.

In future assessment cycles, the instructors could also collect student samples from throughout the semester in order to assess learning in all four rubric areas.

At the beginning of the course, the students spent one intensive week (8 hours a day) together, before the semester started, at an off-campus location. The students and faculty participated in group activities assessing the underserved communities of San Antonio and visited the community-based organizations that serve these populations when they are in need of social services. This week is an intentional experiential group learning activity so that the students can observe social injustice and begin to reflect on its meaning. As the semester continued, there were numerous opportunities for guided reflection on SJ issues, following presentations by agencies on current local and global issues (e.g., homeless students, refugees, the environment, domestic violence, human trafficking), and community service experiences (25 hours minimum). A service-learning reflection guide was used for most of these assignments, both written and discussed. Now, with the SJ Core Outcome Rubric in mind, a modified reflection guide could be developed and a longer reflection paper, comparable perhaps to the portfolio, could be assigned for one or more of these course assignments.

As another consideration, ECCL also administers the support for the 45 hours of community service required of all UIW undergraduates. As students complete their various service projects, they log their activity and respond to questions via an OrgSync software portal. Recent reviews of student reflections have shown that students frequently report their reasons for doing service as being “the right thing to do”, or suggest a sense of moral responsibility; however, they seldom connect their service work to the mission of the university. Future updates to the post-service question prompts can take advantage of lessons learned from the use of the new SJ rubric, and the updated wording to the SJ learning outcome.