



2018-2019 Institutional Assessment: Collegiate Learning Assessment and Learning Goals Questionnaire September 2019

Executive Summary

In accordance with St. Olaf's data collection schedule, the college administered two institution-level assessments in 2018-19: the Collegiate Learning Assessment and the Learning Goals Questionnaire. The Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA+) is a direct assessment of students' written communication and critical thinking skills. The Learning Goals Questionnaire (LGQ) is a locally-developed survey that asks students to self-report their growth in developing skills related to the eight college-wide learning goals ("[STOGGoals](#)"). Results from these two instruments are summarized below and presented in more detail in the full report.

2018-19 Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA+)

The CLA+ was developed by the Council for Aid to Education (CAE) and is administered and scored (using both human and automated scoring) through the organization. Many institutions utilize this direct assessment to measure their students' abilities to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information; think critically; and solve problems. The assessment consists of two sections: a Performance Task and a set of Selected-Response Questions. Both sections are timed; students have 60 minutes to complete the Performance Task and 30 minutes to complete the Selected-Response Questions. The CLA+ is administered every three years to incoming first-years in the fall and seniors in the spring.

On the CLA+, both first-years and seniors were given a "Proficient" mastery level rating and scored at or above the 90th percentile overall. Seniors' performance improvement was as expected based on their performance as first-years, though their average score on the Performance Task (which measures written communication, analytical reasoning, and problem solving skills) was lower than that of seniors in 2016. Seniors also reported lower levels of effort given to completing the CLA+ in 2019, perhaps contributing to their lower scores. It's also important to note that the difference between the 2016 and 2019 group means is relatively small when compared to the individual differences in test performance found within each group. For example, based on the distribution of students' scores, if you were to randomly select one senior from Class of 2016 and one from the Class of 2019, there is only a 60% chance the Performance Task score from the 2016 senior would be higher.

2018-19 Learning Goals Questionnaire

The LGQ was developed at St. Olaf to gather indirect evidence about student achievement of the eight college-wide “STOGGoals”: Self-Development, Broad Knowledge, Specialized Knowledge, Critical Thinking, Communication and Collaboration, Integration and Application, Responsible Engagement, and Vocational Discernment. The survey is administered every three years to incoming first-years, these same first-years in the spring, and seniors in the spring.

The results of the LGQ showed that Vocational Discernment and Self-Development were consistently among the top STOGGoal areas where students reported the most overall growth. Several additional findings emerged from a closer examination of the responses to particular items: 1) Within Self-Development, first-years tend to focus most on resource management (time, money, etc.), while seniors more often report developing the skills to handle challenges and respond effectively to failure; 2) First-years and seniors engage more often in developing skills associated with the humanities and social sciences compared to the fine arts and natural sciences; 3) For the Vocational Discernment STOGGoal, “developing a sense of vocation” ranks lowest among the associated skills; and 4) First-years report working on developing skills for interacting with individuals from different cultural backgrounds more often than seniors.

Future Directions

One concern with these instruments, particularly the CLA+, involves the decreasing participation rates among seniors, a trend we have seen across other surveys as well. For the spring 2019 CLA+, only 52 of the 183 students (28%) who had originally completed the CLA+ as first-years completed it again as seniors. By contrast, 102 seniors out of the prior first-year pool of 185 (55%) participated in 2016. For the LGQ, the response rate for seniors in 2016 was 50%; it dropped to 42% in 2019. In both cases for these two instruments, seniors were given the same incentives to participate (cap and gown fee reimbursement for the CLA+, and a \$5 transfer to their account for the LGQ). This raises the question of the continued benefit of administering these assessments—especially the CLA+, given its high cost. The main benefit of the CLA+ is that it provides direct evidence of students’ knowledge and skills, but it is worth considering other ways to collect this type of information.

One possible alternative that the Assessment Committee is exploring this year involves collecting and assessing student work artifacts produced within courses, eliminating the need to recruit students to complete an additional assessment exercise outside of class. Drawing directly from assignments students already complete would allow us to consistently generate a representative sample and assess different outcomes every year, rather than the particular outcomes measured by the CLA+ every three years. A promising set of resources we could utilize for direct assessment of student work are the [AAC&U VALUE rubrics](https://www.aacu.org/value-rubrics)¹. There are 16 VALUE rubrics that focus on a variety of outcomes, including those that the CLA+ measures.

¹ <https://www.aacu.org/value-rubrics>

We imagine that these rubrics, along with others we may wish to develop locally, could be used to assess the Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) that are developed as part of the new General Education curriculum. We plan to pilot a version of this process in January, using the AAC&U VALUE rubric on Written Communication to score a small sample of first-year writing assignments, recruiting and compensating faculty who agree to serve as scorers. This will allow us to determine whether this model of assessment is sustainable, and perhaps more valuable, than relying on instruments such as the CLA+.