

**New Mexico State University – Las Cruces
Baccalaureate Experience Outcomes Assessment
2011-12 Final Report**

IRB #7456

Overview

The assessment described below is predicated on the development on NMSU-LC's mission, goals and objectives for the Baccalaureate Experience (BE). The BE mission, goals and objectives were developed through widespread participation of faculty, staff and students; they incorporate both academic and co-curricular learning. As an outgrowth of NMSU-LC's participation in the Higher Learning Commission Assessment Academy (HLC AA), the HLC AA Team (now known as the Committee for the Assessment of Student Learning across the Baccalaureate Experience (CASL-BE)), developed a rubric for the BE objectives, the *Vision for the Baccalaureate Experience*.

Although not specifically intended to be used as an evaluation tool for the eleven outcomes of the BE, the rubric can serve as a framework for a general, overall assessment of progress across the eleven objectives. The rubric was developed primarily as a means of communicating to all constituents – students, parents, faculty, staff, administrators and the broader local and national community – the knowledge, skills, abilities and values that a student graduating from NMSU-LC with a bachelor's degree, regardless of their discipline, should possess. The intent was to better inform students what a university degree represents, while emphasizing the partnership between the student and the institution in achieving desired objectives. We hope this rubric empowers students to design their own university experience such that the objectives are achieved at the desired level. We also hope that the rubric will assist the campus community in communicating a rationale to students about why they are required to, or should strive to, participate in a variety of activities and learning experiences that they may or may not view as overtly required in their academic course work.

From an evaluation and assessment perspective, the rubric is intended as a guide upon which faculty, programs, departments and organizations can draw from in developing course, program and/or college or unit goals and objectives for students and their learning. Some units have already adopted some of the defined objectives for their academic majors, while others have simply aligned their own, discipline specific objectives to the BE objectives. For purposes of institutional assessment, each outcome will be identified for assessment on a rotating basis, and appropriate tools for specific assessments will be developed as needed. Newly developed assessment tools will be grounded in the descriptions found on the *Vision for the Baccalaureate Experience* rubric, but will not necessarily be dictated by or confined to the description provided therein.

Over the 2011-12 academic year, the *Vision for the Baccalaureate Experience* rubric was applied in two ways to facilitate institutional assessment of student achievement on BE objectives. These applications are the subjects of this report. The first use included an indirect assessment wherein students self-evaluated on all eleven (11) BE objectives using the *Vision for the Baccalaureate Experience* rubric to indicate their own level of achievement on each objectives. The second application was a direct assessment of Self-Awareness, one of the BE objectives identified on the rubric. The second assessment used the description of Self-Awareness on the rubric to guide the assessment of students' demonstrated levels of self-awareness. Both assessments are described in detail below.

As outlined in Table 1, NMSU's mission, goals and objectives for students across their Baccalaureate Experience provide an overview of the desired characteristics of a student earning a Bachelor's degree at NMSU. These ideals have been translated into the complete *Vision for the Baccalaureate Experience* rubric which follows.

TABLE 1: BACCALAUREATE EXPERIENCE OUTCOMES

Mission of the Baccalaureate Experience: <i>NMSU-Las Cruces baccalaureate studies provide students with educational and life experiences that encourage and promote academic, professional and personal excellence.</i>	
Baccalaureate Goals: <i>NMSU-Las Cruces</i>	
	• provides graduates with a strong, yet broad academic foundation for professional service and advanced academic achievement
	• fosters habits for life-long learning
	• prepares graduates with superior communication skills
	• prepares productive and engaged citizens
	• provides opportunities for students to engage in new and diverse experiences, cultures, and ways of thinking
	• cultivates self- and other- awareness, so graduates understand and appreciate their unique perspective of, as well as their impact on, the world
	• develops critical individuals who evaluate, interpret, critique, synthesize and think reflectively
	• inspires creativity that brings genuinely new, original and valuable things into existence
	• promotes information literacy
	• promotes technological literacy, including knowledge of its applications and implications to academia and society at large
	• cultivates a sense of pride and belonging to the NMSU community
Baccalaureate Objectives: <i>Graduates from NMSU-Las Cruces baccalaureate programs are</i>	
	• academically prepared for successful entry into a professional field or graduate studies
	• life-long learners
	• effective communicators
	• engaged citizens
	• engaged in new and diverse experiences
	• self-aware
	• critical thinkers
	• creative
	• able to locate, evaluate and use information effectively and ethically
	• competent users of technology who understand its impact on society
	• ambassadors for NMSU

Vision for the Baccalaureate Experience at NMSU-Las Cruces

	NO EVIDENCE	EMERGING	COMPETENT	SUCCESSFUL
ACADEMICALLY PREPARED	I am not prepared for successful entry into a professional field or graduate studies.	I have some discipline-specific knowledge but am not yet prepared to enter my chosen profession or graduate studies.	I have ample discipline-specific knowledge and can interact competently with professionals in my field.	I have discipline-specific <i>and</i> broad general education knowledge and am intellectually prepared for entry into my chosen professional field or graduate studies.
LIFE-LONG LEARNING	I have not developed habits identified with life-long learning.	My learning is mostly driven by activities that others (teachers, parents, etc.) require of me; my success or failure in learning is largely dependent on them and their ability to teach and motivate me.	I enjoy learning more about things that I'm interested in, and often create or participate in opportunities to learn for my own satisfaction; I believe my success or failure in learning is mostly dependent on my own efforts.	I am a self-motivated, active, intentional and habitual consumer of new learning experiences, and I believe I am the only one responsible for my own learning.
EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION	I do not communicate my thoughts and ideas to others effectively.	I have a hard time expressing my thoughts and ideas to others; others frequently misunderstand and/or disregard my thoughts and ideas.	I am usually able to express my thoughts and ideas clearly and appropriately to others.	I am able to engage in and create valuable experiences through the exchange of meaningful thoughts and ideas with others.
SELF-AWARENESS	I cannot identify any biases I may have; I cannot tell you what has shaped my world view; I am not aware of how I process information and form judgments.	I realize bias exists and can see other peoples' biases, but I don't usually understand why they have those biases, or why they would see things differently from how I see them.	I can identify some of my own biases as well as the biases of others, but I don't usually consider how those biases impact how people act, process information, or make judgments; I do often consider that people have very different life experiences	I am keenly aware of biases of both myself and others, and I regularly take into account biases when processing information and forming judgments.
TECHNOLOGICAL LITERACY	I am not technologically literate.	I have difficulty using technology to complete tasks and communicate, am not aware of guidelines for using technology, and may or may not practice responsible and ethical use of technology.	I can competently and appropriately complete tasks and communicate through responsible and ethical use of technology.	I use technology to communicate and complete tasks in efficient, effective, responsible and ethical ways.
INFORMATION LITERACY	I am not able to find, evaluate or use information in efficient and/or appropriate ways.	I have difficulty finding, evaluating and/or using information in efficient and/or appropriate ways.	I am often able to find, evaluate and determine the appropriate use of available information.	I am able to consistently, successfully and efficiently find and evaluate information and use it in appropriate and ethical ways.

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Vision for the Baccalaureate Experience at NMSU-Las Cruces

	NO EVIDENCE	EMERGING	COMPETENT	SUCCESSFUL
CITIZENSHIP	I see no need to engage in responsible citizenship.	I appreciate the need for social justice, sustainability and/or global perspective, but do not feel a sense of personal responsibility to contribute to those needs.	I occasionally engage in activities and have a desire to contribute to needs such as social justice, sustainability and/or global perspectives.	I have a personal commitment to, and actively and frequently engage in activities that advance societal needs for social justice, sustainability and global perspective.
DIVERSITY	I avoid experiences that are uncomfortable or unfamiliar: I do not function well outside of my own comfort zone.	I occasionally engage in experiences that are outside of my comfort zone; I'm open to considering opposing opinions or viewpoints; I'm okay with trying new things, but I don't necessarily seek them out.	I like having new experiences and being introduced to new ways of thinking; I try to understand different perspectives; I don't mind being out of my comfort zone.	I actively and consistently seek out new, diverse experiences and relationships with people who have different backgrounds, life-experiences, cultures, beliefs and/or values.
CRITICAL THINKING	I'm not aware of how I form judgments, solve problems or make decisions.	I sometimes consider how I form judgments, solve problems, or what I base my decisions on; if I do, it's usually based on my own current knowledge and understanding of the topic/situation.	I am often aware of the things that influence my judgments, decisions and/or problem solving; I generally try to evaluate, analyze and interpret a situation before I act, and sometimes use inference when addressing a situation.	I make a habit of being purposeful and forward-thinking when forming judgments, solving problems or making decisions; I regularly evaluate, analyze and interpret situations before acting, and am skillful in using inference in my decision-making process.
SENSE OF IDENTITY & COMMUNITY WITH NMSU	I do not identify with the university community.	I rarely feel connected with NMSU or engage in activities outside of the classroom within the university community (sports, concerts, symposiums, etc).	I occasionally feel connected with NMSU and engage in activities outside the classroom within the university community.	I feel very connected with NMSU, and actively seek opportunities to engage in activities outside the classroom within the university community.
CREATIVITY	I am not creative – my work is not innovative, original or unique.	I rarely express creative ideas, and my work is usually based on standard ideas or forms.	I express ideas and produce work that is grounded in existing models, but usually has obvious original elements, or elements that are used in unique or original ways.	I express ideas and produce work that is innovative, original and uniquely my own.

It is anticipated that entering freshmen will primarily fall into the 'no evidence' or 'emerging' categories on many of these components. As they progress in their academic career they should be moving continuously across the rubric so that by graduation, they are primarily in the 'competent' and 'successful' categories.

No evidence – there is no readily available, observable evidence to substantiate that the student possesses this quality.

Emerging – generally includes awareness or knowledge of, but little or no action on the part of the student - generally refers to a passive state of mind.

Competent – generally includes active participation/demonstration of characteristic – there is a shift from awareness/knowledge of, to engagement.

Successful – generally implies intentional proactive, self-directed, and consistent demonstration of the characteristic.

Implementation of the Assessment

The goal of any assessment is to gather useful information about students in order to inform teaching and learning. The information obtained by documenting student learning as it occurs across the Baccalaureate Experience at NMSU may later be used to confirm missions and goals, identify needs, shape curricula and programs and direct resources. The research team has directed its efforts to develop a rubric that would communicate a vision for student learning in a comprehensive fashion, including the contributions of both academic and co-curricular experiences. As a culmination of these efforts, the research team sought to test the effectiveness of the rubric in guiding such an assessment. As such, pilot tests developed from the rubric were performed with representatives of the NMSU student population. Consistent with the best practices in the assessment for student learning, pilot tests were performed in such a way that they replicated authentic real-world situations and created experiences that enriched both the participants and the researchers.

Purpose of the Assessment

The present study had two main aims, first to gather insight about the applicability of the rubric to guide the assessment for student learning across the baccalaureate experience, and secondly, to gather information specifically regarding one dimension of the rubric, Self-Awareness. This particular dimension was chosen for its all-encompassing, cross-disciplinary reach, and was anticipated to allow students to provide responses that demonstrate self-awareness regarding the impact of their academic and co-curricular experiences. As a tertiary consideration, this project was selected as an assessment project that would comply with and fulfill the requirements of NMSU's regional accreditation agency, the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

The pilot study contained both indirect and direct measures. With regard to the indirect measure, students were asked to self-evaluate their progress over time (from freshman to senior) using the rubric. The goal of this aspect of the study was to allow students to think reflectively and purposefully on their baccalaureate experience, get feedback on the rubric from the students' point of view, and to measure students' perceptions of their progress across the rubric.

With regard to the direct measure, the focus was placed on documenting evidence provided by students with respect to one of the dimensions of the rubric: Self-Awareness. Students' responses to open ended prompts regarding their experiences at NMSU posed in focus group sessions were transcribed. These data were then independently evaluated by a team of raters. Responses were then mined for evidence of self-awareness. Levels of self-awareness were then quantified using a rubric.

To guide both the indirect and direct measurement aspects of the present study, the research questions posed were the following:

1. What is the perceived growth across the eleven objectives of the Baccalaureate Experience by students enrolled in their senior year of course work at NMSU?
2. What degree of self-awareness do students enrolled in their senior year of course work at NMSU demonstrate?

Assessment Procedure/Process

In order to select senior-year students for participation in the study, the researchers contacted instructors of capstone courses offered in the Spring 2012 semester to request course time to invite students to participate in the study. This recruitment avenue proved to be successful in identifying

graduating seniors across several disciplines. A total of 94 students from three different colleges (Agricultural, Consumer & Environmental Sciences; Arts & Sciences; Engineering) participated in a total of seven focus group that ranged in size from 9-15 students. Additionally, the researchers recruited students who had recently participated in career-seeking workshops by the campus Career Center. A total of 18 individuals from seven colleges (Agricultural, Consumer & Environmental Sciences; Arts & Sciences; Business; Education; Engineering; Extended Learning) participated in this study in the form of individual mock interview sessions, however, since more than half of these individuals were not representative of the target population (graduating seniors), their data were not considered for further analysis.

The researchers developed a series of prompts that were intended to elicit responses that would provide feedback on the rubric and demonstrate students' levels of self-awareness. These prompts (see Table 2) were used to guide both mock interview and focus group discussions. When deemed necessary and appropriate, prompts were supplemented with follow up questions to provide clarification or elaboration.

Sessions were attended by at least two members of the research team, one working as the discussion facilitator and the other as the note-taker. After providing a brief explanation of the purpose of the research and informing individuals of their rights as participants and securing their consent to proceed, the facilitator provided participants with a copy of the rubric, asked them to mark each dimension of the rubric with a 1 on the scale where they felt they would have rated themselves as freshmen, and to then mark a 2 on the scale for each dimension of the rubric where they felt they would rate themselves at the present time. After participants completed that task, the facilitator initiated the discussion guided by the open-ended prompts. Responses to these prompts were transcribed by the note-taker who provided a summary of each individual's comments rather than a verbatim transcription. Focus group sessions were also digitally recorded as a backup measure in case the note-taker was unable to keep pace with the discussion, however, in all cases the note-taker was able to accurately summarize the comments and recordings were archived.

Scoring

The self-evaluation scores ranged from "No Evidence", "Emerging", "Competent", "Successful", and were quantified correspondingly from 0-3. Each participant had two scores on each dimension, once as Freshman and once as Senior.

The transcriptions of each focus group session were distributed to the researchers for analysis with overt identifying information (date, time, course, instructor, etc.) removed, although no effort was made to eliminate any references made by participants to courses or programs. Each rater independently examined each focus group's transcription and evaluated the responses to each prompt on a scale of 0-2, representing respectively, "Little or no evidence of Self-Awareness", "Evidence of some Self-Awareness, but may be egocentric, misconceived, or external locus of control", and "Clear evidence of Self-Awareness, including how self interacts with/ impacts others". Table 2 identifies the prompts

TABLE 2: PROMPTS USED TO GUIDE DISCUSSIONS OF SELF-AWARENESS

PROMPT	What did you think about as you were filling out the rubric?
	How do you think your own cultural background influenced your interactions and success at NMSU?
	Tell about a personal experience you have had that challenged the way you think.
	What role, if any, has your university experience played in your personal growth?
	Is there anything you'd like to add?

Findings

Our first research question asked *“What is the perceived growth across the eleven objectives of the Baccalaureate Experience by students enrolled in their senior year of course work at NMSU?”*. To respond to this query we examined students’ self-evaluation ratings with regard to each dimension on the rubric. A Paired Sample t-test examined the ratings of the 94 focus group participants to determine perceived change over time. For each of the eleven dimensions, participants’ rankings indicated significant differences between time 1 (Freshman) and time 2 (Senior). Most dimensions displayed correlations that were moderately positive to strongly positive; however, on two dimensions, Academic Preparedness and Sense of Identity and Community with NMSU, correlations were weak and did not achieve significance indicating that the rankings at time 1 and time 2 were not significantly different. The standard deviation among Freshman scores on all dimensions of the rubric demonstrated greater variability than the deviation among Senior scores, with the exception of Sense of Identity and Community with NMSU, and Creativity. Nonetheless, while overall results consistently demonstrated significant perceived gains in each dimension, a closer inspection suggests that patterns for each of the dimensions were not uniform.

Our second research question asked, *“What degree of self-awareness do students enrolled in their senior year of course work at NMSU demonstrate?”* The findings are summarized in Table 3. Very few focus groups were found to consistently provide clear evidence of Self-Awareness. A rating of “clear evidence” was scored by 1-2 raters in only 8 instances. By and large, raters more consistently judged focus group participants’ responses to either demonstrate “no evidence” or “some evidence”.

Evaluating focus groups (FG) for self-awareness proved challenging for the evaluators, as was agreement across raters. There was greater agreement across evaluators for some focus groups (FGs 2, 4, 5 & 7), and lesser agreement across others (FGs 1, 3 & 6) with FG 3 presenting the greatest inconsistencies across evaluators. Notable areas for disagreement included whether one person’s isolated statement was representative of a group’s collective sentiment, and determining what differentiated expressions of self-awareness that were egocentric, misconceived, or external locus of control (some evidence) from an awareness of how self interacts with and impacts others (clear evidence).

Assessment of Self-Awareness (Focus Group)

Table 3 presents raw data from focus group evaluation.

TABLE 3: FOCUS GROUP EVALUATION

		Evaluator Scores		
		Little/no Evidence	Some Evidence	Clear Evidence
		0	1	2
FG #1	What did you think about as you were filling out the rubric?	2	3	
	How do you think your own cultural background influenced your interactions and success at NMSU?		5	
	Tell about a personal experience you have had that challenged the way you think.	1	4	
	What role, if any, has your university experience played in your personal growth?	2	1	2
	Is there anything you'd like to add?	3	2	
FG #2	What did you think about as you were filling out the rubric?		5	
	How do you think your own cultural background influenced your interactions and success at NMSU?		5	
	Tell about a personal experience you have had that challenged the way you think.		3	2
	What role, if any, has your university experience played in your personal growth?	2	3	
	Is there anything you'd like to add?	3	2	
FG #3	What did you think about as you were filling out the rubric?	1	3	1
	How do you think your own cultural background influenced your interactions and success at NMSU?	2	2	1
	Tell about a personal experience you have had that challenged the way you think.		4	1
	What role, if any, has your university experience played in your personal growth?	2	2	1
	Is there anything you'd like to add?	2	3	
FG #4	What did you think about as you were filling out the rubric?		5	
	How do you think your own cultural background influenced your interactions and success at NMSU?		5	
	Tell about a personal experience you have had that challenged the way you think.		5	
	What role, if any, has your university experience played in your personal growth?	1	4	
	Is there anything you'd like to add?	1	4	
FG #5	What did you think about as you were filling out the rubric?	2	3	
	How do you think your own cultural background influenced your interactions and success at NMSU?	5		
	Tell about a personal experience you have had that challenged the way you think.	2	3	
	What role, if any, has your university experience played in your personal growth?	1	4	
	Is there anything you'd like to add?	5		

FG #6				
FG #6	What did you think about as you were filling out the rubric?	1	3	1
	How do you think your own cultural background influenced your interactions and success at NMSU?		5	
	Tell about a personal experience you have had that challenged the way you think.		4	1
	What role, if any, has your university experience played in your personal growth?	4	1	
	Is there anything you'd like to add?	2	3	
FG #7				
FG #7	What did you think about as you were filling out the rubric?	5		
	How do you think your own cultural background influenced your interactions and success at NMSU?	4	1	
	Tell about a personal experience you have had that challenged the way you think.	5		
	What role, if any, has your university experience played in your personal growth?	2	3	
	Is there anything you'd like to add?	5		

Table 4 shows average scores across evaluators for each prompt used in focus group (FG) sessions. Average scores for each prompt across all focus groups are also included, as are overall scores for each focus group, and overall all average for all focus groups across each prompt.

TABLE 4: AVERAGE SCORES – FOCUS GROUPS

	FG1	FG2	FG3	FG4	FG5	FG6	FG7	FG AVG
What did you think about as you were filling out the rubric?	.60	1.00	1.00	1.00	.60	1.00	0.00	0.74
How do you think your own cultural background influenced your interactions and success at NMSU?	1.00	1.00	.80	1.00	0.00	1.00	.20	0.71
Tell about a personal experience you have had that challenged the way you think.	.80	1.40	1.20	1.00	.60	1.20	0.00	0.89
What role, if any, has your university experience played in your personal growth?	1.00	.60	.80	.80	.80	.20	.60	0.69
Is there anything you'd like to add?	.40	.40	.60	.80	0.00	.60	0.00	0.40
OVERALL AVERAGE	.76	.88	.88	.92	.40	.80	.16	0.69

Scores range from 0 – 2, where: 0 = Little or No Evidence; 1 = Some Evidence; 2 = Clear Evidence

While 5 of the 7 focus groups scored an average of at least 1.0 on one or more of the discussion prompts, when averaged across all 7 focus groups, the highest average on any given prompt was .89. The highest average score on any one prompt was 1.40; lowest average score was 0.00. Additionally, not one of the 7 focus groups achieved an average score that indicated students met the benchmark (1) for “some evidence” of self-awareness. The highest overall average score for a given focus group was .92.

Conclusions

Student self-evaluation on eleven BE objectives using *Vision for the Baccalaureate Experience* rubric

Overall, students who self-evaluated their performance on BE objectives using the *Vision for the Baccalaureate Experience* rubric, perceived they had made gains on all objectives of the BE from freshman to senior years. Moreover, the rubric appeared to facilitate students' reflection on their baccalaureate experience, and participants commented on the rubric's usefulness.

Assessment of Self-Awareness (Focus Group)

On average, students did not provide evidence of high levels of self-awareness. These findings suggest that further investigation could help determine whether students truly lack self-awareness, or are simply unprepared to effectively communicate their self-awareness. It was the collective question of the researchers that perhaps participants were not practiced in organizing and expressing their collected experiences in activities that required a more personal philosophical reflection.

Observations & Implications

As discussed, the researchers believe that a potential cause for the lack of evidence of self-awareness is that students unequipped or underprepared to *articulate* their self-awareness in a clear manner. We suggest that NMSU provide more consistent opportunities for students to engage in activities in which they were required to reflect upon their experiences in a holistic manner.

Consistent with the literature on student response to academic rigor, the researchers noted that students who indicated their academic major was challenging, also had demonstrably more positive comments regarding their baccalaureate experience than students who indicated their academic major had low expectations.

On a broader scale, a key challenge for the institution is to become intentional as a campus in developing self-awareness and the ability to articulate experiences in a way that demonstrates self-awareness. Cultivating a campus environment that not only clarifies what it is to be self-aware, but also one that uses data from institutional assessments such as this to move forward and address student challenges in a meaningful and effective way, is important.