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INTEGRATING ASSESSMENT FROM DAY ONE

Integrating Assessment from Day One in a Student Development Event: Long Night Against

Procrastination (LNAP) at a Mid-Sized University

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Abstract

This paper explains the assessment process that was the focus of the planning of an undergraduate student academic development event, from project inception through completion. The learning outcomes for the Long Night Against Procrastination (LNAP) event in 2015 were planned based on key aspects of the home university's mission statement. The learning outcomes for the event and the university's mission statement were next woven together into the learning outcomes and success criteria of the individual workshops. The assessment of the event was planned to investigate whether, and to what extent, the success criteria had been met based on the student responses.

The academic orientation of the event focused on empowering students with strategies to plan study time, write papers, manage stress, and solve problems at mid-term. The goal of the workshops was to teach the students academic and wellness strategies to enable their success. The success criteria were assessed through administration of exit questionnaires after each workshop. The qualitative data collected clearly depicts the learning experiences of the students who attended the event. The qualitative data is matched with the success criteria of the individual workshops, permitting a commentary on the level of achievement of the success criteria and areas for improvement. Results showed that the student experience of the workshops mirrored very closely the planned success criteria. Adherence to the institutional, unit, and workshop goals throughout the planning process yielded outcomes that were closely aligned with the original goals.

Keywords: academic development event, wellness, Long Night against Procrastination, LNAP, assessment

Integrating Assessment from Day One in a Student Development Event: Long Night Against Procrastination (LNAP) at a Mid-Sized University

Introduction

What comes first, the chicken or the egg? This paper will examine the value of integrating assessment into the earliest stages of the development of a new student academic event and its ultimate impact on the student experience. This question will be discussed in the context of the development of the Long Night Against Procrastination (LNAP) event at the University of Ontario Institute of Technology which was held in November 2015. This paper will examine the effectiveness of the LNAP assessment and whether LNAP was ultimately helpful to student participants.

Background

Firstly, since the LNAP has only existed since 2010, peer reviewed publication about LNAPs and their effectiveness is extremely limited. The university and writing centre community blogosphere has more to offer on the topic, but the coming years will surely bring research and results on LNAP.

In Canada, LNAPs have been run in a number of universities in Ontario, BC, and Manitoba in the last five years. The Canadian trends are: writing centres partnering with the library; writing centres running LNAPs twice yearly in November and March; and LNAPs being organized by writing centre directors, writing consultants, librarians, and trained peer tutors. Generally, LNAPs seek to support students as they complete their term papers with workshops on writing topics, individual consultations with specialists and peer tutors, wellness activities, and snacks.

Review of Literature

LNAP was started at the writing centre at European University in Frankfurt (Oder) Germany in 2010 based on student feedback that they wanted writing support all night long. Since 2010, LNAP has run there every year with the goal of creating a supportive writing community for students and publicizing the writing centre on campus. For best results with LNAP, they recommend connecting to other writing communities via social media and having professional tutors work with students at the event (Schreibzentrum, 2012).

Kiscaden and Nash (2015) tell the story of running and assessing LNAPs at a small, private college. Prior to the event, they asked students how confident they felt about being able to complete their writing assignment(s). Pre-LNAP, only 68% felt they could complete their assignment, while post-LNAP, more than 90% were confident. Also, all of the students surveyed said they would attend another LNAP. In a post-event survey, students said they would like to see faculty members at LNAP so they could ask questions about their assignments and speak to them in person. Kiscaden and Nash took this suggestion and invited faculty members to the next LNAP, where there was a lot of faculty partnering.

Datig and Herkner (2014) have run two LNAPs in the library at New York University Abu Dhabi. Their goals were to provide help with writing and researching, help reduce “library anxiety”, participate in an international event, and to promote the Writing Center (Datig & Herkner, 2014). The event was not formally assessed, but they did receive feedback which they used to improve the program after year 1. The feedback was positive after the first year, so the hours and offerings were extended for the second year. Attendance went from 17 to 56 over two years. The second year, the LNAP was a collaboration with the library, the Writing Center, Digital Studio and the Office of First Year Programming. Overall, Datig and Herkner (2014)

recommend: 1) collaborating with other units because many workers are needed; 2) scheduling the event very close to exams and on a night that works for the institution; 3) flexibility; 4) communication with other campus units; and 5) using social networking to advertise while the event is ongoing. In future, they will work on providing enough quiet space for students to get their work done.

Dreyurst (2015) writes about the role of social media in creating buzz and momentum around LNAP in Germany, where more than 20 universities hold LNAPs yearly. Writers and writing centre staff commonly interact virtually via social media throughout LNAP.

Christoph (2015) reports on the LNAP at the University the Puget Sound that has been running annually since 2012. She notes that the format and features of the event change every year as the event is organized by someone new each time. They have always made sure to have fun features, as well as virtual cultural exchanges with Germany and German-themed snacks, in honour of the German roots of the LNAP movement.

The review of literature confirms that LNAPs are student-focused events with emphasis on incorporating technology, such as video messaging and social media, for community-building (Christoph, 2015; Datig & Herkner, 2014; Dreyurst, 2015; Schreibzentrum, 2012). Common goals across LNAPs are to help students with research and writing techniques at the end of term and to promote use of the writing centre and library (Christoph, 2015; Datig & Herkner, 2014; Dreyurst, 2015; Kiscaden & Nash, 2015; Schreibzentrum, 2012). Recommendations include actively using social media, such as Twitter, to publicize LNAP events and to interact with other LNAPs, partnering with faculty members and other student units in the university, scheduling fun and silly activities as study breaks, and having a designated quiet zone (Christoph, 2015; Datig & Herkner, 2014; Dreyurst, 2015; Kiscaden & Nash, 2015; Schreibzentrum, 2012). The

review of literature demonstrates that much of the assessment at LNAPs is done informally, and outcomes-based planning is limited or non-existent. This leads to the research questions below.

Research Questions

1. Did the UOIT LNAP assess the success criteria it had planned to assess?
2. To what extent did LNAP meet its learning outcomes?

Methodology

The plan to assess student learning consisted of comparing the success criteria for each workshop to student feedback collected at the end of that workshop, and note any gaps in learning. As such, the program planning process for the event required a lesson plan for each workshop, which was anchored in both the university's vision, mission and values, as well as the success criteria (as noted in Table 1). In this manner, the planning of each workshop included the development of a lesson plan with learning outcomes in order to match the curriculum of the event with the university's mission and values, success criteria (see Table 1), a teaching plan, and exit tickets. The exit tickets were written for the four workshops were the same (Mason & Meyer, 2012) and stated in the lesson plan. The questions used in the exit tickets for each workshop and the number of respondents are illustrated in Table 2.

According to the method described in Mason and Meyer (2012), the exit tickets were designed to ask students what they had learned and how they would apply this learning in future. This student feedback on their learning was then cross-referenced to the initial success criteria in the workshop lesson plan (see Table 1) in order to complete the assessment cycle, as noted in the discussion of Tables 3-6. Exit tickets were completed, collected, tabulated, and are represented in Tables 3-6.

Participants

The total number of attendees at LNAP was 55 undergraduate students. The number of participants differed for each workshop as students were permitted to sign up to whichever workshops they wanted.

Table 1

Success Criteria for LNAP Workshops

Workshop	Success criteria
Study Skills	-Students will review steps to prepare for exams, how to create an exam task list and how to develop a study plan.
Problem Solving	-Students will be able to describe two or more problem solving strategies to use in my courses. -Students will be able to identify two or more exam writing techniques they can use to write their math or physics exams.
Mindfulness	-Student will be able to define mindfulness and provide one example. -Students will be able to define self-care and provide one example. -Students will be able to identify one way to implement mindfulness in their daily lives.
Survival Guide to Academic Writing	-Students will write a transition sentence at the end of the paragraph which summarizes an idea as well as introduce a new idea for the next paragraph. -Students will identify APA errors in an example essay.

Table 2

Overview of assessment questions used in all LNAP workshops

Workshop	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4
Study Skills (N=28)	What did you learn today about exam prep?	So what?	Now what?	
Problem Solving (N=10)	Two things you learned tonight about problem solving strategies	Two things you learned tonight about exam writing	One thing you will do as a result of participating in Tonight's Problem Solving Session	One thing you need more help in
Mindfulness (N=9)	What did you learn today about mindfulness of self-care?	So what?	Now what?	
Survival Guide to Academic Writing (N=5)	Two things you learned tonight about university writing	Two things you learned tonight about APA	One thing you will do as a result of participating in tonight's Academic Writing session	One thing you need more help in

Results

The success criteria for the Study Skills workshop were: Students will review steps to prepare for exams, how to create an exam task list, and how to develop a study plan. Table 3 illustrates the most frequently occurring responses and provides sample feedback comments from the workshops on Study Skills. The comments discuss concrete skills that were learned to help prepare students for exams. The comments show that student learning matched the success criteria for the workshop.

Table 3
Assessment questions used in Study Skills LNAP workshop

Workshop	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3
Study Skills	What did you learn today about exam prep?	So what?	Now what?
	How to create task lists (N15)	“Helped me be prepared for exams and less stressed”	“Make a task list and a study plan”
	How to make a study plan (N16)	“I know where to begin!”	“I will use the tasks to avoid cramming”
	Not to spend more than 3 hours at a time studying a topic (N4)	“I know what I need to get done!”	“Make and fill the fill the study plan and divide evenly”

The success criteria for the Problem Solving workshop were: students will be able to describe two or more problem solving strategies to use in courses; and Students will be able to identify two or more exam writing techniques they can use to write their math or physics exams.

Table 4 illustrates the feedback from the ten respondents Problem Solving workshop to the assessment question. They described learning strategies to prepare for exams and manage stress. The responses closely match the success criteria for the workshop “I will be able to describe two or more problem solving strategies to use in my courses”. 40% of the students said they would like to learn more about time management. This provides direction for planning future workshops in the Student Learning Centre (SLC).

Table 4
Assessment questions used in Problem Solving workshop

Workshop	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4
Problem Solving (N=10)	Two things you learned tonight about problem solving strategies	Two things you learned tonight about exam writing	One thing you will do as a result of participating in Tonight’s Problem Solving Session	One thing you need more help in
	“create a list of theories and when they work”	“review three weeks before the exam”	“I will set up a page with situations and what to do in these situations”	“creating a proper study package”
	“one page final review study sheets”	“make sure not to be stressed out right before the exam”	“review notes in advance – at least three weeks”	“time management” (N4)

The success criteria for the workshop titled, Survival Guide to Academic Writing were: Students will write a transition sentence at the end of the paragraph which summarizes an idea as well as introduce a new idea for the next paragraph; and students will identify APA errors in an example essay. Table 5 provides a sample of the student responses to the exit ticket questions for the workshop titled, Survival Guide to Academic Writing. When the students were asked what they learned and what they would do in future, all of their comments reflected the success criteria that had been planned for the workshop.

Table 5
Assessment questions used in Survival Guide to Academic Writing workshop

Workshop	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4
Survival Guide to Academic Writing (N=5)	Two things you learned tonight about university writing	Two things you learned tonight about APA	One thing you will do as a result of participating in tonight's Academic Writing session	One thing you need more help in
	Paraphrasing (3)	Formatting a running head on the first page (3)	Use of transition words and phrases (4)	Writing (3)
	Transition words (3)	Where to indent (2)	"I need to re-do my sociology paper!"	
	How to cite using APA (3)	Alphabetical order of reference page		

The success criteria for the workshop titled, Mindfulness were: students will be able to define mindfulness and provide one example; students will be able to define self-care and provide one example; and students will be able to identify one way to implement mindfulness in their daily lives. Table 6 shows student responses to the exit ticket questions for the workshop. All of the respondents discussed examples of mindfulness they had learned in the session, but the success criteria were more specific than the exit tickets. The open-ended nature of the exit ticket did not match the specific success criteria, as above. Although the feedback showed knowledge of mindfulness and a positive result, the students were not able to fully meet the success criteria in their feedback

Table 6
Assessment questions used in Mindfulness workshop

Workshop	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3
Mindfulness (N=9)	What did you learn today about mindfulness or self-care?	So what?	Now what?
	“Stay in the moment and not in the future or in the past”	“not worrying about unnecessary things”	“Practice breathing”
	“That you can do it at the time (mindfulness) without having to be in a structured setting”	“Mindfulness is great for releasing stress”	“I will find time to practice mindfulness”
	“I learned about focusing on the now as opposed to the past or present- a huge impact on perceived stress”	“I need to have a clear brain to think better”	“I will use my mindfulness to combat the high levels of stress I experience daily”

Discussion

The results in Tables 3, 4, 5, and 6 showed the data from the exit tickets for the four workshops (Study Skills, Mindfulness, Survival Guide to Academic Writing, and Problem Solving) at the LNAP. In answer to all the exit ticket questions, “What have you learned today?” students all described concrete skills. In answer to the open-ended questions, “So what? Now what?” the students explained their plans for next steps in the context of the workshop. In all cases, the students had thought about how they were going to put their learning to use in their personal situations, so the responses varied but were all related to the topic. The Mindfulness workshop was the only one where there was a slight disconnect between the success criteria and the responses to the exit tickets. It may be that the success criteria for Mindfulness were more specific than those for the other workshops.

The first research question was, “Did the UOIT LNAP assess the success criteria it had planned to assess?” It did. The 4-1-1 exit ticket questions are quite open-ended, yet convey a specific enough message, that the exit ticket technique accurately assessed a variety of success criteria in this case (Mason & Meyer, 2012). To answer the second research question, to what extent did LNAP meet its learning outcomes? As noted above, this LNAP did assess the success criteria as planned, with a high degree of success, so the learning outcomes were met.

This paper examined the value of integrating assessment into the development of a student academic event and its ultimate impact on the student experience at the Long Night Against Procrastination (LNAP) in November 2015. Use of the exit ticket technique to assess the success criteria communicated the students’ voices quite clearly through their comments. The students indicated through their comments that the strategies workshops were helpful and useful. Using the exit ticket technique puts the focus of assessment on the individual student’s learning

and experience in the workshop. Given that this was a student academic development event, the focus on student learning was appropriate, as opposed to the process around the event or the student's experience of the event. Planning the assessment from the earliest stages of the development of the LNAP academic event ensured the success criteria were integrated throughout, and ultimately, met.

Conclusions

A strategy for closing the loop on assessment is to plan the learning outcomes, success criteria, and lesson plans in tandem. It has been shown that this strategy can ensure that success criteria are met, and that the learning outcomes of the event are in line with the institutional vision.

This paper has provided background on LNAP research in Europe and the United States, and added an assessment perspective from data collected at a mid-sized Canadian university. This research focused specifically on linking the university and unit vision, the success criteria for the individual strategy workshops, and the student assessment of learning. Directions for future research could include a follow up contact with participants to hear about their experience of incorporating the learned strategies into their student toolkits.

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