

Award Title

The Week of Reflection at Stephen F. Austin State University

Awards Categories

Administrative, Assessment, Information Technology, Fundraising, Professional Development and related

Executive Summary

A traditional view of the process of assessment is that it takes place within four broad stages. In the first stage we set goals and objectives, in the second stage we develop strategies for assessing these goals and objectives and in the third stage we put that plan into action. It is the fourth step that is often neglected, the stage where the assessment data collected is used to improve and to move closer to the goals and objectives that were established. Completing this last stage is often called, "Closing the loop," because doing so completes this cycle and because without it the other steps are essentially an exercise in futility and a complete waste of our time.

And yet, once that loop is closed, student learning can often be trapped outside of that loop. Learning outcomes lack saliency to students and many may be completely unaware of them. Many of us settle for the baseline outcome that students know they are learning something from their co-curricular experiences without stopping to consider the kinds of dynamic opportunities that may exist when we invite students to track their own process along the dimensions of learning that we endeavor to measure. Reflection is an essential element of learning, especially in the co-curriculum. Unless students stop for a moment to think about what they are learning and how it is changing them, much of what we have to teach students can be lost. It is therefore essential, if we are to place students at the center of student learning, that we will need to encourage reflective activity.

At Stephen F. Austin, we sponsor an event each spring semester called, "A Week of Reflection." We use this time to highlight our learning outcomes and to encourage students to think and reflect about how their experiences in the past year, both inside and outside of the classroom, have caused them to grow along those dimensions.

The program takes the form of daily events with guided reflection activity, video blogging opportunities and self-guided reflections. Typical questions include, "Think about a time you learned something this year that challenged something you previously thought you understood or believed." This program makes our learning outcomes relevant to students and helps them acknowledge how much they are learning and how it is changing them. In an age where consumerist notions of education are so pervasive, this is one way to help students see that the value of a college degree goes far beyond the diploma.

This year's program featured speeches by prominent author's, athletes and scholars, interactive video blogging, journaling and guided reflections. It was co-sponsored by the Office of the Dean of Student Affairs and the Teaching Excellence Center and included classroom facilitation

guides to encourage faculty engagement with the program in their classroom. Nearly 1800 students engaged in some way with our events during the week. And while the quantity is impressive, the quality of their engagement and learning is most exciting. This will be detailed within this proposal.

Award Description

Description of the Week of Reflection Events

Day 1: Stop-and-Go Wellness Game Show Students could win prizes for answering questions about wellness.

Day 1: Open House at Campus Recreation Free preview day for faculty and staff and guided reflections on the electronic screens of various pieces of exercise equipment.

Day 2: Leaving Your Leadership Mark, Make Your Own Wax Axe Student could journal on the reflection wall and making their own "Wax Axe" (wax hands in the shape of our hand sign, the Axe) in the Spirit Lounge. This event featured video blogging and free prizes.

Day 2: "Where the Birds Never Sing" Lecture by Jack Sacco The SFA History Department presented this year's Maxwell Lecturer, Jack Sacco, author of the Pulitzer-nominated book "Where the Birds Never Sing: The True Story of the 92nd Signal Battalion and the Liberation of Dachau."

Day 3: Community Service Impact – Photo Display Students could reflect on the impact of their community service experiences by viewing our photo wall and participating in video blogging.

Day 4: Worldview Expo Students considered the question, "How does your culture influence the way you see the world?" Using Harvard's Implicit Associations Test, students could determine some of their own hidden preferences and stereotypes. Journaling and video blogging were also available.

Day 4: "Reflections on my America" with George Foreman The College of Liberal and Applied Arts and the Archie McDonald Speaker Series presented, "An Evening with George Foreman."

Day 5: Reflection Lunch Students could attend a free lunch featuring Dr. Michael Tkacik, J.D., Ph.D., Associate Professor of Political Science and Director of the SFA School of Honors.

Day 5: Day of Gratitude Students were encouraged to thank those who have helped them develop and grow this year. We provided small gifts with note cards to write a word of thanks. We then delivered them to the person they identified.

* Positive impact on student learning and success This program encourages students to do something that they do not often do on their own, stop to consider how what they are learning is changing them. It makes our learning and development outcomes relevant to students and uses what we discover about what they are learning and uses it to prime future learning for both that

student and future students. The assessment demonstrates that students are gaining new insight into their own learning.

In our assessment of the program, students wrote what they learned:

- * I learned that I should take the time to look back at what I have done and think about how it affected me.
- * I was able to really think about how my time at SFA has changed my view of diversity. I was took the time to really think about how much my co-curricular involvement has literally changed my post graduate plans.
- * Just to reflect on everything that you do because it all effects someone in some way whether it be your leadership role to a peer or your personal wellness to yourself.
- * That I am able to make a difference in other peoples' lives.
- * That Wellness is all encompassing, not just tied up with my physical or emotional state.
- * The reflection guide helped me think about my personal experiences in college and how they have influenced me today.
- * To increase my awareness of the environment around me and ask myself questions, such as those on the reflection guide, more often.
- * To think about those who have made an impact on my life.
- * To think about what I did this year and how I can make next year better
- * Relevance to institutional mission In SFA's Strategic Plan entitled, "Preparing for the Future" the university identified the strategic initiative of "developing a learner-centered environment." Among the goals connected to this initiative were to find ways to "to measure the "value added by the SFA student experience" and to "Enhance reflective components of co-curricular community service and civic engagement projects to increase learning benefits." This program helped us to meet both goals.
- * Demonstration of success in addressing student needs and/or critical campus issues This program addressed several critical campus and national issues. The first is the issue of making learning outcomes relevant to students. The role of student affairs professionals isn't just to measure student learning but to ensure that it is happening. This program does both. The second critical issue addressed by this program is the growing consumerist notions of the purpose of education that seem so prevalent today. This program encouraged students to go beyond thinking about their classes as credits toward a degree, but stopped to consider how all of their learning experiences were changing them and helping them to reach their goals.

* Collaboration with academic affairs and other departments This program relies on a massive collaborative effort. Major collaborations are listed below.

Student Organizations: Student groups sponsored each day of the Week of Reflection. Each group would provide students to assist with events or activities. These student groups included SFA NAACP, Organization of Latin Americans, Lumberjack Cultural Ambassadors, Student Government Association, Omicron Delta Kappa, Alternative Spring Break and Student Activities Association.

Academic Affairs: The event was principally planned by the Dean of Student Affairs, Director of Student Affairs Programs, a Professor of Chemistry, Assistant Professor of Elementary Education and a Professor of Astronomy. From sponsoring workshops on guided reflection for the Teaching Excellence Center, presenting talks by well-respected faculty, producing the Faculty Reflection Guide and co-sponsoring events with academic departments, this program was a true collaborative effort between academic and student affairs.

Departments within the Division of University Affairs: This program helped to highlight a variety of programs within the Division of University Affairs including, Campus Recreation, Leadership and Service Programs, the Involvement Center, Office of Student Activities, Office of Multicultural Affairs, Orientation Programs and Student Publications.

Student Publications produced daily reflection videos on their website to highlight each day's reflection theme. It featured students considering each day's question and talking about what they had learned.

* Originality and creativity This is the second Week of Reflection at SFA. Similar programs (initiated by Dr. Peck) have been held at Saint Louis University. The University of New Orleans held their first program based on this concept this year. Please see the letter of support from Dr. Pam Rault of UNO.

* Effective use of technology and other resources The effective use of technology was an important aspect of this program. A Facebook page both promoted and contributed to the program. Daily reflection questions were provided for students to respond to on Facebook. Additionally, faculty were provided with digital reflection guides for use in their classes.

* Evidence of sustainability One of the most exciting developments from this year's program was the ability to collaborate with an existing speaker's series on campus to provide a keynote speech for the Week of Reflection. Former two-time world heavyweight champion of the world and Olympic gold medalist George Forman presented a speech entitled, "Reflections on my America." This was made possible through a one-time gift to the College of Liberal and Applied Arts. Based on the success of the program, we were able to create a new collaboration between the Student Government Association and the College of Liberal and Applied Arts for ongoing funding for this program through our Student Services Fee. This provides a renewable funding source for a keynote each year. It provides natural student and faculty buy-in for the program that should help ensure success for the future.

Assessment Data

Learning Outcomes/Key Findings

Learning Outcome 1: The student will think about learning in a new way.

* Of respondents to the Week of Reflection survey, 68% said that the Week of Reflection encouraged them to think about what they were learning in a way they had not considered before.

Learning Outcome 2: The student will think about how what they are learning is changing them.

* Of respondents to the Week of Reflection survey, 70% said that the Week of Reflection caused them to think about how what they are learning is changing them.

Learning Outcome 3: The student will express an increased commitment to meeting personal goals.

* Of respondents to the Week of Reflection survey, 68% said that the Week of Reflection caused them to increase their commitment to meeting personal goals.

Learning Outcome 4: The student will express an increased commitment to meeting educational goals.

* Of respondents to the Week of Reflection survey, 68% said that the Week of Reflection caused them to increase their commitment to meeting educational goals.

Learning Outcome 5: The student will express an increased desire to learn more from classes.

* Of respondents to the Week of Reflection survey, 61% said that the Week of Reflection caused them increase their desire to learn more from classes. Learning Outcome 6: The student will express an increased desire to learn more from co-curricular experiences.

* Of respondents to the Week of Reflection survey, 74% said that the Week of Reflection caused them increase their desire to learn more from co-curricular experiences.