Learning Outcomes

1. An Oxford College graduate will communicate clearly and effectively in writing for different audiences and purposes.

2. An Oxford College graduate will understand and be skilled in literature-based research. Specifically, a graduate will be able to write a research paper that begins with a skillfully constructed thesis statement that is evaluated, supported and defended by appropriately interpreted and cited authoritative information sources.

3. An Oxford College graduate will be aware of the moral dimensions of issues and demonstrate socially responsible leadership.

These outcomes are the result of a faculty vote in an August 2008 workshop in which faculty had to identify the top “signature outcomes” for the Oxford education. The first outcome reflects faculty’s support for effective communication skills, while the second is an operationalization of critical thinking, which faculty supported to the same extent as communication skills. (The idea is that research papers ought to manifest critical thinking.) The third outcome, moral/ethical/socially responsible leadership, is both a curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular outcome, and it actually received the highest number of votes among faculty, whose top priority was that Oxford produces “engaged citizens of the world.”

Assessment Methods

Outcomes 1 and 2: Six English faculty members and one Economics faculty member assessed 38 end-of-semester research papers from writing intensive classes in three disciplines: English, Religion, and Art History. Thirty-eight constitutes about 11% of graduating sophomores. The papers were collected from classes that assigned a research paper. Assessors used a 4-point scale (rubric) to assess (a) control of syntax and mechanics, (b) context of and purpose for writing, (c) topic selection and content development, (d) sources and evidence, and (e) disciplinary conventions. The rubric used was an amalgam of two AAC&U’s Value rubrics: “Inquiry and Analysis” and “Written Communication”—meant to enable assessing both writing and research skills. Two faculty members assessed each paper, and the final score given for each dimension (a-e) for each student was the average of the scores from the two faculty members. The scores for each dimension were averaged both for all students and by discipline.

Outcome 3: We collected data on 64 (of 68) questions of the Socially Responsible Leadership scale (Revised Version II) among both Fall 2010 and Spring/Summer 2011 graduates. Graduating sophomores answered the 64 Likert-scale questions as part of completing the Oxford College Graduation Survey, which is a graduation requirement. Among Spring/Summer graduates, we conducted both longitudinal analyses (entry vs. exit) and “snapshot analyses” (exit) for a number of subgroups for each of the eight dimensions of the SRL scale. In the longitudinal analysis, we contrasted the aggregate score at entry with the aggregate score upon graduation (only students participating in both measurements were included); we then did the same comparison for students exposed to various leadership programs. In the “snapshot analysis,” we compared the exit score of (a) those staying at Oxford for 4 semester and those
staying for only 3, (b) the different ethnic groups, and (c) males and females. While socially responsible leadership has received most attention from members of Campus Life, a 5-person committee initially discussing the leadership results included 2 faculty members as well.

**Analysis of Assessment Results**

**Outcomes 1 and 2:** The average scores for each of the dimensions used in the rubric were the following (sorted on “ALL”):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ALL</th>
<th>ART*</th>
<th>ENGLISH*</th>
<th>RELIGION*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control of Syntax and Mechanics</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>2.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context of and Purpose for Writing</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic Selection and Content Development</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>2.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources and Evidence</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>2.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disciplinary Conventions</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>2.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The highest scores (almost across the board) can be found in “Control of Syntax and Mechanics.” However, due to a relatively small number of papers, we cannot necessarily conclude that that’s the strongest area in our students’ writing. While faculty deemed that the papers were representative of the skill level of Oxford students, they also acknowledged that the papers were not representative of disciplines. Conversely, in these papers, “Disciplinary Conventions” appeared the weakest area across the three disciplines. Faculty were not sure whether that was really so or whether the result was due to the difficulty in judging disciplinary conventions by raters who are not from those disciplines (art, religion). It could also be an artifact of the disciplines included. Papers from the “hard” sciences--area of major interest among Oxford students--might display different areas of strength and weakness?

*Note:* although scoring for the disciplines is not a part of assessment for the AA degree, the disciplines are included here at one faculty member’s request. Also note that this is a small subset of papers from all these disciplines and should NOT be taken to represent skills of student writing in those disciplines.

**Outcome 3:** A comparison of freshman year results to results from all Spring/Summer graduates suggest that students improve in their socially responsible leadership skills more during their two years at Oxford than during freshman year only. More specifically, while our freshman year data from two years earlier (2008-09, i.e., different cohort) showed that there was a slight decline in the scores in all eight dimensions of SRL during the first year, during two years (2009-11) students showed a slight improvement in 5 of the 8 dimensions. However, one should note that at both points of observation, the magnitude of the change (whether a decrease or increase) in the scores from entry to graduation was so small that one cannot necessarily draw conclusions on the change or the impact of Oxford on socially responsible leadership skills. Instead, what may be more important to know is that students are clearly the weakest (both upon entry and exit) in 3 of the 8 dimensions; these are “Controversy with Civility,” “Consciousness of Self,” and “Comfort with Change.” That means that students’ agreement with the following kinds of statements was relatively low: “Hearing differences in opinion enriches my thinking” (Controversy with Civility), “I am able to articulate my priorities” (Consciousness of Self), and “I work well in changing environments” (Comfort with Change).

We had similarly learned two years earlier (from the Wabash National Study) that Controversy with Civility is an area where our students score relatively low—both upon entry, at the end of the first year,
and at the end of the second year—and that likewise, Consciousness of Self and Comfort with Change are the next weakest areas in our students’ skillset. So data from 2010-11 confirm data from an earlier cohort. The same is true with regard to the strongest SRL dimension for our students—“Commitment.” Consonant with scholarly literature, Oxford students have scored highest in Commitment every time data have been collected: at both measurement points upon entry (2008, 2009) and at all end-of-year measurement points (2009, 2010, and 2011). This dimension describes students’ agreement with statements such as the following: “I am willing to devote time and energy to things that are important to me,” “I am focused on my responsibilities,” and “I can be counted to do my part.” Hence leadership data from 2010-11 allowed us to confirm both weaknesses and strengths in our students’ SRL skills (at both upon entry and graduation).

Longitudinal analysis also indicated that there are certain differences between the various leadership programs (and other programs students can be a part of), but analysis of that is inconclusive as we had not yet included certain important “leadership” programs, such as the Student Government Association members, and RA’s, in the analysis of results. We have, however, looked at skill development among the following groups: Leadership Oxford (a leadership program for freshmen), ExCEL (a leadership program for sophomore), Leadership Certificate Program (a co-curricular program), Bonner (another leadership program), PALs (student orientation leaders), the LEAD team (a new leadership program), and Scholars (a group not related to a leadership program at all). We then compared students in each of these programs to students who were not part of any of them, and found that those who haven’t been involved score consistently the lowest at both entry and graduation (only the “Scholar” group scores lower than them in two of the eight dimensions). That way we have an impression of the development of all students regarding our leadership variables, not just those who participate in leadership programs.

In turn, the “snapshot analyses” revealed that, first, students who stay at Oxford for four semesters score higher than the three-semester students in each of the eight dimensions. (However, we have not yet compared the score upon entry for these groups; it could be that the four-semester students have higher scores to begin with.) Second, Asian students (domestic and international) appear to score lowest among the various ethnic groups, especially in Citizenship. However, an important distinction should be made between Asian American and Asian international students: while in some dimensions (such as in Citizenship), the two groups’ scores are very similar, in some others (Comfort with Change, Controversy with Civility, and Consciousness of Self—in all of which foreign Asian students score higher) they are very different. However, in Spring 2011 the foreign student population was still too small to enable us to draw solid conclusions. (Among the 2011-12 graduates, the number of international students will be much higher.) Another weakness in this year’s data is that they do not differentiate between East Asian and South Asian students. Third, female students score higher than male students in all eight dimensions of SRL.

**Use of Results to Improve Program**

**Outcomes 1 and 2:** The most important response to the 2010-11 results in writing/research is that we will improve our assessment processes so as to get more reliable data; faculty will also engage in a more deliberate discussion of the goals and criteria to be used in assessing the research papers. For example, faculty need to determine what scores in the 1-4 scale (or possibly 1-3 in the future) are acceptable and ideal, respectively. Faculty in the Communications Support Committee are also considering various ways of instituting a college-wide portfolio requirement. The idea is that students will be asked to further reflect on their writing skills and needs, including their research writing, and that students and the faculty who read the portfolios will become more aware of the importance of writing to all students and
that this method of evaluation will give us a better idea of how students do research writing across the disciplines.

Further, based on knowledge from previous years, Oxford College librarians have tackled the area that proved to be the weakest in this year’s assessment: disciplinary conventions. When teaching students research skills, they have been careful to differentiate between styles and practices used in different disciplines (how research in, say, history is different from English).

In addition, in consultation with Oxford faculty, librarians are working to map information literacy outcomes to courses in the Oxford College curriculum to find where the skills are being taught, where they are not being taught but need to be, and where there is needless repetition.

These personalized conversations with faculty members have helped us understand and uncover several assumptions that faculty are making about students’ learning of research skills. Some faculty assume that students receive comprehensive library instruction in ENG 185 classes and therefore library research skills do not need to be addressed in their classes. In fact, our top students, who place out of English 185, miss the basic introduction to college research.

This project has opened up cross-campus dialog about the role of information literacy outcomes in undergraduate education. We are able to use the information from these conversations to integrate library teaching into Oxford’s Ways of Inquiry curriculum—an approach that helps students think and learn like disciplinary experts. Within this framework, we can build a case for learning opportunities that are targeted specifically to each class in order to address the problems of (a) students not receiving library research instruction because the professor thinks they’ve already had it in another course and (b) students receiving repetitive research instruction because the content is not specific to the class or the discipline.

Using these conversations and the data from the curriculum mapping worksheets, we are slowly moving away from “one size fits all” library research classes to sessions specifically targeted to one particular discipline and one or two specific assignments, thus addressing “disciplinary conventions,” i.e., an area of weakness in students’ papers this year. This way, even students who have several research classes are introduced to new research content in subsequent classes. Students who have not had a library research class are not overlooked. In addition, outside of class, librarians provide in-depth, individual research consultations, customized to the discipline specific research topics that students are working on.

Outcome 3: Based in part on our students’ lower skill levels in “Controversy with Civility,” and in general Oxford’s commitment to Socially Responsible Leadership, Campus Life has implemented two new formal leadership programs that are solely committed to developing Socially Responsible Leadership. The Leadership Education and Development (LEAD) Team was introduced in fall 2010 to offer ongoing leadership training seminars open to the entire student body. These sessions (offered twice a month) consist of interactive activities that are centered around the 7 C’s of the Social Change Model of Leadership. The second program, Emerging Leaders Summit, a half-day leadership workshop, was first held in September 2011. Enrollment was free and open to the entire student body. Over 45 students participated, representing a wide representation of the student body. Our goal was to reach students who weren’t getting formal leadership training in other areas. Like LEAD Team events, the presentations and activities were all centered around helping students better understand the Social Change Model of Leadership and helping them identify themselves as agents of change within their respective communities.
Furthermore, the 2011 graduates of the Leadership Certificate Program were asked to answer two essay questions:

1) Describe how your ideas of leadership have changed with regard to one or more of the following topics:
   a) ethical leadership
   b) effective leadership
   c) the social change model of leadership (Specifically the 7 C’s of leadership: Consciousness of self, congruence, commitment, collaboration, common purpose, controversy with civility, citizenship)
   d) communication and conflict resolution.

2) Explain specifically how you will apply what you have learned from your leadership training, experiences, and coursework to your future leadership roles.

These essays were used to (a) help students reflect on their experiences, and (b) assess student learning in understanding the Social Change Model and how to utilize the skills they gained to serve as ethically engaged leaders.

Finally, Campus Life has strived to further integrate the Social Change Model of Leadership in its student leader training to help them understand how the skills they gain are transferrable beyond their Oxford College experience.

Assessment plans for next year (outcomes, methods, achievement targets)

We will again assess all three outcomes, seeking to collect better data and improve processes (Outcomes 1 and 2), and wanting to understand better what factors explain SRL development (Outcome 3). With regard to Outcomes 1 and 2, the Communications Support Committee (CSC), which consists primarily of faculty members across the disciplines and at least one librarian, will (1) refine the rubric to be used in the assessment of research papers, which is based on (2) the Committee’s determination of what is “research” and thus which papers/classes qualify, (3) collect the papers, (4) determine the timing of assessment, and (5) assess the papers. The CSC will also collect the assignments for the papers (this was not done in 2010-11). We will collect at least double the number of papers compared to 2010-11, so as to assess papers from at least 20% of graduating sophomores. Unlike in 2010-11, the papers in 2011-12 will come from across the disciplines. Regarding the rubric, faculty will edit it considerably to ensure clarity of and agreement over the various dimensions by which the papers are assessed, and the differences in meaning of each score. They will also determine whether “writing” and “research” should each have their own rubric, or whether these dimensions can be assessed by a single rubric. One of the things faculty will need to determine is what level of achievement is acceptable/ideal for each of the rubric components. (This was not yet clear in 2010-11.) Note: faculty will determine the appropriate achievement targets this year.

After a year of non-administration, we are also administering the Research Practices Survey again in 2011-12, through the HEDS Consortium, asking both freshmen and sophomores to complete it in both Fall and Spring. Research Practices Survey--developed by and for liberal arts institutions--is a 20-minute online survey that assesses undergraduate students’ experiences, dispositions, and proficiencies in conducting college-level academic research. It has been informed by the Information Literacy Competency Standards of the Association of College and Research Libraries. The direct
assessment data that this survey collects pertain to the extent to which students understand source types and research terminology (know how to distinguish between academic journals and popular magazines, recognize source type (book, a journal article, or a portion of a book), distinguish between primary and secondary sources, understand "peer reviewed," understand "citation" and when citation is not required, and understand "scholarly").

Finally, the Wabash National Study, which follows the Fall 2008 entering cohort, will be administered again in Spring 2012 to Oxford seniors graduating from Emory’s main campus. Half of the students will be completing the CAAP critical thinking test, which will give us some data on the critical thinking skill development of our students during their entire 4-year career at Emory. This said, the CAAP has a weakness in that it only gives a single score for each student, which makes it hard to conclude which aspects of critical thinking Oxford may need to tackle.

For the other half of the students participating in the WNS, we will give the DiT-2 moral reasoning test, which will give us data pertaining to Outcome 3.

Regarding Outcome 3, however, our main data will again be the Socially Responsible Leadership—which is included both in the Wabash National Study (graduating seniors) and Oxford College Graduation Survey (graduating sophomores). We will also administer the SRL to freshmen at the end of 2011-12. That way we will be able to continue tracking both the freshman year and sophomore year development of SRL among our students, while the WNS provides a one-time opportunity to understand SRL development in seniors who have spent two years at Oxford and two years on Emory’s main campus. Students will respond to the 64 SRL questions as part of an online survey (sophomores) or paper-and-pencil survey (seniors). Data will enable us to verify whether Controversy with Civility, Consciousness of Self, and Comfort with Change continue to be the weakest SRL dimensions of our students.

During 2011-12 Institutional Research will also continue mining data from previous years so that we not only know our students’ levels of SRL, but also understand what explains them. This means that, beyond variables already included in previous regression analyses, we will identify in the dataset: Student Government Association members and RA’s--i.e., the “leader” groups that have thus far not been analyzed--and the extent of each student’s involvement in Theory Practice Service Learning (TPSL) courses while at Oxford. One faculty member in particular wants to understand the impact of TPSL courses on the development of Socially Responsible Leadership, and through her research, perhaps other faculty members teaching TPSL courses will be involved as well. (The IR Office, in cooperation with Campus Life, will also try to develop continuous measures for “leadership training” and “leadership experience,” as the binary measures used in the WNS dataset that we have been analyzing (e.g., “Have you received leadership training?”) do not enable us to understand how higher or lower levels of leadership training and/or experience impact SRL skills.)