

EMERITUS/OA ASSESSMENT

Lifelong Learning is an integral part of the mission of the California Community College System as well as San Diego Community College District's Continuing Education non-credit program. The Emeritus/OA courses are designed to provide adults 55+ the opportunity to acquire a quality education. These classes, which include both active and frail students, generate various outcomes (skills in critical thinking, community advocacy, physical well-being, and economic self-sufficiency) that benefit their communities as well as the students themselves, which is evidenced by the success of the Emeritus/OA program.

Students bring with them many life experiences including family and civic obligations, and health issues. Knowing this helps faculty design strategies that are successful in the classroom. Teaching adult students is a multifaceted experience. It is imperative that the learning environment meets the needs and interests of older students. Instructors and their institutions need to make sure all of these students 55+ are actively involved in the classroom. Faculty members use strategies that have proven effective including cooperative learning, lectures, group discussions, and brain-based learning to insure all modalities of learning are offered to their students.

As part of the San Diego Community College's accreditation process by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), the Emeritus/OA department carried out an internal assessment to confirm that these teaching modalities were indeed effective in teaching the older population.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the degree of learning, of our 55+ students, that was taking place in our classes. To define what to assess, categories were chosen to fit the instructor's expectations for learning in each discipline area in the Emeritus/OA program. Each discipline chose categories to best fit student learning outcomes.

The data originated from classroom observations conducted by Emeritus/OA instructors. Objectivity was an underlying goal of these assessments to have a clear understanding of what was happening in the classroom. Instructors were asked to give honest responses to assess what was actually going on in the classroom.

Given that there were no prior instruments developed to investigate this issue, these discipline specific assessments were designed by the Emeritus/OA faculty to ask the questions that would specifically address student learning. A total of 24 instructors participated in our Fall 2009 assessments using the assessment rubrics appropriate for their courses. There were 1017 students observed during this process. The assessment focused on the following courses: Arts & Crafts-OA, Social Studies-OA, Effective communication-OA, and Nutrition/Health-OA.

Each course had an assessment rubric that was designed to measure specific criteria for that course. Categories included topics such as: Reasoning, Accuracy, Communication, Understanding, and Craftsmanship. Each category had a ranking of 3. The data was interpreted by the Emeritus program chair and an outside consultant. The results of the assessments were measured by dividing the number of ranks (3) for all assessments using basic Excel formulas.

The assessments were conducted twice during the Fall semester. The first occurred in week three to establish a baseline of comparison for sampling the occurrence in week fourteen. The data was collected at the 3rd week and 14th week, and then given to the Emeritus Program Chair to calculate and appraise the data. Excel computations, along with statistical guidance from an outside consultant, were employed to increase the reliability of the conclusions.

The major results for the four courses assessed are shown in Tables I-IV.

Arts & Crafts-OA classes, as seen in Table I, we see there is a significant increase in all of the 5 categories assessed.

Arts & Crafts-OA

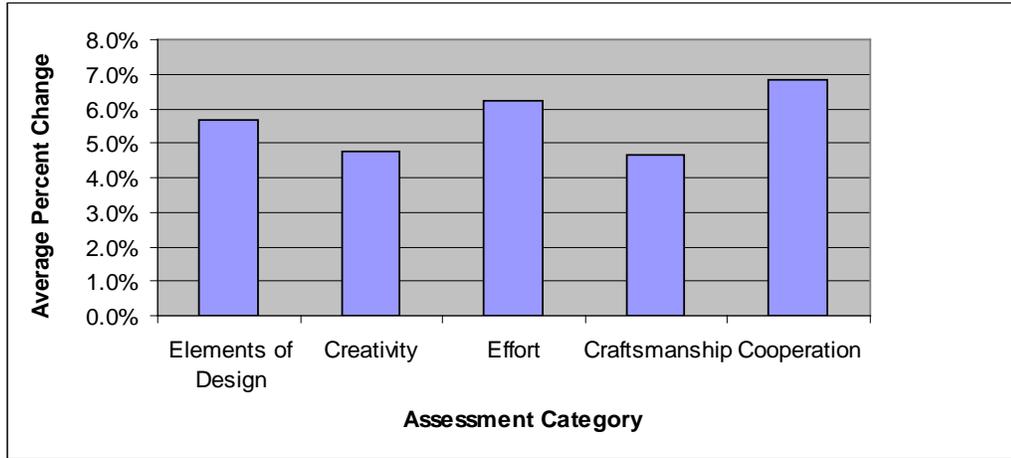


Table I. Eleven Week Learning Rates for Arts & Crafts-OA classes

It is instantly evident that all four courses showed an upward movement in all categories. The mean gains show learning in all categories with the results varying +1.25%-6.9%.

Social studies-OA, as seen in Table II, There is a marked increase in 3 out of the 4 categories.

Social Studies-OA

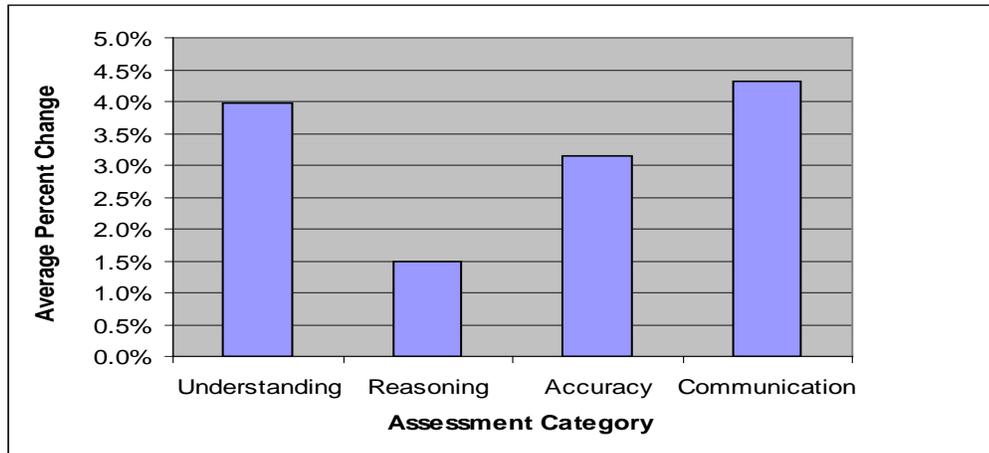


Table II. Eleven Week Learning Rates for Social Studies-OA classes

Effective Communication-OA, as seen in Table III., shows an increase in all of the 3 categories.

Effective Communication-OA

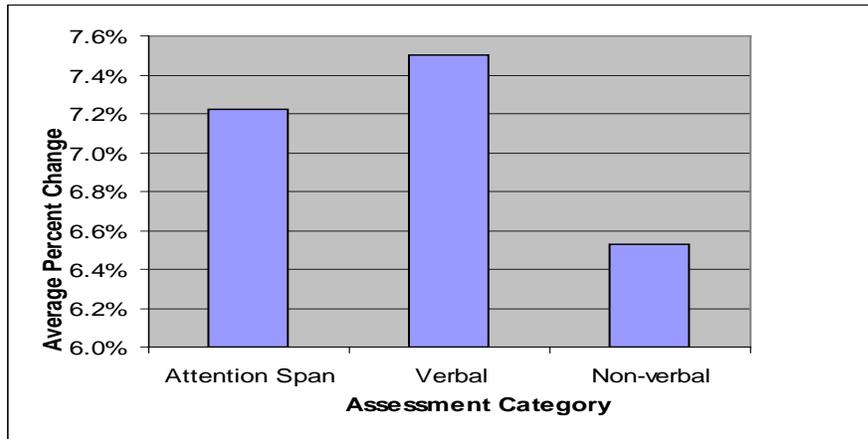


Table III. Eleven Week Learning Rate for Effective Communication-OA classes

Nutrition/Health-OA classes, as seen in Table IV, shows a marked increase in 3 categories and a small increase in 1 category assessed.

Nutrition/Health-OA

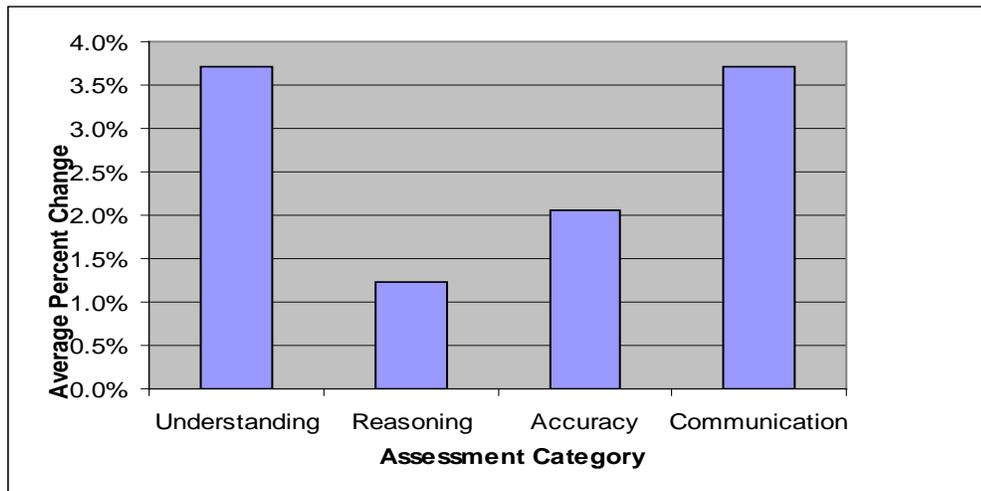


Table IV. Eleven week growth rate for Nutrition-OA classes

The results of these assessments clearly reinforced the conclusion that our students 55+ are achieving their goals to be Lifelong Learners. The findings from this sampling of four courses gives the Emeritus/OA department an opportunity see the learning growth in classes and the impetus to continue to improve the group's commitment to our students by allowing them to learn new skills.

Our instructors are positively impacted by these results by knowing that they are on the right track in their goals to educate older students. Our students are also positively impact because they are gaining the knowledge that will give them the opportunity use their new skill sets to thrive in their communities and workplaces.

Although not every class was assessed, we believe that that the cross-section that was assessed is a fair representation of all of our classes. As an outcome of this process, the Emeritus/OA department gained insight to what instructional content and

methodology is working in the classroom. The Emeritus/OA department is developing more assessments to be instituted in future semesters for all of our course offerings.