

Academic Affairs
Collegiate Learning Assessment Instructors'
Reports

Fayetteville State University

Year 2009

CLA report

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Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA)
Instructor's Assessment Report
By **Michelle R. Darnell**

1. Course information

- a. In what course(s) did you administer your CLA performance task?
PHI 110-15 Critical Thinking (CRN 2740)
- b. Please indicate if the majority of students enrolled in this class are freshmen, sophomores, juniors, or seniors.
The majority of the students in the class are Freshmen.

2. Performance task

- a. What was the task?

The task was to evaluate a fictional situation in which an individual puts forth three arguments to support the belief that a private educational contractor (College Bound, Inc.) should be hired to increase standardized test scores at a particular school.

The task that was created was used by all those who administered the CLA in PHI 110. Dr. Rich and Dr. Sadler took the lead in creating the task itself. I took the lead in writing the rubrics. However, each Philosophy professor involved in the CLA course redesign project (Drs. Osei, Hall, Sadler, Rich and Darnell) provided significant input throughout the development of the task and rubric.

- b. Describe the documents you included in the task. Why did you choose these specific documents?

Document A: A (fictional) letter written by a university professor that contains general information about the private contractor in question (College Bound, Inc.). This document was chosen/created to provide a general introduction to College Bound, confirm student ability to interpret and apply narrative information, and confirm student awareness of the role (including limitations) of experts, to imply the possibility of bias in other documents, and to provide an example piece of evidence that students are likely to encounter in "real" situations.

Document B: A (fictional) newspaper article that is an editorial written in favor of College Bound, Inc. This document was chosen/created to confirm student ability to interpret and apply narrative information, and confirm student awareness of hasty generalization, appeal to unqualified authority, appeal to ignorance, false dilemma, reliance on unreliable indicators, and the presentation of unsupported claims. It was also chosen/created as a result of recognizing that students will likely encounter situations in which newspaper articles are cited as resources in "real" situations.

Document C: A (fictional) table that provide test score data, correlated with the number of years College Bound program has been implemented at a school with a second table that provides indexes of achievement and satisfaction. This document was chosen/created to confirm student ability to interpret and apply quantitative data, and confirm student awareness of conditions for legitimate comparisons, the difference between correlation and causal connection, and fallacy of false cause. It was also chosen/created as a

result of recognizing that students will likely encounter and will be required to interpret quantitative data in “real” situations.

Document D: A (fictional) newsletter from an organization that receives funding from College Bound, which claims College Bound is highly successful. This document was chosen/created to confirm student ability to interpret and apply narrative information, and relate various documents to each other. This document also was chosen/created to confirm student awareness of potential bias, the importance of relevance of premises to conclusions, hasty generalization, appeal to unqualified authority, weak analogies, and the fallacy *argumentum ad verecundiam*. It was also chosen/created as a result of recognizing that students will likely encounter newsletters as a possible source of information in “real” situations.

Document E: A (fictional) scatter plot chart showing the relation between visits to a tutoring lab and scores on end-of-grade tests at one high school. This document was chosen/created to confirm student ability to interpret and apply quantitative data, and confirm student awareness of what constitutes an appropriate sample, conditions for legitimate comparisons, and the difference between correlation and causal connection. It was also chosen/created as a result of recognizing that students will likely encounter and will be required to interpret quantitative data in “real” situations.

Document F: A (fictional) scatter plot car showing the relation between school average test scores and number of years the school was affiliated with College Bound, Inc. This document was chosen/created to confirm student ability to interpret and apply quantitative data, confirm student awareness of what constitutes an appropriate sample from which to generalize, hasty generalization, and the difference between correlation and causal connection. It was also chosen/created as a result of recognizing that students will likely encounter and will be required to interpret quantitative data in “real” situations.

Document G: A (fictional) set of (3) educational research abstracts returned from a search of terms “Test Scores”, “Tutoring”, and “College Bound”. This document was chosen/created to confirm student ability to interpret and apply narrative information, confirm student awareness of conditions for legitimate comparisons, and establish the presence (or lack) of correlation when material is presented in a narrative format. It was also chosen/created as a result of recognizing that students will likely engage in database searches to acquire information in “real” situations.

- c. To what extent did a successful response to the performance task require students to integrate information and data in both narrative and quantitative forms? Explain.

As detailed above, four documents provided information in a narrative format (documents A, B, D, and G) and three documents provided information in a quantitative format (documents C, E, and F). Students were required to utilize information from each of these documents to fully and correctly respond to the task.

3. Performance Task Administration

- a. When did you administer the performance task?

The task was administered on two days, with specific instructions given on each day: Tuesday 14 April and Thursday 16 April. The full class period on each of these days was utilized (1 hour 15 minutes each day).

- b. Was the student's score on the assessment calculated in the final grade? If yes, what weight did it have?

Yes, the task is worth 10% of the student's final grade.

4. Student Performance

- a. Identify any consistent strengths you found in student performance.

I required my students first (day 1) to look only at Documents A-G, and evaluate the documents. Instructions for day 1 were to consider what claims were made in the documents, identify what evidence was presented to support the claims, determine whether a particular argument pattern (e.g. "statistical syllogism") was relied upon in the document, identify any "problems in the thinking displayed" within the documents (including naming any appropriate fallacies), consider whether the student him/herself could draw a conclusion based on the document, and look for general indicators of strength (which we discussed in class as relevance, reliability, quantity, and objectivity). Students consistently did a better job at simply evaluating the documents (with these instructions) than they did at specifically responding to the task, which required them to apply their findings to the hypothetical scenario. This is reflected in the highest average across all students falling under "Evaluation of Evidence".

- b. Identify any consistent weaknesses you found in student performance.

Students appear to have had trouble providing alternatives to explain the data that was provided. This is reflected in the lowest average across all students falling under "Acknowledge Alternatives". The task itself did not explicitly ask to name alternatives, and I suspect that students attempted to avoid being "subjective" by providing what they may have interpreted as their own "opinions" (which they were warned against in the instructions).

Students appeared to have difficulty incorporating their analysis into a formal written response.

Students consistently did not make explicit that they understand the difference between correlation and causation.

Generally, most student responses included superficial analysis, which indicates that they are only "developing" their analytic skills. This, however, might be expected, given that the task was administered in a 100 level course.

- c. (optional) If you reviewed the results with your students, what kind of comments did they make about it? Did they indicate whether they believe their FSU experience is preparing them to take assessments like the CLA?

Results were returned to students, but a lengthy discussion of these results did not occur.

5. Recommendation and follow up

- a. Knowing that our students' performance on the CLA will be part of our institutional assessment, what will you do in the courses you teach to address the skills and competencies assessed by the CLA?

It is clear that presentation of material regarding causal arguments should be altered in my PHI 110 courses. I will begin to incorporate more charts in our consideration of, and have a more detailed discussion of, the distinction between correlation and causation.

I will also require more exercises in which students are required to develop their own "alternatives".

Exercises in which data is applied to "scenarios" will be increased. Specifically, I will incorporate parts of the CLA task into the course throughout the semester. (E.g., while discussing causal arguments, we will look at a hypothetical scenario, like the one given in the CLA task, as well as graphs with pertinent data, and work to apply the data to the scenario).

- b. What recommendations would you offer for all faculty members?

At this point I do not believe I am in a position to offer specific recommendations, because I would need to know what other faculty are currently doing in their courses. Generally, I recommend (1) faculty be diligent in evaluating written assignments for grammar and spelling, and (2) faculty engage in increased communication, especially with those of us teaching PHI 110: Critical Thinking, to ensure continuity in "teaching critical thinking".