

Philanthropic Theory and Analysis in Action: Student Learning Assessment Project
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Abstract: This project proposes to support continuing development of assessment in the school of philanthropy. Newly updated Master's program learning outcomes will be assessed through qualitative analysis of in-person interview data. Undergraduate course learning objectives, mapped to PLUS profiles and Indiana Higher Education Commission college core competencies will be fostered through participation in this research project as interviewers and analyzers. Undergraduate objectives will be assessed via graded assignments and Time 1-Time 2 survey data. This approach will yield direct and indirect measures, quantitative longitudinal survey data, qualitative open-ended survey responses, qualitative interview data, and student co-production.

Purpose

The primary purpose of this proposed project is to support continuing development of school assessment plans by focusing on enhancing student learning. Specifically, the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy implemented a number of recent changes to the undergraduate and graduate programs. Akin to mid-semester feedback for instructors, this project is designed to garner mid-5-year-review-cycle feedback regarding those changes and learn from this assessment prior to the next formal program evaluation period.

A second purpose is to engage students in the process of assessment, to facilitate co-production of knowledge, develop a community of learners, and support achievement of student learning outcomes through participating in research. This approach is founded in assessment research that finds the importance of students engaging in evidence-based reasoning (e.g., Brown et al. 2010a; 2010b), and it builds upon a rich history of attention to evidence-based reasoning (EBR) as a core skill for students to gain. According to Duschl and Gitomer (1997), evidence-based reasoning involves students demonstrating the ability to think and reason in solving problems, and this is a crucial skill for participating in the creation and evaluation of scientific knowledge claims. Similarly, Driver et al. (1994) described the development of EBR as part of

the process of being socialized into the scientific community by learning evidence-based ways of seeing and engaging in supporting knowledge claims with reputable data.

Evidence-based reasoning is also an important skill in philanthropy. Philanthropy is a contested concept that can fall short of its intentions to improve social circumstances (Daly 2012; Zinsmeister 2016; Giridharadas 2018; Reich 2018). While many philanthropic efforts claim to contribute to improving social inequalities, critiques question whether philanthropy's historical and current record can be deemed socially just (Burton & Barnes 2017). Yet, it is challenging to measure whether philanthropy makes meaningful changes for its intended recipients.

Nevertheless, evidence regarding whether intended outcomes are achieved is crucial (Phillips & Jung 2016; Edwards et al. 2014), and this project will engage students in assessing outcomes.

Outcomes

This project proposes to foster student learning outcomes for undergraduate students while assessing the outcomes of graduate student learning. This is proposed through a research project that engages undergraduate students enrolled in PHST 210 Philanthropy & the Social Sciences as interviewers and analyzers of data collected from alumni of the Master of Arts in Philanthropic Studies. The school states: Through the master's program curriculum in philanthropic studies, students are equipped with both the *theoretical framework* and *practical skills* necessary to advance the understanding and practice of philanthropy (emphasis added). The outcomes of interest in these programs are described further within the supplementary materials.

These MA program learning outcomes were updated by the Academic Program and Assessment Committee during the past four years, in collaboration with current students, alumni, other faculty, and program administrators. The methods informing that prior analysis was to qualitatively analyze and code a collection of alumni testimonials, while also quantitatively and

qualitatively assessing comparable and peer program learning outcomes. This culminated in updated MA learning outcomes being proposed to faculty and voted upon last year. The collective sense throughout this process was that these updated MA outcomes better reflected the existing curriculum. However, this has yet to be empirically validated. Thus, this proposed project presents a novel opportunity to investigate these updated outcomes among MA alumni.

Method

In developing their social science competencies and analyst skills, *undergraduate students* will integrate knowledge as an analyst by completing multiple steps in a semester-long project. The first set of steps builds the ability to interact professionally with philanthropy representatives. Second, students will conduct interviews by using the tools of social science research to collect information. Third, students will engage in evidence-based reasoning in citing scholarship to analyze the interviews while collaborating with group members to present an analysis of the collective interviews. Fourth, in the final group presentation, students will apply content from course readings by citing relevant data and theories to assess relevant interview themes. In these ways, the project is founded in Fink's (20143) significant learnings of application and integration, while also collaborating with other group members to learn how to learn, care, and support each other in human dimensions by interacting more effectively.

This series of active learning activities (Barkley and Major 2016) will offer students the chance to develop their interviewing skills, professional communication and networking, critical thinking about theory and methods, management of a mini data collection project, and analysis of real-world organizations and positions. These undergraduate learnings will be measured directly through submitted assignments and oral presentations within the course (Hansen 2017). An advantage of this approach is the assessment is authentic and part of existing work.

Additionally, a Time 1 to Time 2 survey is administered to undergraduate students. The Self & Community Assessment (SECA) asks students to evaluate their own progress toward the course learning objectives, university profiles, and higher education commission social science competencies, as described in supplementary materials. These indirect measures provide advantages in critically understanding what students perceive they know and understand, while also evidencing change over time between their assessments early versus later in the semester. Open-ended data is also collected in the surveys to inform qualitative learning assessment.

The *graduate student* program outcomes will be assessed with indirect measures via interviews with alumni of the MA program who are employed within the field of philanthropy. The interview questionnaire will ask alumni about their perceptions and hindsight reflections regarding how well the program prepared them to: (1) integrate theoretical knowledge into philanthropic work; (2) analyze data, methods, results; and (3) contribute to a professional community with practical skills and ethical principles directed toward social and public benefits.

Analysis

This mixed methods data collection will consist of quantitative and qualitative analysis. Quantitatively, the undergraduate student survey data will be assessed with t-tests to establish whether Time 2 results are significantly greater than Time 1 results. Qualitatively, the interview data will be analyzed by employing the qualitative analysis procedures described by Saldana (2021). This will be done through an updated approach that moves beyond grounded theory, and an inductive-deductive dichotomy toward abductive analysis (Timmermans and Tavory 2012). The analysis will be computer-assisted with NVivo software and follow the coding techniques described by Jackson and Bazeley (2019). The analysis will be reported by employing the

standards for high-quality quality research and analysis (Epp and Otnes 2021; O'Brien et al. 2014; Tong, Sainsbury, and Craig 2007; Tracy 2010; Yadav 2022).

Dissemination

There are four dissemination outlets planned for this project. The first is the final report, which will be submitted within 30 days of the project completion: one year after grant award. The second is through a conference paper submission to the Assessment Institute in Indianapolis for presentation in October 2024. The third is an intended journal article that will be submitted to one of these publication outlets: *Assessment Update*; *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*; *Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Accountability*; *Research & Practice in Assessment*; or *Teaching Sociology*. The fourth is inclusion of social theorists in action insets within a new textbook entitled, *Social Theory in Action*, co-edited by Kathleen Korgen and the project director Patricia Snell Herzog. The textbook is under contract with Sage and will be published in 2027. The insets will provide examples of how theory is used professionally. Plus, the results and implications can inform the next 5-year program review.

Budget

Budget is requested to support the following costs. Modest incentives to interviewees for a \$50 gift card to thank them for contributing their time to this project. A total of 50 interviews will be completed, resulting in a total interview cost of \$2,500. Additionally, a small token of appreciation will be offered to students who complete at least 4 interviews with a \$25 gift card. It is estimated that 10 students will complete at least 4 interviews, for a total cost of \$250. An annual subscription to NVivo Collaboration Cloud will be purchased to facilitate analysis: \$500. Two students interested in working on the analysis and dissemination will be paid \$12/hour for about 5 hours/week for 10 weeks for a cost of \$1,200. This totals to a request for \$4,450.

Supplementary Materials

Undergraduate Learning Objectives

The undergraduate student learning objectives that will be fostered within this project relate most substantially to the IUPUI Profile of Learning for Undergraduate Success (PLUS 2024) called the Community Contributor. Community Contributors respectfully engage their own and other cultures, build community, behave ethically, and anticipate consequences.

Undergraduate students involved in this project will learn to communicate effectively with philanthropy professionals in a variety of settings, engage others civilly and with respect, understand the ethical principles of philanthropic professionals, and develop a professional plan. Additionally, this will build the Problem Solver profiles by engaging undergraduate students in thinking critically, collaborating, analyzing, synthesizing, evaluating, and persevering.

Plus, the P210 course learning objectives connect these university student profiles to the Indiana Commission for Higher Education College Core (2021). Specifically, in fulfillment of the social science requirement, this course is designed to foster competency 5. Social and behavioral ways of knowing. As outlined below, the course objectives map to 5.1 to 5.6 (indicated in parentheses).

1. Understand key social science approaches to the study of philanthropy.
 - This includes the ability to demonstrate knowledge of major concepts, empirical patterns, or historical contexts within a given social or behavioral domain (5.1).
 - This includes the ability to identify the strengths and weaknesses of contending explanations or interpretations for social or behavioral phenomena (5.2).
2. Analyze how issues of race, ethnicity, class, gender, age, and religion are interconnected with charitable giving, volunteering, and other forms of philanthropic activities.
 - This includes the ability to demonstrate basic literacy in social or behavioral research methods and analyses (5.3).
3. Examine the relationships among individuals, organizations, and communities.
 - This includes the ability to evaluate evidence supporting conclusions about the behavior of individuals, groups, institutions or organizations (5.4).
 - This includes the ability to recognize the extent and impact of diversity among individuals, cultures or societies in contemporary or historical contexts (5.5).
4. Apply knowledge to thoughtfully conduct an organizational analysis of a local nonprofit organization, philanthropic foundation, or voluntary association.
 - Identify examples of how social, behavioral, or historical knowledge informs and can shape personal, ethical, civic, or global decisions and responsibilities (5.6).

Master's Program Outcomes

The school MA program outcomes state: Through the master's program curriculum in philanthropic studies, students are equipped with the *theoretical framework* and *practical skills* necessary to advance the understanding and practice of philanthropy (emphasis added). In focusing on those features, this study investigates the first three program outcomes, below:

1. Demonstrate broad knowledge of the values, culture, and history of philanthropy. Students differentiate among the multiple meanings and motivations of philanthropy, generosity, charity, volunteering, and social movements. Students come to recognize that philanthropy leads to intended and unintended consequences.
2. Analyze research methodologies, data, results, and their implications to become sophisticated consumers of scholarly research.
3. Contribute to a community of principled, ethical, and skilled nonprofit practitioners and leaders who serve the public good from an interdisciplinary and global perspective.

These program learning outcomes were updated by the Academic Program and Assessment Committee during the past four years, in collaboration with current students, alumni, other faculty, and program administrators. The methods informing that prior analysis was to qualitatively analyze and code a collection of alumni testimonials, while also quantitatively and qualitatively assessing comparable and peer program learning outcomes. This culminated in updated learning outcomes being proposed to faculty and voted upon last year. The collective sense throughout this process was that these updated outcomes better reflected the existing curriculum. However, this has yet to be empirically validated. Thus, this proposed project presents a novel opportunity to investigate these updated outcomes among alumni.

IRB Protocol

An IRB will be submitted since this research involves human subjects, and the exempt protocol will include the wording for this semi-structured interview questionnaire. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Upon completion of transcriptions, the recordings will be destroyed, and all identifying information removed. Disseminated results will be de-identified.

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