



Student Affairs Information and Research Office

In collaboration with Student Development Health Education

A department of Student Affairs

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Life Skills for College Women and Men Assessment Summary– Academic Years 2004-2007

The Student Affairs Information and Research Office (SAIRO) is the research and assessment office within UCLA’s Student Affairs organization. The mission of SAIRO is to support the learning and development of the whole student by providing reliable, timely and useful information about students and their experiences; developing the capacity of student affairs and other stakeholders to collect, interpret, and utilize data to enhance the quality of students’ educational experience and environment; and by helping Student Affairs units assess and document the effectiveness of their programs and practices.

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For more information or to submit a data request, please contact SAIRO at:
(310) 206-8470
E-mail: sairo@saonet.ucla.edu
www.sairo.ucla.edu

Executive Summary

This report contains the findings from student outcomes assessment in Life Skills for College Women and Men during the academic years 2004-05, 2005-06, and 2006-07. Pre- and post-test surveys were conducted during the Fall, Winter, and Spring quarters of each academic year. Findings from all years demonstrated the following outcomes:

- Improvement in ability to cope with stress.
- Improvement in mental health, specifically showing gains in the areas of positive affect and psychological wellbeing and reductions in depression and psychological distress.
- Increased skills related to competency with intergroup relations including respect for differences, desire to understand the perspectives of others, frequency of engaging in interaction across difference, and self-awareness.
- Increased comfort and confidence in communicating with others in a variety of contexts.
- Greater confidence in their ability to succeed at UCLA.

Table 1: Respondent Characteristics by Academic Year

	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
Sample Size	253	363	332
Gender			
Female	70.4%	64.5%	61.8%
Male	29.6%	35.5%	38.2%
Response Rate	71.0%	67.5%	69.6%

Survey Design and Analysis

A pre-test/post-test format was utilized for this assessment. The questions included in the surveys were based on identified content areas and goals for the course. Specifically, the items were organized around the three main topic areas of the class: stress and coping; communication; and identity development; as well as assessment of academic capability/success. The items focused primarily on the desired behavioral and developmental outcomes of the course, not understanding of specific theory or content.

The pre- and post-test surveys were administered in class each quarter during the academic years 2004-05, 2005-06, and 2006-07. The items on the survey were modified slightly between academic year 2004-05 and 2005-06, so the findings from the first year differ slightly from the two subsequent years. Surveys were administered on the first and last days of class. The introduction to the survey provided students with information about the purpose of the study (program evaluation and improvement), as well as assuring them that their instructor would not see their responses and their responses would be in no way associated with their grade in the course.

Responses from both surveys were matched to create a single record for each student. This analysis only includes students for whom there was data from both time points, which represents about 65-70% of the total number of students enrolled in the class (see Table 1, page 1 for detailed response rates). For the majority of items change from pre- to post-test was evaluated using paired samples t-tests. The significance of changes was evaluated at the 99% confidence level ($p < .01$). For each academic year differences between the three quarters were examined using ANOVA. Very similar results were found for all quarters so the data were combined into one set for each year.

Items for Academic Year 2004-05

The survey included 27 statements that respondents rated on a five point scale from “disagree strongly” to “agree strongly.” Also included were eight self-ratings that asked students to rate their abilities in a variety of areas compared to the “average UCLA student.” An inventory of 17 mental health items

developed by RAND was also included. These items are designed to be combined into six overall scale measures. Finally, four questions focused on the hours per week students spent both acting proactively (setting goals, caring for self) and having difficulty managing emotions (feeling distressed and overwhelmed).

Items for Academic Years 2005-06 and 2006-07

The survey included 26 statements that respondents rated on a four point scale from “disagree strongly” to “agree strongly.” Also included were seven frequency questions with response options ranging from “not at all” to “frequently” and two life balance questions rated on a four point scale from “very well” to “poorly.” The inventory of 17 mental health items developed by RAND was also included.

Summary of Results: Academic Year 2004-05 (Year 1)

Positive change was found on 34 of the 41 variables compared using t-tests (see Table 2, page 4).

Stress and Coping

Students showed an increase in positive coping skills and stress reduction, along with a decrease in getting “stuck” with feelings, not able to move on, and feeling alone. The largest change was observed in the item “when stressed I have healthy strategies for relieving the feeling” (a mean increase of 1.01), suggesting that the tangible skills students learn in Life Skills are being put to use in students’ lives. The students also showed improved mental health at the end of the quarter as measured by the RAND mental health scales (i.e., increase in overall mental health, positive affect, and psychological wellbeing and a decrease in psychological distress and depression). The distributions of responses for the hours per week questions showed an overall increase in the amount of time students spent caring for themselves as well as setting and following through on goals. There was very little change in the measures of feeling overwhelmed and distressed, but it is possible that this is a result of the timing in the quarter—students are completing the post-test in the week prior to final exams which may influence their responses to these items.

Identity Development

Students showed increased confidence in themselves and in the relationship of self to others, including being more confident in their ability to develop friendships. Students also showed increased confidence in their academic skills and abilities in general, as well as increased confidence that they can succeed at UCLA specifically.

Communication

Students showed increased confidence in their communication skills in a variety of settings, including difficult situations, ability communicate their own needs, and communication within a sexual or romantic relationship. Interestingly, the change in confidence communicating with “people different from me” was greater than the change in confidence in communicating overall. This suggests that Life Skills may give students valuable skills that they can use in civil discourse with people who may have views different from their own.

Summary of Results: Academic Years 2005-2006, 2006-2007 (Years 2 and 3)

Positive change was found on 24 of the 32 variables compared using t-tests in academic year 2005-2006 and on 23 of the 32 variables in academic year 2006-2007 (see Tables 3 and 5, pages 5 and 6). Significant positive change in the percent of students reporting frequency of behavior was found on four of the seven items (see Tables 4 and 6, pages 5 and 6).

Stress and Coping

Once again, students showed significant increase in coping skills and ability to cope with stress. Improvement in mental health was also observed in the RAND mental health index, positive affect scale, and psychological wellbeing scale, as well as decreases in the psychological distress and depression scales.

Identity Development

Students improved in various aspects of self-awareness and self-confidence. There was also positive change in their perspectives about cultural differences and their desire to understand others views.

Communication and Relationships

Similar to previous results, by the end of the quarter, students increased in their confidence in communicating with others in a variety of contexts, including their relationships and difficult situations. In addition, they increased the frequency with which they engaged in conversations across difference. Students' perceived ability to form friendships improved, and they felt less anxious about meeting new people.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

One of the limitations that must be discussed is the possibility of bias due to students' desire to please the instructors. Every effort was made to avoid this by informing students that their responses would not be viewed by their instructors and not connected to their grade in any way, as well as having the instructors leave the room while the post-test was administered (along with regular course evaluations). Future research could attempt to eliminate this source of bias by distributing the survey outside of the classroom setting, but would likely result in a significantly lower response rate.

Another limitation of this analysis is the lack of a control group. Because there is no comparison group of students who did not enroll in Life Skills, it is impossible to say with certainty that these changes are a result of participation in the course not simply changes in the UCLA population that were occurring more widely. Future research would benefit from inclusion of a control group, possibly drawn from the waitlist (students who desired to take the class), the undergraduate population at large, or both.

Table 2: Academic Year 2004-2005 Mean Scores for Pre and Post Test Measures with Significant Change ($p < 0.01$)

	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Change
Stress and Coping			
<i>Increase:</i>			
I am comfortable asking others for support and input in making decisions*	3.75	4.27	0.52
My coping skills work well for me*	3.31	3.83	0.52
When I feel stressed I have healthy strategies for relieving the feeling*	2.86	3.87	1.01
Self Rating: Emotional Health^	3.29	3.64	0.35
RAND Mental Health Index-	63.83	68.26	4.42
RAND Positive Affect Scale-	61.54	66.58	5.04
RAND Psychological Wellbeing Scale-	62.76	68.49	5.72
<i>Decrease:</i>			
I have to rely on myself because I can't count on others*	3.07	2.80	0.27
I am unable to successfully cope with changes in my life*	2.36	2.04	0.32
When I am upset I tend to dwell on my feelings for a long time*	3.50	3.18	0.33
RAND Psychological Distress Scale-	35.66	31.80	3.86
RAND Depression Scale-	33.50	29.30	4.21
Identity Development			
<i>Increase:</i>			
It is important to be knowledgeable about cultural differences*	4.47	4.63	0.16
It is easy for me to develop new friendships*	3.47	3.79	0.33
It is easy to make new friends at UCLA*	3.02	3.53	0.51
I am able to challenge aspects of my upbringing that are not supportive of my wellbeing*	3.56	4.00	0.45
I have friends who are different from me (race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, etc.)*	4.22	4.40	0.17
Self Rating: Drive to Achieve^	3.74	3.90	0.17
Self Rating: Leadership Ability^	3.45	3.79	0.34
Self Rating: Social Self Confidence^	3.39	3.75	0.36
Self Rating: Understanding of Others^	3.74	4.08	0.34
<i>Decrease:</i>			
I am unhappy with my physical appearance*	2.80	2.52	0.29
Communication and Relationships			
<i>Increase:</i>			
I feel confident communicating with others*	3.79	4.25	0.46
I feel confident in communicating with people who are different from me*	3.75	4.30	0.55
I feel comfortable communicating about sex*	3.56	3.94	0.38
I am able to communicate my needs in a romantic relationship*	3.34	3.59	0.25
When I am upset I generally can articulate what is bothering me*	3.34	3.76	0.40
I have the skills I need to communicate my needs to others*	3.50	4.08	0.58
I feel confident in my ability to address difficult situations or concerns with other people*	3.24	3.83	0.59
Academic Success			
<i>Increase:</i>			
I have what it takes to succeed at UCLA*	3.83	4.16	0.33
I feel confident in my ability to handle the academic demands at UCLA*	3.53	3.99	0.46
When faced with a problem I am generally confident that I have the critical thinking skills necessary to solve it*	3.81	4.21	0.40
Self Rating: Academic Ability^	3.41	3.58	0.16
Self Rating: Intellectual Self Confidence^	3.33	3.71	0.38

*5-pt Scale: 1=Disagree Strongly to 5=Agree Strongly

^5-pt Scale: 1=Lowest 10% to 5=Highest 10%

-Scale item range: 0=none of the time to 100=all of the time

Table 3: Academic Year 2005-2006 Mean Scores for Pre and Post Test Measures with Significant Change ($p < 0.01$)

	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Change
Stress and Coping			
<i>Increase:</i>			
My coping skills work well for me*	2.84	3.18	0.34
When I feel stressed I have healthy strategies for relieving the feeling*	2.50	3.14	0.64
When faced with a problem I am generally confident that I have the critical thinking skills necessary to solve it*	3.06	3.37	0.30
RAND Mental Health Index-	66.77	71.36	4.59
RAND Positive Affect Scale-	64.84	70.76	5.92
RAND Psychological Wellbeing Scale-	66.24	72.27	6.03
<i>Decrease:</i>			
I have to rely on myself because I can't count on others*	2.59	2.43	0.17
I am unable to successfully cope with changes in my life*	2.02	1.83	0.19
When I am upset I tend to dwell on my feelings for a long time*	2.66	2.45	0.21
RAND Psychological Distress Scale-	33.22	29.42	3.81
RAND Depression Scale-	31.26	27.38	3.88
Identity Development			
<i>Increase:</i>			
It is important to be knowledgeable about cultural differences*	3.52	3.75	0.23
I am able to challenge aspects of my upbringing that are not supportive of my wellbeing*	2.91	3.17	0.26
I have friends who are different from me (race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, etc.)*	3.35	3.47	0.12
Dynamics in my family have shaped my development*	3.40	3.55	0.15
I have what it takes to succeed at UCLA*	3.16	3.37	0.21
I feel confident in my ability to handle the academic demands at UCLA*	2.92	3.24	0.32
Communication and Relationships			
<i>Increase:</i>			
I feel confident communicating with others*	3.17	3.46	0.29
I feel confident in communicating with people who are different from me*	3.06	3.40	0.34
I feel comfortable communicating about sex*	2.99	3.15	0.16
I am able to communicate my needs in a romantic relationship*	2.83	3.02	0.19
When I am upset I generally can articulate what is bothering me*	2.77	3.00	0.23
I have the skills I need to communicate my needs to others*	2.93	3.34	0.40
I feel confident in my ability to address difficult situations or concerns with other people*	2.79	3.14	0.35
It is easy for me to develop new friendships*	2.96	3.16	0.19
It is easy to make new friends at UCLA*	2.76	3.06	0.30
<i>Decrease:</i>			
I am often anxious about meeting new people*	2.52	2.30	0.21

*4-pt Scale: 1=Disagree Strongly to 4=Agree Strongly

-Scale item range: 0=none of the time to 100=all of the time

Table 4: Academic Year 2005-2006 Pre and Post Comparison of the Change in Percent of Students Indicating they Frequently or Occasionally Engaged in Activities in the Past Month ($p < 0.01$)

	Pretest	Posttest
Had in depth conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own	72.9	86.6
Had in depth conversations with students who are very different from you in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values	72.8	83.8
Tried to better understand someone else's views by imagining how an issue looks from his or her perspective	82.7	93.6
Felt at peace/centered	80.9	92.4

Table 5: Academic Year 2006-2007 Mean Scores for Pre and Post Test Measures with Significant Change ($p < 0.01$)

	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Change
Stress and Coping			
<i>Increase:</i>			
My coping skills work well for me*	2.86	3.17	0.31
When I feel stressed I have healthy strategies for relieving the feeling*	2.63	3.13	0.50
When faced with a problem I am generally confident that I have the critical thinking skills necessary to solve it*	3.13	3.35	0.22
RAND Mental Health Index-	68.38	71.59	3.21
RAND Positive Affect Scale-	66.23	71.01	4.78
RAND Psychological Wellbeing Scale-	67.30	72.04	4.74
<i>Decrease:</i>			
I have to rely on myself because I can't count on others*	2.57	2.42	0.15
When I am upset I tend to dwell on my feelings for a long time*	2.71	2.50	0.21
RAND Psychological Distress Scale-	31.17	28.60	2.57
RAND Depression Scale-	28.98	26.43	2.55
Identity Development			
<i>Increase:</i>			
It is important to be knowledgeable about cultural differences*	3.60	3.78	0.18
I am able to challenge aspects of my upbringing that are not supportive of my wellbeing*	2.87	3.19	0.32
I have friends who are different from me (race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, etc.)*	3.36	3.50	0.14
Dynamics in my family have shaped my development*	3.42	3.58	0.16
I have what it takes to succeed at UCLA*	3.23	3.39	0.16
I feel confident in my ability to handle the academic demands at UCLA*	2.96	3.24	0.28
Communication and Relationships			
<i>Increase:</i>			
I feel confident communicating with others*	3.13	3.39	0.26
I feel confident in communicating with people who are different from me*	3.04	3.37	0.33
I feel comfortable communicating about sex*	2.91	3.14	0.23
I am able to communicate my needs in a romantic relationship*	2.74	3.04	0.30
When I am upset I generally can articulate what is bothering me*	2.76	3.04	0.28
I have the skills I need to communicate my needs to others*	2.96	3.34	0.18
I feel confident in my ability to address difficult situations or concerns with other people*	2.79	3.14	0.35
It is easy for me to develop new friendships*	2.97	3.15	0.18
It is easy to make new friends at UCLA*	2.77	3.01	0.24
<i>Decrease:</i>			
I am often anxious about meeting new people*	2.48	2.33	0.15

*4-pt Scale: 1=Disagree Strongly to 4=Agree Strongly

-Scale item range: 0=none of the time to 100=all of the time

Table 6: Academic Year 2006-2007 Pre and Post Comparison of the Change in Percent of Students Indicating they Frequently or Occasionally Engaged in Activities in the Past Month ($p < 0.01$)

	Pretest	Posttest
Had in depth conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own	70.6	87.6
Had in depth conversations with students who are very different from you in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values	66.8	83.5
Tried to better understand someone else's views by imagining how an issue looks from his or her perspective	81.2	93.7
Felt at peace/centered	83.6	93.4