

Message from the Committee Chair

Meaningful Data – Captured and Communicated



Elijah Pritchett, Ph.D.
Professor, Humanities
LAC Chair

Welcome, dear readers, to 2019's final issue of *DataVersed*, the monthly newsletter that keeps you up-to-date on all the hottest and latest assessment issues. At this stage of the semester, many of you are working with students to turn culminating course research into papers and presentations, while some of you are trying to gauge how your students' thinking may have developed and changed as a result of engaging with course ideas. Research and disposition: both are major concerns to assessment, and each presents assessment with certain challenges.

On October 24, the Learning Assessment Committee in partnership with the Office of Academic Assessment engaged with some of these challenges by hosting a professional development panel to discuss the general education competencies Analyze and Research. The latter yielded an interesting discussion on how different what we call "research" can look, depending on whether it is invoked in the context of an English, art history, chemistry, or physics class. The panel on Analyze looked at a fascinating set of assignments designed to cultivate creativity and open-mindedness in fine art, English and humanities courses.

Naturally, in assessment we are constantly exploring ways to meaningfully capture and communicate these ideas in the form of solid data. In this month's issue you'll see a semester-long project designed by Fernando Mayoral to track his students' development in learning Spanish. We also take a look at fresh data from FSW's summer study abroad program to Italy in which students were asked to self-assess changes in their own disposition, specifically their changing curiosity about, and openness to, other cultures.

As we roll into the final days of the 2019 semester and year, may all your research be fruitful and your disposition remain sunny. Keep an eye out for the inaugural 2020 issue of *DataVersed*. Until then, the Learning Assessment Committee wishes good luck and happy holidays to all!

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Assessment in the Foreign Languages

The Often Unsettling Paradigm of Data

Looking at data is a funny thing. Depending on how you look at it, you change the appearance of it. To some, this creates the perception that spawned the assessment trope ‘statistics are deceiving.’ To others, the data remains an abstract idea altogether. But to assessment folk, the fact that data changes based on how you look at it is no different than turning a deck of cards over to see a beautifully painted rosemaling instead of Kings and Jacks. It is exactly what you expect, and exactly what you want. It isn’t deceiving or abstract, it is just the difference between looking at the world through your eyes, and then resting your head on the ground to see it as a small puppy would. It is quite different, perhaps unnerving, but still, it provides valuable insight.

So when you take an otherwise standard indirect assessment practice such as a disposition survey and review the data as Professor Mayoral did with his Spanish classes as a pilot, at first you get what is perhaps an unsettling set of results (see figure). Professor Mayoral asked his students if they were able to understand and express ideas following each lesson, and in each and every case the percentage of students reporting “Yes” declined. From this, it would seem students grasp less and less of the course as time goes on.

The unsettling paradigm outlined in the previous paragraph is not uncommon, and perhaps not unwarranted. However, what is lost in this data is what is not yet recorded as data, and is knowledge that only the instructor can provide. For example, what happens if we re-measure Lesson 1 after having completed Lesson 5, a lesson not yet encountered by students at the time of this measurement? We can continue and ask the same for Lesson 2, 3, and 4. Further still we can inquire as to the self-report of the original four lessons following Lesson 6, 7, or 8.

The answer to these questions is that the course is a foreign language course where each lesson builds very clearly and sequentially from the last. And because the course builds very sequentially, the previous lesson self-report from students should improve. After Lesson 8, Lessons 1 through 4 is likely to exhibit percentages of 98%, 93%, 84%, and 75%, or some similar relationship. In time, each lesson percent response by students will be about even with each other once it is sufficiently practiced, or in the reading of the graph, sufficiently clear of being the most recently studied area (Lesson 4 in the graphic).

So, have we learned anything in recognizing this feature of the data? No, not yet anyway. So far all we know is that the data is exhibiting a pattern that one might expect for a very sequential course. Instead, to understand what is happening in the classroom based on these data we must now carefully consider the communication between the instructor and the analyst, or in this case, Professor Mayoral, and members of Team AASPIRE.

We could argue that the drop from Lesson 1 to Lesson 2 seems reasonable. Whether you arrive at this notion based on the discussion above and that the drop is minimal, or simply because the drop is only 5% compared to others that are two or three times that amount, for certain it is clear that it doesn’t ‘jump out at you.’



Joseph van Gaalen, Ph.D.
Asst. VP of Institutional Research,
Assessment, and Effectiveness,
Team AASPIRE

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Fernando O. Mayoral
Professor, Spanish

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In any case, let's focus now on the drops between Lessons 2 and 3 (91% to 75%) and Lessons 3 and 4 (75% to 59%). Are these reasonable? To tackle these questions, we can begin by exploring another two sets of questions. For clarity, let's look at these in a bulleted format.

1. First, are the expectations for learning in the classroom in a sequential fashion reasonably represented by these results? In other words, should the drop-offs be steeper or more gradual? This could lead us to questions like:

- a. Is there a sufficiently different or perhaps daunting characteristic of content in Lessons 3 and 4 that cause the larger drop off?
- b. Is there a change in the type or style of content in Lessons 3 and 4, such as a shift to conjugations of verbs instead of just basic word translations?

Or

- c. Is there a change in format in Lessons 3 and 4, such as longer chapters commanding more class sessions, or stunted study, such as a gap caused by Spring Break?

All three of the above question avenues tell us something about whether there is a gap in understanding with the students at Lesson 3 or Lesson 4 or whether it may not be an avenue of investigation just yet.

Remember, this is a pilot study. We are all learning here.

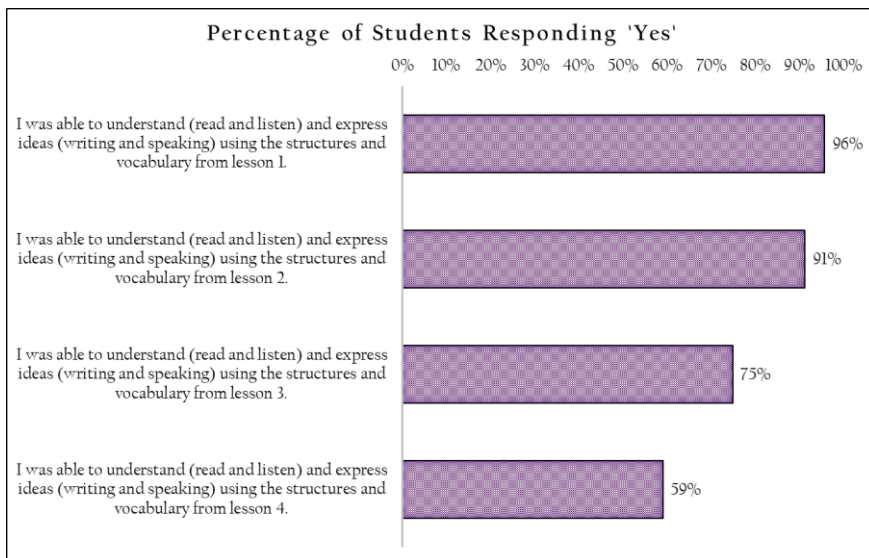
2. And a second, and very closely linked question to #1 above, are the connective points between lessons sufficient enough to correct the drop-offs in time? In other words, will learning Lessons 5, 6, 7, and 8 help to strengthen Lessons 1, 2, 3, or 4, or are the linkages in topics too weak, in which case, the drop-offs are immediately a very real problem? This could lead us to questions like:

- a. How much do students utilize topics from Lesson 1 in Lessons 3, 4, and beyond? And should it be that way?

Or

- a. Are there areas where the utilization from earlier Lessons aren't really necessary or appropriate?

As you might imagine, all that we have described herein can take up a great amount of time discussing. And all that time, whether it is in a meeting, or in a hallway with your colleague, is assessment at its finest. All it needed was a healthy dose of data.

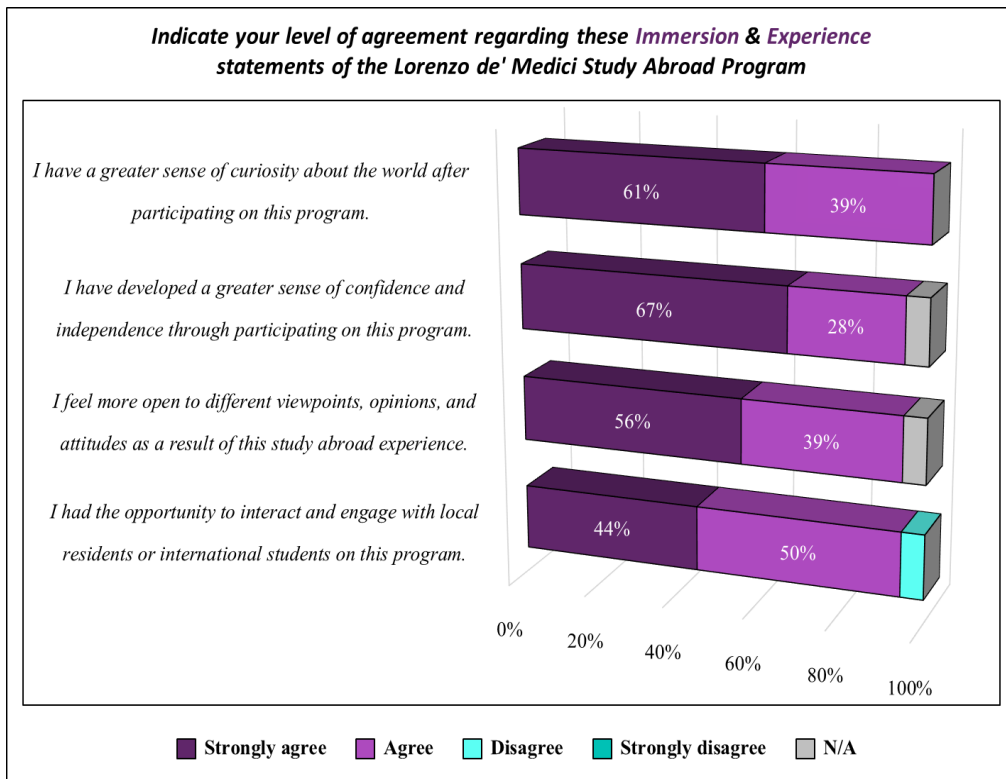


FSW's study abroad at *Istituto Lorenzo de' Medici* Yields Data on Immersive Experiences

FSW's study abroad program at *Istituto Lorenzo de' Medici* (LdM) in Italy is a unique one in which students take one FSW class, taught by FSW faculty, but in Italy, and one LdM course, taught by faculty at LdM, all the while experiencing an immersive experience abroad. While a student can choose a business track, mathematics track, humanities track, or a variety of others depending on the

yearly program offerings, format and function of the study abroad program at LdM allows for general study but with an improvement in international understanding, enriched educational environments, and promotion of a more worldly experience of study.

Experiences like the above can't always be quantified easily, but our



This graphic shows students' reporting of level of agreement regarding study abroad.

Center for International Education (CIE) has worked hard to make that happen anyway. In conjunction with the Office of Academic Assessment, CIE Director Michael Messina developed and administered a survey to LdM students following their course of study this year (Summer 2019) to gauge their immersive experiences. A quick look at the graphic speaks volumes about the success of the program. Ninety-percent or more students report a greater sense of curiosity, confidence and independence, open mindedness towards differing opinions, and interaction and engagement with people abroad.

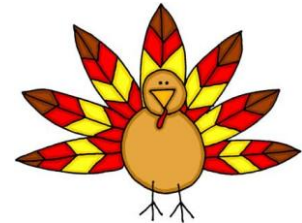
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