



The 2001 – 2002 Student Learning Outcomes Report



Rio Salado College

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General Education Program

Executive Summary

Rio Salado general education learning outcomes highlights are as follows:

- Students scored within the acceptable range of college-level performance¹ on writing, reading, and problem solving. The information literacy cohort also scored within the acceptable range of college-level performance even when the dual enrollment cohort took part in the assessment for the first time.
- The AP was administered to 214 Rio Salado students as a multiple measure. Rio Salado students had a higher mean on all sections of the test than the appropriate comparison group that consists of community college sophomores. Against this comparison group, the graduate cohort scored at the 100th percentile, while the distance learning and dual enrollment cohorts scored at the 97th percentile. Overall, the results of the Academic Profile validate the assertion that, as a group, a majority of Rio Salado students are performing at or above and acceptable college level.

In 2001-2002, Rio Salado general education students demonstrated college-level skills on four of the five general education competencies. Students also performed at a higher level than comparable students nationwide on the AP. Although assessment results are not always conclusive, the multiple competency assessment use makes it possible to identify both strengths and potential problem areas for Rio students.

¹ College level performance is operationalized as a score of 2.75 or above.

Assessment Process

During the 2001-2002 academic year at Rio Salado College, competency assessments were administered to students in order to measure student skill levels in writing, reading, critical thinking, information literacy and problem solving across the curriculum. The results of these assessments provide an indication of areas of strengths and weaknesses for Rio Salado students. Using this data classroom interventions can be made where indicated to enhance student skill levels, particularly if they are scoring below college level in particular skills.

Annual averages were computed using the scores from all students who completed an assessment during the academic year. Possible scores range from 1.00 to 4.00 on the Rio Salado competency assessment rubric. The rubric is defined as follows: 1.00 = unacceptable at the college level, 2.00 = minimally acceptable at the college level, 3.00 = skills expected at college level, 4.00 = superior college level skills. Although each competency has its individualized rubric, they are all based on the Rio competency assessment rubric.

All students taking general education classes at Rio Salado fall into one of the following two cohorts: distance learning and dual enrollment. Distance learning students take courses through the Distance Learning program, which includes distance learning, PASS and Pathways students. Dual enrollment participants are students who are participating in Rio Salado's specialized college-level program for high school students. Further, Rio graduates are also tested on the Academic Profile (see below). The assessment scores of students belonging to these three groups are compared with one another.

Assessment scores were analyzed in a number of ways. Students are placed into cohorts that are defined by mode of course delivery, the age of students, and the number of general education credits completed by the students while at Rio Salado.

Students participating in the assessment were enrolled at Rio Salado through a variety of programs and provided an accurate sample of Rio Salado students. The sampling method used was purposeful, stratified random sampling, achieved through the systematic sampling of general education courses.

A number of changes have been made in the assessment process in the pursuit of continuous improvement at Rio Salado College since the 1998-1999 academic year. Prior to 2000-2001, assessments were administered throughout the year. However, assessments are now administered only during the spring semester. This is an effort to encourage more participation by only asking students to participate once per year. Further, it allows an emphasis on using the results for interventions to improve teaching and learning, as opposed to focusing on data gathering and analysis.

The assessment process has been streamlined in other ways. Competency assessments were previously delivered in paper format to each student in selected courses. The students were required to fill out the paper assessment and return it by mail. The introduction of the Institutional Research Data Base (IRDB) has greatly changed this process. With the introduction of the IRDB, assessments can be placed directly into the line-up of lessons in on-line classes.

The assessment responses are sent directly to the database for analysis by the Institutional Research Office staff. In addition, students in mixed media, print-based, and in-person classes who receive scannable versions of the assessments also have the opportunity to enter their responses on-line into the IRDB. Further, this system has allowed the Institutional Researcher to improve the program level assessment design by using a much more precise stratified sampling distribution process. The results of the research are, therefore, much more generalizable to the Rio Salado student body.

In addition to streamlining the process of assessments during this period, Rio Salado has also refined the assessment instruments. The Reading instrument was pared down from three instruments to one instrument in order to create a more comparable response set. The Critical Thinking and Problem Solving assessments have been replaced with new instruments, and the Information Literacy instrument has been developed and tested. The Writing instrument has been refined such that a total writing score will still be given. However, five subcategories of skills that define the mechanics of the writing process are also graded, allowing for more targeted tutorial interventions.

Other nationally norm-referenced were used as multiple measures to allow the study of student skills from several perspectives on the same or similar skills. The nationally normed Academic Profile (AP) from the Educational Testing Service was begun in 2000-2001. The AP assesses college-level writing, college-level reading, critical thinking, humanities, social science, natural sciences and using mathematical data.