

UNIVERSITY SKILLS: RAISING STUDENT CONSCIOUSNESS

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Students often mistakenly assume that they have adequate or even excellent skills to succeed at university. I have developed pre- and post-skills assessment questionnaires which identify the range of university skills, ask students to assess their own skills, and offer a tool to raise student consciousness about the skills necessary for university success.

In the first tutorial, students fill out a "Learning Objectives/Skills Assessment". Tutorial leaders do not need to read over the student questionnaires but can use them as a vehicle to talk with students about the importance of developing their skills. TAs might also pair students to examine each other's questionnaires. Collect at the end of the class and do not return to students.

At the end of the year, students fill out a follow up questionnaire "Follow-Up: Learning Objectives /Skills Assessment". An exercise on "Doing Data Analysis" offers one way of processing the comparison of pre- and post-questionnaires with students. It encourages students to consider their skill development over the year and presents an opportunity to discuss the difference between subjective and objective measures.

Break students into pairs, one acting as researcher for the other. Have each researcher look over the pre- and post-questionnaires and answer questions #1 and #2. Then the subjects can answer #3-5 and have a discussion with the researcher. When students have finished this exercise, bring the class together to talk about what they found.

In this second questionnaire, many students assessed their skills as weaker than at the beginning of the year. Students often thought the data 'objective' and mistakenly assumed that if they assessed their skills as 'lower' in the second questionnaire, this was an objective measure, rather than a result of their changed consciousness about skills. Through our discussion, many did recognize that they had over-assessed their skills at the beginning of the year and under-estimated the significance of such skills to their success at the university. The second assessment then reflects their greater understanding of the importance and complexity of these skills.

The three student handouts – Learning Objectives/Skills Assessment, the Follow-up Questionnaire and the handout on Doing Data Analysis are all available on the Foundations website

<www.arts.yorku.ca/sosc/Foundations>.

Although the Assessments are relatively generic, you may want to revise them to enhance their relevance to your course.