

Anderson University
School of Adult Learning
ADVANCE Program Assessment Report
November 2005

I. Goal 1: ADVANCE students will demonstrate knowledge and application of organizational leadership principles.

A. Objective 1: Eighty percent of ADVANCE students will receive a rating of satisfactory or outstanding on a tool measuring the application of organizational leadership principles.

Methodology - A case study was designed with items to measure students' knowledge and application of organizational leadership principles. The case study was assigned to Cohorts M, N and O during the ethics module in the summer of 2004 – summer 2005. Names were removed and copies were made of all case studies after being graded by the instructor. Using a faculty designed rubric (Appendix A), another faculty member evaluated seven (25%) of all case studies to determine students' ability to discuss organizational leadership principles.

Data Results - Two components were used to evaluate students' ability to apply organizational leadership principles. On Component A, 42.9% and 57.1% of the students were evaluated at satisfactory and outstanding respectively for a total of 100%. On Component B, 42.9% and 57.1% were evaluated at satisfactory and outstanding respectively for a total of 100%. **This objective was met.** (See data in Appendix A1)

B. Objective 2: Seventy-five percent of ADVANCE student site coordinators (a non-faculty person connected to the action research project) responding to a survey will perceive that ADVANCE students have knowledge of effective organizational leadership principles and concepts.

Methodology – A faculty designed survey was sent to the site coordinators for students in Cohorts M, N, and O who completed the major between the summer of 2004 – summer of 2005. Twenty-seven surveys were mailed, 11 were returned with a

response rate of 40.7%. One question was used to determine the site coordinator's perspective on the student's knowledge of effective organizational leadership principles and concepts (Site Coordinators Survey, Question #17, Appendix B).

Data Results - On a scale of one to five (one being the lowest level of knowledge of effective leadership and five being the highest), four site coordinators evaluated his or her student's knowledge as a four (36.4%) and seven site coordinators responded at the highest level of knowledge (63.6%). The mean score was 4.64. Interpreting scores of fours and fives as knowledge of effective organizational leadership principles and concepts, 100% of students' site coordinators perceived that ADVANCE students have knowledge of effective organizational leadership principles and concepts. **This objective was met.** (Appendix B1 and B1a, Question 17)

C. Objective 3: Seventy-five percent of ADVANCE student site coordinators responding to a survey will report that ADVANCE students demonstrate effective leadership skills.

Methodology – A faculty-designed survey (Appendix B) was sent to the site coordinators for Cohorts M, N and O who completed the major between the summer of 2004 and summer of 2005. Out of 27 surveys mailed, 11 were returned with a return ratio of 40.7%. Seventeen questions were asked to determine the site coordinator's perspective on the student's display of effective leadership skills. Site coordinators could choose to mark unobserved or 1 – 5 with 5 being the highest level of effective leadership skills.

Sixteen questions were asked regarding the student's level of effectiveness in displayed leadership skills (See Site Coordinator Survey Questions 1-16). One question asked for an overall evaluation of effective leadership skills (Question 18).

Data Results – The mean score on 16 skill-items was 4.62. The mean score on the overall effectiveness was 4.55. Scores of 4 and 5 were considered an effective demonstration of leadership skills. Of the site coordinators surveyed, 94.21% reported that their ADVANCE students demonstrated effective leadership

skills. **This objective was met.** (Appendix B1 and B1a, Questions 1- 16 and 18)

Evaluation - Based upon evidence gathered through case study application and the perspectives of site coordinators, this goal has been reached both years with increased scores this year. ADVANCE students who have completed the major demonstrate knowledge and application of organizational leadership principles.

Action research project coordinators agreed that some students portray a “know it all” attitude that may be detected when working with site coordinators. Prior to working with site coordinators, project coordinators will discuss the need for students to yield to their site coordinator’s expertise and glean what they can by listening and learning from them. We will continue to monitor the scores in the future for listening skills and skills in receiving feedback.

We will continue to assign the case study in the Ethics Module to evaluate students’ ability to apply organizational leadership principles. We will also continue to send out Site Coordinator Surveys to assess their perspective of students’ knowledge and demonstration of effective leadership skills. In the future we need to assign numerical values to the criterion in the rubric for Goal 1 Objective 1 and begin reporting means in the future.

II. Goal 2: ADVANCE students will communicate effectively.

- A. Objective 1: Eighty percent of ADVANCE students will receive a rating of satisfactory or outstanding on criteria related to oral communication skills.

Methodology – The action research project presentations for Cohorts M, N and O were evaluated for effectiveness using unsatisfactory (1 point), satisfactory (2 points) and outstanding (3 points) on five components measuring oral communication skills (Appendix C). To be considered as effective, students’ scores had to fall in the range of 12-15 with the highest possible score being 15. Two independent evaluators attended and evaluated 28 presentations. The evaluators were not involved in the preparation or the grading of students’ work.

Data Results – Scores between the two evaluators were reported separately and averaged together. Of the 28 presentations observed, two scores were discarded due to an item being left blank. The average score of each component ranged from 2.19 to 2.59 with the strongest component again this year measuring the use of effective verbal and visual support. Of the students evaluated, 62% of the students received a total score of 12 or better. **This objective was not met.** (Appendix C1)

- B. Objective 2: Eighty percent of ADVANCE students will display effective writing skills as evidenced by receiving a rating of Somewhat Agree (3) or Strongly Agree (4) to the criteria related to written communication skills.

Methodology – A blind review was conducted on Action Research Project Papers to determine the effectiveness of students' writing skills. Out of 20 unrestricted papers received since the last study, 5 (25%) were randomly selected for evaluation. A faculty member used a writing rubric including 19 criteria to determine the effectiveness of students' writing skills (Appendix D). The evaluator was given five choices, N/A, Strongly Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Somewhat Agree and Strongly Agree. Points 1 – 4 were assigned with 1 having least agreement. Effective writing skills were interpreted as those rated Somewhat Agree (3) or Strongly Agree (4) for writing criteria.

Data Results – On nine of the nineteen criteria, the average score was evaluated as less than effective (three criterions from Ideas and Content, two criterions from organization, two from Conventions, and two from APA Format and Style). The average score for the four areas were as follows: Ideas and Content (3.03), Organization (2.85), Conventions (3.07) and APA Format/Style (2.80). The percentages of students evaluated as having effective writing skills (3's or 4's) were less than 80% for all of the areas: Ideas and Content (67%), Organization (65%), Conventions (77%) and APA Format/Style (60%). Overall only 68% of the five students scored as having effective writing skills. **This objective was not met.** (Appendix D1)

- C. Objective 3: Seventy-five percent of ADVANCE students will report that the ADVANCE program has helped them to enhance their oral and written communication skills.

Methodology – A faculty-designed survey was sent to all ADVANCE students who completed the major since the last study. Specific questions were used to measure how students thought the program helped them enhance their oral and written communication skills. Students were given six levels ranging from Don't Agree (1) to Fully Agree (6). Out of 27 surveys mailed, 11 were returned providing a return rate of 40.7% (Appendix E, Questions # 1-4, 6, 12, 20, and 21)

Data Results – Responses to the oral and written communication items listed on the Graduate Survey were as follows. The average score for each communication item ranged from 4.64 to 5.55 with the overall average as 5.18. The range of students responding in agreement (4's, 5's and 6's), were 81.8% - 100%. **This objective was met.** (Appendix E1 and E2, #s 1-4, 6, 12, 20, and 21)

Evaluation - Two of the three communication objectives were not met. Over 75% of the students both this year and last year agreed that the ADVANCE program helped them enhance their oral and written communication skills but the skills were not demonstrated as effective. Scores for both oral and written communication skills dropped from last year. Oral scores dropped from 87% to 62%. Written scores dropped from 77% to 68%.

The ADVANCE faculty is concerned that overall writing skills, as evaluated by a faculty member, were still not considered effective and actually decreased in the four areas when compared with last year. The lowest score area this year was APA Format/Style, 2.80 compared to 2.96 last year. Ideas and Content decreased from 3.17 to 3.03. Conventions also dropped from 3.27 to 3.07. These writing deficiencies are of even greater concern because of the writing intensive nature of the ADVANCE program. Students are required to submit 8-10 page papers for every module and the research projects are evaluated and returned for revisions throughout the 18 months of the program.

A new handbook for the project has been developed by one of our research coordinators. It provides clearer guidelines and expectation for the project. With this new tool and a reminder to faculty through memo and in fall faculty development workshops, we will reiterate the need for faculty to insist on proper writing and APA format and style throughout the program. We will also ask research coordinators to

review with each cohort, presentation expectations before each cohort presents.

Writing workshops have not been offered through the ADVANCE program but students have been referred to the Kissinger Learning Center when writing problems have been detected. We will discuss writing concerns in the next Faculty Development Session and determine if writing workshops need to be developed through the ADVANCE program.

Faculty questioned if the goal of 80% is realistic for demonstrating effective written and oral communication skills. Four out of five students may not be able to demonstrate such skills in an undergraduate program. Faculty agreed, however, to implement the changes discussed and re-evaluate the goal after the next data set has been collected.

III. Goal 3: ADVANCE students completing the major will demonstrate problem-solving abilities related to a specific practical organizational situation.

A. Objective 1: Eighty percent of ADVANCE students who have completed the major will demonstrate effective problem solving skills by scoring good or excellent on criteria related to problem solving abilities as applied in their action research project.

Methodology – A faculty member conducted a blind review on Action Research Project Papers to determine the effectiveness of students' problem solving abilities. Out of the 20 non-restricted papers received since spring 2004 – fall 2005, 5 (25%) were randomly selected for evaluation. A rating of poor (1), fair (2), good (3), and excellent (4) was given on ten problem solving components. (Appendix F)

Data Collected – Eighty percent of ADVANCE students completing the major met only one of the ten criteria demonstrating effective problem solving abilities as evidenced by scoring Good (3) or Excellent (4). Nine other problem-solving criteria, however, had less than 80% of ADVANCE students demonstrating effective problem solving abilities. Only 62% of

the ADVANCE students were evaluated as having overall effective problem solving skills. **This objective was not met.**

B. Objective 2: Seventy-five percent of ADVANCE students completing the organizational leadership major will perceive that the program has helped them to develop effective problem solving knowledge.

Methodology – As part of a survey sent to ADVANCE students who completed the major, two questions were used to measure the level of agreement towards how the program has helped enhance their knowledge of effective problem solving. Agreement was rated from 1 to 6 with 6 considered as full agreement. (Appendix E, Questions 13 and 23)

Data Collected – Of the 27 surveys mailed, 11 were returned (Response rate of 40.7%). The average score on the two components measuring the level of students' agreement to problem solving knowledge gained in the program (a possible 1 – 6) was 4.90 for #13 and 5.36 for #23 (an average score of 5.13). Of the ADVANCE students completing the major, 90% (#13) and 100% (#23) agreed that the ADVANCE program helped them develop effective problem solving knowledge. **This objective was met.** Appendix E1 and E2)

C. Objective 3: Seventy-five percent of ADVANCE students completing the organizational leadership major will acknowledge that they are using effective problem solving skills in their personal and/or professional lives.

Methodology - As part of a Graduate Survey sent to all ADVANCE students who completed the major, 13 items were used to measure level of agreement toward the use of effective problem solving skills in their personal and/or professional lives. (Appendix E, Questions 5, 7-11, 14-19, and 22)

Data Results – Of the 27 surveys mailed, 11 were returned (Response rate 40.7%). The average score of the 13 items measuring students' agreement that they are using effective problem solving skills in their personal and/or professional lives was 5.16. Of the ADVANCE students completing the major,

76.8% fully agreed with 5's or 6's on the 13 items and 96.1% agreed. **This objective was met.**

Evaluation – Two of the three objectives regarding problem solving knowledge and abilities were met under this goal again this year. Problem solving abilities based upon the action research project criteria were again not effective as evidenced by less than 80% scoring good or excellent on problem solving criteria.

The action research project is the culmination of 18 months of coursework and independent projects. The ADVANCE faculty is still concerned that it does not provide a stronger representation of effective problem solving skills. Recommendations from last year were implemented. Project coordinators and other module facilitators met in June 2004 and September 2005 for a faculty development session to share ideas and strategies for success. It was determined that a new project guideline book be developed to more clearly define the expectations for the action research paper and to re-work how the project is implemented. Project research coordinators anticipate an increase in problem solving skills once the new guidelines have been in place and a new data set is collected. We will continue to offer faculty development sessions once a year to provide a better understanding of problem solving skills (as well as others) that can be applied through the action research project and program requirements.

IV. Goal 4: ADVANCE students will understand the role of personal values and ethics in organizational decision-making.

A. Objective 1: Eighty percent of ADVANCE students will receive a rating of satisfactory or outstanding on the components related to how ethical principles and personal values are applied to work and life decisions.

Methodology - A case study involving ethical principles, multiple stakeholder conflict and decision-making was designed with items to measure, the student's ability to describe how personal values and ethics are incorporated in decision-making. Two components were evaluated as unsatisfactory, satisfactory or outstanding. The case study was assigned to Cohorts M, N and O during the ethics module in the summer of 2004 – summer 2005. A faculty member unrelated to the module conducted a blind review on 7 (26%) of the 27 case studies submitted. (Appendix G).

Data Results – Two components were used to evaluate how ethical principles and personal values are applied to work and life decisions. Of the ADVANCE student who completed the major, 100% (57.1% with a score of satisfactory and 42.9% outstanding) described how personal values and ethical principles are incorporated in their organizational decision-making. 100% also articulated and defended the ethical decisions they would make as leaders within the company presented in the case (57.1% with a score of satisfactory and 42.9% outstanding). **This objective was met.**

Evaluation – Last year only 75% of ADVANCE students completing the major articulated and defended the ethical decisions they would make as leaders within the organization presented in the case. The instructor for the ethics module shared that he has worked to move students toward improving their case responses. While pleased with this year's results, however, he is skeptical that 100% truly represents an overall improvement in this area from his case analyses. According to the instructor students still seem to verbalize their understanding throughout the sessions more effectively than their writing represents in their case responses.

In the future, it would be helpful to add criteria that evaluate more specifically how students are using personal values and ethics in their personal and professional decision-making after program completion. We will continue to monitor this goal and consider additional criteria for further study in the future.

V. Strengths and Weaknesses

One of the major strengths of the ADVANCE Degree Completion Program is the fact that it provides a doable approach for working adults to complete their bachelor's degree without compromising the integrity of academic expectations. The data gathered this year indicates improvements needed in the areas of problem solving and oral and written communication skills. The faculty, another strength of the program, is committed to implementing recommendations and changes to make a positive affect on these areas in the future. We are blessed to have consistent part-time instructors and project coordinators in many of our modules who understand the program outcomes and benefit from teaching the same course year after year. Their input is invaluable to longitudinal program evaluation.

The action research project is another strength of the program. This experiential learning requirement provides an opportunity for students to apply the knowledge and skills gained from classroom experiences and utilize them in problem solving with area businesses and community organizations. Many students gain promotions and positive recognition due to their work on these projects. Two students this year acquired grants for their organizations, one for \$20,000 and another for \$5000. These are significant learning experiences that enhance students' personal and professional lives.

Faculty is quite concerned with the decrease in written and oral communication and problem solving skills as evaluated in the action research project this year. Some feel the goal is unrealistic, but we are determined to make improvements in the future by making expectations clear and holding to those expectations throughout the program.

VI. Curricular Improvements

Action Research Project Coordinators have joined forces to provide consistent expectations. The development of the new project manual addresses some of the problem areas identified in the earlier manual. The change in the design of the project from 17 months to 8 months eliminates some of the stress students have felt in having two demands on their time for an extended amount of time. While we have seen many excellent projects in the past, we hope to see more thoughtful problem solving pursuits since they are combining it with their coursework for a shorter period of time. Faculty still feel that there is a disconnect between the project and the coursework. More discussion is needed to determine how to help students see the connection and take optimal advantage of this learning experience.

Two professional development workshops have been provided since the last study for module facilitators and action research project coordinators. Curriculum, course content, course expectations, grading, and a variety of other issues have been discussed. It is expected that these sessions will be held at least once a year to improve communication and understanding of program outcomes.

As stated previously, the directions on the ethics case study were modified to encourage students of the ethics module to clearly articulate and defend their ethical decision-making. With a 100% positive response this year, the data shows an exceptional increase. However, we will continue to monitor this in the future due to the instructors' concerns on how students in general are responding.

A leadership class was added to the program in the spring of 2005. Students must take the course to meet graduation requirements. It was implemented as a recommendation from the previous study to provide an intentional step to broaden the leadership major and enhance students' leadership knowledge and skills. Student evaluations indicate a positive response from this curriculum change.

VII. Recommendations

- ◇ A curriculum study needs to be conducted to determine the writing and formal oral presentation requirements assigned throughout the program. Assignments may need to be added or adjusted to provide more opportunities for enhancing written and oral communication skills. Consistent standards throughout the program will hopefully lead to effective written projects and oral presentations.
- ◇ Project coordinators need to provide more information to students regarding the criteria for effective oral presentations. They believe this will also help students in their presentation planning and delivery.
- ◇ There needs to be a better alert system in place for instructors who identify students with writing problems. Referral forms can be returned with final papers encouraging students to seek assistance from the Kissinger Learning Center. Writing workshops can also be considered in the future in conjunction with the Kissinger Learning Center.
- ◇ After implementing recommendations and collecting another data set, we must consider if the goal for effective written and oral communication is realistic.
- ◇ We need determine if the written communications evaluator is using the same APA expectations as project coordinators.
- ◇ Faculty briefly discussed the lack of critical thinking content in the ADVANCE curriculum. This needs to be considered as a required or elective course for students in the future.
- ◇ Formal exit interviews will be conducted with students completing the major beginning in the spring of 2006. This will provide qualitative data to enhance our assessment in the future.

VIII. Limitations

The sample for this study was very limited. Instead of evaluating each project submitted as was done the first year of our assessment, 25% (five projects) of the non-restricted projects were evaluated. In the future, we should at least increase the sample size by including the restricted projects or consider evaluating all submitted projects when there are less than thirty.

The number of returned graduate and site coordinators surveys was also very low this year. We must attempt to achieve a better response rate for these surveys by sending them out at least two times and consider providing an online survey to generate a better response.

Due to these limitations, any conclusions drawn and curricular changes suggested must be considered cautiously. Additional data will be gathered in the future and curricular improvements will be re-evaluated at that time.