SAILS: Summary of Results and Overview

Over the period of five years (2016 - 2021) Bowie State University conducted the SAILS assessment with freshmen and senior students. The SAILS assessment tests the information literacy skills of students in the following eight areas: (1) Developing a Research Strategy (2) Selecting Finding Tools (3) Searching (4) Using Finding Tool Features (5) Retrieving Sources (6) Evaluating Sources (7) Documenting Sources and (8) Understanding Economic, Legal and Social Issues.

These eight items make up the Project SAILS Skills Sets (https://www.projectsails.org/site/skill-sets/#id1) from The Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education and Objectives for Information Literacy Instruction: A Model Statement for Academic Libraries (https://www.projectsails.org/site/skill-sets/#id1). The results for BSU students were compared to students at benchmark institutions and national institutions. More than 200 universities administer the SAILS assessment.

In the 2017-2018 cohort, the areas where the BSU freshmen students performed the strongest were: (1) Using Finding Tool Features, (2) Developing a Research Strategy and (3) Selecting Finding Tools. The areas where the BSU senior students performed the strongest were: (1) Using Finding Tool Features, (2) Understanding Economic, Legal and Social Issues and (3) Developing a Research Strategy.

When comparing the BSU freshmen to the BSU senior cohort, the senior cohort performed better than the freshmen cohort in all of the eight SAILS skill areas in terms of the average scores. This is not surprising given the assumption that students are learning these information literacy skills in course work between freshmen and senior year. The difference in freshmen to senior scores was particularly notable in Understanding Economic, Legal and Social Issues which had an increase of +49 points between the BSU freshmen and senior cohorts; Using Finding Tool Features which had an increase of +34 points between BSU freshmen and senior cohorts and Documenting Sources which had an increase of +29 between the BSU freshmen and senior cohorts.

In contrast to the 2017-18 assessment, the BSU seniors in the 2019-2020 cohort did not perform as well as the BSU freshmen in that same cohort. The senior cohort average score in this cohort, in six out of the eight skill areas, was lower than that of the freshmen cohort average score. In four of six areas, the drop was substantial — 25 points or more, which was for (1) Searching, (2) Selecting Finding Tools, (3) Developing a Research Strategy, and (4) Retrieving Sources. The only areas where the BSU senior cohort scored higher than the BSU freshmen cohort was in the area of Documenting Sources (+49 for seniors) and Understanding Economic, Legal and Social Issues (+26 for seniors).

This issue has occurred at BSU with assessment previously. For example, CAPA has administered an assessment called the Collegiate Learning Assessment to test for the critical thinking skills of freshmen versus seniors. In that assessment, which was conducted in 2014-2015, 2015-2016 and 2016-2017, the senior cohort performed better than the freshmen cohort in the areas of Analysis and Problem-Solving, Effective Writing and Writing Mechanics. 2014-2015 and 2016-2017. However, in 2015-2016 the freshmen cohort scored higher than the senior cohort. So, there is some precedent for the lower scores, which can be attributed to a variety of factors including such things as the make-up of the testing cohorts, whether the students take the assessment seriously, and sample size of the test-taking population.

One issue with drawing conclusions from the BSU cohort data for the SAILS (and indeed all) assessments is the relatively small sample size (fewer than 200 students) when compared to the benchmark cohort and the national cohort, both of which, had much larger sample sizes. Therefore, in the

future, the CAPA office intends to target specific departments and groups of freshmen and seniors in order to get larger sample sizes.

The summary tables for the cohorts are provided below:

TABLE 1: SAILS (Standardized Assessment of Information Literacy Skills) – Individual and Cohort Performance – BSU vs. Benchmark and National Freshmen and Senior Students

SAILS INDIVIDUAL SCORE COMPARISONS– FRESHMEN VS. SENIORS–BSU, BENCHMARK, NATIONAL (HGX-DKJ – FALL 2016)						
Class Standing →	BSU Freshmen n=101	BSU Seniors n=27	Benchmark Freshmen n=527	Benchmark Seniors n=506	National Freshmen n=8,097	National Seniors n=2,939
Overall Average Information Literacy Score	41.1	56.3	52.8	60.0	52.6	57.4
Change in Information Literacy Score -- Freshmen → Senior students (NOTE: Not same freshmen and senior students)	**+15.2* increase** – **BSU freshmen started with 10 point deficit** in their SAILS scores compared to benchmark and national freshmen. **The BSU seniors scored within 1.1 points of the national peers** and within 3.7 points of benchmark senior peers, essentially on par with performance compared to benchmark, national peers.		**+7.2 increase** – Half of the increase between benchmark freshmen vs. seniors compared to the BSU freshmen vs. senior average scores.		**+4.8 increase** – Less than one-third of the increase between national freshmen vs. seniors compared to the BSU freshmen vs. senior average scores.	
This very large increase the average BSU scores may be attributed to substantial academic growth between underperforming incoming BSU freshmen vs. senior students.						

SAILS COHORT SCORE COMPARISONS–FRESHMEN VS. SENIORS–BSU (AAV-ARF–FALL 2017-SPRING 2018)			
SAILS SKILL AREA	**BSU FRESHMEN (N=62)**	**BSU SENIORS (N=43)**	**SCORE CHANGE (IN ABSOLUTE NUMBERS)**
1.Developing a Research Strategy	**464**	**483**	+19
2.Selecting Finding Tools	**456**	465	+9
3.Searching	451	465	+14
4.Using Finding Tool Features	**493**	**527**	**+34**
5.Retrieving Sources	442	454	+12
6.Evaluating Sources	433	443	+10
7.Documenting Sources	432	461	**+29**
8.Understanding Economic, Legal and Social Issues	450	**499**	**+49**

SAILS COHORT SCORE COMPARISONS–FRESHMEN VS. SENIORS–BSU (HFY-FDW–FALL 2019-SPRING 2020)			
SAILS SKILL AREA	**BSU FRESHMEN (N=16)**	**BSU SENIORS (N=36)**	**SCORE CHANGE (IN ABSOLUTE NUMBERS)**
Developing a Research Strategy	516	486	-30
Selecting Finding Tools	480	447	-33
Searching	458	424	-34
Using Finding Tool Features	527	510	-17
Retrieving Sources	533	508	-25
Evaluating Sources	414	406	-8
Documenting Sources	380	429	+49
Understanding Economic, Legal and Social Issues	440	466	+26