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Office of the Provost
Academic Assessment

**AUBURN UNIVERSITY LEARNING ASSISTANT PROGRAM (AULAP)
FACULTY FOCUS GROUPS - SPRING 2021**

SUMMARY

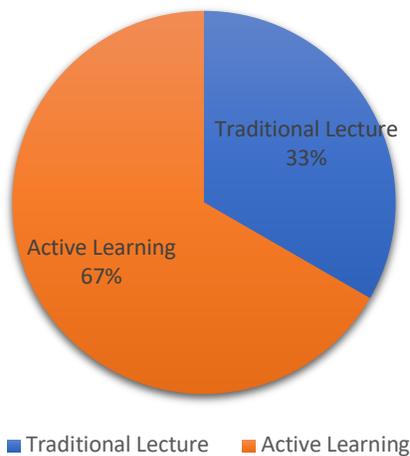
The Office of Academic Assessment facilitated two focus groups during the month of April, with instructors of LA-supported classes. Instructors from each department within the College of Science and Mathematics (COSAM) were invited to participate and provide feedback (i.e. Biological Sciences, Chemistry/Biochemistry, Geosciences, Physics). Overall, there were six (6) instructors that were able to attend and provide feedback.

Feedback was gathered in two ways, a: 1) brief survey administered via Qualtrics and 2) Zoom Focus Group. The following report is divided into two sections. First, we report the results of the survey and provide question by question feedback. A final discussion follows the question-by-question observations.

SURVEY RESULTS

1.) How would you describe class setting?

Class Setting



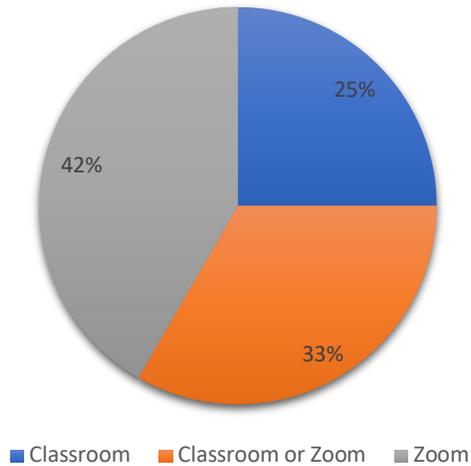


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2.) How do you utilize your LA(s) within the course?

LA Utilization



3.) How do you interact with LAs?

Faculty instructors were asked to free respond to this question. The following responses were most common:

- Weekly email communications
- Weekly meetings or biweekly meetings
- Short conversations before class
- Short conversations during or after class

How many hours weekly, on average, does LA usually work for you?

	Percent Respondents
<i>Less than 2 hours</i>	0%
<i>2-4 hours</i>	25% (3)
<i>4-6 hours</i>	75% (9)
<i>More than 6 hours</i>	0%



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QUESTION-BY-QUESTION OBSERVATIONS

1.) What is the most effective way the Learning Assistants (LAs) help in your class?

- The majority of faculty use LAs for small group work.
 - LAs are used for in-class activities that require further explanation, roughly half of the class time.
 - LA is assigned to specific small groups, using fixed and random assignments, between one third and one half of class time, in groups.
 - LA is used for small group problem solving.
 - This faculty member noted that students are more willing to ask an LA when they don't understand rather than the professor.
 - LA moves around in Zoom from breakout room to breakout room, roughly two breakouts per class.
 - Another faculty member specified how LAs were used for Zoom.
 - This professor designated an in-person LA and a Zoom LA.
 - LA circulates among breakout rooms.
 - Zoom LA has a harder time than in-person.
- One professor indicated that his LA put together study guides and summarized key ideas.
 - This was then distributed through Canvas to the entire class.
 - Similar to Supplemental Instruction group
- Another professor described the use of an SI leader and multiple LAs, almost serves as an extra LA (2 comments)
 - SI has established out-of-class time
 - LA focus on in-class time; outside of class is voluntary.
 - Facilitate active learning model

2.) What are some challenges you have faces when facilitating in-classroom experiences with the support of Learning Assistants?

- In-classroom experiences with LAs become more challenging in pandemic.
 - Students don't turn on camera, so the LA has no context.
 - One professor requires cameras to be on during breakouts, but not lectures.
 - Another randomly assigns roles to students regarding screen sharing.
 - Active learning has dissipated in Zoom classrooms during pandemic; it is more difficult to engage LA in course that is normally hands-on
 - LAs answer questions within Zoom chat during the lecture
 - When moving to a flipped classroom, LA sometimes default to lecturing
 - Some had difficulty breaking LA of lecturing habit during Zoom classes
- Pre-pandemic challenges included:
 - Limited class time
 - Having all new LAs



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- Not having enough LAs to assist with high enrollment
 - Recruitment is a big issue. Only 10 LAs have applied for physics.

3.) How did you encourage students to attend office hours? Did any of your students provide feedback about office hours?

- Generally positive feedback:
 - Some LAs are former SIs, and were willing to help with the process.
 - LA indicated they interacted with many good questions from students when review session was emphasized.
- Some faculty require LA to host office hours
 - Faculty renamed to “review” hours
 - LA waits for students to come to LA office hours
 - Inconsistent attendance
 - Gave bonus for attendance to LA office hours
 - 1/3 of class attend review hours
 - LA builds study guide, practical past questions
 - Works with professor to build worksheets
 - Zoom office hours
 - Had good attendance when the office hour occurs directly before a test/midterm
 - Very low attendance otherwise
- Review sessions held by SI, LA, and faculty member.
 - SI and LA host separate review sessions
 - 20% attend these sessions
 - 50% attend professor-hosted review sessions (as opposed to LA-hosted session)
- One professor does not require LA to hold office hours, all voluntary
 - Uses the SI for holding 2-3 office hour sessions, gives them out-of-class preference over the LA.
 - If had fixed groups, would hold consistent office hours
- Overall, student interest in office hours is not very strong.
 - Less of a personal connection

4.) If you could make any change to the LA program, what would it be and why?

- Having more LAs
 - Smaller groups within class time would possible
- Diversity of LA group should reflect the diversity of the class
- Recruitment:
 - Expanding the recruitment into Engineering has been positive.
 - Consider recruiting non-majors, specifically those who excelled in the class but may not be from the department
 - More secondary education majors, receiving credit within college of education



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- Strong arguments against requiring office hours
 - One professor explained the purpose of the SI is for out of class assistance. The LA should be for in-class assistance.

DISCUSSION

Faculty and instructors are utilizing LAs in a variety of ways, with a majority reporting that they are frequently used for facilitating small group work. LAs were used in a variety of settings, in a combination of in-person classes and Zoom classes. Faculty have LAs circulate break-out rooms in a fashion that is similar to navigating a lecture hall when students are having small group discussions. Student engagement was poor during pandemic, which resulted in lower efficacy or lower engagement with LAs.

Communication between faculty and LAs was generally held weekly, with short conversations occurring before classes. In general, instructors encouraged LA to host review hours, while others let their SI-leaders manage office hours. Survey responses showed students are generally more likely to attend office/review hours when held just prior to an exam and when study guides are provided.

Overall, most instructors agreed that having more LAs would be helpful.