Assessing Basic Competencies
A Guided Exercise in Self-Examination, Reflection and Action Planning

Peggy S. Scott, Ed.D., LPC
Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities
Stephen F. Austin State University

Introduction

The Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities views the student discipline process as an important component in the education of the whole student. To achieve this, the office regularly provides information to students on policies and procedures in the disciplinary process, adjudicates student misconduct in a manner that is fair, consistent and respectful of the rights of all students, includes and encourages student involvement in self-governance and policy development and review, and provides educational opportunities to both prevent and remediate violations.

This workbook contains guided exercises designed to enhance student success. The assignment is not based on a finding of responsibility for a violation and is required as an opportunity to analyze and synthesize the student discipline process experience.

If you have any questions during this assignment, you may contact the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities at 936-468-2703 or email Dr. Peggy Scott, Director, at pscott@sfasu.edu.

AN ALTERNATIVE TEXT FORMAT OF THIS MATERIAL IS AVAILABLE ONLINE AT: http://www.sfasu.edu/judicial/policies.asp
Assessing Basic Competencies

A Guided Exercise in Self-Examination, Reflection and Action Planning

Peggy S. Scott, Ed.D., LPC
Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities
Stephen F. Austin State University

Introduction

Gaining knowledge and skills in a specific academic field may not be enough to ensure a student’s future career success. Along with expertise gained through academic coursework, a student must be able to handle him or herself professionally in a variety of situations. Basic competencies include attending to correspondence and phones calls, the ability to make appointments for meetings or services, communicating in an articulate, respectful and courteous manner, and attending to obligations in a timely fashion. This workbook is designed to help you assess your strengths and weaknesses in these competency areas, reflect on the importance of these skills in your life and provide the opportunity to develop an action plan for self-improvement.

Taking Inventory

Rate yourself on the following skills. Circle the answer that most closely responds to your actions or opinion.

**Correspondence and Messages**

1. In an average week, I check my campus or other local postal mail the following number of times:
   - 1
   - 2
   - 3
   - 4
   - 5
   - 6
   - 7+
   - Never

2. My local postal mail address is: ______________________________.

3. In an average week, I check my official University email the following number of times:
   - 1
   - 2
   - 3
   - 4
   - 5
   - 6
   - 7+
   - OR
   - I have never checked this account.
   - OR
   - I have forwarded this account to a private account such as hotmail or yahoo.

4. On average, when I receive a phone message from a University office, I return the call:
   - same day
   - next day
   - 2 days later
   - 3 days later
   - >3 days later
   - never

5. I thoroughly read correspondence from a University office. 
   - Agree
   - Disagree
**Appointments and Obligations**

6. I understand that when an office states that it works on an appointment basis that I must call to schedule an appointment.  
   Agree  Disagree

7. I am comfortable calling a University office to make an appointment.  
   Agree  Disagree

8. I am able to clearly articulate why I want to make an appointment.  
   Agree  Disagree

9. If I am unable to keep an appointment, I call to reschedule.  
   Agree  Disagree

10. I arrive on time for my appointments.  
    Agree  Disagree

11. I meet deadlines for assignments or handle other obligations (sanctions, community service projects, favors for friends I’ve agreed to) in a timely fashion.  
    Agree  Disagree

12. Handling one’s personal business and obligations is a sign of maturity.  
    Agree  Disagree

13. Failing to attend appointments or handle other personal business can cause problems for me in the future.  
    Agree  Disagree

**Interacting and Communicating with Others**

When responding to these statements, consider how you communicate in a professional situation such as a meeting or the classroom. How we interact with our friends in a private setting can be quite different than how we present ourselves in public.

14. I use “please” and “thank you” when making requests of others.  
   Agree  Disagree

15. I use titles of respect (Mr., Ms., or Dr.) when addressing faculty or staff.  
    Agree  Disagree

16. I respond respectfully using phrases such as “yes, sir,” and “no, ma’am.”  
    Agree  Disagree

17. I refrain from using slang or phrases such as “u-huh,” “huh,” or “yeah.”  
    Agree  Disagree

18. I allow others to speak without interrupting.  
    Agree  Disagree

19. I refrain from using profanity.  
    Agree  Disagree

20. When taking a side in a discussion, I use knowledge and reason to make my case rather than distracters such as yelling or personal attacks.  
    Agree  Disagree
Discussion
There is never a second chance to make a first impression and a first impression is made in the first few seconds of an interaction. When you call a place of business, especially one that has sent you correspondence requesting a response, the office personnel already know something about you. At the very least, they know how quickly you take care of your personal business such as checking mail, email, and returning phone calls. They will immediately know how well you read the information you have been sent by the questions you ask and requests you make.

Tips on Making Appointments

When calling to make an appointment, consider the following:

• Know what office you are calling.
• Know why you need it. Read any correspondence you have received and have it handy when you make the call.
• Know your personal availability or schedule.
• Have a list of questions ready if you need additional information.
• Be respectful and polite.
• Call to reschedule if you cannot keep the appointment. Consider that others may need that time slot.

Besides making and keeping appointments, it is just as important to handle other forms of personal business. College students have many obligations that range from course assignments to student organization activities such as meetings and service projects. Grades are dependent on completing assignments on time and attending meetings and other organization functions are necessary for the club to function smoothly and for the personal development of the student. Taking care of business in both these areas also reflects on your reputation as a student and as an organization member or leader. In addition to these obligations, friends and family make requests for favors and assistance that, once agreed to, should be promptly handled. The willingness to handle your obligations – no matter their source – is a significant indicator of maturity. A student’s levels of maturity and responsibility are particularly obvious when the obligations are less than pleasurable, such as those involving sanctions levied for misconduct. Taking responsibility for one’s actions can be difficult, but it is a sure sign of “living in the adult world.”

Be sure to check your mail and email several times a week. At SFA, the local postal address (usually an on-campus post office box or a local off-campus post office box or street address) and your SFA email address are considered official means of communication. You will be receiving important information through both these channels. Your SFA email address can be forwarded to a private email address if you prefer; however, the University is not responsible if any information is lost during the forwarding process. You will find the instructions to forward your SFA email under the options menu when you login to mySFA. You can change your postal address in the Registrar’s Office on the second floor of the Rusk Building.

Your demeanor when interacting with others says a lot about you. Whether you are in a classroom or a meeting, those around you appreciate your being
polite and respectful and are more likely to respond to you in the same way. Think about people you have admired for their ability to present themselves in a professional manner. Chances are they were well spoken and possessed the ability to present a side in a discussion or persuade others on an issue without use of vulgarity or personal attacks. Additionally, they probably addressed others respectfully using proper titles such as Mr., Ms., or Dr. Use of proper titles is always appreciated in the classroom and university offices. Your instructors and professional staff have worked hard for many years and most have earned advanced degrees. Using proper titles shows respect for that hard work and the individuals that have dedicated their careers to helping you achieve your own success. In some cases, your instructors or staff members will invite you to address them by their first names. Waiting until you are invited to do so is appreciated. Remember, the respect you show is generally the respect you receive in return.

**Time for Reflection**

Consider these three questions and write a short response to each. Use the backs of this pages if needed.

1. How well do you feel you handle your personal business? (When answering, consider your answers to the items listed above and the discussion that followed. Do you check mail and email regularly? Do you return calls promptly? How do you feel about your ability to make and keep appointments? Do you take care of assignments and other obligations in a timely manner?)
2. List three reasons why it is important for you to take care of your personal business (make or keep appointments, complete sanctions, etc.) in a timely manner.

3. How do you think you are perceived as a result of your language choices and the way you address others? (When answering, consider if there are any differences in your public interactions versus your private time with friends. Are you pleased with how you feel you are perceived?)
**Action Plan**

As a result of this guided exercise, what changes would you consider making to improve your ability to handle your personal business in a more professional manner? Identify a weakness you found while completing this workbook and use it to set a goal for yourself.

Goals that are stated in measurable terms with definite timelines are easier to meet. A goal stated as “I’ll try not to be tardy for class” lacks a certain specificity – not to mention a lack of conviction. Here’s a more refined example: “I will be on time for every class for the fall semester.” This example describes a very measurable behavior (being on time) with a definite timeframe (the fall semester).

Objectives are the actions that help you meet a goal. These should also be stated in very measurable terms with deadlines or timeframes. For example: “I will buy a new alarm clock today to help me wake up on time to get ready for class.” Or “I will go to bed each school night by 11 o’clock so I will be rested and able to get up on time.” Each measurable action you can take that gets you closer to meeting your goal is an objective.

Let’s not forget the best part – the reward for meeting the goal. Rewards can be spread out along the way, such as when you meet an objective, or saved for meeting the goal in its entirety. It needs to be something that really motivates you. It can be something really simple, for example, spending time watching a sports event on the weekend only if you’ve made it to class on time for the entire week. Or it can be really big such as a special purchase of electronics or clothing – just make sure you can afford it! In reality, meeting the goal should be enough of a reward in itself – but a little treat can keep you going.

Write a goal for yourself with at least two objectives in the space below. Don’t forget it to make it measurable and specific.

Goal: __________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

Objective 1: _______________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

Objective 2: _______________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

Reward: __________________________________________________________