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GRADUATE PROGRAMS

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The University of Texas Dental Branch and Medical School at Houston

Use of LASSI in Graduate Admissions

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LASSI: As a Tool for Coaching/Tutoring for License Exam Success

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LASSI IN ACTION IS A USER DRIVEN NEWSLETTER THAT ALLOWS PROFESSIONALS TO SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH LASSI ASSESSMENT. WE WELCOME YOUR FEEDBACK ON LASSI, AND WE LOOK FORWARD TO SHARING YOUR SUCCESS STORIES.

Integrating Learning Strategies and Skills into a Summer Academic Enrichment Preparatory Program for Medical and Dental School Students

Paula N. O'Neill, M.Ed., Ed.,D.

The University of Texas Dental Branch and Medical School at Houston

The University of Texas Dental Branch and Medical School at Houston are recipients of a four year grant from the *Robert Wood Johnson Foundation for the Summer Medical and Dental Education Program (SMDEP)* that began in the summer of 2006. The UTHSC-H SMDEP is a free (tuition, meals, housing) six week preparatory program offering eligible students intense exposure to a core curriculum, clinical dentistry and medicine, and career counseling for students who aspire to gain admittance to dental or medical school. Eligibility for selection as an SMDEP Scholar includes:

- current enrollment as a freshman or sophomore in college;
- have a minimum overall GPA of 3.0, with 2.75 in the sciences;
- be a U.S. citizen or hold a permanent resident visa;
- not have participated in SMDEP previously;
- has a combined verbal and math SAT score of at least 950 or ACT score of at least 20;
- identifies with a group that is racially/ethnically underrepresented in medicine and dentistry (as defined independently by each program site);
- comes from an economically or educationally disadvantaged background; and
- has demonstrated interest in issues affecting underserved populations.

Eighty students participate each summer -- 20 pre-dental and 60 pre-medical.

Enrichment courses in organic chemistry, physics, anatomy and physiology, microbiology, and pre-calculus and calculus and lab experience in the human anatomy facility at the medical school are offered through regularly scheduled courses during the six-week experience. Particular emphasis is placed on developing high level learning strategies to become a successful applicant for dental or medical school. The course focuses on reading, implementing strategies to improve study habits, and note-taking strategies. Test-taking skills, time management, and use of information resources (library and Web) are also covered. As a part of the orientation process to the program, students take the web-based LASSI as both a pre and finally, as a posttest.

Pretest results on the 10 scales including Attitude, Motivation, Time Management, Anxiety, Concentration, Information Processing, Selecting the Main Idea, Study Aids, Self-testing, and Test Strategies are presented to the students in a large group setting using aggregate data as a starting point within two days of the pretest. The results are used to help the students gain an overall understanding of their study needs.

As a formal part of the curriculum a Study Skills Course is also presented to the students. Each year the course, presented by three faculty who are highly experienced in teaching study skills and assisting students to reach academic goals, is based upon the results of the LASSI. Each student is expected to set

personal goals based upon his or her individual LASSI scores, discuss those goals with SMDEP tutors, and then set forth a course of action to help themselves achieve the goals supported by information gained from the study skills course over the course of the six week program.

Aggregate LASSI results are also revealed to the core course faculty to enable them to assist students in studying for each of their courses. Specific teaching strategies are tied to various learning needs and issues to enhance study skills and manage attitudinal issues related to studying.

Results from the three year administration of the LASSI indicate that on the pre-test more than 50% of the 80 students enrolled each year need assistance in "managing

attitudinal issues related to studying," 45% need assistance in "developing better test-taking skills"; and approximately 35% need better time management skills. On the LASSI post-test, there are far fewer students needing this assistance, and their academic success based upon the core course pre and post-test results indicate that more focused studying increases academic performance.

Use of LASSI in Graduate Admissions

Marie Sather and Wayne Steffan

Fresno Pacific University

The LASSI is used in the Fresno Pacific University Graduate Admissions Office as a requirement for candidates applying to our School of Business, Leadership Studies master's program. A candidate would take this assessment if their BA/BS degree GPA was under 3.0. Once taken, it becomes part of their application file. The program director reviews this assessment result along with all the other application pieces to get a holistic view of that candidate and what they may be capable of at the graduate level.

We began using the LASSI July 2008. Since that time, we have had 11 out of our 37 admitted students take the assessment. We have found the LASSI convenient and easily accessible. This is helpful to our department since we do have a number of international students and we have three regional centers. The centers are in addition to our main campus.

Fresno Pacific University offers undergraduate and graduate programs that stress solid academic preparation and a strong ethical foundation. Each year about 2,400 traditional and adult students attend classes on the 42-acre main campus in southeast Fresno or centers in North Fresno, Visalia and Bakersfield. The university also reaches 14,000 students across the nation and around the world through professional development studies programs. FPU's traditional undergraduate program has the highest four-year graduation rate of any Central Valley college or university and is the Valley's only comprehensive Christian university granting master's degrees. FPU is accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges and ranked among the best in the Western universities --master's category by *U.S. News & World Report*.

Since we began using the LASSI we have found that the assessment alone may not be a good indicator as to how one will perform in graduate school. It does, however, give additional information to those applicants who are borderline candidates. For the near future we will continue to use this assessment tool.

LASSI: As a Tool for Coaching/Tutoring for License Exam Success

**Paulette D. Rollant, Ph.D., R.N., M.S.N., Emeritus C.C.R.N.
Rollant Concepts, Inc.**

When do I use the LASSI?

As the education consultant for Rollant Concepts, Inc., an education consulting firm, I have used the Learning and Study Strategies Inventory (LASSI) for over 9 years. I use the LASSI as a tool to guide my actions and approaches for graduates, both individuals and small groups, who plan to take or who have failed national nursing or medical licensure exams. For pretest-takers I have used the LASSI during prep classes for these exams in a predictive manner. For those who failed the exam any number of times from once to up to six times, I give the LASSI as one of three self reports that are used in a prescriptive manner. In either case, I give the LASSI at the beginning of the class or prior to coaching/tutoring. Then I review either the group, the collective results or individual results as to skill, will and self-reflection scales along with two to three actions to improve performance in each scale or in a combination of scales.

How do I use the LASSI scales?

I look at the percentile ranks of the scales to cluster them into one of three percentile groups as discussed below. Then I look to see which areas are affected: skill, will or self-regulation. I review my interpretation with the graduates at the beginning of the coaching/tutoring session. I have comments from them such as "How did you know that?" or "That is exactly what I do" or "I

never thought of being overconfident but now that you mention it I see where I have that approach and it messed me up on exams."

Group 1.

I review the percentile ranks of the scales for those falling between the 50th to the 75th percentile. The scales within this group I consider stable having a more solid base. These I usually consider as needing no intervention.

Group 2.

The percentile ranks of the scales for those falling below the 50th percentile I consider to be weaker characteristics. I look at the clustering of scales for skill, will or self-regulation. Then I develop a prescriptive plan of no more than five actions. Of these five actions I suggest a ranking of the actions with one priority scale in mind. I obtain mutual agreement from the graduate to focus on such selected actions.

Group 3.

The percentile ranks of the scales for those falling above the

75th percentile I consider to being weak characteristics also. I consider these as a matter of concern for overconfidence with an increased risk of poor performance on exams. For example, someone who has a 90th percentile rank in study aids often has an approach that if I just read and reread my book and notes I will pass. This approach lends itself to content memorization with a focus on content rather than thinking skills or reading processes to use an application of content for multiple choice questions. In similar situations when the information process or/and the selecting main idea are above the 75th percentile, graduates often demonstrate a test error of glossing over pertinent data in a question. Or these graduates add information into the question that is not there since they are over confident of the content area and actually "know too much."

Retake-Risk Group.

In working with groups as well as individuals retrospectively looking at LASSI results

suggest trends for failure risk when a graduate has 5 or more scales above the 75th percentile or 5 or more scales below the 50th percentile. Also if a combination of either above the 75th percentile or below the 50th percentile for 5 or more scales is present the graduate seems to have a risk of failure. Thus, coaching prior to exams I review this potential situation and provide approaches and actions for success. I reinforce that if one scale is focused on for effective actions, an improvement occurs with the other scales.

Summary

I have found the LASSI to be a valuable tool for predictive and prescriptive purposes in individuals and small groups. Testing errors associated with attitudes or approaches to exams, preparation before exams, and processes used during exams can be deducted from selected interpretation of the LASSI scales. With the use of the LASSI as part of coaching/tutoring, I have graduates achieve a 99% pass rate on exam retakes and 95% pass rate on any initial attempt.