

Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Competency Reflection

DJ Hardwick

Higher Education & Student Affairs Administration, Buffalo State College

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Dr. Amy Wilson

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The Assessment, Evaluation, and Research (AER) competency as outlined by NASPA and ACPA encompasses the design, execution, and application of various methodologies to inform practice and shape the political and ethical landscape of higher education (ACPA & NASPA, 2015). This competency ensures that professionals can use AER processes to make informed decisions that enhance student development and success. AER is a fundamental competency that applies to every program or service within higher education and is aimed at collecting data to improve program delivery and service efficacy while collecting and telling the story of student learning and success (ACPA & NASPA, 2015).

My journey into the AER competency began with a foundational understanding of its significance but quickly evolved as I immersed myself in practical experiences and coursework. This journey was marked by several assessment-related projects, including conducting focus groups and coding data as part of my Assessment Methods course, as well as spearheading large-scale assessment surveys at Buffalo State University and the University of Nebraska at Kearney. These experiences have not only sharpened my technical skills but have also instilled in me a greater understanding of the ethical and political dimensions of AER work. My engagement in the Assessment, Evaluation, and Research competency has been transformative and in-depth and has positioned me at the advanced proficiency level.

One of the pivotal experiences in my AER journey was creating the student involvement survey at Buffalo State University. This project was ambitious with the goal to capture a holistic view of student engagement and its impact on student success. The design and implementation of the survey required a meticulous approach to instrument development, participant recruitment, and data analysis. The insights gained from this survey were disseminated to administrators and

shaped student affairs programming and policies, demonstrating the power of data-driven decision-making.

Similarly, at the University of Nebraska at Kearney, I created my first assessment project, a first-year student longitudinal survey cycle, accompanied by a comprehensive reporting structure. This innovative survey approach allowed for the monitoring of changes and trends over time, providing a dynamic view of student experiences and orientation program effectiveness. The survey was distributed to 950 first-year students and resulted in 814 individual responses with 67,828 data points collected. After analyzing the data and identifying trends, 35 unique breakout reports were shared with administrators and student-facing departments. The challenge of designing a longitudinal study, with its complexities of data collection and analysis, was a significant learning opportunity that enhanced my understanding of AER methodologies.

Within the academic setting, my journey through the Assessment, Evaluation, and Research competency was marked by a project undertaken for an Assessment Methods course, which involved the planning and execution of focus groups. The process entailed the development of open-ended questions that encouraged candid discussions and the transcription of live responses. Subsequently, the focus group responses were coded, a labor-intensive process that required an analytical eye and a patient, thoughtful approach. The culmination of this project was the presentation of our findings to an institutional committee, a moment that underscored the potential of AER work to effect meaningful change.

Reflecting on the AER competency, I recognize the journey as one of continuous learning and growth. The experiences I have described represent just a fraction of my engagement with this foundational area of student affairs. Looking to the future, I am committed to further refining

my skills, exploring new methodologies, and contributing to the creation of an evidence-based culture within the student affairs profession.

Artifacts:

- University of Nebraska at Kearney Six-Week Survey Report
- Buffalo State University Future Forward Presentation
- Buffalo State University Student Involvement Survey Report

References

American College Personnel Association & Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education

(2015). Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Educators.

https://www.naspa.org/images/uploads/main/ACPA_NASPA_Professional_Competencies_FINAL.pdf