

## Collegiate Learning Assessment Plus (CLA+) Results Spring 2019

### Elevator Ride Summary

The Collegiate Learning Assessment Plus (CLA+) measures multiple aspects of critical thinking, written communication, and scientific & quantitative reasoning. In short, it is a good direct assessment of a number of our Gen Ed outcomes. Bethel seniors had an overall mean score of 1190 on the CLA+, which put us at the **81<sup>st</sup> percentile nationally**. First-years had a mean score of 1079, scoring greater than or equal to **65%** of first-years at CLA+ colleges. The differences between Bethel freshmen and seniors on this assessment are much larger than what occurs nationally. Overall, the results from this assessment are quite positive for Bethel.

In 2018-19 we had first-year and senior students complete the Collegiate Learning Assessment Plus (CLA+). The CLA+ is a direct measure of critical thinking and written communication skills. This computer based assessment “includes one Performance Writing Task (PT) and 25 Selected-Response Questions (SRQs). The Performance Task section measures three domains: analysis and problem solving, writing effectiveness, and writing mechanics. The Selected-Response Questions section measures three domains as well: scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical reading and evaluation, and critiquing an argument, which involves the identification of logical flaws and questionable assumptions. Students have 90 minutes to complete the two sections of the assessment—60 minutes for the Performance Task and 30 minutes for the Selected Response Questions” (CLA+ Report, p. 10). The Performance Writing Task is considered the gem of this assessment. Students are put into a “real-world” situation where they are asked to evaluate 6-8 documents, sort out helpful information with bad information, and craft a response to a supervisor.

In 2018-19, we had 84 first-year students take the CLA+ in the fall and 102 seniors take it in the spring. Bethel first-year students’ overall combined score was 1079, which puts us at the 65<sup>th</sup> percentile nationally. **Seniors** had an overall score of 1190, which is **equal to or greater than 81%** of CLA+ colleges & universities. Bethel seniors scored significantly higher than first-years,  $t(183) = 6.16, p < .001, d = .93$ . The effect size ( $d$ ) of .93 is considered large and would be on par with some of the larger first-year to senior differences measured in higher education. (An effect size tells us the mean difference between seniors and freshmen in standard deviation units. For this example, seniors scored .93 of a standard deviation higher than first-years.) Additionally, Bethel’s freshman to senior effect size is much larger than what occurs nationally ( $d = .36$ ).

On the Performance Writing Task, Bethel freshmen had a mean score of 1070 (62<sup>nd</sup> percentile nationally) while seniors had a mean of 1167 (75<sup>th</sup> percentile nationally). The difference between Bethel freshmen and seniors was statistically significant and the effect size would be considered medium ( $p < .001, d = .63$ ).

- On the **Writing Effectiveness** Subscale (6-point scale), 60% of Bethel seniors scored a 4 or higher (nationally 46% scored a 4 or higher). This is a lower than we have seen in the past for our seniors. For Bethel first-years, 31% scored a 4 or higher (nationally 32% scored a 4 or higher). The Bethel freshman score is also lower than what we have seen in the past.

- On the **Writing Mechanics** Subscale (6-point scale), 76% of Bethel seniors scored a 4 or higher (nationally 64% scored a 4 or higher). For Bethel freshmen, 61% scored a 4 or higher (nationally 49% scored a 4 or higher).
- On the **Analysis & Problem-solving** subscale (6-point scale), 61% of Bethel seniors scored a 4 or higher (nationally 41% scored a 4 or higher). For Bethel freshman, 34% scored a 4 or higher (nationally 27% scored a 4 or higher).

On the Selected-Response Questions, Bethel freshmen had a mean score of 1087 (68<sup>th</sup> percentile) while seniors had a mean of 1213 (86<sup>th</sup> percentile). The difference between Bethel freshmen and seniors was statistically significant and with a medium to large effect size ( $p < .001$ ,  $d = .74$ ).

- On the **Scientific & Quantitative Reasoning** subscale, Bethel seniors had a mean of 571 (national mean = 533). First-year students had a mean of 518 (national mean = 508).
- On the **Critical Reading & Evaluation** subscale, Bethel seniors had a mean of 574 (national mean = 530). First-years had a mean of 514 (national mean = 507).
- On the **Critique an Argument** subscale, Bethel seniors had a mean of 578 (national M = 529). First-year students had a mean of 535 (national M = 510).
- Note that on the critical reading ad critique an argument subscale, our first-year students scored above the senior national average.

### Some Final Notes

- The effect size differences between our freshmen and seniors are all much larger than what is seen nationally at other colleges and universities who have had their students complete the CLA+. That is, we are seeing larger differences between our first-years and seniors.
- Although the CLA+ takes a lot of work to administer and is somewhat costly, it does give us direct assessment data (rather than survey data) and comparative results on three of our seven General Education Outcomes:
  - **Think Critically and Analyze Effectively**
  - **Communicate Effectively in Writing & Speaking (the writing portion of this outcome)**
  - **Apply Scientific & Mathematical Concepts.**
- The national trend this year was for freshmen to score higher than they have in the past and for seniors to score lower than they have in the past. Bethel results between first-years and seniors were more stable than the national results; our seniors still do much better than our first-year students.
- The CLA+ also provides a “value-added” score. That is, they calculate a predicted score for our institution based on our demographics and compare that to our actual senior scores. Below is a table of predicted to actual senior CLA+ scores. Our seniors performed better than would be predicted for all three of the categories.

	Expected Senior Mean CLA+ Score	Actual Senior Mean CLA+ Score
<b>Total CLA+ Score</b>	1163	1190
<b>Performance Task</b>	1151	1167
<b>Selected-Response Questions</b>	1174	1213

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**Joel Frederickson, Ph.D.** | Professor & Chair | Psychology Department  
Associate Dean of Institutional Assessment & Accreditation  
Bethel University | 3900 Bethel Drive, St. Paul, MN 55112