

NATURAL ABILITIES: A UNIQUE ELEMENT OF UGA'S UNDERGRADUATE LEADERSHIP SCHOLARS PROGRAM

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Housed in the Terry College of Business at the University of Georgia is the Institute for Leadership Advancement, a privately funded enterprise with a mission "to create a new class of leaders who are well trained and ready for responsibility, committed to stewardship, pursuers of excellence, characterized by integrity, and defined by purpose." The Leonard Leadership Scholars Program (LSP) is one component of the ILA and is designed specifically for undergraduate business students. (For more information go to www.terry.uga.edu/leadership)

Each year, 30 rising juniors from the Terry College of Business are selected to participate in a 2-year, intensive leadership development program that combines classroom and extracurricular programming. Completion of the program results in a Certificate in Personal and Organizational Leadership.

The first course in the curriculum is Leadership and Personal Development, taught by Dr. Vikki Clawson. (See Dr. Clawson's bio at www.terry.uga.edu/directory/browse/all/30/all/) During this class, students examine leadership theories, practice core skills and experience in-depth assessments of abilities, personality, attitudes and behaviors to increase self-awareness of their personal effectiveness and leadership competencies. One of the assessments is the Highlands Ability Battery (HAB), a measure of natural abilities. Use of the HAB is unique to UGA's LSP; no other undergraduate leadership development program is known to use this instrument.

What Makes the Highlands Ability Battery Unique?

The Highlands Ability Battery is an assessment tool, divided into 19 worksamples, each measuring a different ability (talent) or style. Results are organized into three areas; Personal Style, Driving Abilities and Specialized Abilities. What differentiates the HAB from other assessments includes:

The HAB

- Use of worksamples to measure attributes
- Measures are objective
- Most attributes are stable over time
- Differentiates abilities/talents from skills

Other popular assessments

- Use of self-report to measure attributes
- Measures are subjective
- Unknown if attributes are stable over time
- No mechanism to differentiate abilities from skills

The HAB offers students an understanding of how their unique set of talents impacts their approach to assimilating new information, their approach to solving problems, how they communicate, and ultimately the type of work environment in which they could flourish. Each worksample consists of an objective, hands-on measure resulting in a percentile ranking. Information provided by this objective measure of talents enables participants to be aware of their habits and blind spots when interacting within teams, to apply their abilities to learning and studying, and to make better-informed decisions when looking for a job. And, because talents identified by the HAB are stable throughout adulthood, students can use their assessment results over the lifetime of their career. (For more information about the HAB go to www.highlandsc.com/battery.php)

HAB-certified Dr. Dori Stiles, Turning Points Coaching and Consulting, has administered the HAB to 10 consecutive LSP classes. She brings with her 15 years of developing and delivering Leadership Development workshops using the HAB as a springboard in corporations such as IBM, Marriott, BellSouth, Chase, Cott Beverages, Ontario Teachers Pension Program, Charles Schwab and others. Her additional experience with public education administrators across the state and other university student groups lends additional perspective in creating a relevant experience for the students. (For more information go to www.turningpointsconsulting.com)

Dr. Clawson requires students to reflect on their experiences through out the semester culminating in a Personal Development Leadership Portfolio (PDLP). The PDLP is intended to focus students on areas of individual development they consider important to their preparation for leadership positions after graduation. In other words, students have the opportunity to build personal and professional awareness, leadership competency and capacity while still in school. Perhaps more important, students begin to learn a development process for learning, acting, and reflecting - something they can use throughout their careers.

What Does An LSP Student HAB Profile Look Like?

Over the past 10 years, 293 students have completed the HAB as part of the LSP program. We wondered if a single pattern for a LSP student would emerge. To no

one's surprise, there is no single LSP student profile - students' natural abilities vary widely. As a group, however, there are some interesting differences between this group of students and the rest of the HAB database.

To determine whether or not a single HAB profile emerged for LSP students, we first looked at the frequency with which these 293 students scored in the low, mid and high range on all dimensions of personal style, driving abilities, and learning channels (five of the specialized abilities). The first thing we found is tremendous variability among the profiles. In fact, there were low, mid and high scores on every single dimension and no two profiles looked the same.

That said, we found more of these students are specialists (45%) and relatively few are generalists (15%). Forty-three percent are extroverted and only 15% are introverted. Interestingly, 58% have a naturally long time horizon (5 years or greater), 26% have in intermediate time horizon (1-5 years) and 16% scored in the immediate (1 year or shorter) range.

More LSP students solve problems consultatively (39% are high in classification, 63% are high in concept organization, although we must remember the same people might not be both) than diagnostically, analytically or experientially. They tend to have flexibility between brainstorming and focusing (54% are in the mid-range of idea productivity). And more students score in the high range on the spatial relations abilities (47% score high in spatial relations theory, 45% score high in spatial relations visualization) than score in the mid and low ranges.

We were especially interested in reviewing students' learning channels. With a good deal of consistency, the majority of these students are strong in design memory (visual learning) with 82% scoring in the high range. More than half (59%) scored in the high range for verbal memory (learning through reading) with almost as many scoring high range in the rote learning channel called number memory (56%). Tonal memory (learning through listening) had the fewest number of students scoring in the high range (39%) and the greatest number of student scoring in the low range (34%). There are numerous learning strategies based on individual profiles. For the professors of these students the message is clear: do not rely on lectures alone. To create the optimal learning experience, incorporate as many learning channels as possible, and especially visual learning aids.

THE HIGHLANDS DATABASE AS A POINT OF REFERENCE

The HAB database is an amalgamation of everyone who has taken the HAB since 2003 and contains results for over 18,000 test takers. Because test takers are self-selected, the database does not claim to be representative of the general

population. It is updated continuously. No attempt has been made to differentiate ability profiles by occupation. At the time of this analysis, the database contained roughly 55% males and 45% females. Approximately 24% were between ages 15-21 years, 16% between the ages of 22-30 years, 22% between 31-39 years, 33% between 40-55 years, and 5% 56+ years. Most are college bound or college graduates. For ease of description, we refer to that database as the HAB norms.

To give us another point of reference, we compared our results to the HAB norms. Using Chi-square tests, we examined the frequency distributions of the LSP group compared to the HAB "norms" (how many individuals' scores fell into the low, mid and high ranges). The results indicate that the distribution of scores for LSP students is highly significantly different from the Highlands "norms" on 12 out of 14 dimensions ($p < .0001$). In each case, the difference is due either to LSP students having significantly fewer scores in the low range, significantly more scores in the high range, or a combination of both. In other words, LSP students tend to score higher than the Highlands norms in those 12 dimensions.

The exceptions to significantly higher scores are the generalist-specialist dimension and tonal memory. On both these dimensions, LSP scores are about the same as found in the Highlands norms.

WHAT STUDENTS SAY

UGA's Leadership Scholars students formally evaluate the HAB. On a five-point scale, students say that as a result of taking the HAB, they have a better understanding of the difference between their natural talents and skills (average 4.5) and have a better understanding of how their natural abilities help them learn more effectively (4.6). They report tHAB provides them with some new insights about themselves (4.5) and that the group feedback session helped them to more fully understand the written report (4.8). Specifically, students say:

I found the results of this test to be fascinating. Introversion/extroversion I knew about, but the generalist/specialist and timeframe factors were new and incredibly powerful ways of looking at life. When I saw the results of these two factors something about how I perceived life just clicked.

This model will help me to make good choices in the future because it shows my natural tendencies. Knowing my intellectual and operational strengths will allow me to maximize my career potential by selecting a job that is well suited to my strengths. I will be a more efficient and happier worker if I utilize my strengths at work.

Overall, I think the Highlands Battery Test may have been the most informative test I took all semester long. It really gave me a more concrete idea of the things that come natural to me, and the inherent weaknesses with them.

To me the most important thing I took away from the Highlands is that I must accept my specialized, long horizon personality as normal, but that I must still work with it in the generalized present, and that I must engage in activities which use my primary drivers.

While having a high skill set can certainly provide some negatives, it gives me a certain confidence that I am not tied down to any one path. I like the idea that I have a wide group of abilities that I can use in my future endeavors.

It is not enough to say this test shows that I have a natural tendency for leadership; you also have to give concrete examples to back up and explain them. The Highlands gave me that!

I am particularly gifted when it comes to visual memory and spatial relations theory. My highest skill was my observational skills. Dr. Stiles suggested that I pursue a career path with tangible results. It has led me to be interested in consulting and investment banking because both, at the end of the day, have a tangible result.

One of the core tenants of Dr. Clawson's course experience is that the one thing students will consistently carry into any leadership or life context is "you". Knowing yourself is the beginning of leadership wisdom and personal effectiveness. The Highlands Ability Battery provides the LSP students with unique concrete data and insights that are key to developing their personal and professional awareness.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPACTS

UGA develops undergraduate business students for real world leadership positions through their Leadership Scholars Program. Through course work and extracurricular activities, these select students build critical self-awareness and experience the impact of who they are (or of their natural abilities, values and skills) on their potential leadership effectiveness. They have a solid understanding of their leadership strengths and, through internships and capstone projects they have opportunities to put their talents to use. The impressive list of organizations that have hired these students is only surpassed by the list of organizations that seek these students for internships

One unique opportunity LSP students have is to experience the Highlands Ability

Battery, an assessment used by organizations that invest in the development of their leaders. No other undergraduate leadership certificate program offers this comprehensive assessment of natural talents. The students find the Highlands Ability Battery very different from the other assessments and say it adds value to their course experience. They glean:

- Objective information about their natural talents as well as skills they may want to develop
- A language to describe their talents to others (including potential employers)
- Potential habits and blind spots created by abilities
- Information that will last them throughout their career

According to some leadership development researchers, having self-awareness about one's natural talents, abilities and values early in life allow individuals to put themselves in a place where they can "shine". The integration of the Highlands Ability Battery into the LSP leadership development experience has been a unique and "fascinating" experience for undergraduates. The HAB data and impact are notable.