Using SAIL to Enhance Learning and Retention via Transparency
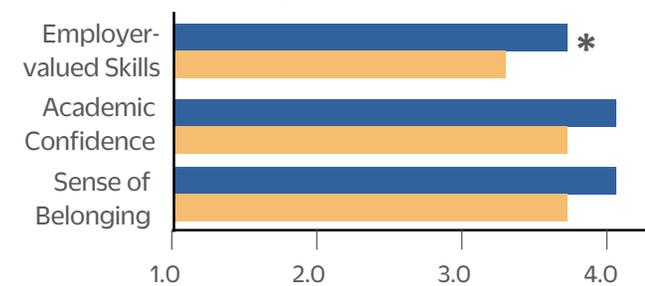
Northeastern University
Self-Authored Integrated Learning

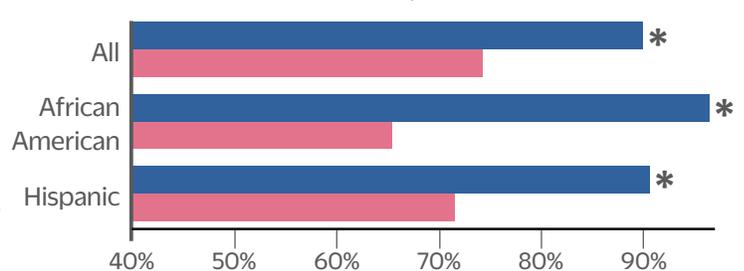## What is transparency, and how does it enhance learning and retention?

In teaching and learning, "transparency" refers to the level of explicitness with which an educator articulates an assignment's *purpose* (including learning objectives, skills, knowledge, and how those elements will serve the student in the future), *task* (the specific steps or activities a student should perform), and *criteria* for success (characteristics of a successful product or outcome). Transparency as a concept can also be applied at the level of the course, the degree program or even research assistantships or other learning experiences.

Increasing our level of transparency can have dramatic impacts on our students' outcomes. A recent study (Winkelmes et al., 2016) of over a thousand students showed a statistically-greater self-reported learning of employer-valued skills in more transparent courses, as well as greater academic confidence and sense of belonging at the institution. The same study showed significantly higher student retention at the institution from freshman to sophomore years for all students, and even larger gains for students in some traditionally underrepresented populations.

Students in less (orange) vs. more (blue) transparent courses

Retention, Year 1-Year 2, overall (pink) vs. students in more transparent courses (blue)

Winkelmes, Bernacki, Butler, Zochowski, Golanics, & Weavil (2016). A teaching intervention that increases underserved college students' success. *Peer Review, 18*(1/2), 31.

How can I use SAIL to increase transparency?

PURPOSE
The SAIL framework provides a set of dimensions, skills, and masteries that you can use to articulate what students will be expected to practice, get feedback on, and improve their mastery of within the context of your course. Those same students may see components of the SAIL framework in other courses or learning opportunities on campus this semester, and may have already used them to map their prior experiences. By recognizing that these skills are drawn upon in a variety of contexts, students understand that developing these skills will help them succeed more broadly in life.
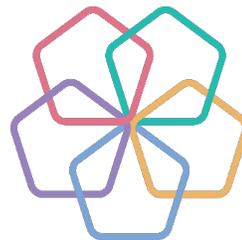
Intellectual Agility
Developing the ability to use knowledge, behaviors, skills, and experiences flexibly in new and unique situations to innovatively contribute to your field.

Well-Being
Developing the knowledge, skills and behaviors necessary to live a balanced and fulfilling life.

Personal & Professional Effectiveness
Developing the confidence, skills, behaviors and values to effectively discern life goals, form relationships and shape your personal and professional identities to achieve fulfillment.

Global Mindset
Developing knowledge, skills and behaviors to live, work and communicate with people whose background, experience and perspectives are different from your own, as well as considering the global impact of your decisions.

Social Consciousness & Commitment
Developing the confidence, skills and values to effectively recognize the needs of individuals, communities, and societies and make a commitment to constructively engage in social action.

Each of these five dimensions has associated skills, along with masteries that are foundational to all of the five dimensions. You can find those skills, and other information, at **sail.northeastern.edu/about**.

How can I use SAIL to increase transparency? (continued)

TASK

SAIL-mapping simply refers to the process of selecting the dimensions, skills, and masteries that students will use and practice during a learning opportunity. Some instructors SAIL-map their courses, entering that information into the Educator Portal (https://educator.sail.northeastern.edu) or incorporating it into their syllabi. Others go farther, beginning each class session or assignment by discussing the components of SAIL that will be involved and how.

CRITERIA

The SAIL framework and tools can also help students with the criteria component of transparency. Each skill and mastery is defined, and each is accompanied in the app by a "Calibration," a series of multiple-choice questions prompting the learner to reflect on their performance on various aspects of that skill or mastery. By revisiting the definitions and taking these calibrations repeatedly over time as they experience the skills in different contexts, students can develop a more concrete understanding of what it means to practice broad skills such as teamwork, critical thinking, systems thinking, and others.

As an instructor, you might also choose to give your students feedback on their performance of these skills. You can do so using the existing SAIL Calibrations in the Educator Portal (https://educator.sail.northeastern.edu): Hover over the individual student's name under "In Cohort," and click the box that appears labeled "Provide Feedback." Keep in mind that you will only see an option to provide feedback on skills you have already mapped to the course. You can also give feedback on these skills verbally during a one-on-one conversation, in the written comments on an existing assignment, using a rubric, or in any way that feels comfortable to you and that guides your students toward learning and improvement.

Snapshot of the Calibration functionality:

Related tools and resources

A variety of additional information and resources are located at https://sail.northeastern.edu/how-to-sail/:

- Looking for a full list of the **SAIL skills and foundational masteries**, as well as their definitions? Check out the *SAIL Skills Glossary*, located under "Helpful Documents."
- Need a worksheet that will guide you through the process of **SAIL-mapping your course** or other learning opportunity before entering the Educator Portal? Download the *SAIL-Mapping Worksheet*, located under "Mapping Your Course."
- Want to **enter the course skills and dimensions into the Educator Portal** (https://educator.sail.northeastern.edu)? Download the *Educator Portal Overview* or *Comprehensive Educator Portal Guide* (under "Using the Educator Portal") or watch the *Adding a Course Opportunity Video* (under "Creating New Opportunities").
- Want a handout that will help students better understand SAIL and the many ways it can **help support their learning** in your course? Download and print copies of *Fostering Academic and Course Success*, located under "In the Classroom."
- **Interested in discussing** how you might incorporate SAIL into your syllabus, or into other components of your course? To request a one-on-one consultation, email us at sail@northeastern.edu.

https://SAIL.northeastern.edu