

Annual Assessment Report: Colleges and Schools

Academic Year: 2007-2008

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Name of College: College of Liberal Arts and Sciences/
Liberal Studies Program (LSP)

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I. Assessing aspects of student learning and general reflections of the LSP assessment process as a whole:

- Trends Observed:
 - Overall, the quality of LSP unit assessment projects (and the write-up reports of them) continue to improve, as they have in recent years.
 - There continues to be greater emphasis on specific learning outcomes.
 - Solid conclusions are being drawn based on results of an assessment project, and reasonable suggestions for how to improve student learning are being proposed. There appears to be less grumbling about how if only more resources would be provided from the College all would be fine, and instead more positive ideas about how best to develop instructors and improve student learning are being pitched.
 - The use of surveys has been minimized, although it is also understood that some areas (e.g., CQ Common Hour component) are best assessed via that method.
 - The LSP unit advisory committees are more actively taking advantage of university resources such as the University Center for Writing-based Learning and the Office for TLA.
 - Improved sampling techniques and innovative approaches for collecting student work are being devised, especially when a specific outcome is to be assessed (e.g., asking faculty to come up with a question relevant for their course and its LSP unit outcomes, selectively identifying courses to assess).
 - Some units are beginning to use more sophisticated designs, such as pre-post testing, specific prompts, sophisticated analyses) in their projects.
 - Two units (i.e., FYW and SSMW) connected elements of reflectiveness in their assessment projects. Given that reflectiveness is one of the four meta-goals of the LSP, this was thought to be an excellent.

- What could be said about learning as a whole in the LSP?
 - Students learn best when they are provided with information about how to complete a task or assignment, such as how to formulate a thesis in a paper.
 - Students may realize they know more than they thought they did if they are asked to reflect on what they have learned in the course.
 - Faculty may discover that student learned more than they thought their students had if they ask them to reflect on how they came to know something.

- What did the assessment projects NOT reveal about learning in the LSP? What ideally still needs to be known?
 - We still know too little about whether are students are achieving any of the four meta-goals of the LSP, although more attention this year was paid to *reflectiveness*. Another meta-goal is *multiculturalism*, which is infused throughout the program so there is not too much concern about that one, but whether students have developed a *value consciousness* or whether they have become more *critical and creative thinkers* has not specifically been explored.

- What might be worth trying in assessing learning in the program, if not in this year then at some point in the near future?
 - Perhaps assessment projects with reflectiveness type prompts about the LSP as a whole could take place in Capstone courses.
 - Reflectiveness, as not only an assessment topic but also a great class exercise, should be the focus of a future workshop to which all LSP faculty would be invited.
 - As one possible option for annual assessment projects, the notion of having a thematic focus across for all or most of the LSP units was mentioned.
 - As a means by which to judge whether implementing a change in teaching students to learn was having the desired results, the same assessment project could be repeated for two years in a row or revisited every other year for a period of time. At the very least, standardized questions could be devised for annual assessment projects within the different LSP units (and even across some of the units) so that comparisons could be made across time.
 - Rotating the five-year syllabus process with the annual assessment project would reduce workload for faculty. (A plan is being developed to investigate this possibility.)

- What are the challenges of assessing learning in the LSP?
 - As noted above, a major challenge during the 2007-08 academic year had to do with the start of the syllabus review process of all LSP course offerings. Within each LSP unit area, one-fifth of all course syllabi had to be reviewed by the LSP unit advisory committee members -- on top of their annual assessment projects. This new responsibility in effect doubled the assessment workload for them.

I. Assessment Reports for 2007-2008 Abstracts and Feedback

During the spring, two members of the Liberal Studies Council volunteered to serve as members on a sub-committee that would meet during the summer to review the assessment project reports of the 13 different LSP units. During late July and early August, this sub-committee met twice and evaluated each unit's assessment project for whether there was a focus on learning outcomes, and for their overall sampling techniques, methods, rubrics, data analysis, and finally their conclusions drawn and proposed plans based on the findings. As seen in the feedback bullets below, overall the assessment s-c was quite pleased with the general quality of the assessment projects for 2007-08.

Abstract for each of the six learning domain areas, and (bulleted) feedback from the LSC sub-committee are provided below.

CORE / SPINE AREAS

Chicago Quarter

Abstract

The Chicago Quarter Committee examined Learning Outcome #5 of Chicago Quarter classes, "Students can demonstrate their ability to navigate university resources, identify academic success skills, and engage in educational, career, and financial planning." This is a desired outcome of Learning Goal #6: "Encourage community building among first year students, provide students with an opportunity for academic mentoring and intellectually socializing students to the University." We distributed a survey during the last week of classes to the Explore Discover Chicago students that asked them to rate the extent to which common hour course topics were covered and what was covered. Our assessment finds that skills related to academic success (academic success skills and time management skills) had the widest range of rating among students. Some classes devoted extensive time to these issues and some barely covered them at all. University resources and co-curricular activities (and to a lesser degree, career resources) were covered the most consistently across classes, and fairly extensively. These findings suggest that although most classes spend common hour time covering the primary learning goals (topics) of common hour, classes prioritize these topics very differently.

Feedback

Strengths:

- The LSC Assessment S-C recognizes the unique challenges faced by the CQ Advisory Committee in assessing LOs associated with the Common Hour, especially since there isn't much in the way of tangible work to be reviewed.

- Thus, although a survey is generally not the best method to use in assessment projects, in this case, it was appropriate.
- The inclusion of open-ended items for the areas of; a) academic success skills, b) time management skills, c) academic integrity policies, d) understanding diversity, and e) educational career planning was an excellent strategy for getting students to at least generate some of their own information.
 - The CQ Advisory Committee is to be commended for collecting a strong sample of data, and especially for conducting a detailed and thoughtfully interpreted analysis of the data.
 - The identified degree of variability in time devoted to time management, academic success, and career development are valuable points to learn in an assessment project like this. Given that the Common Hour is sometimes divorced from instructor oversight, the suggestion to alert the Office of Academic Enhancement about this issue is certainly warranted.
 - The data collected provides a good baseline for future study of Common Hour LOs.

Limitations / Questions:

- The Assessment S-C wondered if the Common Hour LOs could be more sharply operationalized than they were for purposes of assessment. Is it possible, for example, that there are different degrees of success in managing one's time well and developing effective study habits, or in grasping complex issues of diversity?
- The Assessment S-C discussed what else could be done with the collected data, or what other questions could possibly be answered with the data set. For example, further exploration regarding why some classes seem to do a much better job of meeting Common Hour goals than others was proposed. Perhaps, the difference has to do with amount of instructor involvement in Common Hour activities? Does the difference stem from particular CQ topics that more readily lend themselves to the oft touted "seamless approach?" Does the seamless approach actually work as well as people seem to believe it does? Is it possible that Common Hour curriculum is weakened by too much blending of it with course content? In other words, is there an upper limit to the seamless approach?

Focal Point Seminar

Abstract

In 2007-2008, the Focal Point Seminar Committee assessed Learning Outcome # 6 pertaining to students' abilities to produce a project with a clear thesis, supported by evidence and analysis. This assessment was a return to the focus of assessment in 2005-2006 when the same Learning Outcome was studied; this repetition was done in an effort to assess the overall quality of improvement in student work over the past two years. Student papers were collected randomly from all sections of ISP 101 in Winter Quarter 2008 and they were assessed in Spring Quarter. The greatest competence in student work was seen in the ability to write with topical coherence, yet the average score on writing

with topical coherence was lower than it was in 2005-2006. The lowest score in 2007-2008 was on the ability to provide alternative points of view to the thesis statement. This is exactly the same as the results two years ago. In comparison to two years ago, students improved in 2007-2008 in their ability to state a focused thesis topic and to support it with evidence. On each question assessed relating to writing an explicit thesis statement and developing it through to a conclusion, students received the full range of scores, i.e., from the worst to the best, indicating that student work provides evidence of the full range of writing abilities.

Strengths:

- The LSC Assessment S-C agreed this was a strong project. It was focused on a single LO – students’ abilities to produce a project with a clear thesis supported by evidence -- and the current findings could be compared to that found in the 2005-06 project, which assessed the same LO. The long-range outlook was appreciated.
- The particular LO assessed is among the most central to FPS classes. Five different components of producing a clear thesis were separated out and assessed independently, each on a five-point rating scale. This approach allowed for a more precise pinpointing of what developmental work is required to teach instructors how best to teach their students to do a better job meeting this LO.
- The plan to review the findings with FPS instructors will make this project that much more valuable.

Limitations / Questions:

- The methodology mentioned that two committee members reviewed each paper but nothing was said about issues of inter-rater reliability or how differences in scores between the two members might have been resolved (i.e., Averaged? Talked through to reach a consensus?)
- It is recommended results of this project, along with a collection of best practices writing assignments, samples of student papers before and after revisions, and resources for doing revisions, be posted on a website for FPS instructors.
- Keep up the good work!

First-Year Writing

Abstract

This year, the FYW assessment committee examined 62 student portfolios from WRD 103 (formerly ENG 103) – Composition and Rhetoric I. Our goal was to assess students’ ability to articulate how they applied the writing process to the task of learning to write well. In particular, we were interested in students’ meta-knowledge. Were student writers able to talk competently about their processes and their rhetorical choices in the production of texts?

Feedback

Strengths:

- As usual, the FYW committee collected a strong sample of data. A prompt was used to generate student work, and a well articulated rubric, with three fully described categories (i.e., “emerging,” “developing,” and “mastering”), was applied to analyze the papers.
- The reporting of inter-rater reliability rates is greatly appreciated.
- The rubric used relates nicely to future electronic portfolio plans and how best to assess the collected work.
- The notion of breaking down writing as a process upon which student can and should reflect is a valuable approach -- and one that could inform other LSP units, as they struggle to assess the LSP meta-goal of reflectiveness.
- The WRD 103 data can serve as a nice base line of comparison with WRD 104.
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Limitations / Questions:

- A minor detail, but missing from the report was the overall number of instructors teaching WRD 103 who were asked to submit copies of student work. In other words, what was the response rate?
- Obviously, a full 100% of students reaching the “mastering” level is ideal, but that will likely never happen. Thus, a question was raised regarding what is a realistic goal for students overall in the WRD courses. The FYW Committee seemed to express some dissatisfaction with the finding that the majority of students are falling into the “developing” category on the rubric, but no criterion of success was offered (e.g., No more than 5% will be at the “emerging” level, fewer than 25% at the “developing” level, and 70% at “mastering?”)
- Given that so many first-year students place into WRD 102 before being allowed to register for WRD 103, it may be helpful to assess reflectiveness for WRD 102 students, as well.
- The Assessment S-C is sympathetic to the issue of every year having to adequately train new instructors, but we encourage FYW Advisory Committee to continue its strong commitment to educate WRD instructors regarding what prompts best lead to good writing.

Mathematical and Technological Literacy

Abstract

The MTL Committee decided to assess student learning in the area of Consumer Price Index (CPI) and inflation. This particular topic relates to the ability of students to use proportional reasoning in an important applied context. We were motivated to investigate this area because numerous instructors feel that while students seem to be able to master the topic in a mechanical, rote way with the current curriculum materials on this topic, we would like to design our instruction to lead to deeper, conceptual understanding. We conceptualized this year’s project, which is of independent interest, to be a baseline study for curricular intervention study next year.

Feedback

Strengths:

- This project was nicely focused on a single LO. Its design allows for the long-range plan of establishing a baseline of information against which future projects can be conducted and compared when assessing the same LO.
- This project used a set of four questions to assess a particular LO. The MTL area deserves credit for taking advantage of its standardized curriculum to design and conduct such a nice assessment project.
- The proposed plan to discuss the findings and implement possible curricular modification is applauded.

Limitations / Questions:

- One of the conclusions drawn about this project was that perhaps proportional reasoning is not “important enough to be taught” in all sections. The LSC Assessment S-C questions the basis of that particular interpretation of the data and thought if students were poorly understanding the concept, then proportional reasoning might instead be emphasized more.
- A small point of feedback is that the indication of which course, MTL I (ISP 120) or MTL II (ISP 121) was being assessed was not specified in the abstract. It was only through reading the methodology that a reference to ISP 120 courses made it clear it was the MTL I classes being assessed.
- Keep up the good work!

DOMAIN AREAS

Arts & Literature

Abstract

The Arts & Literature (A&L) learning domain area’s 2007-08 Assessment Project focused on the first A&L learning outcome: “Students will be able to explain, in well-written prose, what a work of art is about and/or how it was produced (i.e., they should be able to articulate and explain the ‘content’ of that work and/or its methodology of production).” Specifically we sought to answer two questions: What percentage of papers illustrate that students can explain, in well-written prose, what a work of art is about and/or how it was produced? And of those papers that do illustrate the first learning outcome, is there a correlation between papers that meet this goal and the syllabi/assignment sheets that produced them.

In examining the assignments that produced the successful papers, the committee found that the most successful assignments outlined a clear objective, even as specific as delineating a single question to be answered. Well-defined topics and a series of thorough questions to be answered also led to successful papers. Successful assignments stressed

analysis over summary and often provided guidelines for a particular interpretive structure or format. Vocabulary lists were included in the syllabi of the most successful assignments. Finally, a very successful set of papers was produced when instructors required a meeting with the student beforehand, and when there was a 5-6 page proposal for a final project that included a bibliography, and an outline and “a lively discussion of your argument” before a final 10-12 page paper was due.

Feedback

Strengths:

- The project focused on student work, and was also connected to the instructor’s assignment. (The inclusion of assignments is possibly related to feedback from last year’s project.)
- A wide sample of student work was assessed and information regarding how the papers were collected was indicated.
- A rubric was used in evaluating the papers, and two A&L committee members read each paper, thus making for stronger inter-rater reliability.
- It was unclear what the exact nature of the “correlation” was between papers that meet the criterion of well-written prose, and the assignments that produced them.
- Perhaps the most intriguing conclusion drawn in the report was that there is apparently a limit to how much detail should be provided in assignments. If there is too much detail, students may produce papers that “lack excitement.”
- A good follow-up was proposed to review the findings of the project at the next A&L workshop and for instructors to exchange information regarding successful teaching strategies in their A&L courses.

Limitations / Questions:

- No mention was made for how varying scores from the two members who read the papers might have been resolved. (Were the scores averaged, or did the two members talk through their differences to reach a consensus?)
- A similar issue raised in last year’s project is again seen here, and that is the question of what in particular makes for excellent student work in A&L courses? In other words, what is it about the analysis or interpretation of how a particular piece of art or literature is produced that marks papers as well-written in A&L courses that would distinguish them from papers in the PI or SSMW areas? The rubric employed seemed too general, being designed primarily to assess mechanics (i.e., clearly written, grammatically correct, and well-organized), which are important, but surely not all that is relevant to A&L student work. There was no sense of what the components are for “exciting papers” in the A&L area.
- Related to the first point above, it appeared as though multiple dimensions of student work were being forced into a single score. For example, if a paper was not well written in terms of its mechanics, but did have “a lively discussion” of some relevant art-related concept, how then would such a paper be assessed? And if multiple components were in fact being considered at once, then exactly how were they weighed?

- Perhaps a template or guide could be developed to help A&L instructors more effectively assign the kind of papers that would best elicit evidence of A&L's LOs being met (although the s-c committee also recognizes that this is more of a challenge in an area like A&L where courses comes from so many different academic units across the University than in an area like PI). The Office for Teaching, Learning & Assessment and also the University Center for Writing-Based Learning could possibly help to create an area specific instrument. [*Note: A & L's Response:* Our experience with the templates for assessment is that they telling us very little. So, we may discuss this at the annual meeting for A&L Instructors.]
- In the abstract, the question was asked about a possible correlation between those papers meeting the criteria of being well-written, and the assignments/syllabi that produced them. But then there was no further specification regarding how such assignments and papers would connect, especially given the intriguing observation that there can be too much structure in an assignment. [*Note: A & L's Response:* We are still unclear about whether or not we can comment on assignments and syllabi in these assessments. The issue of too much structure is one of encouraging a "cookie cutter" response that extinguished vibrancy and a distinguishing "voice." We could also examine this for next year as well.]
- In the abstract, there was no real conclusion drawn about the project's overall findings.

Philosophical Inquiry

Abstract

Using the feedback received from last year's project, we tracked students' ability to critically think about philosophical questions and problems. In order to do this, we looked at whether the student work collected showed evidence of their ability to "write an analytic essay treating a philosophical question, issue, and/or problem that forwards an identifiable thesis, argument, and conclusion" (Learning Outcome #5).

Feedback

Strengths:

- This project was concise and stayed focused on the assessment of student work.
- In response to last year's feedback, assignments and student work were both examined.
- The rubric (borrowed from the Philosophy department) does a great job of highlighting what is distinct about the LOs within the PI domain area.
- The Committee may wish to post the rubric on the LSP's website to assist instructors, in particular those from non-Philosophy disciplines, to better assign the type of papers that compel students to defend a thesis using a set of critical thinking skills specific to the PI domain. A sample paper showing this being done

- well could also be posted. (The LSP administrator can assist in the execution of this recommendation.)
- The PI Advisory Committee seems to be listening to feedback and is learning how to conduct well-designed assessment projects. In addition, assessment findings are being applied to explicitly make the domain stronger.

Limitations / Questions:

- It would help your readers to have a more detailed reporting of information, including that related to the following points:
 - o The rationale indicated an effort to collect half of the student work from philosophy courses, and the other half from non-philosophy courses, but why that break down was wanted was never explained. Certainly, on the surface, the proposed approach would seem to be an effective way to compare learning in the two types of courses, but such data collection (had it actually occurred) also would have produced a non-representative sample of all PI courses. And that's okay, as long as the reader knows that those conducting the project are aware of the possible skewed findings such an analysis would have produced. In addition, the reader was never informed whether the two courses from which papers were collected were actually philosophy ones or not. [This was later clarified by the PI Chair.]
 - o There was no indication regarding how different scores from raters for the same paper were resolved.
 - o There was no explanation regarding *why* there were possible scores of 0, 2, and 3, but no score of 1 in the rubric.
- When response rates for paper requests are as low as they were for this project, the PI Chair needs to ask the LSP Director for help in collecting more student work from PI instructors.

Religious Dimensions

Abstract

The committee decided to assess our writing expectations and so we focused this year's project on the methodological skills attained in domain courses. We read student assignments and evaluating methodological skill attainment using a rubric developed by Marion Wilson of the Center for Writing Based Learning. After sending out three separate requests for samples of student work to 18 different, randomly selected classes in the domain, we received samples from only 5 of those classes with a total of 27 student writing samples. The results of the assessment were encouraging

The idea for this project was developed during last year's assessment process when we brought Marion Wilson in to consult with us about our domain's writing expectations and how to best assess these. The committee agreed that assessing the new writing expectations should be a priority for this coming year and for the next three years with the goal of assessing one writing expectation per assessment cycle.

Feedback

Strengths:

- The Committee used a standardized rubric, and took advantage of resources offered by the University Center to Writing-Based Learning (UCWbL).
- A good sample of student work was collected and evaluated.
- The quality of the student work was connected to the type of writing assignments given by instructors.

Limitations / Questions:

- Although the rubric used was provided by the UCWbL, it was possibly more appropriate for grading individual student assignments than for a program-level assessment. In particular, the use of letter grades (e.g., A, C, and F) are not easily adapted to comprehensive program analysis (e.g., with averages and inter-rater reliability rates provided).
- The rubric was perhaps too holistic, with multiple components being applied simultaneously to assign each “grade.” If a student did interpret empirical data but was weak on historical contextualization – or vice versa -- how would that student’s work ultimately be assessed? The inclusion of more RDD instructors during the initial creation of the rubric may have produced a clearer separation of categories and/or some indication of how much weight each component should be given.
- The LSC Assessment S-C recommends that the RD Committee focus on one learning outcome, or even one basic aspect of a learning outcome. There are actually four different LOs associated with the “methodological skills” category. Thus, either an approach using a rubric that separates the four dimensions, or an approach that looks at only one of them, would be more manageable.
- When response rates for paper requests are low, the RD Chair needs to ask the LSP Director for help in collecting more student work from RD instructors.

Scientific Inquiry

Abstract

The Scientific Inquiry Domain (SID) committee this year decided to allow instructors submit student work that assessed a learning outcome of their choosing. This was done both to determine which outcomes were being emphasized in the domain and to determine how well the student work met that outcome. Each instructor was mailed a copy of the learning outcomes, asked to identify one of these outcomes and submit student work that required mastery of that outcome. Based on these results, we made the decision to assess the student work available for learning goals 2, 3 and 4 because these goals yielded the largest sample sizes. Within these goals, we then identified the specific outcomes that would yield the largest samples sizes for each outcome. Each assignment was scored by two independent observers (committee members) as *good*

(*G*), *satisfactory (S)*, or *poor (P)*. Outcome 4 was analyzed in more detail as a follow up to last year's assessment survey on student attitudes by using student work to determine if attitudes about science were being changed. The results of the assessment are mixed and difficult to interpret, but when it is possible to draw concrete conclusions, roughly 2 out of 3 students met the learning outcome at the *G* or *S* level and there is evidence for a change in attitudes.

Feedback

Strengths:

- This project overall was comprehensive and ambitious. The report itself cited multiple references to help explain and support its rationale and findings.
- There appeared to be a favorable response to last year's project feedback to focus more on actual student work.
- A representative sample of student work was collected, and inter-rater reliability figures and other data were reported in great detail.
- The LSC Assessment S-C appreciated how an indirect method was devised to explore whether assignments which are authentic and relevant to students may help them become more appreciative of the role of science in society. Exactly how would one otherwise directly assess whether students formed more positive attitudes about science as a result of having taken SI courses?
- Awareness of the unique challenges of assessing such an affective and subjective LO were noted in the report, as was understanding that no single course or assignment likely yields the desired outcome.
- The plan to distribute the project's finding to SI instructors is good (although it is recommended that the findings be more concisely summarized).

Limitations / Questions:

- While the technique of asking faculty to submit which assignments they think are indicative of meeting SI's LOs is appreciated, such an approach may have inadvertently created too much complexity for the committee to analyze and make sense of, as there were so many variables or components being assessed at once.
- The report would have been stronger if a more explicit conclusion of the assessment project results could have been drawn, and a suggestion as to why they occurred.
- Clearly the committee put forth a great deal of effort on this project, but it wasn't clear that the work yielded enough in the way of useful findings. As the report itself noted, "The results of the assessment are mixed and difficult to interpret . . ."
- The LSC Assessment S-C discussed the larger issue of whether such an LO of developing more positive attitudes about science and technology is warranted. Do the other areas require positive attitudes to be formed about the value of, for example, multiculturalism, art, or philosophy? Isn't it possible for someone to appreciate and understand science, and even recognize its significance in society, without coming to actually *like* science? The LSC Assessment S-C recommends that the SI Advisory Committee have a conversation about the wording and intent of the "positive attitudes" learning outcome. In short, it would seem more

- important for students' knowledge and skills to evolve than their feelings. (This is not to say that a focus on what kinds of assignments best elicit enhanced awareness of the personal relevance of science in students' lives isn't valuable, as it clearly is.)
- It seemed that within the report itself, the focus gradually shifted from being about student work to being more about assignment types. LSC Assessment S-C members found Table 6, in particular, a bit confusing, perhaps because of its lack of connection to student work.
 - In the future, the SI Committee might want to look more closely at how different types of assignments are related to how well students are meeting a particular learning outcome. SI instructors could be informed ahead of time which LO was going to be assessed the coming year, and then they could be asked to select one of their own assignments and submit student work, accordingly. In other words, let the instructor choose which assignments and resulting student work from their class to submit as evidence of their meeting a particular LO.

Self, Society, and the Modern World

Abstract

The Self, Society, and Modern World (SSMW) Learning Domain committee assessed the extent to which SSMW learning outcomes are demonstrated in existing SSMW courses. This year, we paid particular attention to whether or not the personal/ reflective outcome is demonstrated in existing courses. This assessment builds on our assessment project from 2006-2007, which found that the personal/ reflective outcome was not being met in a substantial proportion of the sampled SSMW courses. There were concerns that our 2006-2007 assessment method (i.e., asking for final projects) might have biased the results. Therefore, based on suggestions from the Liberal Studies Program, we decided to repeat the basic method we used last year but to vary the timing of the project we requested (i.e., request student work that occurs earlier in the quarter). Ten faculty provided student work for review. Three SSMW learning domain committee members analyzed the student work. Several consistent themes emerged across their analyses: 1) Most courses in our sample have some student work reflecting one of the three learning outcomes; 2) There is considerable variability in the extent of coverage across courses, with some courses failing to address all three learning outcome categories (i.e., substantive, methodological, reflective); 3) The work that was sampled and evaluated in this assessment contained fewer examples, on average, of the personal/ reflective learning outcomes. Taken together, the results reinforce the importance of the Five Year Annual Review process and highlight a particular weakness in the domain with regard to achieving personal/ reflective learning outcomes.

Feedback

Strengths:

- In response to feedback from last year, student work from earlier in the quarter was collected for this assessment project.

- Because of the replication of methodology, reliability for and validity of last's year's findings are enhanced.
- The findings also could be directly compared to those of last year such that the question could be asked whether increased attention to assist SSMW instructors teach critical thinking skills to students was producing papers that better reflected these skills.
- There was clear reporting of all data, and inter-rater reliability scores were indicated.
- A good plan was proposed to hold a workshop for SSMW instructors solely dedicated to how best to construct assignments that will pull for personal/reflective styles of writing. Because of the more subjective nature of this kind of writing, it is no doubt more challenging for instructors to give assignments that elicit this kind of writing from their students. It is also likely harder to assess evidence of this style of writing in an assessment project.
- The attention to reflectiveness is consonant with one of the meta-goals of the larger LSP.

Limitations / Questions:

- The project seemed too broad, with too many learning outcomes being assessed at once. In the abstract there is a promise of particular attention being paid to the personal/reflective outcome (based on the identified weakness in that year from the prior year's assessment project's findings), but this promise was not realized, since all the LOs were again assessed together.
- The categories in the rubric ("definitely present," "at least partially present," etc) seemed very general, and perhaps too vague for assessing evidence of certain kinds of skills associated with SSMW classes in particular. The assessment of methodological and critical thinking could be made easier (and possibly reduce variance between raters) by providing concrete examples of what critical thinking looks like in an SSMW paper, and what statements do not constitute evidence of its existence.
- The LSC Assessment S-C recommends that a future project be more sharply focused on the personal/reflective style of writing. SSMW instructors could be asked to specifically choose and submit a random selection of student work from whatever assignment they (the instructors) believe was designed to best elicit personal/reflective writing from their students. This approach would have the advantage of SSMW committee members not having to plow through so many different kinds of writing, or having to conduct a review of all LOs across multiple types of writing assignments.
- Other approaches used within the LSP may be adaptable to use by the SSMW committee. The FYW Committee, which it must be noted has a much more standardized curriculum, had instructors design an essay specifically to have students reflect on their writing assignments during the quarter. In another innovative approach, the UP area invited instructors to develop their own questions relevant in this particular case to course content that were administered in a Pre and Post-test format to students, and collected for assessment purposes.

- Another recommendation is develop a template or rubric with categories made up of different levels of personally/reflective writing. For example, a low level type of reflective writing might include statements such as, "I feel such and such to be true," without any connection made to larger institutions or societal issues. A slightly more advanced level of personal/reflective writing might contain statements such as, "I now see the role I've played in shaping and sharing the values of this institution," with additional analysis of why and how. And finally, at the highest form of this style of writing, there might be elements of ethical reasoning and responsibility.
- Related to the above suggestion, the template could be distributed to SSMW instructors to assist them in creating and evaluating appropriate assignments for getting reflective style papers from students. (The template could also of course be used again by SSMW committee members in future assessment projects).
- Among the many student papers already collected, it is possible there already are some that came in response to assignments designed to elicit personal/reflective styles of writing. If that is the case, the SSMW Committee may not need to collect new student work for next year's project, but could instead just re-assess and re-analyze the current papers using the newly developed rubric of different categories of reflection.
- Some discussion took place regarding the following LO: "Students will be able to analyze central institutions and/or underlying social structures and their impact on the larger society"(Ic). A suggestion was made to revise this LO to more modestly phrase it as, "Students will be able to identify at least one central institution, and can discuss its impact on the larger society in an analytical way." The concern expressed was whether it is necessary for a course focused on a particular societal institution to have to cover multiple institutions. Also, with so many possible components to it, this LO (as originally stated) may simply be too difficult to assess. (Given the high level of disagreement between coders for the personal/reflective style of writing, that's another reason why this LO may need to be tweaked. It is also possible, however, that developing a rubric for different types of reflective writing will resolve confusion about whether evidence exists for reflectiveness in a paper.)

Understanding the Past

Abstract

This year, our committee assessed one of our four learning outcomes: that students would, upon completing a U. P. course, be able to "demonstrate in their written work, exams, and/or contributions to class discussions that they have acquired knowledge of prehistoric or historical events, themes, and ideas." We did this by asking 8 history faculty to prepare 3 questions (with answers) about knowledge they planned to impart to students in their courses during Spring Quarter, 2008. This prompt was administered during the first and ninth or tenth week of the quarter. The committee

developed a rubric to score each set of responses and we then conducted analysis to determine change in those scores from the pre-test to the post-test.

Feedback

Strengths:

- This project was well designed. In fact, the Assessment S-C suggested that it be distributed to the other LSP units as a model for how to collect meaningful data.
- The Assessment S-C especially appreciated the technique of inviting faculty to develop questions for students that were consistent with the LO chosen, and to do so both early in the quarter as a Pre-test measure, and the again later as a Post-test measure. This collaborative approach surely empowers and better engages instructors in the conducting of an assessment project. It no doubt also helps faculty feel less negative about carrying out the various requests to submit student work for assessment. This method also cuts down on collecting student work not targeted at the LO being assessed.
- There was a good sampling of history department courses and a well-articulated rubric was applied to assess the student papers.
- The possible connection observed between the quality of student work and how well the syllabus specified the UP learning outcomes was interesting and quite possibly insightful.
- The UP Advisory committee is to be commended for making good use of local resources and local partners, especially Chris McCullough, Assistant Dean of Assessment from the School of Education.
- The proposal to further analyze data for possible differences among those students performing at the upper versus lower ends of achievement, from a course's beginning to its end, reflects a strong commitment to glean as much as possible from the collected data.
- The project included a good long range plan for where to go with the findings, and how best to disseminate the information. The data collected has the potential to serve as a solid baseline for years to come.
- The idea to integrate the level of knowledge students bring with them to the topic appears to be a good way to expand the study.
- Overall, excellent work!

Limitations / Questions:

- A couple of questions were raised about why only tenure and tenure-track faculty in the history department were invited to participate in the project. It is certainly understood that this single discipline dominates the UP area, but there are several other units represented in it, as well. Perhaps there exists other ways of thinking about the teaching of history these other disciplines could bring to the table.
- Also, since so many LSP courses in general are taught by non-tenure track instructors, the rationale for only using tenure or tenure-track faculty was missing from the report. Even if convenience, and ease of cooperation from participating

- instructors, were the primary reasons for why only tenure/tenure track history faculty members were sampled, this needs to be explained.
- While interesting, it was never explained in the report why analysis of data was broken down by which college the students attended. Are there any plans to do more with that dimension of the data?
 - The difference in the number of respondents from Pre- to Post-test deserves some discussion. Is it possible that the students who demonstrated no knowledge or only superficial knowledge on the Pre-test were less likely to be participating in the class at the time of the Post-test, thus creating an artificially larger appearing gain between the Pre and the Post scores? Are there other possible explanations for this sample difference? Also, not explained is why the number of respondents was so much higher for Q1 and Q2 compared to Q3 (e.g., Total Gains by Item Summary Table in Appendix C) given that a result of “no answer” was coded as a “1.”
 - The collection of anonymous student work can create problems of motivation in terms of how much effort students give the assignment. Faculty may want to discuss ways of possibly embedding assessment assignments into the course (the UP Advisory Committee would need to determine if anonymity is necessary or if removing identification is sufficient). Doing so might also better allow for analysis of complete sets of Pre and Post-test scores without the introduction of survivorship bias.
 - Indication of the percentage of students in each of the four categories both Pre and Post may also provide another perspective on how many students are partially or fully achieving the UP’s goals, as compared to those that are not doing so at all, or only superficially.
 - The three different questions from each of the eight different courses were averaged separately, but it was unclear if the questions were meant to build upon each other in some meaningful way. If they were, then that information was not fully conveyed, but if they were just three questions about course content, then why not just average all three into a single response score?