

Liberal Studies
Spring 2011
Assessment Report

This year the Liberal Studies Program faculty completed devising their assessment plan, and began to collect and analyze data from two surveys and from an assessment of final projects of LS 690, the senior seminar.

A. The LS 300 survey, which assessed how well the LS program was addressing the needs and expectations of those intending to enter multiple subjects credential programs, gave us a few pieces of useful information that we are already using to rethink aspects of our program. We learned that 75% of our incoming students either want to be teachers or might want to be teachers. This is a significantly higher percentage than we had thought. On the basis of this and other more specific questions, we have decided to incorporate more information, guest speakers, and assignment options into LS 300 that will directly appeal to future teachers. We are also working on improving the materials available in the advising office so that future teachers are aware earlier in their education of the requirements for entering and completing a credential.

B. The LS 690 survey more generally assessed student satisfaction with the major at the end of their senior seminar; we have not yet analyzed this data, but anticipate that it will help us focus course and program revisions around issues that matter most to the students.

C. Our assessment of LS 690's final projects was carried out over the course of two afternoon-long meetings, during which we shared our individual evaluations of 8 randomly selected papers, focusing on questions #1 and #4 of the 690 rubric that was submitted along with our assessment plan.

Our first conclusion was that the rubric itself needed to be revised, since it aggregated criteria that we felt should be separated out, particularly writing skills and integration. As a result we wrote a separate rubric specifically for assessing the assignments in 690 that disaggregated these criteria, and thus made our process more useful as well as simpler to carry out. The new rubric broke down our SLO's for the project into the following:

To what extent do projects demonstrate:

1. Clarity of prose: sentence structure, syntax, punctuation, etc.
2. Effective organization, cogent reasoning
3. Strong, interesting central idea/thesis

4. Appropriate and sufficient evidence and sources, including peer-reviewed academic sources
5. Connection and integration between at least two different areas (from the LS core) to address complex problems
6. Articulation of why complexity of problem requires multidisciplinary and integrative method

At this point we are simply judging how they meet these criteria on a scale of 1-5; in the future we plan to more fully articulate the different levels of the scale for each criterion. However, we are not convinced this is necessary for the rubric's usefulness.

In reviewing the 8 papers, we concluded that our students are weakest in numbers 4, 5 and 6 of the above. Our discussion led us to a very rich and important conversation about, most importantly, what each of us means by "integration"; and how each of us evaluates "sources." We decided to implement the following in future versions of both LS 300 and 690:

1. To offer models of successful papers/projects from past courses to give students more concrete examples of what "integration" looks like, and why the quality of their sources matters.
2. To offer a wider range of types of final projects, to give students more ownership over their topics and more of a sense of their possible "real world" applications. (This came from recognizing that the most successful projects were those that clearly came out of passionate engagement with the topic.)
3. To make clearer to students the difference between different kinds of sources, particularly between academic and journalistic sources.
4. To help our students gain more depth of understanding, even if it means we sacrifice some breadth. In other words, we are asking too much in trying to get undergraduates to integrate 3 or 4 different disciplines, and these kinds of assignments tend to lead to very superficial treatments of those disciplines.