

**Liberal Studies**  
**Report on P3 Course Assessment**

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## **Introduction**

This report assesses the extent to which history courses designated as P3 in the Liberal Studies Program meet the program's general goals, the goals for all perspectives courses, and the specific goals of the P3 category. The committee examined course syllabi, samples of student work, and data generated through faculty and student surveys.

All of the materials used by the committee came from the Spring 2008 semester. The committee received materials related to nine P3 sections. That group included three different sets of materials for HIST 141, one set each from three different instructors. The committee received syllabi for all nine sections and samples of student work generated in seven sections.

HIST 107 World Cultures in Historical Perspective

HIST 141 Turning Points in American History (three sets of course materials)

HIST 221 European History to 1517

HIST 232 United States History to 1865

HIST 322 British History to 1603

HIST 342 North Carolina History

PAR 210 Origins of Early Christian Traditions

Total number of syllabi reviewed - 9

Total number of student products reviewed - 36

### Rubric for student products

1-Unsatisfactory – Student work reflects a level of mastery below that expected of a college graduate.

2- Meets expectations – Student work reflects a level of mastery consistent with that of a college graduate.

3- Exceeds expectations – Student work reflects a level of mastery above that expected of a college graduate.

Total number of faculty survey responses - 6

Total number of student survey responses - 45

## **Syllabi Assessment Method**

The Liberal Studies Program identifies six overarching learning goals for the entire program, seven goals for all perspectives classes, and four goals specific to the P3 category. Most of the syllabi the committee examined listed the four P3 goals but did not list the more general Liberal Studies and Perspectives goals. Committee members concluded, however, that syllabi can address the full range of Liberal Studies objectives without listing all seventeen goals. In deciding whether a particular syllabus addressed the Liberal Studies goals, committee members examined course structure and teaching methods, course policies, content material, and assignments.

## **Note on Student Products Assessment**

Most of the student products used in this assessment consisted of short essays, in which students responded to instructor questions about a particular reading assignment or set of primary sources.

The committee considered the student work portion of the assessment process to be of limited use. The collection of student products represented a small and fairly narrow sample. Moreover, for many of the short essays, committee members did not know the original questions and were not familiar with the readings addressed in the assignments. The assignments, however, all seemed to be appropriate for history and Liberal Studies courses. Indeed, many appeared to be quite excellent assignments.

The statistical portion of this part of the assessment was especially flawed. Most instructors, when asked to submit student work samples, provided one or two examples each of average, above average, and below average work. Not surprisingly, the numbers generated for the third column of the table below show an even distribution among the poor, satisfactory, and excellent categories. The committee concluded that the data was meaningless.

The recommendations section of this document includes suggestions for improving this element of Liberal Studies assessment.

## **Note on Faculty Survey**

The faculty survey asked questions tied to the general perspectives goals and the goals for P3 classes. The questions related to the general perspectives goals were appropriate; however, the three P3 questions did not accurately correspond to the P3 goals. Two of the three survey questions addressed different elements of a single P3 goal, while the third survey question reflected one of the C3 goals (C3 is the category dedicated to speech communications). The survey left unaddressed three of the four P3 goals.

**Overarching Learning Goals of the Liberal Studies Program:**

<b>Learning Goal</b>	<b># of syllabi addressing each goal</b>	<b># of student products reflecting each level of mastery as described above</b>	<b>Survey data results from faculty addressing each goal</b>
Demonstrate the ability to locate, analyze, and evaluate information	Nine syllabi addressed this goal.	1 - 14 2 - 11 3 - 11	The survey did not address the overarching Liberal Studies objectives.
Demonstrate the ability to synthesize information	Nine syllabi addressed this goal.	1 - 13 2 - 11 3 - 12	
Demonstrate the ability to interpret and use numerical, written, oral and visual data	Nine syllabi addressed this goal.	1 - 14 2 - 11 3 - 11	
Demonstrate the ability to read with comprehension, and to write and speak clearly, coherently, and effectively as well as to adapt modes of com. appropriate to an audience	Eight syllabi addressed this goal; one syllabus implied that the class addressed this goal.	1 - 12 2 - 13 3 - 11	
Demonstrate the ability to critically analyze arguments	Eight syllabi addressed this goal; one syllabus implied that the class addressed this goal.	1 - 13 2 - 12 3 - 11	
Demonstrate the ability to recognize			

behaviors and define choices that affect lifelong well-being	See note 1 below.	N/A - 36	
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1. History courses almost always involve learning about choices made by individuals and groups of people in the past. Moreover, history invariably involves discussion of values. While the syllabi did not directly address this Liberal Studies goal, committee members believed that the courses almost certainly contributed to the attainment of the goal. In addition, the committee noted that most of the syllabi included course policies that encouraged students to behave responsibly and make reasonable choices in the context of the course (completing assignments on time, respecting classmates, acting like human beings, and so on).

## Primary Goals for All Perspectives Courses

Learning Goal	# of syllabi addressing each goal	# of student products reflecting each level of mastery as described above	Survey data results from faculty addressing each goal
To promote love of learning and to cultivate an active interest in the Liberal Studies	See note 2	N/A - 36	The survey did not address this objective.
To build on the Core's foundation through practice and refinement of areas academic emphasis	Nine syllabi addressed this goal  See note 3	1 - 13 2 - 13 3 - 10	Four of six respondents assessed this area formally through exams, writing assignments, oral presentations, and class discussion and debate.  Two respondents listed this area as N/A.
To provide students with a broadened world view and knowledge base	Nine syllabi addressed this goal	1 - 14 2 - 10 3 - 12	Two respondents assessed this area formally and three informally through exams, writing assignments, oral presentations, and group activities.
To provide experiences in the arts, humanities, and social sciences from which connections between disciplines can be revealed	Two syllabi addressed this goal; six syllabi implied that the classes addressed this goal	N/A - 36	Three respondents assessed this area formally and two informally through exams, writing assignments, and class discussion and debate.  Two respondents identified this area as N/A (this number leads to a total of seven respondents, rather than six, as in the rest of the survey).
To provide an introduction to the challenges of living in a global society	Three syllabi addressed this goal; five syllabi implied that the class addressed this goal	1 - 3 2 - 3 3 - 2  N/A - 28	Two respondents assessed this area formally and two informally through exams, writing assignments, class discussion, oral presentations, and group activities. Class discussion represented the most popular method of addressing this area.  One respondent identified this area as N/A.

To create opportunities for reflection on values, and for discussing differences in values in a critical yet tolerate manner.	Nine syllabi addressed this goal	1 - 10 2 - 9 3 - 10 N/A - 7	One respondent assessed this area formally and four informally through exams, class discussion, writing assignments, oral presentations, and group activities. Class discussion represented the most popular method of addressing this area.
To afford opportunities to make career or disciplinary choices	No syllabi addressed this goal.  See note 4	N/A - 36	One respondent assessed this area formally and one informally through exams, class discussion, writing assignments, and group activities.  Four respondents identified this area as N/A

2. The committee concluded that, while promoting a "love of learning" represents an inherent goal of almost all teaching, this objective was not something that syllabi, which typically deal with course policies and assignments, could formally address.

3. Committee members found the wording of this objective confusing. They interpreted it as meaning that P3 classes, as history classes, should offer opportunities for "practice and refinement" of the skills and activities associated with the academic area of history.

4. While the syllabi did not address this goal formally, the committee believed that the courses, by introducing students to elements of history and religious studies, informally encouraged contemplation of disciplinary choices.

**(P3) History**

<b>Learning Objective</b>	<b># of Syllabi Addressing Each Goal</b>	<b># of Students at Various Levels of Mastery as Described Above</b>	<b>Survey Data Results from Faculty Addressing Each Goal</b>
Students will be introduced to a distinctive body of knowledge in the discipline of history and to the tools of historical inquiry that shape and define it.	Nine syllabi addressed this goal.	1 - 13 2 - 11 3 - 12	The survey did not address this objective.
Students will be able to locate people and events in space and time, explain change and continuity, and explain the diversity of forces shaping events, institutions, and value systems.	Nine syllabi addressed this goal.	1 - 12 2 - 12 3 - 12	Six respondents addressed the first part of this goal formally (locate people and events in time) through exams, class discussion, writing assignments, oral presentations, and group activities.  Five respondents addressed the second part of the goal formally (change and continuity, etc.) and one informally through exams, class discussion, writing assignments, oral presentations, and group activities.
Students will be able to understand development over time and illustrate the complexity of forces that mold events.	Nine syllabi addressed this goal.	1 - 14 2 - 10 3 - 12	The survey did not address this objective.
Students will engage in the experience of interpreting the record of the past and drawing their own conclusions.	Eight syllabi addressed this goal; one syllabus implied that the class addressed this goal	1 - 13 2 - 11 3 - 12	The survey did not address this objective.

**General Comments Concerning syllabi:**

Most of the syllabi listed the P3 goals. More important, the syllabi suggested that the actual classes embraced those goals in their structure, content, assignments, and activities. None of the syllabi listed the general goals for Liberal Studies, and few listed the general perspectives goals. Again, however, the committee concluded that the actual classes reflected most of those objectives. The only goals the syllabi did not address, directly or indirectly, were the "love of learning" objective and the goal regarding disciplinary and career choices.

Faculty teaching Liberal Studies courses are required to list the official Liberal Studies objectives. In the courses examined for this report, most instructors interpreted this requirement as being limited to the P3 goals. The committee considered this interpretation to be appropriate. If instructors listed all of the Liberal Studies goals, P3 syllabi would have seventeen course objectives, plus the goals specific to course topics. That number struck committee members as excessive.

The syllabi indicated that most instructors favored fairly traditional teaching methods, emphasizing lecture and discussion, and that their most important assessment vehicles were written exams and short essays.

**General Comments Concerning Student Work:**

As noted above, the committee would need a better sample of student work, along with other related material, to make any kind of judgment about student performance in P3 courses. The committee concluded, however, that the assignments represented in the student work reflected many of the Liberal Studies Program's goals, particularly the P3 goals. Adequate performance on these assignments required the possession and refinement of the skills and knowledge indicated in the P3 goals.

**General Comments Concerning Faculty and Student Surveys:**

The surveys, from both faculty and students, suggested that the P3 courses are meeting the P3 goals, as well as the program's general objectives. The faculty surveys reinforced the committee's impression that the courses emphasized lecture and discussion, as well as the conclusion that they stressed reading comprehension and writing.

It is worth noting, however, that relatively few faculty and students completed the surveys.

**Strengths:**

The committee concluded that all of the courses inspected fulfilled the requirements of the Liberal Studies Program and, in particular, that they thoroughly met the P3 objectives. The courses are rigorous, with a substantial emphasis on reading comprehension and writing.

**Recommendations for P3 courses:**

Instructors of P3 courses should be reminded to include the P3 objectives in their syllabi, if such listing remains a university policy. Committee members did not believe that it was necessary to list the general Liberal Studies goals and the general perspectives goals.

New faculty and non-tenure-track faculty should receive a more thorough orientation to the Liberal Studies Program. The committee derived this recommendation not from the assessment materials but from the informal observation that many new faculty and non-tenure-track faculty are unfamiliar with the history and overall structure of the Liberal Studies Program. Successful liberal arts courses generally live up to the objectives of the Liberal Studies Program, since faculty designed the program to embrace and perpetuate the values of a liberal arts education; however, new and non-tenure-track faculty will still benefit from a general understanding of the program's outlines and development.

Faculty teaching P3 courses should consider complementing their existing instruction methods with applied teaching techniques, such as service learning. The university's Quality Enhancement Plan suggests that applied teaching methods will become a more prominent part of life at WCU in coming years. Liberal Studies courses should include those methods when faculty consider them appropriate.

## **Recommendations for Liberal Studies Assessment:**

In completing this assessment, committee members found that they wanted a somewhat different set of course materials. In addition to course syllabi, future assessment teams should collect one or two examples of each kind of assignment for a given course (one quiz, one essay assignment, one exam, one group project, etc.), along with one or two samples of student work corresponding to each assignment. One learns much more about a course by examining the construction of assignments than from a random selection of student work.

The statistical report on "levels of mastery" displayed by student work samples should be eliminated. The samples are small and selective enough that these numbers will never be informative.

If future assessments include student and faculty surveys, an effort must be made to convince more people to complete the questionnaires. This is particularly the case with the student surveys, since faculty who participate will provide considerable amounts of evidence through their course materials. The numbers yielded by the spring 2008 surveys were too small to be meaningful.

Many P3 instructors ignored the invitation to submit course materials. Clearly an alternative process for gathering materials is necessary. Perhaps the assessment office could work through particular faculty members in the various departments (the head of the undergraduate committee, for example, or some other individual designated by the department head) to gather syllabi and other documents. Faculty are regularly inundated with email messages from various administration offices. It is easy to lose track of some of the requests and mandates.

Starting the assessment process earlier might also help. The deadline for the submission of materials could be set in late March, which would give faculty plenty of time to gather sample assignments, exams, and projects. An earlier deadline might also send the message that the assessment office has made this process a priority. If the assessment office considers this review to be significant, it must convince the faculty of its importance.