Liberal Studies Assessment Report on First-Year Seminar Courses

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The First Year Seminar assessment was fraught with numerous issues which made the assessment process problematic. Among the most challenging issue was that the artifacts ranged across fourteen different Student Learning Outcomes, leaving most outcomes with insufficient numbers to adequately assess. As a result, SLO 3(b) - demonstrate the ability to write clearly, coherently, and effectively as well as adapt to modes of communication appropriate to an audience - was assessed. Additionally, the assessment team did not have access to the assignment instructions, which made it impossible to determine whether students were able to adapt their modes of communications. Another significant challenge was that only six syllabi were available for review, and likely did not correlate to the artifacts that were examined for assessment.

The team assessed SLO 3(b) on a scale ranging from Emerging (1), Developing (2), Achieving (3) and Exemplary (4). Students were assessed to range between Developing (2) and Achieving (3) all of the 3(b) SLO components. While difficult to assess, one outcome of the FYS may be improved retention statistics from first to second year students. The assessment team felt that revisions to the current assessment plan may benefit the quality of data that is collected, the means through which it is assessed, and ultimately the conclusions that it provides for the Liberal Studies Committee.

II. OVERVIEW OF THE CHARGE TO THE ASSESSMENT TEAM

The charge to Liberal Studies Assessment teams indicates that the primary tasks for the members are to (1) use the Liberal Studies rubrics to score samples of student work as a way to determine how well students are achieving the associated outcomes of the Liberal Studies Program, and (2) to review the syllabi of the courses taught in the category under review. The overarching goals of the Liberal Studies assessment are to determine how well students achieve the Liberal Studies Learning Outcomes, and to determine how consistent the goals of the Liberal Studies Program are with what faculty and departments are delivering.

The Guiding Principles for Liberal Studies Program Assessment are to answer the following questions:

1) Are we delivering what we say we do?
2) Are students learning what we want them to?
3) What can we do to strengthen the correlation between what we deliver and how well students learn?
This results of this team’s assessment are outlined based upon these guiding principles and questions.

III. STUDENT LEARNING: A REVIEW OF RANDOMLY SELECTED STUDENT WORK

The programmatic goals for Liberal Studies include the ability to:

1) Demonstrate the ability to locate, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information
2) Demonstrate the ability to:
   a) interpret and use numerical data
   b) interpret and use written data
   c) interpret and use oral data
   d) interpret and use visual data
3) Demonstrate the ability to:
   a) read difficult texts with comprehension
   b) write clearly, coherently, and effectively as well as adapt to modes of communication appropriate to an audience
   c) speak clearly, coherently, and effectively as well as to adapt modes of communication appropriate to an audience
4) Demonstrate the ability to critically analyze arguments
5) Demonstrate the ability to recognize behaviors and define choices that affect lifelong well-being
6) Demonstrate an understanding of:
   a) past human experiences and ability to relate them to the present
   b) different contemporary cultures and their interrelationships
   c) issues involving social institutions,
   d) issues involving interpersonal and group dynamics
   e) issues involving human development and behavior
   f) issues involving cultural diversity
   g) scientific concepts and methods
   h) contemporary issues in science and technology
   i) cultural heritage through its expressions of wisdom, literature and art and their roles in the process of self and social understanding.
7) Demonstrate an excitement for and love of learning

The programmatic goals for the First Year Seminar (FYS) include the ability to:

1) Introduce students to intellectual life at the university level.
2) Introduce students to the importance of Liberal Studies in a university education.
3) Help students understand the necessity for reasoning and communication proficiencies as a foundation for lifelong intellectual and professional growth.
4) Help students begin to see that important cultural, social, economic and political issues of a global society are not limited to the traditional boundaries of the academic disciplines or the specializations of the professions.
5) Encourage discussion of serious ideas and development of rigorous intellectual habits.
6) Engage in a significant writing component based on rigorous reading and seminar format discussions.

Faculty teaching First-Year Seminars (FYS) were notified at the beginning of the semester that FYS was going to be assessed. Faculty were asked to submit syllabi and choose which FYS learning outcomes were demonstrated with the artifacts submitted. At the end of the semester, faculty were provided with random student identification numbers and asked to submit artifacts for the selected students. Table 1 shows the number of student artifacts that were submitted for each learning objective.

Table 1
Frequency of Student Artifacts for Each First-Year Seminar Learning Outcome

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Outcome</th>
<th>Frequency of Student Artifacts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2A</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2B</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3A</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3B</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3C</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6D</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6E</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6F</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6G</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6H</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6I</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 168

As Table 1 indicates, there is great diversity among the predominant learning outcome among courses. This is because FYS courses are in a stand-alone category in Liberal Studies. The FYS category provides great flexibility, and consists of courses that are motivated by faculty interest, in any discipline. As Table 1 shows, only one of the learning objectives, 3(B) demonstrate the ability to write clearly, coherently, and effectively as well as adapt to modes of communication appropriate to an audience, had sufficient artifacts for meaningful analysis. All seventy-four artifacts in the 3(B) category were used for assessment. It is important to note that entering freshmen are assigned to either a FYS or an English class their first semester, but not both. Since artifacts were collected in the Fall semester, it is likely that students submitting the artifacts have not had a college level English course.

Three Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) for the 3(B) category were identified as relevant to the selected artifacts:

a) Demonstrate the ability to write clearly
b) Demonstrate the ability to write coherently
c) Demonstrate the ability to write effectively

d) Demonstrate the ability to adapt modes of communication appropriate to an audience

The assessment team consisted of four reviewers. Reviewers met for a norming session with the Director of Assessment. During the norming session, reviewers independently evaluated several artifacts, reported results, discussed differences and developed norms for assessing the remaining artifacts. Through this process, it was determined insufficient data existed to appropriately assess criterion (d), adapting modes of communication. The primary reasons for this conclusion were that assignment instructions were not submitted with the artifact, which made it impossible to accurately assess the target audience of the assignment and numerous assignments focused on responding to discussion questions and did not require the student to demonstrate adapting modes of communication. As a result, N/A was recorded as the score for “adapting modes of communication,” and is not included in the total score. After the norming session, reviewers were randomly assigned artifacts to assess.

A. QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

Two reviewers assessed 40 artifacts, one reviewer was assessed 39 and the other reviewer assessed 37 artifacts. Each artifact was independently assessed by two reviewers and scores were submitted on Qualtrics. Each of the three remaining Student Learning Outcomes 3 (B) criteria (a, b and c) was evaluated on the following 4-point scale:

1 - Emerging
2 - Developing
3 - Achieving
4 - Exemplary
N/A - Not Applicable

On first scoring, if individual criterion scores differed by more than one point, a third scorer rescored the individual criterion. If the rescore agreed with one of the two original scores, that rescore was used in the final calculations. The original score that did not agree was removed from the calculations (because it differed by two or more from the other scores). If the rescore did not agree with one of the two original scores, then the two original and the rescore were kept. On all occasions, the rescore fell in the middle of the two original scores. Final criterion scores for each sample are the average of the scores that were kept. Kept scores could be the original two scores if they differed by no more than one point, the rescored values if they agreed with one of the original scores, or the average of the original two scores and the rescore if the rescore did not agree with either original score.

Tables 2 and 3 below, generated by the Director of Assessment from the Qualtrics survey used by the assessment team, indicate the distribution of the ratings assigned to the 74 artifacts scored. Charts 1-4 below, help illustrate the frequency distribution of scores for artifacts, with values representing means of individual scores of the two reviewers (e.g. a value of 2.5 represents the mean scores of 2 and 3).
Table 2: Liberal Studies SLO 3B (Written Communication) Descriptive Statistics Following Rescoring (2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>Write Clearly</th>
<th>Write Coherently</th>
<th>Write Effectively</th>
<th>Total Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Dev</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>2.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category (Mean)</td>
<td>Achieving (3)</td>
<td>Achieving (3)</td>
<td>Achieving (3)</td>
<td>Achieving (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Liberal Studies SLO 3B (Written Communication) Reliability Estimates Following Rescoring (2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Write Clearly</th>
<th>Write Coherently</th>
<th>Write Effectively</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agreements</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreements (+/-1)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagreements (&gt;-1)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$r_{(+/-0)}$</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$r_{(+/-1)}$</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. $r = \frac{(\text{Agreements} + \text{Agreements} + \text{Disagreements})}{\text{Agreements} + \text{Disagreements}}$; an estimate of Percent Agreement

Chart 1: Writing Clearly Distribution of Scores
Chart 2: Writing Coherently Distribution of Scores

Chart 3: Writing Effectively Distribution of Scores
B. QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Based on the assessment team’s analysis, Western Carolina University’s students in First-Year Seminar courses, on average, demonstrate proficiency in written communication skills, as viewed through the lens of the Student Learning Outcomes of the Liberal Studies Program.

LEARNING OUTCOME 3B: DEMONSTRATE ABILITY TO WRITE CLEARLY
The 74 artifacts examined from First-Year Seminars for the 3(B) category indicate that Western Carolina University students are performing at all four levels, from “Emerging” through “Exemplary,” with 49/74 students (66%) scoring a mean of 2.5 or 3. The total mean score for the category was 2.66, between “Developing-2” and “Achieving-3.” Most students in the sample were able to communicate their thoughts in a written format.

**LEARNING OUTCOME 3B: DEMONSTRATE ABILITY TO WRITE COHERENTLY**

The 74 artifacts examined from First-Year Seminars for the 3(B) category indicate that Western Carolina University students are performing at all four levels, from “Emerging” through “Exemplary,” with 50/74 students (68%) scoring a mean of 2.5 or 3. The total mean score for the category was 2.72, between “Developing-2” and “Achieving-3.” Most students in the sample were able to coherently communicate their thoughts in a written format.

**LEARNING OUTCOME 3C: DEMONSTRATE ABILITY TO WRITE EFFECTIVELY**

The 74 artifacts examined from First-Year Seminars for the 3(B) category indicate that Western Carolina University students are performing at all four levels, from “Emerging” through “Exemplary,” with 49/74 students (66%) scoring a mean of 2.5 or 3. The total mean score for the category was 2.68, between “Developing-2” and “Achieving-3.” Most students in the sample were able to communicate their thoughts in a written format.

**LEARNING OUTCOME 3D: DEMONSTRATE ABILITY TO ADAPT MODES OF COMMUNICATION APPROPRIATE TO AN AUDIENCE**

The assessment team determined that this category could not be adequately assessed due to insufficient information regarding target audiences of assignments as well as assignments requiring responses to questions which did not lend itself to adaption of communication to different audiences.

**IV. FACULTY DELIVERY: A REVIEW OF SYLLABI**

The primary goal of the First-Year Seminar is to introduce students to intellectual life at the university level. The goal of each FYS is to:

- Learn about the importance of Liberal Studies in a university education;
- Consider how reasoning skills and communication skills are the foundations for life-long intellectual and professional growth;
- See that cultural, social, economic and political issues of a global society are not limited to one academic discipline or one profession;
- Discuss serious ideas and develop rigorous intellectual habits.

As part of the assessment, the FYS review team was only able to access six syllabi to analyze. It is unclear whether these six syllabi are related to the artifacts that were assessed in the 3b Student Learning Outcome category, or if they were related to other Student Learning Outcomes. Each syllabi represented a different course, so no overlap among sections existed.

The assessment team used the syllabi for to confirm the inclusion of:
1) The explicit statement of Course Description
2) Specific Learning Objectives
3) First Year Seminar goals
4) General Liberal Studies Learning Outcomes

All of the syllabi reviewed provided an explicit statement of course description as well as specific learning objectives (6/6 or 100%). Half of the syllabi reflected a statement of First Year Seminar goals (3/6 or 50%). Finally, two-thirds of the syllabi provided statements of General Liberal Studies Learning Outcomes (4/6 or 66.7%).

It is difficult to provide meaningful feedback regarding syllabi given the small sample size combined with the broad diversity among courses. However, it should be recommended that all FYS syllabi include First Year Seminar goals as well as the specific General Liberal Studies Learning Outcomes that the course seeks to address. Indicating the SLO(s) addressed will facilitate the improvement of the assessment process.

V. STRENGTHENING THE CORRELATION BETWEEN STUDENT LEARNING AND FACULTY/DEPARTMENTAL DELIVERY

The previous assessment of FYS Liberal Studies Category was completed in 2008, and the report of the assessment findings can be found among those listed on the Liberal Studies Program Assessment website.

It is important to note that since 2008, the university has been affected by the fiscal recession and has increased enrollment. These factors have increased the difficulty in making wide-scale FYS changes. In the committee’s assessment, the university focused on maintaining current quality while providing FYS sections for all incoming students.

There were significant improvements in the first year experience when the Department of Student Transitions, developed a First Year Experience, with Glenda Hensley as the Director. This served to identify practices that increased retention and improve academic success of first year students. While difficult to assess, one outcome of the FYS may be the improved retention statistics from first to second year students.

A. REFLECTION ON CHANGES SINCE 2008 FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR ASSESSMENT

The recommendations from the 2008 Assessment Report on FYS courses, the actions taken in response to these recommendations, and the associated outcomes are summarized in Table 8.

Table 8. Update from 2008 FYS assessment.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendations from 2008</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Syllabi explicitly state Liberal Studies and FYS learning objectives</td>
<td>LSOC worked with department heads to ensure all syllabi state learning objectives.</td>
<td>A majority of syllabi state Liberal Studies learning objectives and about half state FYS learning objectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignments should include specific statements of how they will address Liberal Studies and FYS learning objectives</td>
<td>Development of Liberal Studies Faculty Resource Handbook.</td>
<td>Examples are provided in Liberal Studies Faculty Resource Handbook.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop syllabus template</td>
<td>Development of Liberal Studies Faculty Resource Handbook. Collaboration with Coulter Faculty Commons.</td>
<td>Examples are provided in Liberal Studies Faculty Resource Handbook. Coulter Faculty Commons has developed syllabus resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rework Liberal Studies and FYS learning objectives so they are more transparent and able to be assessed</td>
<td>The Liberal Studies Oversight Committee and Faculty Senate have all worked on updating learning objectives (and the entire LS program) to no avail.</td>
<td>No change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop common attendance framework to support learning outcome “develop rigorous intellectual habits.”</td>
<td>University has common attendance policy for all students posted in the most current undergraduate catalog.</td>
<td>No change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FYS are only taught by established instructors who have time to prep courses (avoid last minute hire/fixed term instructors).</td>
<td>FYS courses are planned by individual faculty and the decision to schedule is at the department level. There is no requirement or university support to offer by only “established” instructors.</td>
<td>No change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No instructor should teach more than two seminars per semester.</td>
<td>Course scheduling occurs at the department level. The university is typically short on seats in FYS and additional sections have been welcomed. (Current assessment committee is unsure of the justification of this previous recommendation, as none was given.)</td>
<td>No change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of students should be limited to 22 or less.</td>
<td>During fiscal crisis, seats in FYS were officially increased to up to 30 seats. Often, there is a request from the Associate</td>
<td>There is currently a subcommittee of LSOC to consider this issue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations from 2008</td>
<td>Actions</td>
<td>Outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University should find means of support for small FYS sections without budgetary penalties of teaching small classes.</td>
<td>None. During fiscal crisis, seats in FYS were officially increased to up to 30 seats. Often, there is a request from the Associate Provost’s office to increase the number of seats.</td>
<td>No change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remind faculty that seminar students have not completed Freshman Composition sequence.</td>
<td>None.</td>
<td>Recommend this be added to the WCU Faculty Advising Guide and the Liberal Studies Faculty Resource Handbook.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generate assignments that address variable learning styles</td>
<td>Coulter Faculty Center provides Development of Liberal Studies Faculty Resource Handbook</td>
<td>Development of Liberal Studies Faculty Resource Handbook. Examples provided in Liberal Studies Faculty Resource Handbook. Coulter Faculty Commons also has staff and guidance for feedback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment scores and grades are accompanied by clear feedback (ideas include peer evaluations and post assignment discussion).</td>
<td>Development of Liberal Studies Faculty Resource Handbook.</td>
<td>Examples provided in Liberal Studies Faculty Resource Handbook. Coulter Faculty Commons also has staff and guidance for feedback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Include small group activity in all FYS courses.</td>
<td>None. This is determined by individual faculty members.</td>
<td>Coulter Faculty Commons also has staff and guidance for feedback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University provides enough FYS sections so students can choose a course that appeals to them.</td>
<td>University has no carrot for faculty to teach FYS; therefore, it is determined at the department level according to interest and staffing.</td>
<td>None.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a Faculty Fellow position in Coulter Faculty Center to assist FYS instructors.</td>
<td>None.</td>
<td>Coulter Faculty Commons is currently trying to hire enough staff to cover basic requirements.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**B. ASSESSMENT OF THE FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR IN CONTEXT OF LIBERAL STUDIES DOCUMENT AND BROADER UNIVERSITY-LEVEL ASSESSMENTS**

The FYS serves as an introduction to academic life. This assessment only reviewed one of the general Liberal Studies learning outcomes and **none of the FYS learning outcomes**. Therefore, this assessment report has limited utility in making changes to the FYS.
In terms of the one liberal studies learning outcome that was assessed, demonstrate the ability to read with comprehension, and to write and speak clearly, coherently, and effectively as well as to adapt modes of communication appropriate to an audience, the mean results indicated student learning was 2.6, between “Developing-2” and “Achieving-3, on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 4 (highest). No student artifacts were submitted by faculty with this learning outcome as the one that was intended to be assessed and reviewers did not have access to assignment information or instructions.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM FIRST YEAR SEMINAR ASSESSMENT TEAM

Based on the Liberal Studies Assessment Team Charge, our group was tasked with assessing student work to determine if First Year Seminars were delivering on the Liberal Studies curriculum, teaching students based on the Liberal Studies learning objectives, and recommend ways to improve the correlations between what we teach and what the students take away from FYS courses. The following recommendations are broken into two sections: recommendations based on our analysis of student artifacts and recommendations on the assessment procedure.

A. RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON THE ANALYSIS OF STUDENT ARTIFACTS

The data we analyzed were collected at the completion of the Fall 2015 semester. While we were originally required to assess all of the Liberal Studies learning outcomes associated with FYS, it was decided that we should only assess the learning outcomes related to 3B: “Demonstrate the ability to write clearly (a), coherently (b), and effectively (c) as well as to adapt modes of communication appropriate to an audience (d).” We were unable to account for the last sub-skill, “the ability to write modes of communication appropriate to an audience.” This is because assignments to which the writings refer were not included in our data (see below), so we were unable to accurately determine the audience to which the writings were directed. Our results show that most students fall in-between the rankings of “Developing” and “Achieving” - with the mean assessment scores falling closer to the latter. Given that we as a group reviewed dozens of student-produced writings produced in First Year Seminars, clearly many of our students are writing at a college level in these courses. However, we feel that there are few, if any, generalizations we can make based on these results. The limited number of student artifacts as well as the fact that we measured only one of the Liberal Studies learning objectives does not provide enough information for us to conclude on whether the FYS course is delivering what we want it to, teaching students the Liberal Studies learning objectives, or providing strategies for improving the pedagogical practices between instructors and their students. While we may not have recommendations based on the student artifacts, we do wish to provide context from the assessment process that may be useful to future assessment projects.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE FYS ASSESSMENT PROCEDURE

In reviewing the process, we offer some questions that may warrant further exploration rather than concrete recommendations on how to change or improve the current assessment process. First, how do we measure and quantify the Liberal Studies learning objectives? While there are seven learning objectives for the FYS, which is a sizeable number in itself, the breakdown of sub-skills within the
learning objectives equates to 44 different sub-skills being included on the assessment rubrics. Additionally, the diction among the sub-skills that are being measured present their own difficulties. During our team’s norming session, for example, one of the items we discussed was whether we could accurately differentiate assessment on “writing clearly,” “writing coherently,” and “writing effectively.”

Second, is it possible to assess the Liberal Studies learning objectives without access to the course assignments and syllabi? Although we were provided with a small sample of syllabi, these were likely not the syllabi for the courses in which the writings were produced. A significant challenge we faced was assessing the student artifacts while attempting to infer what the assignment prompt required of each student. This issue was exacerbated by the diversity of courses, disciplines, and subject matter included within the FYS courses.

Third, is there a way to collect and assess the data faster? Our report is based on data that is over two years old. While there may be interesting conclusions to glean from the data, there may have been enough changes among the FYS within the past two years to make any conclusions less relevant.

Fourth, the coordination between the Liberal Studies faculty-based sub-committee and the Office of Assessment led to lengthy wait times to access data. While the committee felt it was appropriate for data analysis to come from the Office of Assessment, It appears that the Office of Assessment is understaffed to provide results and in put in a reasonable timeframe, particularly when it occurs during the in the same time window as SACSCOC or other university-wide assessments.

Finally, given the lack reliable data tied to clear objectives, and the difficulty of classifying the work into what seemed like rather arbitrary categories, it was hard not to think that this report was doomed from the beginning. Hopefully it is not so, and it will be useful in at least refining future assessment activities. Based on our experience with this assessment process, we can make the following recommendations to improve the process:

- Prior to beginning an assessment, develop an assessment plan that is clear to faculty. This assessment was methodologically flawed as assessment was changed multiple times (differing Directors of Assessment) after syllabi and student artifacts were already submitted. Student artifacts submitted did not correlate to faculty-intended assessment of student learning outcomes. Further, the assessment team did not have access to the actual assignments, so it was difficult to ascertain if students met instructor’s expectations.
- Add to the WCU Faculty Advising Guide and the Liberal Studies Faculty Resource Handbook that first year students are assigned a FYS or English course. This will ensure instructors understand that students have not (in most cases) taken a college-level English course yet.
- The FYS should be taught by the best faculty departments have to offer: faculty who are a good fit for and understand first-year students and faculty who inspire. Teaching the FYS should become a privilege and should be recognized as a high-value teaching assignment.
- It would be beneficial to offer faculty who are new to the FYS a professional development session of some sort to work with veteran faculty and/or Coulter Faculty Commons for the course so they can understand the unique nature of the FYS.

As a group, we understand the value of assessment within our Liberal Studies program, especially as it pertains to the 2020 Vision. However, we feel that revisions to the current assessment plan may benefit
the quality of data that is collected, the means through which it is assessed, and ultimately the conclusions that it provides for the Liberal Studies Committee.
### Liberal Studies Assessment Rubric—Student Learning Outcome 3, Part B (Written Communication)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Skills</th>
<th>Emerging (1)</th>
<th>Developing (2)</th>
<th>Achieving (3)</th>
<th>Exemplary (4)</th>
<th>No Score (x)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Write clearly</td>
<td>Student demonstrates the inability to write clearly. The work is confusing and difficult to comprehend.</td>
<td>Student demonstrates some ability to write clearly, but some times that clarity breaks down in significantly confusing portions of the work.</td>
<td>Student demonstrates the ability to write clearly. The work is neither confusing nor difficult to comprehend throughout.</td>
<td>Student demonstrates a refined ability to write clearly in a way that exceeds expectations for clarity.</td>
<td>A score of X designates irrelevancy of the category to the assignment, or folders and/or content cannot be viewed or assessed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Write coherently</td>
<td>Student demonstrates the inability to write coherently. The work is confusing in a logically disconnected way.</td>
<td>Student demonstrates some ability to write coherently, but logical connections break down in significant portions of the work.</td>
<td>Student demonstrates the ability to write coherently. The work is logically connected throughout.</td>
<td>Student demonstrates a refined ability to write in a logically connected way that exceeds expectations.</td>
<td>A score of X designates irrelevancy of the category to the assignment, or folders and/or content cannot be viewed or assessed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Write effectively</td>
<td>Student demonstrates the inability to write effectively. The intended purpose of the work is neither recognizable nor realized.</td>
<td>Student demonstrates the ability to write effectively some of the time, but the intended purpose of the work is not fully realized.</td>
<td>Student demonstrates the ability to write effectively and, therefore, fully accomplishes the intended purpose of the work.</td>
<td>Student demonstrates the refined ability to write effectively by fully accomplishing the intended purpose of the work in insightful and convincing ways.</td>
<td>A score of X designates irrelevancy of the category to the assignment, or folders and/or content cannot be viewed or assessed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Adapt modes communication appropriate to an audience</td>
<td>Student demonstrates the inability to write in modes that demonstrates an awareness of a specific, appropriate audience.</td>
<td>Student demonstrates some ability to identify an appropriate audience, but is unable to maintain the appropriate register consistently.</td>
<td>Student demonstrates the ability to identify an appropriate audience and maintains the appropriate register consistently and adequately.</td>
<td>Student demonstrates the refined ability to identify an appropriate audience in a consistent, insightful, and rhetorically effective way that exceeds expectations.</td>
<td>A score of X designates irrelevancy of the category to the assignment, or folders and/or content cannot be viewed or assessed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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