

**Western Carolina University
Liberal Studies Assessment Plan
2019-2022**

Overview of Liberal Studies Program

Western Carolina's Liberal Studies (LS) program requires 42 hours and is divided into three segments: Core Courses (21 hours), Perspectives Courses (18 hours), and a First Year Seminar (3 hours). The Core includes courses on writing, mathematics, oral communication, wellness, and physical and biological sciences, while the Perspectives courses center on social sciences, history, humanities, fine and performing arts, and world cultures. Finally, First Year Seminars (FYS) are taught on a disciplinary basis, with individual faculty proposing course topics that fit their particular research interests. The current iteration of our general education program was created in 1999. Although minor elements have been revised since that time, including the implementation of revised student learning outcomes in 2018, the foundational aspects of the program remain unchanged.

The Liberal Studies Committee (LSC) is responsible for curriculum oversight within Western's general education program. The LSC consists of approximately 15 faculty members representing all colleges across the university, as well as important stakeholders within the program, such as the Advising Center and Undergraduate Studies.

Measurement of the program's student learning outcomes is overseen by the Liberal Studies Assessment Director, a position created in 2018 after previous assessment efforts made it clear that a dedicated (part-time) position was needed to coordinate the various participants within and requirements of the assessment process.

Rationale for Assessment

WCU's Liberal Studies Program engages in an on-going assessment of student learning within its curriculum, which consists of approximately 200 courses. The scope and size of its curriculum means that Liberal Studies touches almost every student experience and almost every department at the university. For that reason, it is important evaluate the extent to which the Program speaks to its intended content and objectives.

Additionally, the accreditation process requires program assessment, as SACS-COC comprehensive standard 8.2.b states that for general education competencies, the university must "identify expected outcomes, assess the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provide evidence of seeking improvement." (SACS-COC, Resource Manual for the Principles of Accreditation, 2018, p. 70).

In that spirit, WCU's Liberal Studies program has identified the following eight expected student learning objectives/outcomes for the program (listed on the next page).

Objectives	Outcome
Inquiry	Students will formulate focused questions and hypotheses that address appropriately the topic at hand, as well as identify and explain a method of inquiry.
Information Literacy	Students will identify appropriate information sources and evaluate critically the credibility of those sources for relevance, legitimacy, and bias.
Critical Thinking	Students will evaluate evidence, context, and multiple perspectives as a means of analyzing complex issues.
Problem Solving	Students will apply appropriate disciplinary methodologies to answer questions and propose solutions to problems with the human and natural worlds.
Means of Expression	Students will craft written and/or oral communication demonstrating organization, clarity, logic, and skill for various audiences.
Awareness of Self	Students will recognize behaviors and define choices that affect their lifelong well-being.
Awareness of Cultural Diversity	Students will critically examine various cultures through historical and contemporary contexts at the local, national, and/or global levels.
Awareness of Impact	Students will evaluate the impact of their own and others' actions on the human and natural worlds.

WCU utilizes an artifact, or student assignment-based, approach for its general education assessment. This approach was chosen because it centers on authentic student work actually created within the Liberal Studies curriculum. Additionally, the artifact approach is easily adapted to the wide variety of outcomes within the program, as compared with the most common readily available standardized assessment instruments. Finally, the artifact-based approach does not increase significantly faculty workload because it measures assignments already utilized as an integral part of existing coursework.

To that end, the annual outcomes assessment process will address four primary questions:

1. **To what extent are WCU students demonstrating the university's Liberal Studies learning outcomes?**
2. **To what extent do students demonstrate the sub-goals of each outcome?**
3. **What are the strengths and weaknesses of the assessment process itself?**
4. **What recommendations do the data suggest for strengthening the Liberal Studies Program?**

Schedule for Assessment

The eight student learning outcomes are to be assessed over a three-year assessment cycle, and at the culmination of the three years, the cycle will begin anew, so that the LS program can measure comparative improvement over its range of goals. The artifact collection schedule

below has been chosen to account for the number of courses offered within a given semester and to keep the assessment implementation manageable. Please note that this process is a flexible one, and should the need arise, the schedule is adaptable to change.

Outcome Assessment Schedule	
Fall 2019	Means of Expression
	Information Literacy
Spring 2020	Awareness of Impact
Fall 2020	Critical Thinking
Spring 2021	Awareness of Self
Fall 2021	Inquiry
	Problem Solving
Spring 2022	Awareness of Cultural Diversity

Artifact Collection and Scoring Process

The Liberal Studies Assessment Director will notify faculty the semester before their course is to be included within Liberal Studies assessment, so they have time to prepare an assignment that aligns with the outcome being measured. Then, at the beginning of the semester in which artifacts will be collected, the assessment director will provide detailed artifact submission instructions and will, in conjunction with the Coulter Faculty Commons, offer curricular and technological support for artifact creation and submission.

In order to keep the scoring process manageable in terms of time and personnel resources, collected student artifacts may be sampled randomly for assessment purposes. Once selected, artifacts will be divided between and scored by two-person teams of WCU faculty members during an annual summer workshop. These faculty members will receive training regarding artifact scoring during this same summer workshop, with faculty scorers recruited from departments and colleges across the university and compensated for their time.

Scorers will rate each artifact against a common rubric, based upon the AAC&U's externally validated VALUE rubrics (see Appendix I). Along with providing a numeric rank for each artifact, faculty scorers will also complete a qualitative survey to provide additional feedback to departments across the university regarding 1) the alignment between an artifact and its relevant learning outcome, 2) the components of the course syllabus that relate to the Liberal Studies program, and 3) any other relevant feedback related to artifact creation.

Dissemination of Results

By the end of each fall semester, the Liberal Studies Assessment Director will review the data from the summer scoring workshop and write an annual assessment report to be shared with the Liberal Studies Committee and the Office of the Provost for their response and recommendations for action.

The report will also be posted on the WCU website for public dissemination. Finally, the LS assessment director will share the report itself and more specific course-level assessment data with all relevant department heads in the spirit of continuous improvement and transparency.

APPENDIX I:

Rubric for SLO #1: Inquiry				
<i>Students will formulate focused questions and hypotheses that address appropriately the topic at hand, as well as identify and explain a method of inquiry.</i>				
	Exceeds Expectations (3)	Meets Expectations (2)	Below Expectations (1)	Not Applicable (0)
Question/Hypothesis Formation	Hypothesis/Question to be considered is stated clearly and described comprehensively, delivering all relevant information necessary for full understanding.	Hypothesis/Question to be considered is stated, described, and clarified, although some terms may be left undefined or ambiguous.	Hypothesis/Question to be considered is unclear and/or stated without a detailed description.	Artifact does not align with the rubric and/or artifact cannot be scored.
Method of Inquiry	All elements of the methodology or theoretical framework are skillfully developed and explained.	Central elements of the methodology or theoretical framework are appropriately developed; however, more subtle elements may be ignored or unaccounted for.	A research design is either missing from the assignment altogether, or the design demonstrates a fundamental misunderstanding of the methodology or theoretical framework.	Artifact does not align with the rubric and/or artifact cannot be scored.

Adapted from the AAC&U's *Value Rubrics

Rubric for SLO #2: Information Literacy

Students will identify appropriate information sources and evaluate critically the credibility of those sources for relevance, legitimacy, and bias.

	Exceeds Expectations (3)	Meets Expectations (2)	Below Expectations (1)	Not Applicable (0)
Determine Information Sources	Chooses a variety of information sources appropriate to the research question. All selected information sources relate directly to concepts or question at hand.	Chooses a variety of information sources. The majority of selected information sources relate directly to concepts or question at hand.	Chooses only a few information sources, or most of the chosen sources do not relate directly to concepts or question at hand.	Artifact does not align with the rubric and/or artifact cannot be scored.
Evaluate Information and its Sources Critically	Source selection uses all of the following criteria for evaluation: relevance to research, legitimacy, and bias/point of view.	Source selection uses two of the following criteria for evaluation: relevance to research, legitimacy, and bias/point of view.	Source selection uses none or one of the following criteria for evaluation: relevance to research, legitimacy, and bias/point of view.	Artifact does not align with the rubric and/or artifact cannot be scored.

Adapted from the AAC&U's *Value Rubrics

Rubric for SLO #3: Critical Thinking

Students will evaluate evidence, context, and multiple perspectives as a means of analyzing complex issues.

	Exceeds Expectations (3)	Meets Expectations (2)	Below Expectations (1)	Not Applicable (0)
Evidence	Conclusions/observations drawn from evidence are logical and informed.	Conclusions/observations seem informed, but may not consider all evidence presented.	Conclusions do not rely on a consideration of the evidence presented.	Artifact does not align with the rubric and/or artifact cannot be scored.
Context	Conclusions emerge from a systematic inquiry that considers multiple pieces of evidence in their appropriate context (to potentially include the intellectual, scientific, geographic, political, authorial, or cultural context of the evidence).	Conclusions recognize at least one aspect of contextual evidence creation (to potentially include the intellectual, scientific, geographic, political, authorial, or cultural context of the evidence.)	Conclusions do not reflect any consideration of context.	Artifact does not align with the rubric and/or artifact cannot be scored.
Perspectives	Multiple perspectives and competing evidence are evaluated and synthesized.	Multiple perspectives are identified, but not evaluated thoroughly.	A single perspective is identified or artifact lacks a mention of any perspective.	Artifact does not align with the rubric and/or artifact cannot be scored.

Adapted from the AAC&U's *Value Rubrics

Rubric for SLO #4: Problem Solving

Students will apply appropriate disciplinary methodologies to answer questions and propose solutions to problems within the human and natural worlds.

	Exceeds Expectations (3)	Meets Expectations (2)	Below Expectations (1)	Not Applicable (0)
Apply disciplinary methods to answer questions	Critical elements of the methodology or theoretical framework are skillfully applied. Uses multiple approaches for answering questions with relevant disciplinary methods.	Critical elements of the methodology or theoretical framework are applied, but some may be missing, incorrectly applied, or unfocused. Uses at least one approach for answering questions with relevant disciplinary methods.	Demonstrates a misunderstanding of the methodology or theoretical framework. Unable to apply disciplinary methods to answer questions.	Artifact does not align with the rubric and/or artifact cannot be scored.
Propose solutions to problems	Proposes solutions/hypotheses that indicates a deep comprehension of the problem and that are sensitive to contextual factors.	Proposes solutions/hypotheses that indicate comprehension of the problem, but that may not be sensitive to all relevant contextual factors.	Proposes a simplistic solution/hypothesis that is not tailored to the problem at hand or is difficult to evaluate because it is vague or only indirectly addresses the problem.	Artifact does not align with the rubric and/or artifact cannot be scored.

Adapted from the AAC&U's *Value Rubrics

Rubric for SLO #5: Means of Expression

Students will craft written and/or oral communication demonstrating organization, clarity, logic, and recognition of various audiences.

	Exceeds Expectations (3)	Meets Expectations (2)	Below Expectations (1)	Not Applicable (0)
Language	Language use is meaningful and skillful. Demonstrates command of and fluency with the appropriate register, syntax, and convention.	Demonstrates command of language, syntax, and convention that conveys meaning with few errors.	Language used impedes meaning due to errors in usage and convention.	Artifact does not align with the rubric and/or artifact cannot be scored.
Recognition of Audience	Crafts communication that is responsive and informed by audience, context, and form.	Crafts communication that demonstrates a recognition of audience, context, and form. (Demonstrates at least 2 of the 3)	Reflects minimal attention to audience, context, and appropriate form.	Artifact does not align with the rubric and/or artifact cannot be scored.
Central Message	Central message is compelling, convincing, professionally communicated, and strongly supported.	Central message is clear and consistent with supporting material.	Central message is not clearly articulated and must be deduced.	Artifact does not align with the rubric and/or artifact cannot be scored.

Adapted from the AAC&U's *Value Rubrics

Rubric for SLO #6: Awareness of Self

Students will recognize behaviors and define choices that affect their lifelong well-being.

	Exceeds Expectations (3)	Meets Expectations (2)	Below Expectations (1)	Not Applicable (0)
Knowledge	Examines thoughtfully how learning might lead to changes in personal behavior.	Identifies the connection between knowledge, choice, and overall well-being.	Does not identify behaviors that contribute to lifelong well-being.	Artifact does not align with the rubric and/or artifact cannot be scored.
Action/Resources	Pursues beyond the classroom knowledge and experiences that affect lifelong well-being.	Acknowledges a repertoire of choices that affect and impact well-being.	Unable to articulate the link between behavioral choices and resulting consequences.	Artifact does not align with the rubric and/or artifact cannot be scored.

**Adapted from the AAC&U's Value Rubrics*

Rubric for SLO #7: Awareness of Cultural Diversity

Students will examine critically various cultures in historical and contemporary contexts at the local, national, and/or global levels.

	Exceeds Expectations (3)	Meets Expectations (2)	Below Expectations (1)	Not Applicable (0)
Examination of cultures and cultural contexts.	<p>Exhibits sophisticated understanding of the complexity of elements important to culture(s) studied in relation to their history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, aesthetics or beliefs and practices.</p> <p>Explains and shows awareness of more than one cultural perspective.</p>	<p>Exhibits adequate understanding of the complexity of elements important to culture(s) studied in relation to their history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, aesthetics or beliefs and practices.</p> <p>Shows awareness of more than one cultural perspective.</p>	<p>Exhibits surface or partial understanding of the complexity of elements important to culture(s) studied in relation to their history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, aesthetics or beliefs and practices.</p> <p>Describes the experiences of others through only one cultural perspective.</p>	Artifact does not align with the rubric and/or artifact cannot be scored.

***Adapted from the AAC&U's Value Rubrics**

Rubric for SLO #8: Awareness of Impact

Students will evaluate the impact of their own and others' actions on the human and/or natural worlds.

	Exceeds Expectations (3)	Meets Expectations (2)	Below Expectations (1)	Not Applicable (0)
Assess Impact	<p>Explains the impact of one's own actions or the actions of others from more than one perspective (perspectives could include ethical, civic, social, environmental, etc.).</p> <p>Identifies a range of actions to create change in a particular area.</p>	<p>Explains the impact of one's own actions or the actions of others from more than one perspective (perspectives could include ethical, civic, social, environmental, etc.).</p>	<p>Explains the impact of one's own actions or the actions of others from only one perspective, or the artifact does not address impact at all.</p>	<p>Artifact does not align with the rubric and/or artifact cannot be scored.</p>

**Adapted from the AAC&U's Value Rubrics*