

Liberal Studies C1 Assessment Team Recommendations

Liberal Studies Committee Response

8 October 2015

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Ensure students enroll in the English 101 and English 202 sequence prior to the start of their junior year.** The Assessment Team suggests increasing the number of sections of English 101 and 202 offered (not the enrollment in each class) each semester in order to fulfill this recommendation.

The LSC concurs, but also recognizes that the complexity of the issue goes beyond simply increasing the number of sections. Staffing in the English department, advising, course availability, programs who discourage their majors, and needs of transfer students represent some of the issues relevant to the problem of ensuring that students receive 101/202 before they begin the junior year of study. The LSC will work with the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Studies and the Director of Advising in order to generate processes for increasing the number of students who take 101/202 before junior year and supports efforts to increase staffing so the number of sections will meet the need. LSC will also ask the Director of Assessment to generate reports of the number of students who take 101/202 and when they take it so as to understand the full scope of the problem.

- **Review syllabi prior to beginning of the semester.** The Writing, Rhetoric, and Critical Studies program should be responsible for verifying all English 101 and 202 syllabi contain a description of the purpose of the C1 category, the appropriate Liberal Studies Student Learning Outcomes, and the WRCS Learning Outcomes prior to the start of the semester. These details must be included in the syllabus itself rather than a separate document.

The LSC concurs and has consulted with the director of WRCS, who will develop processes that will ensure review of syllabi before the beginning of the semester. The LSC chair will follow up in January to assess progress towards implementation.

- **Increase the focus on primary and secondary research and citation within the WRCS Program.**

The LSC concurs and has consulted with the director of WRCS, who will conduct a revision of the curriculum directed towards these goals. This process represents a long term vision for the program and will be developed and implemented prior to the next round of LS assessment, to occur Fall 2018 and Spring 2019.

- **Strengthen ties with Writing Across the Disciplines.** The Assessment Team supports the addition of a full time Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) hire to be a faculty member in the English Department.

The LSC concurs, adding that this position should be separate from hiring intended to increase numbers of sections of 101/202 offered. A full time expert in the activities associated with WAC will increase the levels of connection among the 101/202 sequence and the Major/Minor experiences, with the contention (as indicated in new LS Document Language) that writing represents a skill that is universally essential among the disciplines.

- **Provide additional support for English as a Second Language (ESL) students in English 101 and English 202.** The Assessment Team believes sections of English 101 and 202 should be reserved for ESL students and facilitated by faculty with background and training in teaching students for whom English is a second language. Suggestions include mandating that international students with TOEFL reading and writing scores below a benchmark level (determined by a team of the appropriate faculty and staff) should be required to enroll in these specialized sections. Grades First could be adapted to include a feature that will allow advisors or faculty to identify students who would greatly benefit from participation in an ESL section of English 101 or 202. If a student with such a flag tries to enroll in a non-specialized section of English 101 or 202, permission of the instructor should be required to allow the student to register for the class.

The LSC concurs and encourages Advising, the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Studies, International Programs, and the Director of WRCS to work together to improve these services to our foreign students.

- **Provide the assignment instructions along with each artifact.**
The Director of Assessment will work to determine whether or not this revision to the assessment will be possible. Once the LSC receives this report, it will review the desirability and worth of the recommendation in the context of the next round of assessment (C4 and C3).
- **Add more dimensions to the Liberal Studies Assessment Rubrics.** The Assessment Team recommends revising not only the rubrics for SLO 1 and 3b assessed in C1 category, but determining if more dimensions or sub-skills could be highlighted for each of the seven SLOs. Not only would this aid the reviewers, but it should help to provide more depth to the review findings as well.
LSC concurs and will revise the assessment team charge accordingly.
- **Increase number of artifacts sampled and the number of faculty rating the artifacts.**
LSC concurs, but remains sensitive to issues related to faculty work load. For next semester's data capture (Spring 2016), the number of artifacts collected will be increased incrementally so that the balance between quality of assessment and minimizing the increased workload for instructors and assessors is maintained at reasonable levels.
- **Include inter-rater reliability measures in the assessment.**
LSC concurs and has asked the Director of Assessment to incorporate into the artifact scoring process.

- **Provide earlier access to artifacts and more time for scoring.**
LSC concurs and will make every effort to begin processes earlier, including the delivery of artifacts to the assessment teams. This should become easier as the assessment plan continues to be implemented and becomes more familiar to those involved.
- **Require a norming session early in the assessment.** Multiple artifacts for each learning outcome to be assessed should be included.
LSC concurs and will revise the assessment team charge accordingly.
- **Revise the description of the Writing portion of the Core.** Currently, the description of the Writing portion of the Core refers to and focuses on the First-Year Composition Program no longer in place rather than the purpose of the required Liberal Studies course sequence. The Assessment Team believes the description should reflect the purpose of the writing portion of the Core (as delivered through a two-course sequence that is a two-year sequence), the placement of the courses in the students' college career (within the first and second years), and the Liberal Studies Student Learning Outcomes specifically addressed in this portion of the Liberal Studies Program, although additional student learning outcomes may also be incorporated.
LSC concurs and will revise the LS Document accordingly. These revisions will be approved by LSC and forwarded to the Faculty Senate for final approval.
- **Improve working conditions for full-time faculty as a strategy for improving student retention.** This includes restoring student enrollment caps in 101/202 courses to pre-budget-cut numbers.
The LSC concurs, noting also that before the budget crisis, the maximum number of students in 101/202 was 19. Subsequently the number was expanded to 24. The current maximum, 22, moves in the correct direction, but efforts should be made to continue to shrink that number so that individual attention to students' writing and the work-intensive processes related to that attention increase at the same time the working conditions for the instructors improves.
- **Include two kinds of focus-group interviews, one with randomly selected students, and another with randomly selected faculty, in each Liberal Studies component assessment.** The Liberal Studies Committee should consider including both faculty teaching courses in the component being assessed as well as faculty not involved in delivering courses for the component. This may help the Committee better understand and address misconceptions regarding what occurs in these courses as well as expectations for the students.
The LSC concurs that focus-group interviews would provide a useful addition to the assessment process for Liberal Studies. However, the LSC also recognizes the extensive amount of effort and work and expertise that would go in to this kind of assessment. The LSC, therefore, will forward this recommendation for the development and implementation of focus groups to the Coulter Faculty Commons, which already has in place the expertise and infrastructure to conduct focus groups.

Changes to the Charge

The LSC concurs with these changes in additions to others devoted to improving the coherence and value of the assessment.

- **Introductory paragraph of charge:**
 - The Assessment Team recommends inclusion of two kinds of focus-group interviews, one with randomly selected students, and another with randomly selected faculty.
 - Include a reference to a link for broader university assessments (interpreted as the NSSE and CLA)
- **List of deliverables from the Task Force:**
 - Remove the reference to learning outcomes for the category in part 2, and replace with an appropriate reference to selected Liberal Studies Program learning outcomes.
 - Clarify the meaning of “broader university-level assessments” in part 5.
 - Recommend moving the reference to Goal 1.2 and Initiative 1.2.4 from part 6 to part 5, and indicating that assessment should include how this category enhances the LS Program’s ability, **in part**, to achieve Goal 1.2 and Initiative 1.2.4. (The Assessment Team had difficulty with this charge, as a single category is not intended to address all aspects of Goal 1.2, and the information provided to the Assessment Team was not sufficient to assess Initiative 1.2.4, to ensure **all academic programs** incorporate the core abilities detailed in Goal 1.2.)
 - Rather than framing recommendations based on Goal 1.2, it may be beneficial to frame recommendations in terms of the Guiding Principles for the Assessment (listed on the second page of the Liberal Studies Assessment Team Charge document).
- **Paragraph following list of deliverables:**
 - This paragraph would benefit from being divided into shorter, simpler sentences, to aid with understanding. Perhaps return to the Guiding Principles of Assessment again.
- **Description Following Student Work:**
 - The Assessment Team recommends increasing the size of the random sample to assure the desired level of confidence in the representativeness of the sample. *To be implemented with the Spring 2016 data capture.*
 - The Assessment Team recommends the assignment statement be included with each sample of student work. *Director of Assessment is determining the feasibility of this revision in process.*
 - The Assessment Team recommends a mandatory norming session for assessors.
- **Liberal Studies Assessment Rubrics**
 - The Assessment Team recommends adding sub-skills or additional dimensions to each of the Liberal Studies rubrics.

Changes to the Liberal Studies Document

The LSC committee concurs and will revise the LS Document accordingly, with additional changes as necessary, to be submitted subsequently to the Faculty Senate for final approval.

- **Section III: Learning Goals of the Program**

- Update the first paragraph of this section to reflect the revised WCU Mission Statement as well as WCU's Core Values and Guiding Principles (see <http://www.wcu.edu/about-wcu/leadership/office-of-the-chancellor/wcu-2020-plan/wcu-mission-statement.asp>).
- As the revised Mission Statement does not directly reflect educational attainment goals, it may also be beneficial to reference WCU's Intentional Learning Plan (our previous Quality Enhancement Plan, <http://www.wcu.edu/about-wcu/leadership/office-of-the-provost/ugstudies/intentional-learning-plan/>)

- **Section VI: The Core**

- Update the Writing description as indicated in Section V. b. of this report. Indicate this is a two-year sequence (not one-year).

Writing (6 hours): Two sequential writing courses to be completed before the commencement of the Junior year of study. These course are taught in the Department of English's Writing, Rhetoric, and Critical Studies Program (WRCS). English 101 (Writing and Rhetoric) and English 202 (Writing and Critical Inquiry) introduce students to college-level writing via the best practices of composition instruction available. To maintain this quality, these practices undergo constant assessment and improvement. This course sequence addresses immediately an essential academic skill common to all disciplines, that of communicating ideas in written form effectively.

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- Update the Writing description as indicated in Section V. b. of this report. Indicate this is a two-year sequence (not one-year).

- **Section VIII: The Administrative Component**

- Update the section and title "Assistant Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate Studies" to "Associate Provost for Undergraduate Studies" where needed.

- Update the section and title “The Liberal Studies Oversight Committee” to reflect the name (Liberal Studies Committee,” apportionment, and structure of the Liberal Studies Committee as specified in Article II Section 10.2 of the Faculty Constitution of Western Carolina University.
- Note: the Liberal Studies Program document indicates inclusion of a student representative from the Student Government Associate (or designee) in the membership of the Liberal Studies Committee. This is not included in the current structure of the committee, but if the Committee deems this valuable, it should take this request to the Rules Committee of the Faculty Senate.
- Review the “Incentives and Rewards System” of the document with respect to current practices, and update as needed.
- Update “Criteria and Procedure for Approval as a Liberal Studies Course” to reflect current practices with Curriculog.
- Review and revise “The Assessment of the Program” section to reflect intended and future assessment practices. The Assessment Team echoes its recommendation for inclusion of focus-group interviews in the assessment. The Liberal Studies Program document also indicates that in addition to **assessing components of the program based on themes** to be examined in a single assessment cycle, a second assessment focus will be on the **performance outcomes of students who have successfully completed the First-Year Core and the Perspectives components of the Liberal Studies Program**. These assessment activities are to be conducted for selected courses each semester.