

Report for the Assessment of Liberal Studies Core P1: Social Science

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Outline

- I. Overview of the Charge to the Assessment Team
- II. Student Learning: A Review of Randomly Selected Student Work
 - a. Quantitative Analysis
 - b. Qualitative Analysis
- III. Faculty/Departmental Delivery: A Review of Syllabi
- IV. Strengthening the Correlation between Student Learning and Faculty/Departmental Delivery
 - a. Reflection on Changes Since 2008 Category P1 Assessment
 - b. Assessment of P1 Social Sciences in Context of Liberal Studies Document and Broader University-Level Assessments
- V. Recommendations of the P1 Assessment Team
 - a. P1 Specific Recommendations
 - b. Questions and Recommendations Regarding the Assessment Process
- VI. Appendix A: Liberal Studies Assessment Rubric Used in this Assessment

I. 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 thus outlined based upon these guiding principles and questions.

II. Student Learning: A Review of Randomly Selected Student Work

A total of 148 artifacts (from six different student assignments) were submitted for this assessment. There were examples of student work from five different classes, PSC 101 (named PSC 150 when the artifacts were collected), ECON 231, ECON 232, ECON 344 and SOCW 251, classes that fulfill the requirement of the P1 category with the exception of one, ECON 344. Artifacts from ECON 344, a P4 course, were assigned for scoring, in error, by the Office of Assessment. The scoring for those 12 artifacts was included in the final data received from the Director of Assessment.

Prior to collection, the P1 faculty identified the Liberal Studies Learning Outcomes that were best reflected in the assignment. One Student Learning Outcome (SLO) of the Liberal Studies Program was identified by the faculty as relevant to the selected assignments.

SLO 6C Demonstrate an understanding of issues involving social institutions.

The 148 represented the total number of artifacts available. The assignments ranged from short answer responses to multi-page position papers. Identifying factors were removed,

and the artifacts were stored on Blackboard for use in the assessment. The team of four reviewers were each assigned an average of 74 artifacts to score, and each artifact was independently assessed by two reviewers. The reviewers met for a single norming session with the Director of Assessment on September 26 of 2017 and scored the artifacts separately. Additionally, 3 artifacts were unable to be scored, bringing the final number for assessment to 145 artifacts. During the norming session, the team agreed that one portion of an artifact did not address the SLO so that portion of the two questions assignment was not considered in the scoring.

In February, 2018, the Director of Assessment contacted the Assessment Team regarding the need for the rescoring of artifacts, where there was disagreement between the initial two reviews. In the event the two scorers differed by more than one performance level on any SLO, the student work sample was scored a third time by a different reviewer. Rescoring was distributed among the four members of the assessment team.

Assessment Team identified a potential issue with scoring once final scores were received in late February; a set of artifacts appeared to be from a non-P1 course. The Director of Assessment was contacted and confirmed that an error was made by his office; 12 of the artifacts had been from a P4 course. The scoring data was not recalculated to omit the P4 scores. The Liberal Studies Committee Chair recommended that the Assessment team use the current data and note the issue with the P4 scoring in their final report.

A. Quantitative Analysis

Tables 1 and 2 below, generated by the Director of Assessment from the scoring recorded by the Assessment Team members, indicate the distribution of the ratings assigned to the 145 artifacts scored. Artifacts were scored as 1, 2, 3, or 4, corresponding respectively to “Emerging,” “Developing,” “Achieving,” and “Exemplary” levels of ability (see Appendix A: Rubric). Charts 1-4 below help to illustrate the frequency distribution of scores for artifacts, with values representing means of individual scores of the two reviewers (e.g., a value of 1.5 represents the mean of scores of 1 and 2).

Table 1. Liberal Studies SLO 6C (Social Science) Descriptive Statistics (2017)

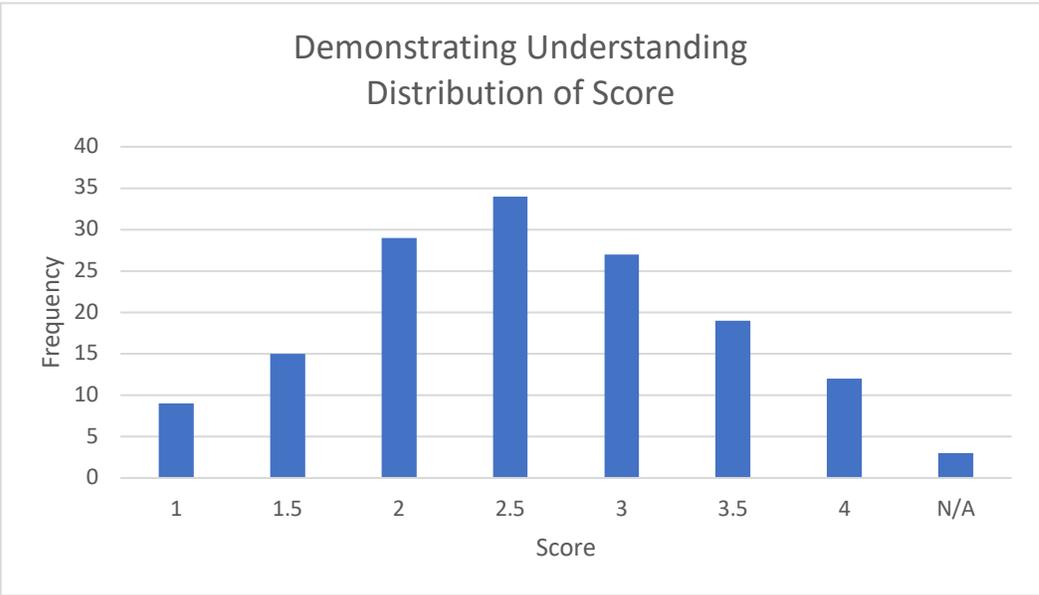
Statistic	Criterion
	Demonstrating Understanding
N =	145
Minimum =	1
Maximum =	4
Range =	3
Standard Dev =	0.812
Mean =	2.6
Category (Mean) =	Achieving (3)
Median =	2.5
Mode =	2.5

Table 2. Liberal Studies SLO 6C (Social Science) Reliability Estimates Following Rescoring (2017)

Component	Criterion
	Demonstrating Understanding
Agreements	72
Agreements (+/-1)	72
Disagreements (>1)	1
Total	145
$r_{(+/-0)} =$	0.50
$r_{(+/-1)} =$	0.99
<i>Note.</i> $r = (\text{Agreements}/(\text{Agreements} + \text{Disagreements}))$; an estimate of Percent Agreement	

Table 3. Distribution of scores

Score	Count of Average Score
1	9
1.5	15
2	29
2.5	34
3	27
3.5	19
4	12
N/A	3
Grand Total	148



B. Qualitative Analysis

It is the conclusion of the Assessment team that, based on the review and application of the learning outcomes of the Liberal Studies Program, Western Carolina University’s students are demonstrating a **developing level of understanding of the issues of social institutions**.

This conclusion is different from the Director of Assessment's report, which assigns the mean score of 2.6 to the "Achieving" level of accomplishment.

Learning Outcome 6C: Demonstrate an understanding of the issues involving social institutions

It is the Team's conclusion that the scores on the rubric define the minimum score needed to meet a specific level of accomplishment. A score of "2" defines the minimum criteria for "developing" and a score of "3" defines the minimum to be "achieving" (the desired outcome, stated above).

Artifacts scored in all four levels, from "Emerging" through "Exemplary". The mean score of the P1 artifacts was 2.6, which the team determined to be "Developing" (not meeting the minimum score of "3"). Of the 145 artifacts, 63 (43%) scored a 2 or 2.5, placing them directly in the Developing category and a combined total of 87 (60%) scored a 2.5 or lower, meeting or falling below the criteria for "Developing". Additionally, 46 (32%) scored a 3 or 3.5, placing them in the "Achieving" category and total of 58 students (40%) met or exceeded the criteria "Achieving".

III. Faculty/Department Delivery: A Review of Syllabi

The Assessment Team reviewed syllabi from four different courses. In total, six syllabi were reviewed; two each from Economics, Social Work and Political Science. Five of the syllabi were from courses offered in the Fall of 2016 and one was from spring of 2017. Syllabi were reviewed for the inclusion of the following information.

1. Specific Liberal Studies objectives to be addressed in the course
2. Liberal Studies Perspectives goals
3. P1: Social Studies statement
4. A course description

NOTE: Though it was included, in error, in the scoring of artifacts and analysis of scoring, ECON 344 was not included in the syllabi assessment, since it is not a P1 course.

Liberal Studies Learning Objectives

Three (50%) of the courses listed the "LS Description and Learning Outcomes" (see below) in their entirety but noted courses the outcomes specific to the course by bolding or highlighting them on the full list. One Course (17 %) stated the LS Outcomes that were specific to the course. Two (33%) of the courses did not include a LS Outcomes in any format.

Perspectives course statement description

One syllabus (17%) contained the complete Perspectives requirement description, verbatim from the LS Document. One syllabus (17%) contained a brief statement, at the introduction of the LS Outcomes, explaining that this course meets the Perspectives requirements. The remaining four course syllabi (67%) did not include any mention of the class being a Perspectives class.

P 1 Social Sciences statement

One syllabus (17%) contained a verbatim description of the P. 1 Social Sciences. The remaining five (83%) did not include any mention of the class satisfying the P. 1 Social Sciences.

Course Description and Learning Outcomes

All of the reviewed syllabi contained a course description and collection of learning outcomes, though the language was not consistent between the syllabi.

Table 4. Syllabi Review Findings

Syllabi	LS learning outcomes			Perspectives course statement description			Explicit P1 Social Sciences			Course Description and Learning Objectives/ Outcomes	
	All are Present	Course specific	absent	Entire statement	Brief statement	Absent	Present	different	absent	Objectives/outcomes	Description
A	X	X		X			X			X	X
B	X	X			X				X	X	X
C			X			X			X	X	X
D	X	X							X	X	X
E			X			X			X	X	X
F		X							X	X	X

Learning Outcomes for the Liberal Studies

The learning goals of the Liberal Studies Program are for students to...

- Demonstrate the ability to locate, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information;
- Demonstrate the ability to interpret and use numerical, written, oral and visual data;
- 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;
- Demonstrate the ability to critically analyze arguments;
- Demonstrate the ability to recognize behaviors and define choices that affect lifelong well-being;
- Demonstrate an understanding of
 - Past human experiences and ability to relate them to the present;
 - Different contemporary cultures and their interrelationships;
 - Issues involving social institutions, interpersonal and group dynamics, human development and behavior, and cultural diversity; scientific concepts and methods as well as contemporary issues in science and technology;
 - Cultural heritage through its expressions of wisdom, literature and art and their roles in the process of self and social understanding.
- Demonstrate an excitement for and love of learning

Perspectives Course Statement (from the Liberal Studies document)

The P1 courses assessed and discussed in this report are “Liberal Studies Perspectives” courses.

The primary goals of the Perspectives courses are:

- To promote love of learning and to cultivate an active interest in the Liberal Studies;
- To build on the Core's foundation through practice and refinement of areas of academic emphasis;
- To provide students with a broadened world view and knowledge base;
- To provide experiences in the arts, humanities, and social sciences from which connections between disciplines can be revealed;
- To provide an introduction to the challenges of living in a global society;
- To create opportunities for reflection on values, and for discussing differences in values in a critical yet tolerant manner;
- To afford opportunities to make career or disciplinary choices.

In addition, each Perspectives course will be expected to include emphasis *on one or more of* the following:

- Critical analysis of arguments
- Oral communication
- Service learning
- Moral reflection

- Cultural diversity
- Any other creative but defensible area of intellectual development that a discipline wants to focus on, and that the program chooses to adopt

P1: Social Sciences

This course partly satisfies the *Social Science Perspective Requirement* of the *WCU Liberal Studies Program*. Courses in Social Sciences provide systematic study of observational and analytic methods and findings of those disciplines that focus on the interpersonal functioning and institutional creations of human beings. Courses in this category may focus on the scientific study of the mental and behavioral characteristics of individuals or groups or may focus on the description and explanation of political, economic, or legal institutions. Included will be inquiry into basic social scientific concepts such as mind, behavior, class, society, culture, freedom, government, property, equality, and rights.

IV. Strengthening the Correlation between Student Learning and Faculty/Departmental Delivery

A. Reflection on changes since 2008 category P1 assessment

The previous assessment of P1 Liberal Studies Category was completed in 2008, and the report of the assessment findings and recommendations can be found on the Liberal Studies Program Assessment website.

The assessment recommendations from the 2008 report on P1 Social Sciences Assessment, the actions taken in response to those recommendations, and the associated outcomes are summarized in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Changes since the 2008 assessment

Recommendation from 2008	Actions	Outcome
Provide separate analysis for upper level perspectives courses and lower level liberal studies courses	The ULPs were not assessed as a separate category in 2008, but are now, and in fact the first ULP report has been submitted to the LSC and is up for discussion on April 17 th , 2018.	In progress – this is being addressed in current LS assessment efforts.
Consider reevaluating the liberal studies program goals and objectives within an assessment framework.	In February of 2018, the LSC adopted a streamlined set of eight Liberal Studies student learning outcomes to aid with its assessment efforts.	Successfully completed.
Help instructors make better and/or more appropriate choices about the student work they will be submitting. Notify them at the beginning of the semester	As of AY 2017-2018, the LSC Chair has notified instructors prior to the assessed semester that work will need to be submitted. Additionally,	In progress – this is being addressed in current LS assessment efforts.

that they will be submitting work. Ask instructors to include a copy of the assignment and ask instructors to submit a separate syllabus for each section they are teaching.	instructors are now asked to submit separate syllabi for each section, alongside a copy of the assignment. Those elements of the recommendation have been addressed, and the LSC continues to work on effective means of communicating with instructors regarding the TYPES of assignments submitted as artifacts.	
Reconstruct the survey questions, if necessary, that were sent to faculty and students regarding the liberal studies courses.	The newest round of LSC assessment (started in 2014), did not include a survey component	With the change in assessment methods, this issue is no longer relevant.

B. Assessment of P1 Social Sciences in Context of Liberal Studies Document and Broader University Level Assessments

The Perspectives component of the Liberal Studies Program allows for students to develop an understanding of history, culture, language, arts, sciences, and ethics building upon the foundation derived from the Core components. The P1 courses meet the overall purpose of Liberal Studies Perspectives in that they emphasize “important modes of inquiry, discovery, and interpretation through study of the concepts, principles, and theories of the Liberal Arts and Sciences.” The assessed assignments and courses cover a range of topics focusing on the interpersonal and institutions of human beings. They map directly onto the primary goals of the Perspectives, particularly:

1. To build on the Core’s foundation through practice and refinement of areas of academic emphasis;
2. To provide experiences in the arts, humanities, and social sciences from which connections between disciplines can be revealed;
3. To provide an introduction to the challenges of living in a global society;
4. To create opportunities for reflection on values, and for discussing differences in values in a critical yet tolerant manner;

The P1 category of the Perspectives links to specifically to GOAL 1.2 and Initiative 1.2.4 of the WCU 2020 Vision.

GOAL 1.2: Fully integrate into the general education program and into each major and minor at both undergraduate and graduate levels an emphasis on those core abilities expected of all WCU students: to integrate information from a variety of contexts; to solve complex problems; to communicate effectively and responsibly; to practice civic engagement; and to clarify and act on purpose and values.

Initiative 1.2.4: Ensure that all academic programs incorporate the core abilities detailed in Goal 1.2.

Our assessment of the P1 course data shows the evaluated courses in this category aid students in demonstrating a “developing” level of understanding of social institutions.

Concerns

When evaluating a small sample of one component for the Liberal Studies Program, it is unreasonable to make suppositions as to achievement of strategic initiatives.

V. Recommendations of the P1 Assessment Team

A. P1 Specific Recommendations

Using the guiding principles stated in the first section of this report, the P1 Assessment Team provides the following response and recommendations.

Are we delivering what we say we do?

1. Based on the artifacts and syllabi reviewed, the courses appear to offer a variety of opportunities for students to develop an understanding of social institutions.
2. Both the Liberal Studies Program Learning Outcomes and the relationship of a given course to the fulfillment of Perspectives requirements are not consistently presented to students on the syllabi. Liberal Studies faculty need to be informed of the expectations for course syllabi, as well as resources available to them, such as the Liberal Studies Handbook, Liberal Studies Document and Liberal Studies website, to aid in faculty understanding of the Liberal Studies Program.

Are students learning what we want them to?

1. Based on the artifacts assessed, 60% of student work assessed performed at or below a “developing” level of the Learning Outcome. There may be methodological limitations in the assessment process that led to this outcome (discussed earlier in this report and in the process recommendations) or the issues may lie elsewhere within the courses and Social Sciences program.
2. A review of the rubric by P1 faculty, to develop a consensus what is expected at each scoring level of understanding, could help guide future program assessment as well as faculty choices regarding their teaching.

What can we do to strengthen the correlation between what we deliver and how well students learn?

1. The Learning Outcome rubric that was used presented challenges with regard to the assignment of achievement levels as they related to the final scoring. The averaging of two scores yielded scores that fell in between rubric scores, leading to judgement call by the assessment team and one that differed from the Office of Assessment. Does the rubric need review, or does the issue lie in the scoring process or student learning?
2. It may be helpful to refer back to learning outcomes on specific assignment guidelines. This would clearly connect the assignments for students back to the Liberal Studies Learning Outcomes stated on the course syllabus.

B. Questions and Recommendations Regarding the Assessment Process

This P1 Assessment has had challenges from the beginning. Based on our experience with the Assessment process, we present the following questions and recommendations.

1. *Is there a way to collect and assess the data more efficiently at the Office of Assessment to create more accurate and reliable scores?* Artifacts were collected in fall of 2016 but the Assessment team did not have access for scoring until fall of 2017. Analysis of initial scoring by the Office of Assessment was not completed until February of 2018, four months after scoring was completed. The delay from scoring to rescoring may have impacted the reliability of the rescoring. Additionally, Artifacts assigned by the Office of Assessment for scoring included some that were not from a P1 course. These should not have been included and impacted the final scores. The data was not recalculated by the Office of Assessment after the issue was identified. Staffing and prioritization at the Office of Assessment may need review in order to improve this process.
2. *It there more effective criteria for assigning faculty to specific Assessment Teams?* The Team consisted of four faculty, none of whom was experienced in program assessment and only one who is an expert in the Social Sciences. In order to more accurately assess the level to which students demonstrated “an understanding of the issues of social institutions”, it would have been helpful to have work assessed by those with a high level of understanding themselves.
3. *Should the artifacts submitted for the assessment be more comparable?* There were a wide range of artifacts, from handwritten short answers to a multi-page papers. The inconsistency of the scope and quality of assignments reviewed posed scoring challenges.
4. *Could faculty time on scoring be used more efficiently?* The recording and reporting process was cumbersome and time-consuming, and could have been completed by administrative staff.
5. *How can Assessment Team members be better trained and supported?* Initial training focused on the scoring of artifacts with a brief discussion of the process and final report. The timeline presented lead the Team to conclude that scoring analysis needed to be completed prior to moving forward with other aspects of the report ,when it could have

been done concurrently. More training, consistent guidance and communication between the LSC chair and the Team chair could have allowed the Team to better manage the process and their time.

6. *Should faculty be expected to serve beyond the initially agreed upon time frame?* The faculty serving on the Assessment team agreed to do the work based on an understanding of an assessment timeline and how that timeline balances the assessment process with their other responsibilities.

VI. Appendix A. Liberal Studies Assessment Rubric Used in this Assessment

Liberal Studies Student Learning Outcome 6C—Social Science Demonstrate an understanding of issues involving social institutions					
Performance Levels					
Criteria	Emerging (1)	Developing (2)	Achieving (3)	Exemplary (4)	N/A
Demonstrate Understanding	Student demonstrates a flawed understanding of the issues associated with social institutions.	Student demonstrates some understanding of the issues associated with social institutions, but does not do so consistently.	Student demonstrates an understanding of the issues associated with social institutions and does so consistently and adequately.	Student demonstrates a refined understanding of the issues associated with social institutions and does so in clear, insightful, and precise ways that exceed expectations.	A score of N/A designates irrelevancy of the category to the assignment, or folders and/or content cannot be viewed or assessed.