

Liberal Studies Committee Response and Action Plan

C4 Assessment Team Recommendations

29 April 2016

A. RECOMMENDATION FOR CHANGES TO THE LIBERAL STUDIES PROGRAM

1. Are we delivering what we say we do?

- Average class sizes of 38-40 do not reflect the goals of the Liberal Studies program overall.

The LSC concurs.

2. Are students learning what we want them to?

- Ensure that students have completed the C4 category prior to the start of their junior year. In this way, students can maintain habits introduced in C4 while taking advantage of the campus resources related to wellness for their remaining two years.

The LSC concurs with this recommendation.

Action item: The Liberal Studies Document should be revised to include language to encourage students to take this course before junior year, as has been done for C1. LSC will coordinate with advising to make sure that incoming students are made aware of the importance of taking these courses early in their undergraduate course of study.

Updated LSC Response: The LSC chair has made the suggested change to the Liberal Studies Document and will introduce that change for discussion and approval before the LSC.

- Provide additional support for Health and Wellness C4 instructors and departments that teach in C4. In particular, additional faculty are needed to reduce class size.

The LSC concurs with this recommendation and will forward it to the program administrators so that they are aware of the assessment team's recommendation and the LSC's support of it.

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

- With the loss of the graduate program in Health and PE and the rising numbers in these courses, faculty and students are at a disadvantage in being able to maximize instruction related to wellness. Earlier recommendations for increased graduate student teaching assistant positions had been one strategy to divide large classes to maximize physical wellness and activity and more personal instruction in terms of health, personal assessment, and stress management. With graduate teaching assistants no longer a possibility, the 2 additional faculty are not

adequate to complete what C4 instructors had advocated in 2006. The assessment team suggests not only a return to smaller class sizes in order to deliver what Liberal Studies demands but even a lower faculty to student ratio in these courses to allow students to take advantage of WCU's expanded opportunities for wellness.

The LSC concurs with the suggestion.

- Consider opportunities and provide resources to create learning communities, linked classes, or even team-taught classes that would link C4 Liberal Studies goals with the goals of other Liberal Studies categories such as C5 (a link between an Environmental Science course for example and a HEAL 123 course that emphasizes hiking, or an ENG 101 or 202 course that uses nature writing or environmental writing or fiction with a C4 course.

The LSC concurs and will forward this recommendation to the relevant parties in C4 and in Learning Community development to facilitate this process.

Action item:

- Provide specific expertise from Service Learning that links Liberal Studies courses in other categories with C4 courses to have students from multiple academic perspectives participate in activities that demonstrate the deep connections between Liberal Studies courses. For example, students taking a ULP in the History of American Education and C4 might participate in a service-learning project that involves a 5K fundraiser for a local school.

Updated LSC Response: The LSC encourages instructors to consider linking their own LS courses with those of other departments. As a first step, however, the LSC advocates for incorporating service learning into existing C4 courses, and encourages a meeting between the Director of Service Learning and the C4 coordinators for the purpose of discussing the linkages between service learning projects and C4 outcomes.

B. RECOMMENDATION FOR CHANGES TO LIBERAL STUDIES ASSESSMENT

1. Are we delivering what we say we do?

- The assessment teams should list in the report faculty and staff consulted from the academic areas or programs in the writing of the assessment report. This will reflect what the assessment teams are already doing without adding additional work to faculty and assessment team members.

The LSC concurs with this recommendation and will revise the charge accordingly. It will be the responsibility of the chair of LSC in consultation with the director of assessment and the Associate Provost for undergraduate studies to make sure that assessment teams have access to persons responsible or participating in each category.

- At least once during the assessment process, have a member of the assessment team meet with a department head or program coordinator to get some summary data about Liberal Studies in C4 and to answer any questions that the assessment team might have raised.

The LSC concurs with this recommendation and will revise the team charge accordingly.

Updated LSC Response: The LSC encourages the assessment teams to meet with a department or program coordinator, if necessary, during the assessment process, and the LSC chair will facilitate such a meeting if the assessment teams requests it.

2. Are students learning what we want them to?

Liberal Studies Assessment Rubrics used in this assessment (see Appendix A) were developed in the 2014-2015 academic year and were very valuable in assessing the level of achievement of the Liberal Studies Outcomes our students have attained by the time they finish C4 requirement. Through the process of scoring student artifacts, some samples were more challenging to assess, and the Assessment Team has recommendations to strengthen this process.

- If the assignment involves a class presentation, the artifacts should include student notes for presentation or videos of the student presentation and not just, for example, the Powerpoint slides and bibliography.

The LSC concurs with this recommendation and will continue to work with the director of assessment to solve the problem of providing assessment teams with sufficient materials, in particular assignment prompts, for determining how well students are achieving outcomes.

- The assessment team liked the various assignments, but the unevenness of the distribution of artifacts that looked at Learning Outcome 5 (62) versus Learning Outcome 1 (6), means that our assessment of Learning Outcome 1 is not as meaningful as Outcome 5. We recommend that if a Learning Outcome selected for an assignment is not selected for a substantial portion of the artifacts that that Learning Outcome and those artifacts be exempt from the Assessment process.

The LSC concurs with this recommendation and further recommends that instructors in C4 focus their efforts on the delivery and assessment of outcome #5.

Action item: LSC will consult with the program coordinators of C4 to explore this commitment to outcome #5.

Updated LSC Response: The C4 program coordinators are aware of this LSC recommendation and will continue to explore the commitment to outcome #5.

- The rubric for Learning Outcome #5 needs modification. The rubric could be changed to differentiate between exemplary and achieving to reflect critical thinking, to more accurately reflect the realities of a semester course. What is the difference between refined and just a basic ability? Documentation of research or quality of student reflection could supplant the language of long-term commitment to behavior change. Currently, exemplary goes beyond the

modes of the assignment as it suggests a longer term outcome that a semester course could assess. Perhaps the rubric could be revised to have Exemplary demonstrate a higher order of critical thinking and use of supporting evidence and research to undergird student's self-reflection or findings.

The LSC concurs with this recommendation and will work with members of the team and the relevant program coordinators to revise the rubrics accordingly.

How can we improve Liberal Studies Assessment Process, in general?

The recommendations made in this section are based on in-depth assessment committee discussions about balancing objectivity (non-biased assessment) and providing thorough evaluations.

- The student numbers need to be provided the faculty at the onset of the third week of classes, after formal drop/add period is ended. At that time, there also need to be at least 2 alternative 92 numbers provided to faculty to guide their collection of artifacts to compensate for late withdrawals.
- Faculty should be informed prior to the semester of collection and asked to designate an assignment at the beginning of the semester with their selected Learning Outcome. This will allow for additional artifacts to be assigned if a certain Learning Outcome does not have a significant number of participants.
- Syllabi should be collected at the beginning of the semester as well to avoid the assessment team not having necessary syllabi during the report writing process.
- In our case, the composite assessment of the data by the Office of Institutional Planning did not correlate with our data. The data used in this report were compiled by our team and double checked by each individual in the assessment team.

The LSC concurs with these recommendations for the assessment process.

Action item: The LSC will solicit from the director of assessment his response and actions for addressing these recommendations.