

**Western Carolina University
Liberal Studies Assessment Plan
2022-2025**

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 research, personal interests, and/or pedagogical approaches. The current iteration of the general education program was created in 1999. Minor elements of the program's administration have been revised since that time, including the implementation of revised student learning outcomes and the creation of a Liberal Studies Assessment Director position, both in 2018. In 2023, the program added three new student learning outcomes focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

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.

Rationale for Assessment

WCU's Liberal Studies Program engages in an on-going assessment of student learning within its curriculum, which consists of approximately 250 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 ten 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 and context 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 Impact	Students will evaluate the impact of their own and others' actions on the human and natural worlds.
Diversity	Students will acknowledge and understand the concept of diversity and demonstrate the ability to critically analyze dimensions and perspectives of diversity.
Equity	Students will acknowledge and understand the concept of equity and demonstrate the ability to address structural inequities at the social, institutional, and/or individual levels.
Inclusion	Students will acknowledge and understand the concept of inclusion, and will demonstrate the ability to address issues of inclusive participatory environments.

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 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 significantly increase 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 two primary questions:

- 1. How strongly does student work demonstrate the learning goals within the LS Program?**
- 2. What recommendations do the data suggest for strengthening the Liberal Studies Program?**

Schedule for Assessment

The ten student learning outcomes are assessed over a three-year assessment cycle, and at the culmination of the three years, the cycle begins 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.

Outcome Assessment Schedule	
Fall 2022	Means of Expression
	Information Literacy
Spring 2023	Awareness of Impact
Fall 2023	Diversity
	Equity
Spring 2024	Inclusion
	Problem Solving
Fall 2024	Critical Thinking
Spring 2025	Awareness of Self
	Inquiry

Artifact Collection and Scoring Process

The Liberal Studies Assessment Director notifies 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 provides detailed artifact submission instructions and support for artifact creation and submission.

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

Scorers rate each artifact against an outcome's rubric (see Appendix I). Along with providing a numeric rating for each artifact, faculty scorers also complete a qualitative survey to provide additional feedback to departments and faculty 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 assignment design.

Dissemination of Results

By the end of each fall semester, the Liberal Studies Assessment Director reviews the data from the summer scoring workshop and writes 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. This report is also posted on the WCU website for public dissemination.

Additionally, the LS Assessment Director shares specific course-level assessment data with all relevant department heads and provides individual feedback on assignment design to Liberal Studies instructors - all in the spirit of continuous improvement and transparency.

APPENDIX:

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**

Information Literacy				
<i>Students will identify appropriate information sources and evaluate critically the credibility of those sources for relevance, legitimacy, and bias.</i>				
	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**

Critical Thinking				
<i>Students will evaluate evidence, context, and multiple perspectives as a means of analyzing complex issues.</i>				
	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**

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**

Means of Expression				
<i>Students will craft written and/or oral communication demonstrating organization, clarity, logic, and recognition of various audiences.</i>				
	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**

Awareness of Self				
<i>Students will recognize behaviors and define choices that affect their lifelong well-being.</i>				
	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**

Awareness of Impact				
<i>Students will evaluate the impact of their own and others' actions on the human and/or natural worlds.</i>				
	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>	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.).	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.	Artifact does not align with the rubric and/or artifact cannot be scored.

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

Diversity Definition: WCU’s concept of “Diversity” acknowledges, accepts, and celebrates the inevitably wide variety of shared and different personal and group characteristics that include, but are not limited to age, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, nationality, cultural norms, religions, belief systems, ideologies, socio-economic status, education, marital status, language and linguistic differences, physical appearance and abilities, and the ideas, perspectives, and values contained in these identity-forming characteristics of individuals.

Diversity				
<i>Students will acknowledge and understand the concept of diversity and demonstrate the ability to critically analyze dimensions and perspectives of diversity.</i>				
	Exceeds Expectations (3)	Meets Expectations (2)	Below Expectations (1)	Not Applicable (0)
Acknowledge and understand the concept of diversity	Acknowledges and understands (course specific) aspects of diversity across people or worldviews.	Acknowledges diversity across people or worldviews.	Limited acknowledgement or understanding of aspects of diversity across people or worldviews.	Does not align/did not respond to aspects of diversity across people or worldviews.
Multiple Perspectives (i.e., how Diversity affects me/others)	Critical analysis* of more than two points of view as it relates to diversity of perspectives and experience.	Critical analysis* of two points of view as it relates to diversity of perspectives and experience.	Critical analysis* of one point of view as it relates to diversity of perspectives and experience.	Does not align/did not respond to critical analysis* as it relates to diversity of perspectives and experience.

* Critical Analysis: assessment of beliefs, traditions, norms, and biases, including one’s own as they might differ from and/or have commonalities with different perspectives

Equity Definition: WCU’s concept of equity is defined as fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all people through identification and elimination of social, institutional, and/or individual barriers that disadvantage some groups while advantaging others.

Equity				
<i>Students will acknowledge and understand the concept of equity and demonstrate the ability to address inequities at the social, institutional, and/or individual levels.</i>				
	Exceeds Expectations (3)	Meets Expectations (2)	Below Expectations (1)	Not Applicable (0)
Acknowledge and understand the concept of equity	Exhibits an exceptional understanding of the systems or structural factors (societal, institutional, and/or individual) that advantage some groups and disadvantage others.	Exhibits an adequate understanding of the systems or structural factors (societal, institutional, and/or individual) that advantage some groups and disadvantage others.	Exhibits a limited understanding of the systems or structural factors (societal, institutional, and/or individual) that advantage some groups and disadvantage others.	Artifact does not align with the rubric and/or artifact cannot be scored.
Address issues of inequity	Demonstrates exceptional ability to propose, evaluate, or enact solutions to address issues of inequity.	Demonstrates adequate ability to propose, evaluate, or enact solutions to address issues of inequity	Demonstrates limited ability to propose, evaluate, or enact solutions to address issues of inequity	Artifact does not align with the rubric and/or artifact cannot be scored.

Inclusion Definition: WCU’s concept of inclusion acknowledges, accepts, and celebrates **intentional efforts to create environments** where all individuals feel welcome, supported, respected, and able to participate fully.

Inclusion				
Students will acknowledge and understand the concept of inclusion and will demonstrate the ability to address issues of inclusive participatory environments.				
	Exceeds Expectations (3)	Meets Expectations (2)	Below Expectations (1)	Not Applicable (0)
Acknowledge and understand the concept of inclusion	Exhibits exceptional ability to both acknowledge and understand the concept of inclusion.	Exhibits adequate ability to both acknowledge and understand the concept of inclusion.	Exhibits limited ability to acknowledge and/or understand the concept of inclusion.	Artifact does not align with the rubric and/or artifact cannot be scored.
Address issues of inclusion	Demonstrates exceptional ability to propose, evaluate, or enact solutions to address issues of inclusion.	Demonstrates adequate ability to propose, evaluate, or enact solutions to address issues of inclusion.	Demonstrates limited ability to propose, evaluate, or enact solutions to address issues of inclusion.	Artifact does not align with the rubric and/or artifact cannot be scored.