

I. Assessment Activities

A. **Program Goals:** The Humanities Assessment Plan provides for an evaluation of teaching and learning according to areas of fundamental knowledge and abilities/skills which Humanities majors need to demonstrate at the point of their graduation. These areas of fundamental knowledge and abilities/skills, common to the program, have been expanded to explain in addition the knowledge and skills in each particular option (Classics, Philosophy, Religious Studies) that graduates must demonstrate. Similarly faculty goals have been developed for the program and for individual disciplines. These goals have been in place now for nine years and were evaluated in fall 2008 as part of our program review.

In fall 2005, however, we reorganized our goals by kinds of skills and made minor changes to them. Evaluations of students in this update continue to be based on these revised goals:

I. Rhetorical Skills:

1. the ability to interpret thinking and texts with attention to important literary elements.
2. the ability to create oral and written discourse with attention to topic, development, argument, counterargument, validity, and critical perspective.

II. Critical Thinking Skills:

3. the ability to analyze texts written from different perspectives and for different purposes.
4. the skills of exploring and fairly comparing evidence and reasoning for conflicting viewpoints.
5. the ability to re-examine a critical position from multiple and sometimes competing perspectives.

III. Informed Openness to Multiple Perspectives

6. the ability to define any thinking or text as a product of human beings and as a window to the nature of its human author(s) and audience(s).
7. the ability to imagine any thinking or text as an insight into the world.
8. the skills of openness to different personal and cultural viewpoints within the context of a multicultural world.

IV. Field-Specific Research Skills

9. the ability to write and speak effectively from a humanities perspective or from perspectives for different purposes and different audiences.
10. the ability to use professional humanities (disciplinary) research tools.

B. **Learning Outcomes/Data Collection:** During AY 2008 - 2009, five faculty members taught three separate team-taught courses, one at the 300 level and two at the 400 level (492 in fall 2008; 390 and 493 in spring 2009), and these courses provided this year's opportunity to put into practice the testing of the skills of undergraduate majors and graduating seniors in Humanities. A total of 36 majors were evaluated in the three courses (13 students completed the fall course, and 23 students completed the other two courses in the spring). During the fall of 2004, the Humanities faculty decided to begin careful and thorough assessment of only three or four of our ten goals every year so that in any given three-year period we will have evaluated all ten of our goals. The goals for AY 2008-2009 are 1, 5, and 6 (see chart in C below).

C. **Results:** Our assessment results show more strengths and less weaknesses than two years ago—*last year being our five year review year*. What the faculty decided two years ago (to make the development of strong lines of argument and counterarguments a designated objective in all classes taught by the three departments that are outside of the interdisciplinary, team-taught courses and feed into them) continues to be in play. Note that professors teaching the interdisciplinary, team-taught courses this year developed refinements of some of the goals which allow them to assess the goal accurately and quantify significantly their evidence for making each assessment. The following table shows the evaluation of

students in the three team-taught courses this past year on goals 1, 5, and 6. Note that the designations “excellent, competent, deficient” are explained at the end of this update.

OUTCOME	METHOD OF ASSESSMENT	BENCHMARK	EVALUATION	CONCLUSION/ACTION
<p>1. The ability to interpret thinking and texts with attention to important literary elements</p>	<p>Teaching to and testing by means of clearly stated, written assignment guidelines for both written and oral projects</p>	<p>Written grading criteria for oral and written projects which represent abilities/skills.</p>	<p>In the 492 course (6 students), about 50% performed in the excellent, 50% in the competent, and 1 student in the deficient range. In order to evaluate what students knew about literary texts (that is, what knowledge that they brought with them from other classes), faculty in this course experimented with the assessment process by providing instruction on only essay content and not on form and process. In the 493 course (13 students), on 1, about 50% performed in the excellent, 40% in the competent, and 10% in the deficient range. In the 390 course 3 were excellent, 7 were competent, and none deficient.</p>	<p>Humanities faculty resolved to make the development of literary elements a stated objective in all courses that are outside the interdisciplinary, team-taught courses and feed into them and to focus special attention on meeting this objective in these courses.</p>
<p>5. The ability to re-examine a critical position from multiple and sometimes competing perspectives</p>	<p>Teaching to and testing by means of clearly stated, written assignment guidelines for both written and oral projects</p>	<p>Written grading criteria for oral and written projects which represent abilities/skills</p>	<p>In the 492 course (all 13 students) 100% performed in the excellent. In the 493 course (13 students), roughly 70% performed in the excellent, 10% in the competent range, and 20% in deficient category. In the 390 course 5 were excellent, and 5 competent, and none deficient.</p>	<p>Humanities faculty were pleased with student outcomes for this objective and resolved that continuing strong teaching toward this objective would enhance the number of students performing at the excellent level.</p>

<p>6. The ability to define any thinking or text as a product of human beings and as a window to the nature of its human author(s) and audience(s).</p>	<p>Teaching to and testing by means of clearly stated, written assignment guidelines for both written and oral projects</p>	<p>Written grading criteria for oral and written projects which represent abilities/skills</p>	<p>In 492 course, roughly 75% (10 students) performed in the excellent and 25% (3 students) in the competent, and 0% in the deficient range. In the 493 course 9 students performed in the excellent, 3 students in the competent, and 1 was deficient. In the 390 course only 3 were excellent, with 7 competent, and again no deficiencies.</p>	<p>Applying this objective to course writing projects, Humanities faculty recognized that being able to explain perspective, purpose, and audience well is solidly connected with performance of objective 5 (see above). Consequently, they resolved (a) to make the development and evaluation of counterarguments an objective in those courses that are outside the interdisciplinary, team-taught courses and feed into them and (b) to focus special attention on meeting this objective in these courses.</p>
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Summary:

- Clearly outcomes 1, 5, and 6 all need attention in both disciplinary and interdisciplinary courses, and the program needs to focus on creating assignments that teach and test these three outcomes.
 - Also the program can be content that it is doing a solid job teaching toward outcome 6, for many students in two of the three classes excelled in this area.
 - In 492 no students fell into the deficient category. In 493 students did better on 5 & 6 than on 1, which suggests the need for continued work on literary elements. Consequently, the faculty resolved to focus on issues of literary elements in all the disciplinary classes that feed into the team-taught, interdisciplinary classes.
 - In 390 no students fell into the deficient range in any category.
 - Humanities faculty continue to be aware of overlaps in the assessment objectives (see III below).
- II. **BOT Initiative 3 Compliance:** Since this program is unique nationally, no national standards exist which might provide quantifiable evidence that graduates are meeting appropriate standards. In the core courses of the program (CL/PHL/RST 250, 390-394, and 490-494), the definitions of skill rating which appear at the end of this update provide the standard from which we are working. Faculty this fall have continued the process of targeting three outcomes per year for careful and intense scrutiny and have created clear and detailed guidelines for judging the categories of excellent, competent, and deficient.
- III. **Plans for the current year:** The Humanities faculty continue to implement the changes we instituted fall 2004 with some additions: 1) the faculty will assess only three to four of the ten outcomes per year, anticipating that this focusing of attention on three instead of the entire ten will allow a more careful and more in-depth testing and evaluation of students and greater knowledge about students who perform in a deficient manner; 2) the full faculty will examine carefully the results of these assessments of three to four outcomes at meetings to be held at the beginning of each semester; in this way, changes in teaching and evaluation of students can be made twice every academic year; 3) the faculty continue to use detailed guidelines for evaluating students as excellent, competent, and deficient, and these guidelines appear at the end of this report; 4) the faculty have

designated outcomes 2, 4, and 8 as the three which will be the focus of careful evaluation of student performance within the team-taught courses offered this AY, 2009-2010; 5) the faculty decided to make the development of the literary elements of texts a designated objective in all classes that form part of the Humanities major; 6) this year's assessment process uncovered overlaps that exist among some assessment objectives (see I.A above) and plan a series of meetings beginning in February 2010 to revise and consolidate our assessment objectives, especially in view of the new core curriculum; 7) the faculty agreed that assessment of student completion of degree objectives in the interdisciplinary courses should include experimentation with methodologies that will lead to better evaluation of student progress; and 8) the faculty will begin discussing the "portfolio" method for future senior evaluations.

The faculty continue to consider the assessment options that appear below and how they might benefit our assessment program. At present we are only involved in assessing student work in the first context listed here:

In each course we specify criteria by which to evaluate performance on the relevant assessment outcomes. There may be several criteria for each outcome. We specify deficient, competent, or excellent performance for each criterion, for each student on each assignment.

We check for trends with respect to these criteria in three contexts:

- 1) within each course, over several assignments
- 2) between different, simultaneous courses dealing with the same assessment outcomes
- 3) between different, consecutive courses, dealing with the same assessment outcomes.

Contexts (2) and (3) allow us to identify not only outcome trends for classes as a whole, but also performance trends and type for individual students. Context (1) is not sufficient to conclude concerning individual students, since there are too many possible interfering variables in each individual case to control for, given the limitations on the data it is possible to collect on individuals' motivations and current life circumstances.

Having established trends, we are then in a position either to endorse our current teaching strategies, or to design strategies and assignments to focus on the weak areas the trends have shown. Then, in addition to evaluating the new year's set of outcomes, we also repeat evaluations of those of the previous year's criteria that were evaluated as unsatisfactory, in order to assess whether we have succeeded in improving the unsatisfactory trends.

- IV. **Assistance Needed:** It would be helpful to have a discussion or workshop on how to make effective use of assessment results in the revision of curricula and individual courses in curricula, especially if information is available about how other programs have achieved this kind of revision.
- V. **What one most important thing has the program learned through this process?** For the first time, faculty have committed to the emphasis of one important writing and critical thinking skill in all those classes which can possibly feed into the team-taught, interdisciplinary courses (including capstones). This decision affects teaching and learning in the entire major.

[To explain results in C above:]

Definitions for Student Outcomes Assessments in Team-Taught Courses of the MU Humanities Program

A. Purposes of Definitions:

- to indicate and explain parameters of each assessment
- to make the relationship between Student Outcomes assessments and student grades on individual assignments and in courses clear

B. Definitions

1. **Competent** (likely to be the assessment for most students who make As and Bs, and sometimes those who make Cs, in our classes):

- Student meets expectations for success in undergraduate course work in *critical thinking skills, area knowledge, and application*

Skills

- Student acquires a basic **skills set**, such as for research, reasoning, or composition; *and*
- Student demonstrates these in written and oral assignments
- *Assessment techniques*: writing, presentation, class discussion

Example: a student uses the library to do independent research on a humanities topic set by the instructor, and then communicates that research in a written essay, or by formal oral presentation.

Area Knowledge

- Student acquires competence in **area knowledge (a data set)**, *e.g.* the specifics of ancient Greek theater practice, or 20th century American Christianity
- Student acquires **disciplinary knowledge**, such as intellectual vocabulary and area-specific terminology and methodology.
- *Assessment techniques*: writing, presentation, class discussion, and objective quizzes/exams

Application

- Student is aware of the correct application of skills sets and/or knowledge areas, not just for one assignment but as a general (replicable) method of work, analysis, or critical thinking.
- *Assessment techniques*: methods for skills sets and area knowledge, with results compared across all major assignments for the course

Summary: Student succeeds at being a “student of a particular discipline,” and is prepared for further study, in the opinion of the instructors. “Competent” students (although prepared) may or may not be successful at advanced study.

2. **Excellent** (likely to be seldom used, and to be almost exclusively associated with “A” students)

- Student meets *and exceeds* expectations for success in undergraduate course work in *skills, area knowledge, and application* as outlined above
- Student demonstrates original or creative use of skills
- Student shows extraordinary sensitivity to the broader applications of skills, knowledge, and analysis
- Student can work independently

- *Assessment techniques:* writing (especially longer papers and research projects that involve written presentation), spoken presentation, class discussion, objective quizzes/exams

Example: A student reads additional materials outside of course assignments regularly, seeks out additional (discipline oriented) contact time with professors, or adds insights that are not simply a reflection of the professors' lecturing or course materials

Summary: student performs as a "junior colleague in a particular discipline," and is likely to succeed in advanced (graduate) studies and enjoy post-graduate professional success in the particular discipline, in the opinion of the instructors.

3. Deficient (most likely to be the assessment of students who receive a grade of D or F for the course, and for some students who receive a grade of C)

- Student cannot effectively demonstrate *skills sets* and *area knowledge*, or
- Student is not fully aware of the correct *application* of the skill sets and/or knowledge areas (cannot apply area knowledge or skills independently)
- *Assessment techniques:* written and oral assignments; objective exams/essays

Example: A student succeeds in a particular assignment or presentation, but cannot transfer performance to other assignments, presentations, or circumstances of work, analysis, or thinking in humanities.

Summary: Student is unsuccessful at mastering disciplinary skills and knowledge.

C. Note on Correlation Between Outcomes and Grades

Course grades do not **directly** reflect student outcomes. A student designated as "deficient" in a particular skill or knowledge set may or may not be highly successful in other skills sets. Thus, a student may attain a high grade (B or A) on a particular assignment (or even several assignments) and still be judged as deficient. Alternatively, a student may be a poor performer on certain assignments but receive a "competent" designation in a particular skill or knowledge set because of performance over the course of several assignments.