

**Humanities Program  
Graduate Program Assessment  
Yearly Report  
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**Submitted by**

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**I. Program's Mission**

The Graduate Humanities Program is an interdisciplinary program that brings together faculty and students from a variety of backgrounds to collaboratively explore the intersection of the arts, culture, literature, and history within an open, exploratory, and experimental graduate-level educational environment. The Program provides students with varied undergraduate backgrounds in humanities the opportunity to continue their studies at the graduate level with an integrated and interdisciplinary perspective on human inquiry. As a Full Member of the Association of Graduate Liberal Studies Programs (based at Duke University), the Program is charged with serving students at the highest level in graduate liberal studies. The program is thus charged with enhancing students' abilities to deal critically and flexibly with intellectual, social, political, historical, literary, or artistic issues through a broad humanistic perspective. In this capacity, the Program is designed to serve three groups of students: (a) students working toward an M.A. in the Humanities; (b) students seeking professional development (such as in Appalachian Studies, per the Program's certificate program), and (c) lifelong learners. Students in all three groups are to be engaged in critical thinking, directed inquiry, and independent study.

The Graduate Humanities Program supports the mission of Marshall University Graduate College by providing a degree option for adults and working professionals who do not wish to pursue degrees in Education, Business, or Engineering. It is, at present, the only option for adults in southern West Virginia who are interested in local/regional history and culture, creative writing, and literature. All of these areas provide valuable education for employed adults and/or lifelong learners. Through our degree courses and our professional development efforts, we participate in the statewide outreach of the College's mission. Program commitment to multiculturalism and global studies also supports the mission. Courses in literature, history, and the arts provide insights into other cultures and historical periods. The graduate certificate in Appalachian Studies contributes to Marshall University's commitment to this region.

As an interdisciplinary program, the Graduate Humanities Program networks with other programs and institutions to meet the educational needs of students. By drawing faculty from other educational institutions in the State, the Graduate Humanities Program maintains contacts with humanities faculty

from around West Virginia. Scholarly research by faculty and students and other professional activities contribute to the cultural life of all West Virginians.

## **II. Program's Student Learning Outcomes**

Providing students with an integrated and interdisciplinary perspective on human inquiry, the program should enhance the graduate's ability to deal critically and flexibly with intellectual, social, political, historical, literary, or artistic issues through a broad humanistic perspective. By the time a student graduates from the Graduate Humanities Program, then, faculty expect students to exhibit *high-order critical thinking skills, sensitivity to and articulation of interdisciplinary knowledge and concepts, cognizance of the wide range of study made possible by the humanities, an aesthetic valuation for how the humanities informs larger concepts of human diversity and multiculturalism, and finally, hermeneutic synthesis and evaluation of the broader applications of humanities-based knowledge* (see chart below).

## **III. Assessment Activities**

### **Holistic and Contextual Approach**

Because of the relative small size of the Program, the Director and participating faculty are able to engage in a holistic and contextual approach to assessment, evaluating student success at five different points; and assessing learning outcomes and benchmarks accordingly *for each student* as they progress through the Program. Though holistic and contextual approaches to assessment can often be at odds with programs and processes of assessment at the undergraduate level, such an approach lends itself well at the graduate level, especially in Programs where emphases on textual analysis and hermeneutic synthesis, evaluation, and transformation have primary roles. Indeed, as several scholars of graduate-level assessment have argued, the goals, attributes, and purposes of graduate education (and thus its approach to assessment) still remain categorically, and distinctly, different from undergraduate education (where hierarchical ordered approaches to assessment, such as in Bloom's Taxonomy, remain dominant): because graduate "learning is primarily a process," argue Paul Hager and Susan Holland, ". . . graduate attributes are inherently holistic and contextual in character" (see *Graduate Attributes, Learning and Employability* [Springer, 2006], 10).

### **A. Assessment Measures, assessed at five different points:**

#### **1. Admissions to Program**

Students seeking a Master of Arts in Humanities must meet the following requirements: (1) a score in the 60<sup>th</sup> percentile on the verbal section of the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) General Test or an equivalent score on the Miller Analogies Test (MAT); (2) an undergraduate major in the humanities (broadly defined, including fields such as philosophy, history, English, religious studies, folklore, anthropology, archaeology, classics, the arts, modern languages, and communication studies); and an overall undergraduate grade point average of 3.0; and (3) write a brief essay that explains the degree goals and the reasons for selecting the Humanities Program. Data on student progress is initiated upon admission and maintained throughout their tenure in the Program.

## 2. Curriculum Planning and Design Conferences & New Program Director Semester Review

Each of these students must meet with the Program Director several times during their tenure in the Graduate Humanities Program. During these conferences, in addition to developing and recurrently reviewing the student's Plan of Study, students are interviewed about their progress in the program, engaged and re-engaged in the planning and design of their evolving curriculum, and assessed as to whether learning outcomes are being met.

Based on feedback from the Office of Assessment & Program Review of the 2010 Graduate Humanities Program assessment report (received June 8, 2011), the Program Director has implemented a new review of the file of each enrolled student at the conclusion of each semester. Based on interview notes collecting during Curriculum Planning and Design Conferences, the review of Assessment Day activities, and the analysis of collected class materials when appropriate, the Program Director is now endeavoring to assess student progress concerning, in particular, learning outcomes valued by the Program (*high-order critical thinking skills, sensitivity to and articulation of interdisciplinary knowledge and concepts, etc.*: see Part II). In the spirit of evaluating and assessing the progress of each student, each learning outcome includes an attached rubric of "needs improvement," "making satisfactory progress," or, when further information is needed, "unable to access at present / more information needed." These ongoing assessments are then provided back to students during follow-up Curriculum Planning and Design Conferences.

## 3. Comprehensive Examination

Prior to taking the comprehensive exam, a candidate must have completed 24 hours of course work, including all core classes, and have a 3.0 grade point average. Three examiners construct the comprehensive examination for the student based on the individual plan of study. The comprehensive exam focuses on two core areas and the area of concentration (Arts & Society, Literary Studies, Cultural Studies, or Historical Studies). The student must pass the examination before progressing to the final research project. In addition to the learning outcomes identified above, further outcomes being measured include *the ability to analyze texts and images from more than one particular perspective, knowledge of research methods/critical issues in two core areas, knowledge of major figures/issues in area of concentration, written proficiency, and technological competence.*

Rubric for Exams: the Program utilizes a "pass with honors," "pass," "fail," "retake" rubric for the exams. Pulling from broad literatures, engaging in reflective and critical thinking, doing comparative analysis, creating new linkages, analyzing and evaluating texts, the Program expects 100% of students to pass the exam accordingly (with "pass with honors" reserved for the most exceptional exam responses).

Based on feedback from the Office of Assessment & Program Review of the 2010 Graduate Humanities Program assessment report (received June 8, 2011), the Program Director has implemented a new procedure to analyze just which sections of the exams students need to rewrite, the percentages of students who score in each category (Pass

with Honors, etc.), and how this information might inform program improvement. As only a few students have taken the comprehensive exam since the Program received feedback from the Office of Assessment & Program Review, this new procedure is only in its earliest of stages.

#### 4. Research Assignment (thesis or project)

In addition to the learning outcomes outlined above, outcomes being measured at this stage (compiled by the thesis committee or project mentor) include *production of an appropriate piece of research*, one that begins with formulating an interdisciplinary research question; *written and oral proficiency* (product and presentation of research in symposium or thesis defense); and *technological competence* in carrying out research and producing the document.

#### 5. Exit Surveys

Soon after graduation, each student is asked to fill out an exit survey, a survey used to assess the learning outcomes listed above. This data is compiled and maintained by the Project Director.

The following chart (page 5) summarizes the Program's assessment efforts.

**B. Benchmarks.** The Graduate Humanities Program standards/benchmarks are tied to the student learning outcomes and assessment tools / measures (see the chart below), and include the following expectations: (1) All graduates are expected to complete coursework, pass comprehensive exams, and complete the final thesis/project within 7 years. (2) Comprehensive exams should exhibit the ability to analyze texts and images from more than one particular perspective, knowledge of research methods/critical issues in two core areas, knowledge of major figures/issues in area of concentration, written proficiency, and technological competence. (3) The final project/thesis must reach a standard of production of an appropriate piece of research, one that begins with formulating an interdisciplinary research question; written and oral proficiency (product and presentation of research in symposium or thesis defense); and technological competence in carrying out research and producing the document. (4) All students should have the option to develop study in public/applied humanities. (See the chart below.)

**C. Results/Analysis.** Analysis of the relationships between student outcomes, assessment tools/measures, and standards/benchmarks since the last Assessment Report (2010) suggests that while Admission into the Program (assessment data collection tool #1) and initial Curriculum Planning and Design Conferences (assessment data collection tool #2) articulate trajectories for (and assessment of) the maintenance of individual student achievement; ongoing Curriculum Planning and Design Conferences (assessment data collection tool #2), the comprehensive exam (assessment data collection tool #3), the final project/thesis (assessment data collection tool #4), and exit surveys (assessment data collection tool #5) articulate trajectories for improving and/or growing the program. Analysis of comprehensive exams, for example, suggests that while most students are often well-prepared for this assessment, in a few cases, students must re-take their exams (see the chart below for actual figures, embedded in the narrative text). The percentage of

students having to take the exam more than once continues to decline, suggesting that previous findings from earlier assessment reports (i.e., that individualized instruction on the articulation of interdisciplinary knowledge and concepts should be addressed more carefully before students take the exam either in the classroom or via independent faculty-student meetings) are continuing to take hold. Along similar lines, analysis of the final project/thesis suggests that the majority of students who complete their coursework in a timely manner also complete the final thesis or research project (see chart below for actual figures). Importantly, however, exit surveys and interviews conducting during Curriculum Planning and Design Conferences suggest that many students shift from the thesis to the project option (see the chart below for actual figures), or choose the project option outright because the Program does not have enough full-time faculty (there is only one FT faculty, the Program Director) to serve as advisors for all thesis topics (only FT faculty can serve as thesis advisors; MU policy does not allow the many PT faculty who serve in the Program to serve in this role). While the faculty serving in the Program have no doubt that the Research Project offers students the opportunity to engage in high-order critical thinking skills—among other student outcomes—the more limited opportunity of the thesis option clearly presents an obstacle for some students to achieve the fullest articulation of this end. As a final note, exit surveys and interviews conducting during Curriculum Planning and Design Conferences indicate that students continue to be extremely satisfied with the Program and are achieving the Program goals and most if not all the learning outcomes. Many students, however, continue to express interest in developing more applied curriculum and more instruction on apprehension of the broader applications of humanities-based knowledge—an area that the Director and participating faculty continue to address via more offerings of courses in the applied/public humanities (See the chart below.)

**D. Analysis/Planned Action.** Since the last Program Assessment (2010), program faculty have continued to implement more focused preparations for student achievement across all measures. For example, as in 2009-10, in the past year the Program has continued in its efforts to: develop varied and creative options for student work to be carried out for the project option (given the limitations for the thesis option); seek monies externally to provide students with a wider array of options for humanities-based study; and solicit opportunities within COLA and across colleges (such as in GSEPD) to secure the participation of more FT faculty willing to direct theses. In this same vein, the Program continues to develop several university-community partnership initiatives meant to develop and augment new opportunities for public and applied humanities (see “improving program quality below”). (See also the chart below.)

## Graduate Humanities Program Assessment Summary

Learning Outcomes	Persons Responsible	Assessment Tools	Standards/Benchmarks	Results/Analysis	Action Taken
<p>Graduates of the Humanities Program are expected to exhibit:</p> <p><i>high-order critical thinking skills; a sensitivity and articulation of interdisciplinary knowledge and concepts; an cognizance of the wide range of study made possible by the humanities; an aesthetic valuation for how the humanities informs larger concepts of human diversity and multiculturalism; and finally,</i></p> <p><i>hermeneutic synthesis and evaluation of the broader applications of humanities-based knowledge.</i></p>	<p>Graduate Humanities Program Director and Program Faculty</p> <p>Graduate Humanities Program Director and Program Faculty</p>	<p>Admission into Program data collection; Curriculum Planning and Design Conferences (interviews); Comprehension Exams (knowledge and skill assessment); Thesis and/or Project (Independent Research Symposium) and Exit Surveys</p> <p>Exit Surveys and Curriculum Planning and Design Conferences meetings (interviews)</p>	<p>All graduates are expected to pass complete coursework, pass comprehensive exams, and complete the final thesis/project within 7 years.</p> <p>Comprehensive exams should exhibit the ability to analyze texts and images from more than one particular perspective, knowledge of research methods/critical issues in two core areas, knowledge of major figures/issues in area of concentration, written proficiency, and technological competence. Rubric for Exams: the Program utilizes an “pass with honors,” “pass,” “fail,” “retake” rubric for the exams. Pulling from broad literatures, engaging in reflective and critical thinking, doing comparative analysis, creating new linkages, analyzing and evaluating texts, the Program expects 100% of students to pass the exam accordingly (with “pass with honors” reserved for the most exceptional exam responses).</p> <p>The final project/thesis must reach a standard of production of an appropriate piece of research, one that begins with formulating an interdisciplinary research question; written and oral proficiency (product and presentation of research in symposium or thesis defense); and technological competence in carrying out research and producing the document.</p> <p>All students should have the option to develop study in public/applied humanities.</p>	<p>Analysis of comprehensive exams suggests that while most students are often well-prepared for this assessment, in a few cases, students must re-take their exams. From 2002 to the present, for example, approximately 71% of students passed the comprehensive exams the first time; approximately 27% had to re-write one section; and approximately 2% had to re-write two sections a second time. The percentage of students having to take the exam more than once has begun to decline, suggesting that previous findings from earlier assessment reports (i.e., that individualized instruction on the articulation of interdisciplinary knowledge and concepts should be addressed more carefully before students take the exam either in the classroom or via independent faculty-student meetings) are beginning to take hold.</p> <p>Analysis of the final project/thesis suggests that the majority of students who complete their coursework in a timely manner also complete the final thesis or research project. Since 2002, approximately 84% of these students have completed research projects and approximately 16% have completed theses, with an average of 3.5 years to complete the program. Exit surveys and interviews conducted during Curriculum Planning and Design Conferences suggest that many students shift from the thesis to the project option (since 2002, approximately 16% have done so), or choose the project option outright because the Program does not have enough full-time faculty (the Program Director is the only FT faculty) to serve as advisors for all thesis topics (only FT faculty can serve as thesis advisors; the many PT faculty who serve in the program cannot serve in this role). While the Program has no doubt that the Research Project offers students the opportunity to engage in <i>high-order critical thinking skills</i>, the more limited opportunity of the thesis option clearly presents an obstacle for some students to achieve the fullest articulation of this end.</p> <p>Exit surveys and interviews conducted during Curriculum Planning and Design Conferences indicate that students continue to be extremely satisfied with the Program and are achieving the program goals and most if not all the learning outcomes. Many students, however, continue to express interest in developing more applied curriculum and more instruction on <i>hermeneutic synthesis and evaluation of the broader applications of humanities-based knowledge</i>.</p>	<p>Program faculty continue to discuss ways to implement more focused preparations for student comprehensive exams and for the <i>articulation of interdisciplinary knowledge and concepts</i> via classroom instruction and independent faculty-student meetings prior to the exam.</p> <p>The Program continues to provide students with varied and creative options for student work to be carried out for the project option; however, the Program also continues to seek monies externally, and seek other opportunities within COLA and between and among colleges to secure the participation of more FT faculty willing to direct theses.</p> <p>The Program continues to develop its Public Humanities Project, including developing new curriculum in applied humanities, obtaining monies to provide students with opportunities for applied work in humanities settings, and other programs and initiatives (e.g., the Glenwood Project).</p>

#### IV. Overview of Changes since Last Report

Since the last Assessment Report (2010), Program faculty have continued to monitor the assessment plan currently in place, and seek to put into practice those actions as emergent from the assessment lined out in the above chart. As they have in the past, the Program Director and the Program Faculty will meet during Assessment Day in the Spring (see below) to determine the best ways to implement these findings into classroom instruction, advising, and individualized work with students via the Research Project and/or Thesis. In addition, the Program continues to administer an in-depth survey of all graduates since the program was established in 1979 (then under the auspices of the West Virginia Graduate College). As reported in 2010, the Graduate Humanities Program is a small program, and most students are able to complete the degree within the seven years allowed. Graduates do find employment following the degree. As lined out in the chart above, the Program will continue to implement new opportunities for students in the area of public/applied humanities, develop more focused preparations for student comprehensive exams, and seek creative ways to provide students with increased opportunities for the Program's thesis option.

With all of this in mind, in this past year, the Program Director and the Program's affiliated faculty have continued to work on several specific initiatives and projects meant to enhance the Program's effectiveness, especially in the area of developing and growing public and applied humanities (see chart above). As reported in the 2010 Assessment Report, some examples on which the Program Director and affiliated faculty have worked to expand include:

- **Public Humanities Project**—a long-term initiative to augment, strengthen, and grow a curriculum in public and applied humanities, one meant to directly benefit both our students and the communities and organizations surrounding the Marshall University Graduate College. See <http://www.marshall.edu/humn/> for more information.
- **The Glenwood Project**—funded by the West Virginia Humanities Council, and in partnership with the Glenwood Foundation, Inc., the project engages students, faculty, and community members in the history of Charleston and the Kanawha Valley through the interdisciplinary study of the Glenwood Estate on Charleston's West Side. Since the last Program Assessment Report (2010), the Graduate Humanities Program received a new grant from the West Virginia Humanities Council for Phase III of the project, which includes an oral history of Glenwood and the surrounding community. See [www.marshall.edu/humn/](http://www.marshall.edu/humn/) for more information.

In addition to these changes, the Program Director has implemented new assessment measures in two areas (detailed above) since receiving the feedback from the Office of Assessment & Program Review (received June 8, 2011):

##### **Curriculum Planning and Design Conferences & New Program Director Semester Review:**

Based on feedback from the Office of Assessment & Program Review of the 2010 Graduate Humanities Program assessment report (received June 8, 2011), the Program Director has implemented a new review of the file of each enrolled student at the conclusion of each semester. Based on interview notes collecting during Curriculum Planning and Design Conferences, the review of Assessment Day activities, and the analysis of collected class materials when appropriate, the Program Director is now endeavoring to assess student progress concerning, in particular, learning outcomes valued by the Program (*high-order critical*

*thinking skills, sensitivity to and articulation of interdisciplinary knowledge and concepts, etc.:* see Part II). In the spirit of evaluating and assessing the progress of each student, each learning outcome includes an attached rubric of “needs improvement,” “making satisfactory progress,” or, when further information is needed, “unable to access at present / more information needed.” These ongoing assessments are then provided back to students during follow-up Curriculum Planning and Design Conferences.

**Comprehensive Examination:** Based on feedback from the Office of Assessment & Program Review of the 2010 Graduate Humanities Program assessment report (received June 8, 2011), the Program Director has implemented a new procedure to analyze just which sections of the exams students need to rewrite, the percentages of students who score in each category (Pass with Honors, etc.), and how this information might inform program improvement. As only a few students have taken the comprehensive exam since the Program received feedback from the Office of Assessment & Program Review, this new procedure is only in its earliest of stages.

## **V. Assessment Day Activities**

As Graduate Humanities students are for the most part working professionals, and come to campus only in the evenings to attend Program seminars, the Program does not plan activities for students during the day on Assessment Day. Given this, however, the Program Director collects and records student information at each Curriculum Planning and Design Conferences throughout the year, which, in turn, is shared at an Assessment Day lunch with participating affiliated faculty. At this year’s Assessment lunch, as we do each year, participants discussed the process of assessment and its findings, and importantly, the progress of individual students; identified problem areas in the Program, and developed new ideas for graduate seminars, ones in line with evolving student interests and/or requests. As we did last year, this year, participants again reviewed the Program’s strengths and weaknesses as outlined in the 2010 Program Assessment Report. Program strengths and weaknesses include:

### Strengths:

- The teaching faculty, both full-time and part-time, are academically well-prepared and engaged in research and other professional activities. Although the Program employs many part-time faculty, several have been part of the Program for many years and feel real ownership in it. These “senior” adjuncts--many of them senior faculty at colleges and universities--teach regularly, serve as comprehensive examiners, and supervise research projects. Part-time faculty are valued for their commitment to the Program. Several are members of the Program’s Advisory Committee.
- The quality of students enrolled in Graduate Humanities courses continues to reflect well on the Program and the Graduate College. They also represent a diversity of background not found in other graduate programs in South Charleston.
- Graduate Humanities classes are available to other graduate programs, such as Elementary and Secondary Education and Counseling in GSEPD. In the last 5+ years we have cross-listed courses, for example, with Elementary and Secondary Education (GSEPD), History (COLA), and the School of Journalism.

- Graduate Humanities courses and workshops are appropriate for lifelong learners. As an interdisciplinary program, Graduate Humanities provides a natural environment for faculty from several disciplines to work together in providing educational experiences for different audiences.
- The Program continues to attract students, and graduates express high satisfaction with their education. Although the numbers remain small in the Program, the applications are steady, and the graduate certificate in Appalachian Studies has increased the Program's visibility. Graduate students elect the M.A. in Humanities as a program that meets personal educational goals.
- The flexibility in the program, with individual plans of study, and with opportunities to focus in a particular area of study (A&S, CULS, HIST, or LITS) allows the Program to meet the professional development needs of teachers and other professionals via traditional course offerings as well as through third-party contracts that the Program provides as professional development for teachers.
- The Program is a full member of the Association for Liberal Studies Program, an organization, based at Duke University, for networking and program assessment.
- The Program's ongoing collaborations with other colleges and programs, such as the Graduate School of Education and Professional Development, augments an interdisciplinary exploration of the arts, culture, literature, and history within an open, exploratory, and experimental graduate-level educational environment.
- The Program has a long history of engaging in local and regional outreach initiatives, community-university partnerships and programs; and has great potential to expand these programs and initiatives.

Weaknesses:

- By far the greatest weakness of the Program is having only one full-time faculty member, the Program Director, to which all student advising, achievement and success is tied. Having at least one additional full-time faculty would bring more stability and continuity to the Program, increasing its visibility and impact, not to mention increasing course delivery, assisting with advising, and supervising independent research—all of which could potentially have a dramatic impact on promotion, recruitment, and retention.
- A related issue is the Program's ability to provide a broader range of opportunities for students seeking the thesis option. A good many students must opt for a research project instead of a thesis as the number of full-time MU faculty who teach in the Program—and thus the range of related academic interests—is limited (e.g., to the specialties of the Program Director).
- As the Program seeks to augment its public/applied curriculum and grow its outreach and university-community partnership opportunities, the ability to capitalize on those

opportunities is severely limited to the Program Director's individual capacity to accept and manage these projects independently as per the absence of other full-time humanities faculty. While the Program has engaged in several outreach and university-community research initiatives (see above), the Program receives multiple requests to conduct historic, ethnographic, and humanities-based research beyond its capacity to entertain—i.e., research the Program has had to decline due to a lack of available full-time personnel with expertise in humanities-based research and dissemination. Many of these requests stem from major project requests with great potential to involve large numbers of students and even generate capital for the Program and University. In the past several years, for example, the Program Director has turned away or deferred specific and individualized humanities-based research requests from the National Park Service, West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy, and the West Virginia Humanities Council. Having another full-time faculty member would no doubt grow the Program's potential to field and accept requests, organize student involvement in graduate-level research, and potentially, generate revenue for the program.

While the Program's strengths continue to provide a foundation to build upon and grow various initiatives and projects (see above), participants at the Assessment Day lunch agreed that the Program's weaknesses continue to hinder the Program's effectiveness in several key areas (as outlined above). Be that as it may, it is agreed that its strengths continue to outweigh its weaknesses.

#### **VI. Assistance Needed**

None at present.