

COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS
Assessment Report
Fine Arts Competency
General Education

October 2004

I. Assessment Activities

A. Component area goals

The College of Fine Arts, through general education courses in the appreciation of the arts, is dedicated to the transmission, application and advancement of knowledge in the arts. We seek, through arts appreciation courses, to stimulate understanding and individual response to the arts.

The College of Fine Arts is confident that the goals articulated above are appropriate for the general education of all Marshall University students.

B. Learning outcomes/data collection

Beginning in the spring semester, 1997, COFA began a systematic effort to collect assessment data to help measure the effectiveness in achieving the learning outcomes we articulate for our students. Writing samples were collected to assist in measuring students' abilities to (1) converse about various art forms using the language of the fine arts to convey ideas; (2) demonstrate that students know basic arts elements and that they are able to recognize them in works of art regardless of the cultural context they come from; and (3) articulately and critically respond to works of art to reflect observation and critical thinking. A fourth (4) expectation is that students be provided direct experiences with works of fine art in exhibition and performance venues so that they can interpret and evaluate the value and significance of the works.

A standard writing exercise was implemented during the spring 2000 semester, with the intent that every section of arts appreciation taught at Marshall participate. At the time, each class was to administer a set of two "value added" writing prompts designed to elicit measurable responses for assessment purposes. Students were asked early in a semester to articulate what art, or music or theatre as an art form means to them. A second, comparable exercise, was to be administered late in the same semester. Responses were grouped by individual student, submitted to COFA for review and maintained for long-term assessment purposes.

In 2001 it became clear that the college could not insure participation of the "value added" writing exercise from all sections of arts appreciation in

any given semester, nor could the college maintain the volume of responses of the “value added” exercise as well as writing samples. With the fall semester, 2001, we began a process whereby we randomly chose six sections of appreciation classes from which to gather the “value added” exercises and writing samples.

Throughout this process of gathering student writing, periodic reviews of these artifacts were done but there was no systematic evaluation. The college realized that we needed a better way to validate student learning outcomes. At the same time (fall 2003), the size of appreciation classes rose from 42 students per section to over 65 because of the loss of three full-time faculty due to budget cuts. Hence, in the fall semester of 2003, we suspended all assessment activities in arts appreciation.

We did not collect any assessment materials that fall. We returned our enrollment cap to 42 for the spring 2004 semester, and we initiated a new assessment strategy for all arts appreciation classes modeled after assessment strategies for English composition classes. Initial results indicate that we have much work ahead of us to refine the process before we can begin to have a better understanding of how well or not so well we are achieving some of the stated outcomes.

Working with the Office of Institutional Research, we randomly identified six students per section of appreciation. A writing sample from each student was collected and turned in by his or her teacher. Papers were collated by discipline (art, music, theatre) and two readers were hired for each discipline to read the papers – thus, each student’s work was read by two readers.

Readers were given an evaluation matrix and asked to “score” individual papers. Attached are the quantified results of each reader’s scores. It is evident that scores vary considerably between readers of any particular discipline. We did not pretest for reliability between readers of a discipline and we knew going into this exercise that it was likely some, if not most, of the papers would not necessarily address all the stated objectives. We did not ask for papers that represented a culminating experience where it would be most likely that evidence of all learning objectives might be found. Lastly, we did not establish benchmarks against which the scores for the various objectives or overall averages could be measured.

C. Results

Any conclusions drawn from this initial evaluation of student writing from arts appreciation classes is sketchy at best. We need to refine our approach and tighten the process considerably. We need to pretest our readers for reliability and discussions with Bob Edmunds have helped us to better understand how to do that.

However, the college is confident that we now have in place a process that will

lead us to more meaningful information once we refine that process.

The College of Fine Arts, through its numerous productions of MU Theatre, concerts and recitals offered by the Department of Music, exhibitions in the Birke Art Gallery, and diverse offerings of the Marshall Artists Series, offers a vast array of opportunities for students to have first-hand experiences with the arts. Moreover, students are encouraged to attend arts events beyond campus including (but not limited to) the Huntington Symphony Orchestra, the Huntington Museum of Art, and various community theatre groups. Graduating student satisfaction surveys conducted annually by the University continue to point to very high satisfaction with arts and cultural opportunities for our students. In fact, this category routinely scores as the highest or second highest item on the survey.

Ongoing review of syllabi tells us that the consistency with common learning outcomes for all students can be improved upon. This becomes all the more important with our new assessment strategy aimed at scoring student papers. Relatively large numbers of part-time faculty and an increasingly greater number of graduate teaching assistants serving as instructors in arts appreciation challenges the chairs' abilities to insure consistency. While these folks are dedicated teachers and constitute some of our best teachers, the department chairs find it difficult to monitor and guide them as much as we would like. However, the department chairs are implementing some mentoring activities and are promoting stronger associations between full-time faculty and the part-time faculty and graduate assistants who are teaching greater numbers of classes at all levels, including arts appreciation.

Several years ago we addressed aging and inadequate equipment in all arts appreciation classrooms. However, the challenge of maintaining visual resources (photographic slides, videos, etc.) for art appreciation classes is problematic, and represents a significant challenge and threatens the quality of course offerings in that area. Building on a consultative report from 2002, the art department is working to create a digital library of visual resources and will enter into a partnership with the Drinko Library and the Faculty Development Committee for Online and Multimedia Instruction to purchase a subscription to ArtStor Digital Library. 300,000 images will be available to our teachers by late fall 2004, and by 2006 that number will increase to 500,000.

In an effort to assess our effectiveness with the fourth learning goal - to provide direct experiences with works of fine art in the exhibition and performance setting to allow students the opportunity for self interpretation and evaluation of art - COFA looks at overall student attendance figures for the Marshall Artists Series (MAS) and for MU Theatre. It is difficult to identify student audience for the Birke Art Gallery, as counts are taken daily, but there is no way to distinguish

between students and others who might be visiting the gallery. The multiple, free to the public, music events offered by the Department of Music make it impossible to count students as well.

Student attendance is strong at arts events at Marshall. Clearly, the number of opportunities for students to attend arts events is impressive, and our students take advantage of those opportunities. All arts appreciation classes require attendance at arts events.

II. BOT Initiative 2

Essential skills emphasized in arts appreciation courses include effective written communication skills, critical thinking, appreciation for the arts, and the need for life-long learning. Course content in all sections of arts appreciation classes stress these skills, and over time, the data collected will allow us to measure reasonably well our effectiveness in helping to develop these skills in Marshall students.

III. Plans for the current year

We will work to refine the process we now have in place to collect student writing and to score it. We will establish benchmarks against which to measure those scores.

Department chairs will continue to hold meetings prior to the beginning of every term with appreciation faculty. Learning goals should be reaffirmed, syllabi will be reviewed, and programmatic assessment strategies discussed in order to underscore the importance of collecting materials for assessment review.

IV. Assistance needed

We will request that the costs of paying readers be funded by the Office of Program Review and Assessment.

V. Most important thing learned

COFA is struggling with finding meaningful assessment in arts appreciation.