

COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS
Assessment Report
Fine Arts Competency
General Education

September 2005

I. Assessment Activities

A. Component area goals

The College of Fine Arts (COFA), 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

Learning outcomes for arts appreciation classes are: (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.

Since 1997, the college has used a number of strategies to determine how well we accomplish the learning goals. Beginning with the spring 2004 semester, we initiated a new assessment strategy for all arts appreciation classes modeled after assessment strategies for English composition classes. Initial results indicated that we had much work to do to refine the process before we could begin to have a better understanding of how well or not so well we were achieving some of the stated outcomes. Those refinements continue, but we feel that data gathered from spring 2005 classes is probably a bit more reliable because our process is cleaner.

Working with the Office of Institutional Research, we randomly identify six students per section of appreciation. A writing sample from each student is collected and turned in by his or her teacher. Papers are collated by discipline (art, music, theatre) and two readers are hired for each discipline to read all the papers from the respective disciplines.

Readers are given an evaluation matrix and asked to “score” individual papers. Matrixes consist of the learning goals that are discipline specific - faculty in each of the three departments have established “universal” learning goals for arts appreciation classes in their respective disciplines which are consistent with the 4 overall learning outcomes stated above for all arts appreciation students. Syllabi for all sections taught list the learning goals and course outlines are structured to address the goals.

Readers’ results are turned in to the college’s associate dean, who is responsible for quantifying data. The AD distributes and helps interpret data for the department chairs. Chairs are responsible for sharing aggregate data with appreciation faculty in their respective departments as well as individual data with each instructor. To the extent that it is possible with what is still inconclusive data (three semesters of data), chairs are expected to address problem areas with individual faculty. Moreover, discussions with the full cadre of departmental faculty teaching appreciation are held at appropriate intervals to make sure learning goals are appropriate and to address any programmatic weaknesses.

Attached are the quantified results of each reader’s scores for the three semesters COFA has used this assessment method, with the most recent scores – spring 2005 – in bold. Papers are scored on a scale of 1-4 with four being the highest. It is evident that scores vary considerably between readers of any particular discipline. We have not pre-tested for reliability between readers of a discipline nor have we pursued using third readers to resolve discrepancies.

C. Results

Any conclusions drawn from this initial evaluation of student writing from arts appreciation classes is sketchy at best. We do know that a couple of significant procedural problems still exist. Clearly, there remain some faculty who don’t fully understand the process. Writing samples vary from lengthier papers to brief writing prompts, and for obvious reasons, the more fully developed papers are generally going to provide us with much better information. It appears that some papers turned in come from early in the semester. Also, the matrix for scoring papers the music faculty developed was not well suited to determining to what extent students were mastering stated objectives.

The dean’s office and the chairs continue to try to help faculty understand the process. Efforts have been increased to encourage faculty to turn in papers with broad enough scope to demonstrate whether or not learning goals are being achieved, and also to make sure papers come from later in the semester. The music department redesigned the matrix used for scoring papers for the spring 2005 and it now better reflects the learning goals of the course.

Caution with what we still consider preliminary data notwithstanding, some

thoughts can be formulated about the effectiveness of arts appreciation and student achievement relative to learning goals 1-3

Faculty teaching theatre appreciation appear to be achieving greater success with outcomes. Modest improvement in scores from art and music suggest that chairs and faculty are looking carefully at the information the assessment process is providing and doing a better job of working with faculty teaching these courses.

However, we feel that there are not yet valid discernable trends in the data. A faculty member whose students may score high in one section may score low in another, and there is certainly no significant continuity from one semester to the next. The added concern of widely varying scores by readers of the same papers causes the college to look at the data and information with caution.

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 – the fourth learning goal. 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.

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.

Ongoing review of syllabi tells us that the consistency with common learning outcomes for all students has been 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.

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

Work will continue on refining the process we now have in place to collect and score student writing. 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. Follow-up sessions with faculty, as a group and individually, will be held to review assessment data. Improvement strategies will be developed as needed.

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 takes this process seriously and we know we have keep at it.

Spring 2005 Appreciation Assessment Report

Spring 2005 Theatre Appreciation 112 – Assessment Report

29 Total Papers – 4/4 sections

Average Total Score	Readers #1 St. G.	3.06	Reader #2 H	2.76	30 total papers
(Fall 04)		(3.17)		(2.54)	
(Spring 04)		(2.46)		(1.95)	

Spring 2005 Art Appreciation 112 – Assessment Report

56 Total Papers – 8/10 sections

Average Total Score	Reader #1 H	2.66	Reader #2 K	1.99	56 Total papers
(Fall 04)		(2.30)		(1.93)	
(Spring 04)		(2.58)		(1.91)	

Spring 2005 Music Appreciation 142 – Assessment Report

58 Total Papers – 9/10 sections

Average Total Score	Reader #1 T	2.13	Reader #2 W	2.71*	71 Total papers
(Fall 04)		(1.89)		(2.48)	
(Spring 04)		(1.68)		(2.10)	

* Music reader #2 only graded 7/9 sections writing: one section's papers were much too short to evaluate and the other section's papers were from the very beginning of the semester and could not possibly address the objectives of the class
(compiled August 12, 2005)