

COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS
Assessment Report
Fine Arts Competency
General Education

September 2006

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 stated outcomes. Last year we reported that we were making some progress in the area of data gathering, and while we continue to feel that we have a more reliable process, we continue to confront challenges with collecting valid assessment tools.

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. 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 that are identified by the assessment process.

Attached are the quantified results of each reader’s scores for the five semesters COFA has used this assessment method, with the most recent scores – spring 2006 – 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

Significant procedural problems still plagued our assessment methodology. Clearly, there remain some faculty who don’t fully understand the process. The associate dean and chairs have worked diligently to address these problems. However, a regularly changing cadre of teachers makes this especially challenging. Although less of a problem than in previous semesters, we continue to get writing samples that vary from lengthier papers to brief writing prompts. Assigned topics for papers range from specific questions that are tied closely to objectives to much more abstract concepts that are loosely aligned to objectives. While all paper topics are all appropriate to these classes, some are better suited to assessment strategies than others. Papers continue to be turned in from earlier in the semester although this problem is becoming less of an issue as we have made substantial efforts to make sure faculty understand that papers completed at or near the end of a semester are going to serve as much better measurements of comprehensive learning and the response is generally positive. We learned in 2004 that the scoring matrix used for music papers was not useful and a new matrix was developed and used in 2005-2006 that more effectively determines how well stated objectives are being met.

We still consider much of the data to be preliminary in nature, but 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. Scores on papers from sections of theatre appreciation have steadily improved. The faculty who teach theatre appreciation remain the same (for the most part) from one semester to the next, making easier the work of the associate dean and theatre chair with the faculty to strengthen these courses.

Modest improvements in scores from art and music that we had seen over the first three semesters using these assessment strategies have stalled, and in fact, we now see deterioration in those scores. Reasons for these trends are many, not the least of which is constant changes in who is teaching appreciation classes in art and music. Enrollment demands and pressures are causing chairs in those two departments to have to shift personnel routinely in contrast to the relative stability that theatre enjoys. Confusion about the assessment process has been high in these two departments, due in part to the constant shifting of personnel.

We are not ready to say that there are major instructional problems in art and music appreciation. Steps have been taken to identify faculty who can serve as coordinators of appreciation and we think these individuals will provide much needed continuity that is currently missing. That lack of continuity is responsible to some degree for the apparent back sliding of readers' scores for art and music appreciation. Moreover, both departments are working on reviewing objectives and testing techniques to make sure that necessary parallels exist to insure valid measures of success/lack of success.

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.

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 improve the cohesive quality of faculty teaching art and music appreciation, using theatre faculty as the model. This will not be easy and cohesion will not occur overnight as the challenges are substantial.

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

Maintaining consistency in faculty teaching multiple sections of the same course is critical to achieving valid assessment outcomes. Because it is likely we won't achieve much consistency in art and music, we have to be much more proactive with faculty who filter in and out of the rotation of appreciation courses to make sure they understand assessment processes and why we conduct assessment.