

## **Annual Assessment Report Summaries**

**2014-2015**

### **Biology**

The department of biology has completed a pilot review of our students' proficiency in scientific literacy – specifically, each student's ability to 1. accurately interpret the results and conclusions of research articles, 2. correctly employ proper practices in regard to experimental design, and 3. properly present their own investigative findings in an organized and comprehensive fashion. The assessment was conducted via the use of a department-generated rubric. Our findings suggest that first year students exhibit limited skills, but as they mature through their first three years of coursework, their skills do improve toward a departmentally established definition of exemplary proficiency. From this initial study, we have opted to emphasize particular aspects of literacy (notably, experimental design and graphical/tabular presentation of data) as we reflect on our course designs.

### **Economics**

During the last week of classes last December all the members of the Economics Department collaborated in the scoring of 14 Senior Project oral presentations according to a rubric reflecting our student learning goals. This was the first time this particular rubric was employed. On average, our students demonstrated a high level of strong achievement in all the examined areas. The dispersion of the scores was small. Considered individually, slightly more than four out of every five assessed presentations received an aggregate mean score of either “strong” or very “strong”. The pedagogical and curricular implications of this exercise are under discussion. The strategies to close the feedback loop would be related of our ongoing efforts on curricular reform.

### **Educational Studies**

Revised state rules have demanded that teacher education students seeking licensure with an elementary level endorsement master more robust content in the science and social science areas. We thus decided to pay specific attention to our students' performance on the elementary level content test in this area. Not surprisingly, students' scores demonstrated a wider range of achievement than was true in other content areas, although their mean scores were above those in the language arts, and arts and literacy categories. The department, in response to the revision in state rules, is emphasizing through the advising process, the necessity of students' meeting the enhanced social science state requirements through additional general education coursework where necessary. The results noted above emphasize the need for the department to continue to monitor this policy to determine its long-term effectiveness.

The other two student learning goals that we chose to emphasize for 2014-2015, planning for differentiated instruction, and assessment of student learning are also goals emphasized by the state of Illinois, as constituting essential elements of teacher preparation. The planning process is not one that is intuitive; it requires close mentoring and extensive revision prior to and during the student teaching experience. In addition, planning with reference to Universal Design principles is extremely important, given the necessity of making accommodations for one's classroom students' individual learning needs. Such principles are covered extensively in The Exceptional Child course, in upper division curriculum courses, and during one's student teaching. While the results

with regard to this goal were quite positive, we again need to continue to evaluate our effectiveness in helping our students master the competencies involved in planning for differentiated instruction.

The State of Illinois emphasizes the importance of teachers' not only developing and administering effective assessments, but expects that they will use the data gathered from those assessments to inform their instructional strategies. At Illinois Wesleyan, we have worked hard to embed principles of assessment and evaluation of assessment results within our curriculum courses and it is assuring to note the positive results apparent within the final student teaching evaluation measure, the senior exit survey, and more generally, within the Assessment of Professional Teaching external examination. This too is an area we will continue to monitor but we don't see a need to radically change our own instructional approach at this time.

### Conclusion

All three measures provided strong evidence that we are meeting our learning goals. For the most part, the concerns that influenced the selection of the learning goals to assess for 2014-2015 were adequately addressed, although these concerns are of a longstanding nature as they are somewhat generic to teacher education programs of all types. It will take some time to analyze the lasting impact of recent curricular changes within the department, such as the creation of The Exceptional Child course and additional general education course recommendations that address science and social science competency. However, the department will certainly embark upon such analyses in future years.

### English

During the 2014-2015 academic year, the unit began its effort to assess student learning outcomes in its foundations course for the major: Practical Criticism (English 280). Employing a revised rubric devised by members of the unit in summer, 2013, the unit assessed one set of argumentative papers from 3 sections of the same course. The data reveal that, in general, students in Practical Criticism are creating work assessed predominantly as "developing." This information will be factored into the unit's ongoing conversation about revisions to the sophomore-level curriculum and into discussions about expectations of the unit's professors offering 300-level classes.

### Environmental Studies

The ES Program assessed whether ES majors have gained skills in collaborative engagement with community members to advance environmental sustainability (Goal #9), using results from three different measures collected in April 2015: 1) seven of eight community partners for the eight ES seniors enrolled in ENST 480 Senior Seminar completed an assessment rubric with five performance categories of these students' research projects; 2) four supervisors for the four ES majors enrolled in ENST 397 Internships completed an evaluation form which was then grouped into six performance categories for these students; and 3) eight graduating seniors completed a Senior Exit Survey which included a question about their perception of achieving skills in collaborative engagement. The three measures all employed a similar "1-to-5" scale 6 where "1=unacceptable or not-at-all" and "5=outstanding".

For the seven ENST 480 students, the mean score for all five performance categories was 3.69 (SD +/- 1.32). This suggests that, while some individual students in ENST 480 met the goal of achieving collaborative engagement skills, others achieved this only marginally. For the four ES majors in ENST 397 the average score in all six performance categories rated by their internship

supervisors was 4.53 (SD +/- 0.31). This suggests that ES majors with internships (ENST 397) met the goal of achieving collaborative engagement skills with community members in the range of “very good” to “outstanding”. On the Senior Exit Survey, the eight graduating ES seniors reported perceptions of their achievement of collaborative engagement skills at an average of 3.38 (SD +/- 1.06), thus slightly above “3=satisfactorily” but below “4=well”.

Overall the findings suggest that ES majors enrolled in internships (ENST 397) acquire considerable collaborative engagement skills, along with some ES seniors in ENST 480 with their community research projects. However, results from both community partner scores for ENST 480 and students’ perceptions on the Senior Exit Survey suggest that the ES Program should look for opportunities to improve collaborative engagement skills with the community around sustainability.

### **Greek & Roman Studies**

In 2014-15 the GRS steering committee assessed our majors’ Writing Portfolios overall, with close assessment of senior seminar (GRS 499) papers for content mastery, research competence, and writing comprehension, which fall under GRS goals #2-4. Our second aim was to rewrite our StrAP with meaningful but manageable annual assessment tasks. We also collected data on our majors’ language proficiency (GRS goal #1) for future assessment. For the GRS 499 papers and language assessment, we used direct assessment instruments written from our goals to be well-targeted and dependable. We implemented a Google Docs folder shared among the GRS steering committee to store the most recent versions of the instruments. For the GRS 499 papers, each member of the steering committee assessed each of 6 papers, and the GRS Assessment Liaison collected the data into a spreadsheet. The steering committee analyzed the spreadsheet during meetings in Dec. 2014 and April 2015. The data for GRS 499 papers showed that our students over the last five years have struggled to complete their final drafts within one semester, and average scores on individual assessment criteria were lower on drafts than on revised papers. Revised papers demonstrated improvement to proficient levels (2.0 or higher) on all criteria. Even in draft papers, however, our majors scored proficient (2.0) or higher on the average of all criteria, which demonstrates that they are meeting our goals for them. Overall, we learned that GRS offers a similar senior seminar experience to related humanities departments. To assist our students in finishing their projects within one semester, we reorganized the timeline for GRS 499 to reflect writing as a process. Our department’s future assessment plans are written into the revised StrAP 2015, and we also revised the Writing Portfolio to better align with our expectations for, and assessment of, students’ work.

### **Hispanic Studies**

In Spring 2015 the Hispanic Studies Department assessed the writing and critical thinking abilities of graduating seniors using a department-wide direct measure. Overall, our seniors have strong critical thinking skills as evidenced through writing. Hispanic Studies is considering changes that need to be made to the curriculum to replace the previous capstone experience (Senior Seminar) that has been eliminated with another form of this experience. Faculty continue to serve as role models in the target language as we communicate with students outside of class and actively discuss with majors the many opportunities available to them to work on their Spanish writing and critical thinking skills.

## **Political Science**

The students' performances overall were good, if not necessarily great. This year's findings will provide a baseline against which we can work in assessing similar papers in the summer of 2016. The range of ability certainly tells us that we have work to do in teaching students to identify how political actors' preferences and behaviors are shaped by institutions, that is, how institutions work. Some of this might be accomplished more effectively by being more explicit in our classroom discussions. We might also advance this goal by asking students to write specifically about what institutions are relevant in a given topic area and how, specifically, they function. Naturally, we want to be careful to not transform our curriculum into something that mainly serves the purpose of assessment and only secondarily conveys the topical material we want to teach. We will discuss this as a department in the fall of 2015 and look forward to repeating this exercise next year.

As for the rubric, because both pairs of readers found the last two components not to be useful (the paper's thesis is clearly identifiable, and the institution under discussion is clearly identifiable), we will remove these from the rubric.

## **Psychology**

This past year we assessed the following student learning goals: 1) the learning of key concepts in our psychology 100 class, 2) the development of effective writing skills and the understanding of scientific methodology and 3) preparation for career planning. The data suggests students overall were successful in demonstrating these learning goals. Direct measures suggest students demonstrated knowledge of most subfields in Psychology. Direct measures suggest students have developed effective writing skills and understand scientific methodology. The data especially show a demonstrable increase in performance on these measures as students progress towards their senior year. One potential area for improvement is to increase effectiveness in these areas for our first and second year students. Lastly, this year's assessment data suggests we provide effective career planning to our students, especially in a group setting, but there needs to be a greater emphasis on individual career planning advising.

## **Religion**

As a result of our deliberations it became clear, that our goal, "fluency in the critical study of religion" was too vague, or that the faculty did not all mean the same thing by this. As a result, we entered into discussions about how we might make our own assumptions as faculty about the learning goal transparent in order to better discuss, teach, and assess this in a uniform matter going forward.

We decided to change the senior seminar. Rather than trying to meet all the criteria in one final project, we will break it up into two. The first assignment will deal with a writing assignment from a textbook that reviews the history of the field of religious studies and recounts various theories. We will ask students to offer a writing assignment comparing two theorists: Compare and contrast any two theorists in Pals regarding how they understand religion and how it fits into their larger methodological projects.

The subsequent categories will focus primarily on the larger research paper. In short, while we agree with the larger learning goal of "fluency in the critical study of religion" we have now broken it up into four subpoints that are inextricably linked, but which can be attended to in

different assignments. Thus, “fluency in the critical study of religion” can itself be broken down into:

1. Demonstrate a sense of awareness of the larger frame of inquiry specific to the topic. [dominant methods, sources etc in the field, what field and subfield is this located]
2. Appropriately engage and cite other scholarly works. [annotated bibliography etc, who are the scholars invested in this topic, what are they talking about, what claims are they making]
3. Demonstrate an awareness of the difference between scholarly and confessional sources.
4. Demonstrate an awareness of his or her perspectival standing in relation to the material being studied [which loops back to #1], how is the student related to the topic, what sort of methods area appropriate for approaching this issue]]

### **School of Music**

The School of Music tested two different tools for collecting data about student performances in juries, the playing exams presented by each student at the end of each semester of study. The rubrics used were varied in terms of the number of aspects of performance to be evaluated. As the School of Music moves ahead with multi-dimensional evaluations in juries, rubrics will continue to be customized for each applied area.

The students who were evaluated in this round of juries demonstrated strong skills in various areas of performance that were under review in each applied area. Juries will continue to be a part of the ongoing assessment efforts by the School of Music.

### **School of Nursing**

The School of Nursing Curriculum Committee formed a workgroup to examine the effectiveness of critical thinking evaluation and curricular modifications that could enhance critical thinking. Half of the School of Nursing Fall Retreat held August 16, 2013, was devoted to reviewing the CCTDI, including the 7 factors that comprise the subscales, and discussing ways to modify existing teaching tools used in classroom and in clinical to enhance critical thinking. The retreat was attended by all School of Nursing faculty and professional staff and included a 2 hour presentation by Drs. Lisa Searing, Wendy Kookken, and Noel Kerr on best practices in nursing education to evidence critical thinking followed by an experiential exercise allowing all faculty to modify at least one learning exercise used in a Fall course. The outcome of the meeting was that every faculty member revised at least one learning tool for a Fall 2013 class that made the tenets of critical thinking more overt in an assignment. A decision to retain the CCTDI was made to assure analysis across decades of data and because no superior direct measure was identified. Discussion began about how to incorporate CCTDI results into academic advising; this plan was further developed at the Fall 2014 Retreat.

At the 2014 retreat, Drs. Searing, Kookken, and Kerr provided additional data analysis and reviewed alternative critical thinking tools to consider as additional direct measures. Focus was placed on discussing the impact adding language that promoted critical thinking to assignments was evidenced in each clinical course. Consensus was reached by the School of Nursing continue using the CCTDI in the 2015-2016 academic year.

### **School of Theatre Arts**

SoTA used multi-faceted, program level rubrics fully for the first time in last year's Assessment cycle, which showed the faculty that the rubrics can work to assess individual student development, a snapshot in time for individual learning outcomes. However, used at this "big picture" level, those rubrics would be too broad, encompassing too many variables to be usefully actionable programmatically. As SoTA faculty mentors we chose this cycle to adopt the singular trait model that the BFA Music Theatre degree piloted last cycle. This approach provides a powerful singular look at an aspect of student training and outcomes.

Prior to the completion of this report, the SoTA faculty met and discussed the data. The group agreed that the numbers shed light on some issues which may deserve attention in the short term. However, the faculty also agreed that, given the small sample numbers from group to group, it is important not to jump to conclusions, and that, to achieve an accurate impression, we should observe data based on related assessment traits longitudinally.

That said, examining a single performance trait yielded useful information for faculty to adjust training for following terms. For example it has become quite clear, from focusing on the "organized collection and development of visual work as applied to portfolio development," that most BFA DT majors are developing a coherent and presentable portfolio at level. Alternatively, in the case of the BA freshman cohort, it may be necessary to adjust the delivery of critical content related to "concept and the interpretive act" in the first semester, to encourage early advancement on the developmental continuum.

The jury resulted in true assessment outcomes used for teaching/training enhancement that wasn't an opinion or hearsay, but rather a trait that had been identified and specifically looked at during the jury event. The School of Theatre Arts believes this model to be ideal for "closing the loop" and in the future intends to carry this model of fine-grained assessment, discussion, and curricular adjustment into all areas of our curriculum.

### **Sociology**

In AY 2013-2014, the sociology program undertook an assessment of our 2013 senior writing, in order to measure one aspect of our student learning goals, that students can "complete an original research paper from conceptualization to analysis and reporting." Because this research paper consists of many distinct skills, we developed a rubric that can measure the most important elements of students' senior seminar papers. We then used that rubric to score student papers, and examined our results in aggregate. In doing so, we found that students were lacking in 4 of the 12 skills needed to achieve this student learning goal. As such, we collaborated in order to agree upon common assignment types in our 100-, 200-, and 300-level courses, with the hope that a future re-assessment will demonstrate improvement for future cohorts. Our assessment work in AY 2014-2015 was an examination of our own course materials to ensure that these assignments were in fact being implemented. In the coming academic year, 2015-2016, we will re-assess senior work in order to determine whether our efforts have achieved the desired impact on those student learning outcomes.