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2013-14 Annual Assessment Report Summaries

Assessment Committee, Illinois Wesleyan University

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Annual Assessment Report Summaries AY 2013-14

School of Art

During the 2013/2014 academic year we concentrated on the first of our four student learning goals:
Creating works

Our main direct method of assessment was a visual portfolio review coupled with an interview of each 4th semester sophomores. This was the first time that we had conducted this review for at least 15 years. In the past students had to actually hang an exhibition of their work in some venue on campus. A large group review of the work in the company of all of their peers and the faculty was the culmination of this process. We then would send each student a progress report. Due to the large number of participating students and the logistics of getting the exhibitions hung, this was an onerous task for both the students and the faculty. With digital access to visual work, and an unfortunately smaller number of students, this was a refreshing change from the old way of critiquing. As before, we sent each student a progress report. The process revealed some things about our sophomores that we didn't know. The number of designers has declined when compared to the students who have decided to pursue fine art. There was also a universal request for an illustration course that features both hand drawn and digital image making.

Biology

This AAR presents data from a locally designed Likert-type scale survey taken by our graduating seniors during the 2013-2014 academic year. For this assessment, students were asked to respond to a series of statements that addressed all aspects of the Biology department's learning goals. Overall, students had a positive reaction to all their learning experiences, with at least 89% responding that they "agree" or strongly agree" that the department provided them learning experiences that reflect the learning goals for the department. Despite these positive results, our department cited two areas that require our attention – our students' proficiency in interpreting primary literature and our ability to motivate students to independently explore biological areas of interest beyond what is presented in their coursework. Both of these can be addressed by efforts to improve our students' scientific literacy, which is the subject of our assessment analysis for the 2014-2015 academic year. Further analysis of the aptitude our senior students will be addressed using additional, directed measures which are currently under development.

Computer Science

The Department of Computer Science administers the Major Field Test to graduating seniors. Results of the test are reported in three different categories: percentile of individual results, percentile of mean results, and percentile of subscores in three central areas of computer science. This report concentrates on the 2014 graduating class. While our number of majors is growing, we are currently still graduating relatively small classes. This year's class had 6 students. The large difference between individual scores makes generalizations of our results difficult. With larger graduating classes over the next several years, it will be easier to draw meaningful conclusions from the data.

Economics

Over one and a half days in early June all the members of the Economics Department collaborated in the scoring of 22 Senior Project papers according to a rubric reflecting three of our student learning goals. The same rubric was employed during the assessment exercise conducted over the last two years. 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 less than three quarters of the assessed papers received an aggregate mean score of either “strong” or very “strong”. The pedagogical and curricular implications of this exercise continue to be refined. These strategies to close the feedback loop would be extensions of last year’s efforts. Finally, the evidence accumulated through our repeated assessment exercises will inform some aspects of our ongoing self-study.

Educational Studies

Six student learning goals were selected for assessment during the 2013-14 academic year: five of the goals addressed professional competencies required of the State of Illinois for licensure in all programs, one of the goals addressed the dispositions reflective of the Educational Studies department mission. The direct measures used to assess the student learning goals included state examinations in content areas and in pedagogy and professional competency, and a final student evaluation, constructed by the Educational Studies faculty and assessed by the University supervisor. The department senior exit survey was used as an indirect measure and the data from all instruments was collected and analyzed on an individual and comparative basis. There was strong congruence in the results among all of the measures employed. The results themselves do not indicate a need to change what we are doing. However, changes in state rules will require that we vigilantly monitor student progress with particular regard to social science and science content area mastery at the elementary level, and resource constraints will put pressure on the department to insure that student success in addressing these learning goals remains robust.

English

During the 2013-2014 academic year, the English department began its effort to assess student learning in its creative writing sequence. Employing a program-wide rubric devised by members of the English department in summer, 2013, the department assessed significant, end-of-semester projects by upper-level writing students. Student work from three out of the four upper-level writing courses offered in the 2013-2014 academic year were assessed by course instructors. The data reveal that, overall, students at the 300-level are creating work assessed as “developing,” while students at the 400-level are creating work assessed as “mastering.” Overall, the English department is pleased with these initial findings; however, in the interests of advancing student achievement, it plans to undertake the following initiatives: clarify and enforce prerequisites in creative writing courses (thus, ensuring that each individual course can best serve its students); include students much more fully into discussions about the creative writing curriculum; include creative writing courses in the department’s ongoing conversation about revisions to the sophomore-level curriculum; improve advising for creative writing students with advising webpages focused on navigating the curriculum and introducing students to the business of the writing life; consider the benefits of a portfolio system for creative writing students; and continue to revise assessment strategies to make assessment more dependable and nuanced.

Environmental Studies

We devised an objective exam that tested Environmental Studies (ES) majors on basic ecological concepts that underlie many of the Earth's environmental problems. A "Pre-enrollment" test was administered to 20 students enrolled in the introductory ENST/BIOL 120 on the first day of class during the spring semester, 2014. An identical "Post-Enrollment" test was administered to nine graduating senior ES majors at the end of the spring semester, 2014. The scores on the Pre-enrollment and Post-enrollment tests were then compared and a statistical analysis of the data was performed. On the Pre-enrollment test, only 15% of the students scored as high or higher than 78% (7/9 correct answers), while more than three-fourths of the graduating ES seniors scored as high or higher than 78% on the Post-enrollment test. The average Post-enrollment exam score (75%) was significantly higher than the average Pre-enrollment exam score (61%; $P = 0.002$). The results of this analysis indicate that students have gained knowledge of basic ecological principles from the introductory Environmental Studies courses they have taken at IWU. An understanding of these principles is necessary in order for Illinois Wesleyan graduates to help to solve many of the pressing environmental problems faced by humanity today.

German

During the 2013-2014 academic year, the German Studies section of the Department of German, Russian, and Asian Languages continued to implement the direct measure of STAMP testing at the level of German 301 Advanced German and also for graduating seniors. The STAMP test stands for Standards Based Measurement of Proficiency, was developed by the University of Oregon and is now sold by Avant Assessment. It is a nationally recognized method of assessment testing. The STAMP test assesses the modalities of speaking, reading, and writing. The STAMP test results are reported on a scale that corresponds to the ACTFL proficiency guidelines that we use for our goals. After having assessed the results with two years of data for Ger 301, we are happy with the results. All students fell within the category of 4-5 in reading, writing, and speaking with a few exceptions in reading that we find fairly statistically insignificant due to the nature of the score. Category 4 is the equivalent of Intermediate Low and Category 5 is Intermediate Mid. Our goal for Ger 301 is Intermediate Low to Intermediate Mid. A goal range is necessary depending on student prior experience before Ger 301.

We also implemented the first round of testing for our graduating seniors. Due to budget cuts, we will no longer be able to offer the STAMP test in future years. For this reason and also the test-course correlation challenges above, we have decided to focus on the reading skills of our graduating seniors in the coming 2-3 years. Our current goal at graduation is Advanced Low. We will also likely assess the 301-level again, so that we will be able to compare the 5th year with the graduation year. Because pursuing an assessment of reading will be rather time-consuming, we will forgo the study abroad assessment mentioned in last year's AAP for the time being, in order to devote our full efforts to an assessment of the development of reading skills in our program. These plans are the next step in closing the feedback loop from the STAMP testing that we did in 2012-2014.

Greek and Roman Studies

From 2013-14, GRS assessed how effectively our students learn and apply information literacy skills, which falls under GRS Goal #2 that students “comprehend and demonstrate the ability to use primary and secondary sources and reference tools” in the study of Greek and Roman topics. We collected library assignments from Hum 101 and Hist. 120 in Fall 2013 and assessed them using either a dedicated rubric or holistically. After writing reports on their own qualitative assessments, A. Coles and N. Sultan met to discuss the results and formulate an action plan. We discovered that, after a library session led by K. Schmidt or M. Miner, our students learn how to use the library’s resources, find books and articles, cite them, know the difference between primary and secondary sources, and assess the value of websites and sources. The library assignments from each class reinforce the lessons of the library session, but Amy’s and Nancy’s assignments are each unique, which is appropriate as long as the aims of Goal #2 are fulfilled. Overall, we find the combination of a library session and assignment enables students to meet our Goal #2, and we will continue to employ these methods in the future. Regrettably, because we did not use the library exercise rubric to assess both exercises this year, we cannot address whether it is well-targeted and dependable. In five years, the GRS Steering Committee will again assess information literacy and will make sure to use the rubric across the board. This year, GRS also created an online version of our Study Abroad Survey, so we can collect our students’ responses more easily in the future for indirect assessment.

Hispanic Studies

From Spring 2012 to Spring 2014, the Hispanic Studies Department assessed the oral communication abilities of graduating seniors using a direct measure. For two years we used a program-wide oral production activity simulating the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview, which we call a Modified Oral Proficiency Interview (MOPI). For the third year we used an external evaluator dedicated to assessing language proficiency that also used a MOPI. On balance, our seniors have high oral communication skills. Hispanic Studies has decided that no changes need to be made to the curriculum. However, 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 maintain their Spanish language skills including work study in the LRC, internships, Spanish club activities, and volunteer opportunities in the B-N community. One example is that we have begun to strongly recommend to our graduating senior majors to apply for Hispanic Studies tutor positions. In these positions they work with lower-level proficiency students (~80 students per semester) in our mandatory, weekly conversation sessions, among other duties. In these sessions, not only do they help less advanced students, but they also work on their interpersonal speaking skills.

History

In 2013-14 the History Department assessed our students’ writing abilities at the History 290 level, when the students have just learned responsible historical analysis, and after they had taken three 300-level History courses, when they should be ready for History 490, our senior seminar. Our overall assessment goal was to determine whether our students learned historical writing skills at the lower level and improved them at the upper level so that they were prepared for senior seminar. Using our “Assessment Tool for Student Papers,” three professors assessed each of 22 student papers collected in Spring 2013. Our instrument measures our learning goals B-E, which deal with critical thinking, practical research,

written communication, and secondary source critique. The assessment liaison compiled information for each of the criteria on our instrument separately, so we could more easily identify specific problem areas. The results were that our overall assessment of 290 papers (on a scale from 1 to 5) averaged at 3.5 and 300-level papers at 3.9, which equates to 'adequate-plus'. This means we think our students are meeting our goals and improve from 290 to the 300 level. Moving forward, each professor is encouraged to focus his or her individual 300-level courses on different problem areas we discovered, such as critique of secondary sources or using sources in argumentation. This will expose students to concentrated practice of different skills as they take the required three 300-level courses. We also learned that assessors are approaching some criteria on our tool differently, so we will refine the instructions to remind us to adhere to the same methodology. Finally, in addition to the same sort of quantitative assessment we performed this year, next year we plan a qualitative discussion of what we expect from our students in History 490.

Mathematics

The results of both direct and indirect measures indicate that we continue to successfully meet our goals and produce graduates who are well prepared in their major. We are especially pleased with our success in meeting Goal 2, which addresses conceptual development. This is also reflected in our majors' favorable comments, which focused on that aspect of their development. While we have achieved some measure of success in reaching our goals, we acknowledge the need to articulate our goals more clearly and to discuss them with our students, especially the goals pertaining to constructing and testing conjectures and to relating mathematics to practical problems.

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 well as which specific students were to be included in the results. Discussions about the strengths and weaknesses of the two assessment instruments resulted in agreement about the rubric that will be used going forward.

In general, the students who were evaluated in this round of juries demonstrated strong skills in the area of technical proficiency (the aspect of playing which was the focus of this assessment effort) and in particular when sorted by curriculum – BA music, BM and BME. Also, one jury found that students in their applied area demonstrated developing skills in the area of intonation. Those faculty members plan to bring additional focus to bear on that skill in lessons and technical exams in order to further strengthen those skills, and to continue to evaluate intonation, among other aspects of performance, in the next rounds of juries.

Juries will continue to be a part of the ongoing assessment efforts by the School of Music. A rubric with broader focus will be implemented in the next round of evaluations and will be targeted specifically toward the achievements of our senior majors.

Philosophy

In 2013-2014, we focused on our:

- *Knowledge Goals:* The Philosophy Department aims to assist students in developing an understanding of perennial philosophical problems, (e.g., the nature of reality, the conditions for knowledge, and the source of value), the scope and significance of these problems, and their treatment by historical philosophers (e.g., Plato, Descartes, Hume) as well as by contemporary philosophers (e.g., Stroud, Nagel, Korsgaard).
- *Assessment Measures.*
 - An exit survey given to all graduating majors and minors
 - An external review of the portfolios we ask our graduating majors and minors to submit
- *Summary of Data.*
 - Exit surveys. Students believe the department helps them achieve our knowledge goals.
 - External review of portfolios. The external reviewer gave each paper a score of 1 through 5 (1 for Strongly Disagree through 5 for Strongly Agree) in response to seven different statements. The average score for all 15 papers was above 3.5 for 6 out of these 7 statements.
- *Evaluation of Data.* The tenure-track members of the department review the exit survey responses and the external reviewer's report. They discuss all of this material and to decide what changes, if any, to make in response.
- *What We Learned.* Our students believe they are meeting our knowledge goals, but we need to make significant revisions to our knowledge goals rubric.
- *What We Have Done and Plan to Do.* We have hired a tenure-track philosopher of science, broadened our course offerings, especially in contemporary areas, and we are making significant revisions to our knowledge goals rubric.

Political Science

The members of the Political Science faculty elected to assess student learning in two ways during the 2013/14 academic year. We examined senior seminar papers, the capstone experience, to assess students' ability to write good quality research papers. We also assessed shorter, argumentative papers from an upper-level political theory class to evaluate students' ability to develop and elaborate claims supported with cogent reasoning and relevant evidence. This document reports our assessment methods and findings for this past academic year and spells out some of the responses we plan to make in light of these findings.

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

There are several factors that contributed to a situation in which assessment as planned did not take place. In addition to an ongoing search, the long-standing chair was on sabbatical. In this context, there was a lack of communication between the interim chair and the assessment liaison.

This failure in communication has made it clear to the members of the Religion Department that assessment has not been embedded sufficiently in the department's culture. We plan to implement the following steps to rectify this. First, the assessment liaison will now call a meeting once every semester that will explicitly deal with assessment related matters. Second, we are planning a yearly retreat which will devote significant attention to assessment.

While there is nothing that can be done regarding assessment in regard to this particular AAR, we will begin planning next year's YEAP and this spring we will assess methodology. In addition, the department will meet together to plan next year's YEAP.

Sociology

In AY 2013-2014, the sociology program undertook an assessment of our 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 sub-goals, we developed a rubric that can measure the specific skills that should be demonstrated in students' senior seminar papers. That rubric underwent revision in June 2013, and in January 2014, we used it in order to score student papers and look at 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.

Women's and Gender Studies

In Fall 2013, following the Yearly Action Plan and Strategic Assessment Plan, the Women's Studies Program [now Women's and Gender Studies Program] assessed its first learning goal, "Through the major courses in Women's Studies, students will learn to: 1. demonstrate an understanding of feminist perspectives on the human experience and to communicate that understanding through written and oral work." The process for assessment entailed providing a pre-test and post-test to senior WS majors in the Senior Seminar with three main sections: What is feminism? Identify and explain at least one feminist perspective. What do feminist perspectives "on the human experience" reveal? Two members of the Women's and Gender Studies Steering Committee reviewed and graded the responses in 2014. Both graders ranked the answers from the first set of questionnaires as mostly "understood partially" with a few "did not understand." The second set were all ranked "understood partially" or "understood completely," with both graders noting the fuller and more perceptive answers given by the students in December. We agreed that this assessment indicated that students were learning about feminism and

feminist perspectives in other courses in WGS, but had gained a more accurate and inclusive understanding by the end of the Senior Seminar.

The WGS Steering Committee will review the information at a later date in order to give further advice on assessing student learning. The Director will utilize a revised set of questions for assessment when there are student majors in Fall 2015.