

## Summary Report for Calendar Year 2008

It is clear from the program assessment reports that most AHSS programs are successfully engaged in meaningful and appropriate assessment exercises and, perhaps more importantly, that they are actively engaged in both department and college-wide discussions of how we do program assessment at UALR. All of the reports submitted showed a commitment to using Assessment data to effect curricular changes and improvements. Two programs did not submit reports this year, the BA Philosophy program and the MA Public History program. The coordinators of both programs have submitted new Assessment Plans, as has the coordinator of the BA Political Science program; next year will be the first year that these programs will submit Program Assessment Reports based on these new plans.

For the second year, assessment reports were not “ranked” or “graded” as they have been in previous years. However, written feedback was provided to each report-writer by a sub-committee comprised of three members of the AHSS Assessment Team (each subcommittee evaluated five or six reports). This method of evaluating reports promotes collegiality across the College, but it also provides much more useful feedback to report-writers. Several report-writers revised their reports based on this feedback.

### General Comments and Recommendations

Overall the AHSS Assessment Team is pleased with the changes that have been made to the process of writing and evaluating Program Assessment Reports. One concern that is commonly voiced by AHSS Assessment Team members (and a concern that has been voiced for years) is that while individual programs work hard to ensure that assessment is meaningful, there seems to be little more than perfunctory concern for assessment at the level of administration. Members of the Assessment Team wonder, for example, if anyone besides AHSS Deans actually read the reports. There have not in the past been consequences for programs that have not engaged in appropriate assessment activities, nor are there incentives for those who strive to improve assessment activities and the way assessment data are used to make positive changes in programs. There is, in short, the general feeling that assessment is one of those exercises that we must undertake to satisfy some higher power, but that ultimately what we do does not matter beyond our own programs and college. There is, therefore, a strong feeling within the Team that assessment should be geared towards programs rather than administration; what this means in practical terms is that departments should report in ways that are useful and meaningful to them, rather than being forced to conform their assessment reporting to standard forms and categories, standard curriculum maps, etc, that are used across the university.

### Summary

All AHSS programs have effective and in many cases innovative assessment strategies that reflect their commitment to assessment and almost all strive to use their assessment data to engage in discussions with their colleagues about how they deliver their programs. Overall, the following strengths and areas of concern have been identified:

#### Strengths:

- ❖ Most programs are eager to use assessment data in meaningful ways within their departments;
- ❖ assessment takes many forms across the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences. Many programs have moved to a portfolio method of assessment, but other assessment tools include standardized tests, capstone papers, exit interviews, employer surveys, and faculty focus groups;
- ❖ many programs are striving to increase stakeholder involvement, particularly amongst faculty and students;

- ❖ several programs make effective use of outside experts in evaluating their students and programs, which significantly enhances stakeholder involvement. It has been suggested that more departments utilize outside evaluators from time to time.

**Areas of concern:**

Although, as we have seen above, most if not all programs have made great strides in their assessment activities, there is always room for improvement. Following are some “issues” that have become evident on the basis of the program assessment reports and evaluations:

- ❖ there is some concern that assessment is a time consuming and labor intensive activity that is not always sufficiently rewarded at the department level. In many programs assessment is done by committee, so the labor is shared equally across the department. But in others, all assessment activities are done by a single individual, and there is little recognition, either in the form of course releases or other incentives, for the time consuming and labor intensive nature of assessment.
- ❖ .there is also concern that too much emphasis is placed on making assessment fit a “one-size fits all” pattern. Assessment reports are expected to conform to standardized forms that were drafted several years ago by PAAG, but these forms do not allow for flexibility. The AHSS Assessment Team has in recent years moved away from such a heavy emphasis on these forms.

**Appendix A: AHSS Assessment Team, 2008-2009**

Moira Maguire, team leader (History)  
Andrew Deiser (DISLS)  
Betty Freeland (Rhetoric and Writing)  
Rolf Groesbeck (Music)  
Yslan Hicks (Theater Arts)  
Angela Hunter (Philosophy and Liberal Arts)  
Jacek Lubecki (Political Science/International Studies)  
Terry Richard (Sociology/Anthropology)  
Eric Mantle (Art)  
Roger Webb (Psychology)  
Zabelle Stodola (English)