Undergraduate Degree Program Assessment Progress Report Cover Sheet

Degree: BA in Interdisciplinary Studies (formerly Liberal Arts) (27)

For Calendar Year: 2014

(Date submitted to college committee:) March 2015

(Date posted on college assessment website:)

By: Angela Hunter

Overall Rating: ⬇

Respond to all six parts following the “Degree Program Assessment Progress Report Instructions.” Attach additional pages as needed.

(NOTE: Parts 1 through 4 can be copied from the relevant sections of your assessment plan.)

(1) Student learning goal(s) addressed this year:

This year we addressed Goal #2:

2. familiarize students with the history and structure of the academic disciplines

(2) Learning outcomes/objectives for those goals addressed this year:

This year we addressed objective 2:

Students who complete a major in Liberal Arts/Interdisciplinary Studies should be able to:
2. describe some of the distinguishing features of two of the student’s selected concentration area disciplines of study (Goal 2)

(3) Courses & activities where assessed:

IDST 4350: Liberal Arts Colloquium. This course is required of all seniors in the major and is a capstone course. An assignment embedded in the course is used to assess Objective 2 (goal 2).

(4) Methods used:

objective #2: Assignments completed in IDST 4350 are collected by the instructor of all sections and kept for use in assessment. This objective is then assessed through evaluation. A rubric is used for evaluation of competence by the assessment committee. The committee created and discussed the rubric in 2012, and we updated it in 2014
based on recommendations from the 2012 assessment. The rubric previously used scores of 0-3, but this year we switched to 0-4 (to parallel a typical A-F grading scale). 1=minimal degree of competence, 2=adequate degree, 3=strong degree, and 4=exemplary degree of competence.

The embedded assignment asks students to create a kind of cognitive map of two of their chosen concentration areas of study (ideally the 2 areas are both disciplines or multi-disciplinary fields located within the former AHSS College). They fill out a worksheet for each discipline that asks them to use scholarly and other sources (including class reading material and previous course material to a) define and describe the discipline; b) define and describe two sub-fields in the discipline, c) explain one research method used in the discipline, d) define and explain two concepts in the discipline; e) list and describe two scholarly journals that would be used in the discipline.

Interrater reliability is achieved through use of faculty from different disciplinary background who discuss the objective and the rubric before evaluation and then also discuss initial findings of individual committee members.
What are the assessment findings? How did you analyze them?

The assessment committee this year was composed of Angela Hunter (former professor in BAIS with interdisciplinary background, current interim chair of department) and Heidi Skurat Harris (Assistant Professor in Rhetoric and Writing). Dr. Tommy Poling of Psychology had planned to join our evaluation team but was unable to and we thus moved forward with a 2-person evaluation team for this year.

We evaluated a sample of assignments taken from 2 semesters of IDST 4350. We evaluated 18 assignments in all.

We used a rubric devised when the new assessment plan was submitted, which was also used in 2012 (the first time we assessed this objective.) The only change we made this year, as mentioned above, was to the scoring, which moved from a 0-3 to a 0-4 scale (based on recommendations from 2012 assessment evaluators, Dr. Tommy Poling and Dr. Valerie Franks).

Our rubric asked the following questions relative to objective #2:

Does the student’s work:

1) define two different disciplines fully, clearly, and accurately?
2) identify and define 2 sub-fields within each discipline clearly and accurately?
3) explain at least one research method used in each discipline clearly and accurately?
4) identify and explain at least one concept from each discipline clearly and accurately?
5) demonstrate familiarity with two scholarly journals in each discipline?

Our findings for each of the questions are below. These scores are figured using the average of the scores of the 2 evaluators.

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<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Score</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>2</td>
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The scoring scale represents the following:

0 = demonstrates no significant degree of competence in relation to learning objective
1 = demonstrates minimal degree of competence in relation to learning objective
2 = demonstrates adequate degree of competence in relation to learning objective
3 = demonstrates strong degree of competence in relation to learning objective
4 = demonstrates exemplary degree of competence in relation to learning objective

Thus, in the sample we were able to evaluate this year, on all but 1 of our criteria, the performance was slightly above adequate and just below strong (on criterion 5, the
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Scores were strong. It should be noted that Dr. Skurat Harris’ raw scores were lower, with the lowest being 1.7 for criterion 5) than Dr. Hunter’s, which had the lowest rating of 2.4 for criterion 3.

Discussion of the evaluations in our committee meeting led us to believe that defining and explaining concepts is perhaps one of the more difficult of the tasks assigned and measured here, but explaining research methods seems to be the biggest challenge. Students don’t always show a clear understanding of what constitutes methods and methodologies, and this was the area where they often provided the least amount of detail in the assignments. Furthermore, students seem to rely too much on direct citation for completion of this assignment, making it hard to measure how well they have mastered a deep understanding of the material (on all of the questions). In many instances where correct information was provided, we still did not give highest score due to amount of citation used instead of synthetic re-statement in student’s own terms.

Considerations for the above points, however, should be taken into account: these are students who are not majors in the given field but rather completing only 18 hours (at the point of enrollment in the course, the students might have completed any where from 12-18 in the two disciplines they use in this assignment, so there is also greater variation in background preparation in the disciplines). Furthermore, many minors (which provide the curriculum for the concentration areas) do not require specific methods courses as they do for their majors; thus these students are learning about methods through picking it up in electives within the concentration, and/or in the introductory course of the discipline, and in IDST 4350 (which provides an overview of methods across sciences, social sciences, and humanities). This may be a limitation that should be anticipated; if this remains an important part of the learning objective, however, then changes in the curriculum may be necessary to enhance student learning and mastery. We could also de-emphasize this in the learning objectives.

I will note here that we did not assess Objective #1 this semester, as planned in the calendar. We did collect the data and will hold on to it for use in the next assessment year.

(6) What conclusions were drawn and what decisions were made as a result? How were stakeholder groups involved?

The Assessment committee agreed that the assignment used for this assessment is a good one to measure the objective (and goal), and that it elicits the kind of information we’d like to know regarding what students are learning throughout the course of their degree (in their content areas) and in the IDST 4350 course.

Our general qualitative impressions of the student work was that sometimes their overall work was good on almost all of the criteria rated here. The students are demonstrating at least a basic competence in "describing some of the distinguishing features of two of the student's selected concentration disciplines of study” (objective 2). When students did have problems it was mostly because the responses were too vague or relied too much on direct citation. As mentioned above, too, there seemed to have been some confusion about research
methods: students sometimes mis-identified specific types, although others were sometimes too vague. Discussions in the department and across various disciplines that contribute to the major will need to occur about the importance of the elements included here in objective 2. There are certainly other ways to measure this and to show students' familiarity with the disciplines involved and there are ways to increase their exposure to methods as well.

Importantly, we concluded that we are in a unique position since we are measuring student knowledge of disciplines that they study in other departments and that they thus acquire without us really knowing how and where. The readings and materials in the course IDST 4350 about the history and structure of the disciplines aim to make sure all students have a basic understanding of the arts/humanities and social sciences, but what is being measured is also what students bring to this capstone course. The course includes students in the regular major and in the online-only major (the latter of which have much more limited choices in concentration areas and in course selection). Given that some students will have had limited course offerings in the disciplines in question--further compounded by the fact that the online course offerings in a department are rarely as broad and diverse as those offered to on-campus students--and given that the students will have completed varying hours in each discipline at the point of the course (anywhere from only 4 classes to 6 classes or perhaps more), we believe we are doing the best we can to assess and also seeing the kinds of results we can expect.

In terms of how the students are performing, we are mainly satisfied that they are coming to an acceptable understanding of important elements in two of their chosen disciplines (as far as this assignment measures). At this time we do not recommend any major changes in curriculum or in assessment process. We will evaluate the assessment procedures and tools as stated on the assessment calendar.

Stakeholder involvement in this assessment can be seen in the inclusion of a faculty members from outside the Department of Philosophy and Interdisciplinary Studies on the assessment committee. The report will be distributed to and discussed by all of the faculty in Philosophy and Interdisciplinary Studies as well.

General stakeholder feedback from students is solicited through regular class evaluations and through surveys of graduating students.