

**Knowledge Goals for Courses Meeting the Humanities  
Core Requirements for Undergraduates at the  
University of Arkansas at Little Rock**

**Report on the Pilot Knowledge Goals Assessment for  
the Core Area Assessment Committee for the  
Humanities**

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## I. Summary

After revising the proposed knowledge goals assessment rubric to bring it in line with suggestions from the Core Council, one section of each of the three Humanities Core courses was randomly selected. Appropriate assignments for assessing the knowledge goals were selected by the instructors in collaboration with the HCAAC members. Three student artifacts, representing a range of quality, were randomly selected and assessed according to the revised rubric. Results of the assessment using the rubric suggest that it does adequately assess the achievement of knowledge goals in Humanities Core courses.

## II. Revised Rubric

<b>Learning Outcome:</b>	<b>3 (Capstone)</b>	<b>2 (Milestone)</b>	<b>1 (Benchmark)</b>	<b>0 (Not Met)</b>
Students will ...				
<b>Knowledge 2.1:</b> understand foundational concepts and methods in a particular humanistic discipline	Identifies most or all of the basic concepts and/or methods that are relevant and demonstrates, at an advanced level, a broad and comprehensive understanding and awareness of the complexity and inter-relationships between concepts and/or methods	Identifies many of the basic concepts and/or methods that are relevant and demonstrates, at a satisfactory level, a broad understanding and awareness of the complexity and inter-relationships between concepts and/or	Identifies some basic concepts and/or methods that are relevant and demonstrates, at a rudimentary level, some understanding of the complexity and inter-relationships between concepts and/or methods appropriate to the discipline.	Identifies few or no basic relevant concepts and/or methods, and is unable, or barely able, to demonstrate an understanding of levels of complexity or inter-relationships between concepts and/or methods

	appropriate to the discipline.	methods appropriate to the discipline.		appropriate to the discipline.
<b>Knowledge 2.2:</b> understand cultural and historical contexts as they inform philosophical, literary, and other texts	Demonstrates an advanced understanding and awareness of the significance and importance of the relevant historical and cultural contexts. Identifies and critically engages where appropriate, a range of cultural and historical perspectives	Demonstrates a satisfactory understanding and awareness of the significance and importance of the relevant cultural and historical contexts. Identifies and critically engages where appropriate, some cultural and historical perspectives	Demonstrates some basic understanding of the relevant cultural and historical contexts. Identifies and makes connections with one or more cultural and historical perspectives	Demonstrates little or no understanding of the relevant cultural and historical contexts. Identifies with only one or a limited cultural perspective.

### III. Selection of Courses for Pilot Assessment

To select the sections of the Humanities core courses whose instructors would have to be contacted for artifacts, we used the section numbers for the courses listed on Banner and used the random number generator [www.random.org](http://www.random.org). Each HCAAC member contacted an instructor from one of the three selected sections (Ethics and Society, World Literature, and Mythology) and requested artifacts for the pilot assessment.

The instructors were given the following instructions:

**Step 1:** Choose an assignment that provides students with the opportunity to demonstrate attainment of the two learning outcomes being assessed in the pilot study. It can be an essay, an exam, a quiz, etc. (if it is an in-class assignment for

which you don't use computers, make sure the students write in pen, not pencil). The important thing here is that the students will have to demonstrate the following learning outcomes:

Knowledge Goal – Concepts, Methodologies, and the Global Cultural Heritage of the Arts

Learning Outcomes:

1. Understand foundational concepts and methods in a particular humanistic discipline.
2. Understand cultural and historical contexts as they inform philosophical, literary, and other texts.

**Step 2:** Collect all student work for the chosen assignment and sort it into three groups, based on performance on that assignment (not overall performance in the course): high performance, medium performance, and low performance.

**Step 3:** Provide a copy of your course syllabus, the assignment prompt, and the 3 piles of student work, clearly classified into high, medium, and low performance.

#### **IV. Selection of Artifacts for Pilot Assessment**

After the instructors from each of the selected sections submitted their student artifacts, the HCAAC members assigned numbers to the artifacts in each pile and randomly selected one artifact from each pile by using [www.random.org](http://www.random.org). In all cases, assessors did not score artifacts from their own courses to ensure reliability. Dr. McAbee and Dr. Robinson scored the 3 artifacts from World Literature; Dr. McAbee and Dr. Barrio scored the 3 artifacts from Ethics and Society; and Dr. Robinson and Dr. Barrio scored the 3 artifacts from Mythology.

#### **V. Results of Pilot Assessment**

Results of the assessment using the rubric suggest that it does adequately assess the achievement of knowledge goals in Humanities Core courses. Having the instructor's prompt and rubric for the assignment facilitated the process of scoring the student artifacts. In all cases, both reviewers arrived at the same rubric scores for each individual artifact.

The process of assessing the rubric highlighted two major issues:

1. The difference between comprehensive-course knowledge goals and assignment-specific knowledge goals

The knowledge required in a humanities course is so broad that is impossible to capture in one assignment. In fact, the Core Council has identified that the criteria for humanities courses is that they “emphasize the reading and interpretation of a broad survey of philosophical, literary, and other texts.” Given that this “broad survey” is fundamental to the knowledge goals of humanities courses, in the absence of a comprehensive final assignment, assessing knowledge goals with only one set of artifacts will necessarily not demonstrate a breadth of knowledge representative of the survey of texts assigned over the course. Many humanities courses tested students on multiples areas of knowledge through various assignments, in order to also adequately assess the other skills and values curriculum areas, which, as defined by the Core Council, “address communication, critical thinking, information technology, ethical and personal responsibility, civic responsibility, and global and cultural understanding.” Thus, the knowledge goals meet a particular challenge for assessment (one that may not be replicated for the other curriculum areas, which have no implicit breadth component). As long as the confines of the assignment were kept in mind artifacts met the milestones differently than they might if the HCAAC considered the knowledge goals for the course as a whole. For example, if asked to discuss only Aristotelian virtue ethics for the assignment, an artifact may achieve a “Capstone” ranking in terms of specificity about Aristotle, but in terms of showing a breadth of knowledge about several texts-- which is not the purpose of the assignment-- the artifact might achieve only “Benchmark” or lower. Since comprehensive assignments, by and large, do not work for a survey course which must also assess curricular areas beyond the knowledge goals, and, because assessing multiple artifacts is unnecessary given the reliability of assessing individual artifact’s ability to achieve knowledge outcomes as tested by specific assignments, the HCAAC does not recommend requiring comprehensive assignments, nor collecting and assessing multiple artifacts, nor revising the rubric. Instead, it must simply be kept in mind that the rubric is meant to assess the knowledge goals as they pertain to the particular, representative assignment.

2. Discrepancies between suggested instructions for sorting the artifacts and the assessment itself

We found the instructions provided to the HCAAC regarding the process of sorting the artifacts into A, C, and F level ambiguous and confusing. We revised the rubric to fit the model suggested by the Core Council to provide three achievement levels and one level of “not met.” We were also discouraged from assessing in the “not met” level; however, those artifacts that fall into the lowest category (as sorted by the instructors), may well have scored on the level of “not met.” In other words, “not met” artifacts may go beyond the category of non-responsive. It is our hope that this pilot assessment clarifies the need for more explicit instructions about the instructors’ sorting of the artifacts for assessment. Rather than sorting the artifacts in three sets corresponding with A, C, and F grades, it would more readily align with the rubric for the instructor to sort the artifacts into four sets, corresponding to highest level of achievement, strong achievement, low achievement, and no achievement. Artifacts from each set would then be blindly selected and assessed in the same process, but without the confusion over the lowest level artifacts.

Finally, while the results of the pilot assessment of the knowledge goals rubric suggests that it adequately assesses the achievement in humanities knowledge goals in the core courses, the pilot did suggest that the HCAAC will need some more clarity about the overall assessment process in the future. First, the issue of how to sort the sets of artifacts, as discussed above, needs to be clarified. Also, as none of the members of the HCAAC are social scientists, we would like some direction about what will constitute a representative sample of courses and artifacts when we do the full assessment in the next academic year.