

Spring 2018
Core Curriculum Assessment Report

of

Skills 2 – Critical Thinking

from the

Humanities

Core Curricular Area



submitted by

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on behalf of the

Humanities

Core Area Assessment Committee

Methods

How was student work (artifacts) collected for assessment?

In both English and Philosophy, we selected a single section of each core course in all modalities offered for evaluation. For English, this included face-to-face, online, and concurrent; for Philosophy, this included face-to-face and online; Religious Studies artifacts were not collected due to a lack of instructor response to the request (only 1 section of “World Religions” was offered in Fall 2017). While there was a section of “Mythology” offered in the concurrent setting, the artifacts provided were received too late to be included in this evaluation. All of the courses from which we pulled artifacts were taught in Fall 2017. We asked the instructors of those sections to send us all of the student work for an assignment or test that would best match the 2 skills being evaluated.

What type of artifacts were collected?

All of the artifacts were student works produced during the course of the semester. These were primarily papers or other forms of written work, except in one case which was an audiovisual file. We asked for 1 artifact from each section of the course. In all cases where artifacts were received for evaluation, we received 1 artifact that we used to assess both skill 2 and skill 3.

How were the artifacts sampled for assessment?

We randomly selected the section for collection (when multiple sections of a modality were offered), and then we randomly selected 15 student artifacts in each section from the total number available. To avoid confusion, the artifacts that were not selected were deleted from the data set except in both sections of PHIL 2330--where one section provided 21 artifacts, and the other provided 10. As noted previously, no artifacts were collected for “World Religions.” For the remaining courses, 20-30 artifacts were collected, but, due to the deletion of the unselected artifacts, we have represented the number of artifacts collected with an asterisk. We will take care to not delete unselected artifacts in the future for more detailed reporting.

How were the artifacts scored?

The Humanities CAAC adopted the broader Core Assessment rubrics created by the Core Council and encouraged for use across disciplines. These rubrics provide a range from 0-4 for each of the Core Learning Goals/Outcomes. In adopting these rubrics, a significant issue arises: the reporting spreadsheet allows CAACs to select an “Educational Goal,” such as Skill 3--Technology. While Skill 3 is an Educational Goal, the earlier template identified two subset goals, each of which had a Learning Outcome and a Learning Objective associated with it. This is still implied in the spreadsheet where the row for Learning Objective allows one to select from the various goals/objectives represented in the earlier spreadsheet. In using the Core Assessment rubrics, this additional level is elided. The Humanities CAAC represents this by selecting N/A in the Learning Outcome row. The language for the subset humanities “goals” was used to guide discussion among committee members on how to interpret various degrees of student achievement, but they did not serve as specific points of assessment or individual components in an additional rubric. If the aim of adopting the Core Assessment rubrics across disciplines is to provide a shared language and create comparable data, the new rubrics are quite useful, and the Humanities CAAC found them highly functional. We do wonder, however, if the templates (of learning objectives) that we are including in our syllabi need to reflect this change. Further discussion of this point will be needed before next year.

How was reliability in scoring determined and ensured?

To ensure reliability in scoring, the Humanities CAAC met to review the Core Assessment Rubrics for the areas we were assessing. We discussed a distinction that we had noticed between explicit and implicit evidence for a given skill. This was particularly important in the case of Skill 3, Technology. The committee decided that when the citation of secondary resources implied the use of technology to find resources it would constitute an implied use of technology but would be a fairly low-level index. We also agreed that the mere use of a computer to write, edit, and format an essay would be ranked as absent/not scorable. In norming our scores, we considered a difference of 1 point between the two scorers to be a case of agreement. There were only a few instances where the score differed by 2 points. For the scores that differed by 1 point, we reported the higher score because half-scores are not an option on the spreadsheet. For the few scores that differed by two points, we were able to report the average.

Reflection

What was learned from the assessment results?

From an assessment and workload standpoint, the committee feels that it is not helpful to attempt to assess more than an individual Educational Goal per assessment cycle. Assessing skills as diverse as critical thinking and technology in the same artifact is unlikely to yield meaningful data in both areas. Requesting multiple artifacts from instructors is an alternative, but is problematic due to the burden of collection (on both ends), especially if the schedule of assessment with one or more objectives per semester occurs. In departments with one or more core courses taught across all 3 modalities, this burden is increased.

Our data reflects the difficulties faced when using a single artifact for evaluating two quite different skills. In Skill 2, Critical Thinking, of the 117 artifacts assessed, 7 were advanced, 27 were proficient, 55 were novice, and only 10 did not meet the baseline. Of the eighteen that were not scorable 15 were absent because no artifacts were submitted, 2 were duplicate artifacts, and 1 was a corrupt audio file. Conversely, in Skill 3, technology, only 15 of the 75 absent or not scorable artifacts were due to a failure to submit an artifact. Moreover, the scores for advanced, proficient, novice, and unmet were decidedly lower, scoring, respectively at 3, 7, 16, and 16. Of those scores, two classes contributed to all of the scores of novice or higher, and one course provided 3 advanced, 5 proficient, and 5 novice. This particular class artifact was explicitly designed to engage both skills as a test case. It is clearly an outlier, and it raises the question of whether core assessment practices should be driving assignment creation or revision at the level of individual classes.

Continuous Improvement

What changes will be made based upon the assessment results?

The committee will need more data to propose an informed plan for continuous improvement in either Skill 2 or Skill 3. Many of our discussions hinged on the types of assignments that fit well or fit poorly (or might fit) for the objectives. In terms of the types of assignments we received, we gleaned some information that might help us guide instructors in the future when they are deciding which assignment to submit for these skills. For example, final papers or final projects may produce the best artifacts for the critical thinking outcome because of its emphasis on synthesis of course materials. The committee does wonder whether the humanities would be better served by focusing on critical thinking and allowing other core areas to develop technology. In a functional core, students will learn a shared set of skills and methodologies through their cumulative coursework and engagement with different disciplines. It does not follow that each discipline will or should engage students with each and every educational goal.

When we discussed Skills 3 (Technology), we noted that sometimes students are not required to formally cite secondary sources in a paper in a core course, and in other instances they are, which could explain divergence in artifacts between those that had citations with a bibliography and those that didn't. This divergence did not hamper our ability to score the Critical Thinking skill, however. Additionally, in the case where such sources were cited, it was unclear if the professor might have provided the sources used (say, in a common repository for students to select from) or if the student sought and selected the source using databases or web research. This kind of distinction is important when we have so little to work with (across our artifacts) when it comes to seeing students use information technology. Thus, we found the Technology skill to be the most problematic to evaluate. This could be because 2 different skills were assessed at once (making collection of a single artifact to cover both difficult). However, and as we suspect, it could tell us that basic humanities courses do not require a substantive interaction with "information technology" in a meaningful way--note that we dismissed, as stated above, the mere usage of computers and word processing systems as counting for this skill; and we discussed the fact that submitting assignments via email or Blackboard or other similar software (were we to be able to verify that this had occurred) would also not count in our view.

Feedback

What changes are recommended for Core assessment?

The Humanities CAAC believes that the Core Council will need to address the issues raised by the adoption of the Core Assessment rubrics outlined in our report section on artifact scoring. The committee also believes that the Core Council should consider the workload and assessment issues raised by assessing multiple Skills, Values, etc. in a single semester-long assessment cycle.

Comments

Other comments?

This form only allowed us to select one skill. Our report is for Skill 2 & 3.

END OF REPORT