



Humanistic Studies | 2013-2014 Assessment Report

Please answer the following two questions based on the data you collected as part of your Programmatic Assessment Plan, which is provided below for your reference.

1. Please give a brief overview of the data you collected. This can be in any form you feel is appropriate, such as a table, a short narrative of results, statistical analysis, highlighting findings that were of particular interest, etc. In short, it doesn't matter how you submit your findings.

The Humanistic Capstone Seminar focuses on the One and the Many, helping students to understand the relationship between unity and diversity in metaphysics, religion, politics, and culture. We carefully read five texts. I always include Buddhist texts, Lucretius' work, and the writings of the Platonist philosopher Plotinus. I want students to encounter a non-Western religious tradition before they graduate. I also want them to read Greek and Roman sources, and to understand the importance of Platonism. However, the last two texts vary, and have included works from Anthony Appiah, Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen. This year, we read Hobbes' *Leviathan* and Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*.

For the Seminar, I grade students on class participation, a short mid-term paper, and a substantial final paper. The final paper constitutes the major assessment tool. I ask students to identify a thinker or cultural artifact from a previous course in Humanistic Studies and compare it to one of the thinkers of the course. They must move beyond simple compare and contrast exercises, and explain why they have paired thinkers/artifacts. Because Humanistic Studies faculty members teach courses on film and music, I construe a cultural artifact very broadly. I do not assign topics, and students must creatively select thinkers/artifacts. Once students identify a topic, I meet with them individually to discuss it.

This year, students had no difficulty selecting ideas from previous courses. They spoke enthusiastically about their favorite courses, professors and thinkers from previous classes. They also responded well to the thinkers in the course. This year, students found Hobbes particularly interesting. However, in the final paper, some students encountered difficulties with doing anything more than a simple comparison and contrast. Others found tenuous similarities and difference between diverse texts/cultural artifacts. For the final project, I gave out the following grades:

A-, B+, B-, F, B/B-, A-/B+, B+, B, B, C+, A-/B+, B+, B, A-, B+

Topics this year included the following:

"Plotinus and Edgar Allan Poe on the Soul," "Hobbes and Fritz Lang," "Hobbes and Machiavelli," "Homer and Lucretius," "Homer and Hobbes on the State of Nature and Security," "Plotinus and Marx," "Hobbes and Persepolis," "The Levellers and Hobbes," "Spinoza and Hobbes," "Chaucer and Lucretius," "Foucault and Machiavelli on Power," "Foucault and Carlo Ginzberg," "Hobbes and H.G. Wells," "Hobbes and the English-only movement in the United States," "Hobbes and Michelle Alexander on Punishment and Race."

2. How will you use what you've learned from the data that was collected? Some examples are: a change in assessment plan for the following year because you want to drill down deeper to find more or better information, faculty will discuss the data to decide what to do with it, curricular changes, faculty development, etc.

This fall, I will again teach the "Humanistic Studies Capstone Seminar." I will spend more time working on advanced writing skills, using the work of Joseph Williams. I will also reiterate the importance of creatively comparing diverse thinkers and cultural artifacts. Finally, I will encourage students to work on films and other non-textual artifacts.

Humanistic Studies Assessment Plan

For over a decade, we have relied on our senior Capstone Seminar for the assessment of majors and minors. In the last six years, the seminar has focused on the theme of unity and diversity in philosophy, politics, religion and culture. Students read primary sources from Buddhist, Greek, Roman, English and other traditions. They also discuss and debate topics like the nature of evil, beauty, the soul, life after death, cultural relativism, and identity in a globalized world. Each semester, students are required to produce a substantial paper. In it, they must select two thinkers or cultural artifacts, one from the seminar and another from their previous work in Humanistic Studies. They must indicate how these thinkers or artifacts link unity and diversity. Although the professor meets with students to help them craft essays, they must come up with thinkers or artifacts on their own. For example, they can compare a work of music to a non-fiction work, a philosophy text with a film or an artistic work with a philosophical one. The final project measures program effectiveness by:

1. Challenging students to creatively link ideas or thinkers.
2. Developing advanced writing skills.
3. Encouraging interdisciplinary work in the Humanities.
4. Analyzing primary texts.