



Humanistic Studies | 2014-2015 Assessment Report

1. Please give a brief overview of the assessment data you collected this year. 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. You will, however, likely want to submit results for each learning outcome you assessed this year individually.

As stated in our assessment plan for 2014-2015, we assessed the second Learning Outcome for Humanistic Studies this academic year, which reads as follows:

Students will acquire essential life skills, including the ability to reflect critically on texts and artifacts, to recognize and appreciate nuance and complexity of meaning, and to express themselves in a clear, organized, and well-reasoned manner.

An assessment committee was convened in Humanistic Studies of faculty from a variety of humanities disciplines. The committee began meeting in Fall 2014 to discuss the learning outcome in detail including its specific indicators and to begin designing a rubric to assist in evaluating this outcome as evident in the student writing of outgoing HUS Majors. We also discussed the implication of this year's efforts for making improvements to course design and assignments, etc. and as a means of framing discussions concerning our next round of assessment.

The HUS assessment committee approached the unit in Winter 2015 with our intended plan. We discussed which rubric we would use, who would assess the papers and what we might do with the results. After this discussion with the unit, it was agreed that the committee would read and evaluate the papers and would present and open their findings to discussion at an early Fall 2015 HUS meeting.

The Process: We first identified a list of graduating HUS Majors and the HUS (and affiliated department) courses they were enrolled in during Spring semester 2015. We contacted the instructor for each of these courses and indicated that we would be soliciting writing samples from the graduating HUS students in their course. We then decided on a rubric to assist us in assessing student writing. After discussing our own ideas and comparing other rubrics, we thought that, like the wheel, perhaps a good tool already existed. We considered several different rubrics before settling, as a template, on Barbara Walvoord's, from her influential *Assessment Clear and Simple: A Practical Guide for Institutions, Departments, and General Education*. We revised this rubric to meet our specific need, viz., our second Learning Outcome. We then requested of the faculty earlier identified, electronic submitted writing samples from each HUS graduating student in their selected course. Working through the Assistant Chair of Humanistic Studies (to insure anonymity), the set of papers was compiled, saved as a single file and sent along with our rubric to each of the members of the assessment committee.

The Results: Our results reflect the assessment by HUS faculty from Modern Languages, History, English and Philosophy, and therefore include data from representatives of nearly all academic programs within Humanistic Studies. Our rubric consisted of 7 essential points of analysis, the results from which are listed below on a 5-point scale.

Indicators:	Results:
Thesis	2.95
Originality and Complexity	3.0
Organization and Coherence	3.25
Evidence, Support	3.25
Style	3.38
Sources	3.1
Grammar, Punctuation	3.8

Early look at Results: Given **(a)** that the rubric is on a 5-point scale, **(b)** that this assessment is based on papers from advanced (graduating) HUS majors and **(c)** that humanities students are believed to be *particularly* good at coming up with original ideas, thinking critically, incorporating a variety of sources and writing well-organized and nuanced prose, these occasionally below-average results are somewhat alarming, especially with regard to the categories of Thesis, Originality and Complexity, and Organization and Coherence. Our students have clearly not all learned to pay attention to these aspects regularly as a matter of course in their writing assignments.

2. How will you use what you've learned from the data that was collected? Some examples are: particular improvements to the curriculum, incorporation of a different pedagogy, a change in assessment plan for the following year in order to obtain more specific feedback, better information or a better response rate, a determined need for faculty development in a particular area, better career alignment, a faculty retreat to discuss the data and how best to use it, etc.

The Assessment Committee looks forward to an exploratory and vigorous discussion of these results at an HUS department meeting in early Fall 2015 and anticipates suggestions emerging from that discussion for incorporating curricular changes designed to improve student performance in these skill areas. With respect to the assessment process itself, we have also identified a need to more carefully tailor our rubric to our specific assessment. Many committee members felt, for instance, that the Sources and the Organization and Coherence criteria for the papers we were examining were poorly worded, causing difficulties with assessment. It may also be advisable to compare earlier and later writing samples from graduating students, which would help us to better identify the extent to which our institution has helped these students *improve* their writing. Also, the committee will need to secure the papers earlier next time so that we will have time for the committee to meet after the evaluation and before the final exam period ends.