

HUS First Look

Overview

Humanistic Studies is an interdisciplinary program that provide students with the opportunity to develop a greater understanding of what it means to be human through the study of several core disciplines, including history, literature, philosophy, religion, languages and world civilizations. At its core, the program explores some of the central questions in life, such as the meaning of beauty, justice, and just what it means to live the “good life,” as well as the importance of language, culture and artistic expression in the human existence. Courses and content are diverse, as the humanities are comprised of those fields that study human creation of all sorts, including literary studies, creative writing, linguistics, history, ancient and modern languages, cultural studies and philosophy. Currently, the major is divided into four areas of emphasis: western cultures; ancient and medieval studies; religious studies; and American cultures, while the minor has two emphases: cultures and values and linguistics and linguistics/teaching English as a second language. The HUS program has a strong mission statement that is in line with the institution’s core mission. The program has specifically identified key skills that have been incorporated into each course in order to support the university’s mission and they have clearly defined and articulated learning outcomes for their students.

Since the last program review, HUS has taken several steps to address the recommendations of the Dean with regards to the program, including restricting their areas of emphasis to make them more attractive to students and to meet student demand for a discipline based major within the program. They did note, however, that the loss of one tenure track faculty line in Linguistics/TESL and the lack of possibilities for new positions have made this problematic. The suggestion for more programmatic assessment leads to the decision to imbed this tool into course content in order to fit with the program’s learning outcomes, and to consult with Prof. Angie Bauer, Special Assistant to the Provost for Assessment to develop the means of implementing targeted assessment using metrics for critical thinking, although there is an potential problem anticipated with gathering a baseline as most majors do not declare until their junior year. One primary took for assessment has been the capstone seminar, which has provided excellent data regarding learning out comes for majors, though it has not been as useful for minors, and for whom no longer required. For the past five to six years, curricular development has been a primary focus for the program, and they anticipate that assessment will be an ongoing task as they continue to develop more precise methods of assessing courses and the major.

The Dean also recommended that the program look at the student responses to the development of crucial learning skills over the course of the program. In response, HUS has pushed for smaller class sizes, more writing, more authentic texts, and

creating issues or themes within courses in order to focus on more critical thinking. Results of assessments after these measures were taken show an increase in critical thinking skills, while problem solving results remain average, which may be due to students' misperceptions of what the term actually means. HUS has also spent a good deal of effort on general education reform, with the goal of decreasing reliance on ad hoc funding and maintaining smaller class size. Their reform has been held up as a model for broader gen ed reform across campus.

Since the previous review, HUS has made a number of significant changes, not all of which were positive or successful. FNS was created as a standalone major, eliminating the emphasis within the HUS program. An attempt to merge religious studies into the philosophy major to create a Philosophy and Religious Studies Program was not supported by the AAC and therefore dropped. The major emphasis in TESL was lost with the departure of Prof. Russell Arent, whose position was lost. Two new major emphases were created within the program, western cultures and ancient and medieval studies, allowing faculty from several different areas within the program to come together. Currently, there are plans to expand the program in the area of digital humanities, a rapidly growing area within the field that shows great promise for interdisciplinary and collaboration with colleagues outside of HUS as well as high student demand and the program has formed a working group to explore the possibility of creating a collaborative Master's program in cultural sustainability with the Universidad de Desarrolla in Santiago, Chile.

Strengths

- An award winning, highly distinguished faculty.
- High number of student internships
- High number of students going on to grad school

Weaknesses

- Constrained by loss of faculty positions, in several areas, French, TESL
- Variety and availability of courses in the major
- Faculty often on sabbatical, retirements and departures, positions not being replaced.
- Assessment is in transition.

Possible Questions

- What challenges do you foresee in the creation of a new digital humanities curriculum? Do you anticipate needing new resources? Faculty? Will this be a collaboration with other departments/faculty on campus?
- Will the digital humanities curriculum be offered as through online delivery, face to face, or a hybrid of both?
- Other departments) function one faculty deep in their individual areas of expertise, (in fact, some programs are just one person) why is this such a problem for your particular program?
- What do you (or the students) lose by not requiring minors to take the capstone course? Is expository writing enough of a similar experience for them to make it a worthy replacement? Is there another alternative that wouldn't overburden faculty but still give them the kind of experience that students get in the capstone?
- Do you have any details on how you plan to embed assessment into courses beyond the one example provided?
- Where are the charts detailing student responses?