

General Education Assessment

Summary of Individual Reports, 2018-19

Learning Objective 1. Reading Closely: Literary Analysis and Interpretation. *One course.*

The ability to read closely provides a foundation for informed and reflective critical analysis that is fundamental to lifelong learning and literary experiences of lasting value. Instruction in reading closely equips students to pay careful attention to the constitutive details and stylistic concerns of significant works of literature so as to arrive at a meaning that can be defended with confidence. In addition to promoting responsible ways of taking a literary work of consequence on its own terms, courses satisfying this requirement enable students to become proficient at identifying, interpreting, and analyzing new ideas, perennial topics, universal themes, and vivid descriptions of sensory and internal experiences.

Outcomes:

SLO 1: Students can identify and analyze constitutive details and literary style.

SLO 2: Students can produce interpretations of literary meaning.

SLO 3: Students can produce convincing arguments for their interpretations.

Sample formal assessment tools:

- Final in-class essay
- Final exam, with specific questions tied to specific SLOs
- Extended essay focusing on a close reading of a passage / poem
- Deliberate shaping of discussion groups with required group notes
- Series of journal entries throughout the semester. Students were required to begin with a portion of a text and write a commentary around it, starting with its constitutive details, then how that portion affected their own understanding of the text as a whole, then conclude their writing by making an argumentative statement.

Sample uses of data:

- Recognized need to increase the attention on interpretation
- Students were good with analysis, but their larger arguments were less compelling
- Attention to expanding the work outside of the class, which meant that professor met individually with students not just in determining their thesis, but constructing their first paragraph and, sometimes, the entire essay
- Focus on the classroom time as a chance to open up the text and create discussion
- A new selection of texts that catered to students' variety of interests helped to generate more discussions in class
- Revision of discussion questions according to students' response posts on Blackboard. The essay questions were based on our discussions in class and allowed students to elaborate their thoughts on assigned texts.
- Introduced "discourse" as a term for students this semester, which gave them a vocabulary for discussing the way in which texts can create the space for ideas (rather than the assumption that ideas are "hidden" in the text's depths). Will have more emphasis on the formal aspects of text in the future iterations of this class.

- Professor will engage in the Course Redesign Experience offered through the Center for Teaching
- Implemented a series of short close-reading assignments as “feeders” for the longer papers
- Chose to focus more explicitly on rhetoric

Learning Objective 2. Understanding the Arts: Creativity, Performance, and Interpretation. *One course.*

The need to create, experience, and comprehend art is a defining human activity. Learning in the arts fosters aesthetic development, self-discipline, imaginative insights, and the ability to make connections between seemingly disparate ideas and issues. Many courses provide insight into the discipline, craft, and creative processes that go into making a work of art, while others focus on analyzing and interpreting the products of that artistic creativity. Developing the ability to think in intuitive, non-verbal, aural, or visual realms enhances creativity, and provides students a way to address problems that do not have conventional solutions.

Outcomes:

SLO 1: Students are able to identify and appreciate non-verbal or intuitive modes of thought.

SLO 2: Students can comprehend a creative process through experience OR analysis.

SLO 3: Students can produce interpretations of artistic work, OR artistic works themselves, which display an understanding of creative processes.

Sample formal assessment tools:

- Writing portfolio
- Short writing assignments
- Periodic tests with analytical essays
- As part of final exam, in-class analysis of several artifacts the students had not studied before (to apply the analytical skills developed in the course)
- Create actual works in the medium appropriate to the course content

Sample uses of data:

- Less writing and more creative assessment assignments.
- Continually update artistic selections under consideration to reflect most current art forms.
- Split content to focus more thoroughly on different areas.
- Add a technique component to assist students with development of artistic works.
- Spend more time emphasizing the distinction between the action of a story/film/work of art and the choices made in how all of that is depicted.

Learning Objective 3. Seeking Meaning: Wisdom, Truth, and Inquiry. *One course.*

The quest to answer fundamental questions of human existence has always been central to living the examined life. Through this learning objective, students examine how people in diverse times and places have addressed basic human questions about the meaning of life, the source of moral value, the nature of reality and possibility of transcendence, and to what or whom persons owe their ultimate allegiance. Courses that explore texts and traditions dedicated to philosophic

questions and ethical inquiry, or that examine religious belief and practice as a pervasive expression of human culture, encourage students to develop a deeper understanding of what it means to be human.

Outcomes:

SLO 1: Students have deepened their understanding of humanity's quest, in diverse times and places, to address questions about the meaning of life, the source of moral value, the nature of reality and possibility of transcendence, and to what or whom persons owe their ultimate allegiance.

SLO 2: Students have gained a critical appreciation of texts and traditions that are dedicated to philosophic questions and ethical inquiry, *or* that examine religious belief and practice as a pervasive expression of human culture.

Sample formal assessment tools:

- Extended essay
- Multiple shorter essays / responses to readings
- Brief daily writing assignments focusing on critical analysis
- Have students review / evaluate sections of other textbooks

Sample uses of data:

- Changed textbook
- Reframed the weekly assignments in a way that allows students to highlight areas of interest and potential confusion in the readings
- Modified delivery (lecture plus discussion, class activities)
- Re-evaluating course structure to approach content not chronologically but thematically
- Provided clearer framework for discussion by giving discussion prompts ahead of time
- Adding daily assignments allowed regular and immediate feedback on analysis
- Implemented one-on-one grading of longer assignments to offer more focused feedback relevant to the SLOs
- Introduced the G3 elements earlier and make them more integral to the class. One way of doing this would be to have weekly (or biweekly) passage exercises similar to the relevant section of this year's final exam, asking students to diagram and critique arguments focusing on a particular theme.
- scale back on the number of writing assignments I give the students, keeping the Reading Response assignment and the Dialectical Reflections. Both of those assignments, in combination with the readings and thematic presentations, generally accomplish the task of G3.

Learning Objective 4. Exploring Past and Present: Perspectives on Societies and Cultures. *Two courses.*

Curiosity about society and its institutions is central to the engaged life. In addition, informed citizens should have an understanding of individual and collective behavior in the past and present. To address the challenges facing the world today, citizens must understand how these challenges arise and the roles that individuals, communities, countries, and international organizations play in addressing them. Learning how to pose appropriate questions, how to read

and interpret historical documents, and how to use methods of analysis to study social interaction prepares students to comprehend the dynamics within and among societies. These skills enable students to examine the world around them and to make historically, theoretically, and empirically informed judgments about social phenomena.

Outcomes:

SLO 1: Students are able to make informed judgments about social phenomena by reading and interpreting historical documents OR by using methods of analysis appropriate to social science.

Sample formal assessment tools:

- Extended formal research assignment, analyzing primary document(s)
- Extended formal research assignment, analyzing contemporary issue and proposing solution
- Analysis of interviews with individuals
- Analysis of primary document on final exam
- Formal presentation on artifact, placing it within its historical / social context
- Multiple short essays
- Writing assignments that necessitated analysis of a current news event in light of past documents

Sample uses of data:

- Changed writing assignments to more intentionally connect concept to theory.
- Continue to focus on enhancing class participation.
- More discipline-specific writing instruction so that students can write more successfully.
- Updated course texts to be consistently current
- Diversified content (more audio-visual media, for example)
- restructuring of the term paper to encourage students to think more systematically about the conflicts within American government rather than topically
- More frequent (and briefer) writing assignments to assist with practicing analysis
- Assigned multiple drafts of major analysis
- Added a set of primary historical documents so that students can sharpen their social analytical skills and make informed judgements drawing on different bodies of evidence: visual, primary documentary sources, and secondary literature
- Allow additional time for student reflection as well as revision
- Focus on students' understanding and awareness of what historians do and how we examine primary texts
- Develop more group discussions on focused topics (like historical quotations)
- Re-evaluated number of written assignments to allow for improved quality
- Incorporated more group-based discussions of the primary sources
- Increased number of tests, allowed take-home exams to give students more time to process and analyze
- Will include explicit training on how to craft a historical argument
- Introduce a specific grading rubric for essays.
- Changed syllabus to allow adequate class time for meaningful discussion of the primary source materials, including the ones that students write about in their short papers

Learning Objective 5. Observing, Experimenting, and Modeling: The Scientific and Quantitative View. *Three courses. One must include substantial quantitative, algorithmic, or abstract logical reasoning. One must be a science course with a substantial experiential or experimental component.*

The study of the natural world through careful observation, construction and testing of hypotheses, and the design and implementation of reproducible experiments is a key aspect of human experience. Scientific literacy and the ability to assess the validity of scientific claims are critical components of an educated and informed life. Scientific and quantitative courses develop students' ability to use close observation and interpret empirical data to understand processes in the natural world better. As they create models to explain observable phenomena, students develop their abilities to reason both deductively and inductively.

Outcomes:

G5 SLO 1: The student can evaluate scientific information and/or scientific texts, and distinguish data or facts from interpretation and opinion.

G5 (experiential) SLO 1: The student demonstrates the ability to use scientific methodologies to study and draw reasonable conclusions about the natural world through detailed observations, carefully recorded data, and data analysis techniques appropriate for their field of study.

G5 (experiential) SLO 2: The student can evaluate scientific information and/or scientific texts, and distinguish data or facts from interpretation and opinion.

G5 (experiential) SLO 3: Students demonstrate the ability to calculate and analyze empirical data sets and/or demonstrate the ability model mathematical theory.

G5 (quantitative) SLO 1: The student demonstrates the ability to calculate and analyze empirical data sets and/or demonstrate the ability model mathematical theory.

Sample formal assessment tools:

- Periodic tests
- Final exam with specific questions tied to specific SLOs
- Weekly quizzes
- Analysis of real-life case study or of contemporary issue
- Writing assignments addressing current topics in science
- Literature reviews
- Analysis of primary and secondary sources
- Group research projects, with presentations
- (G5E) Laboratory experiments, with formal lab report
- (G5E) Scientific paper based on results of own lab work
- (G5E) Students designed and implemented their own research study
- (G5Q) Paired students work as “coder” and “observer” in developing computer code

Sample uses of data:

- Assign additional homework problems for practice
- Additional practice time in class to further develop analytical skills

- Assigned multiple drafts of papers in progress
- Additional short quizzes to assess both knowledge and skill development more regularly
- (G5E) Continue to update lab assignments to keep them current
- Updated course texts to be consistently current
- Updated research assignments to reflect current affairs for immediate applicability of analytical skills
- Modify size of working groups (smaller)
- Intentionally address reasoning behind the interpretation of scientific results so that students can recognize the role of this reasoning in building models of scientific knowledge
- Incorporated “active learning” activities into class participation
- Engaged professional library staff in assisting students with research topics
- Include more examples of experimental data, and more discussions on how to describe this data, and how to draw conclusions from this data
- Have students work through statistical exercises/problems either individually or in groups
- Address predatory journals with my students so that they know what to look for and can identify sham journals. The media is brimming with misinformation.
- Focus on the difference between a review of a specific piece of scientific research, in which specific experimental results are used to reach conclusions, and a general (textbook style) review of a topic
- Revised syllabus to give clarity and specificity to address the shortcomings and lack of understanding in writing research papers
- Will offer instruction on how to study in the sciences
- Offer additional instruction in how to use research tools (esp. online)
- (G5Q) More frequently required students to solve problems at the board, in class
- (G5Q) Dedicated more time to assisting students with how to write a paper on a mathematics topic

Learning Objective 6. Comprehending Cross-Culturally: Language and Global

Studies. *One 300-level or higher foreign language course OR foreign language through the 200 (3rd semester) level together with one course in a related culture.*

The cross-cultural comprehension requirement at Sewanee helps to prepare students for full citizenship in our global society. Upon completion of this requirement, students have developed a range of communicative strategies in a foreign language, recognition of another cultural perspective, and the capacity for informed engagement with another culture. These skills lead students to understand a variety of texts: oral, visual, and written. Students practice writing, public speaking, conversing, critical thinking, and textual analysis. Success in a foreign language gives students knowledge that they can apply broadly to academic and non-academic settings. The study of at least a second language is and always has been a hallmark of liberal arts education, providing not just access to the thought and expression of a foreign mentality and culture, but also a useful way to reflect on one’s own mentality, language, and culture.

Outcomes:

G6 (language) SLO 1: Students can read and comprehend authentic text in the target language, with the help of a dictionary, and can express themselves (in the case of modern languages) in the target language.

Note: Competency in this SLO can be demonstrated by passing the intermediate (200-level) language course. Those students who place out of the 200-level course must demonstrate competency at the 300-level.

G6 (culture) SLO 1: Students can analyze and discuss texts related to a culture and recognize another cultural perspective.

Sample formal assessment tools:

- Final exam (whole or in part)
- Periodic tests
- Short written assignments
- Pre- and post-tests
- (language) Student presentation in target language
- (culture) Analytical essay on current topic in target culture
- (culture) Students create a physical “prop” associated with culture (and relevant to discipline), provide a written context about the prop, and offer brief presentation to class

Sample uses of data:

- Increase opportunities for class discussion
- Identify their research topics and goals earlier in the semester in order to have more time to research the topic
- (For a culture class with two G-attributes) Changed assignments so that they were specific to respective Learning Objectives, rather than blended
- (language) Decreased volume of reading in target language to emphasize clearer comprehension
- Developed creative project
- Updated course texts to be consistently current
- Reorganized lectures to tie more closely to primary readings
- (language) More emphasis on spontaneous spoken language in class
- Ongoing review of grammar and vocabulary
- (language) Encourage participation in public speaking contest in target language
- Provided supplemental materials for course textbook with immediate cultural relevancy
- Carry out more discussions that encourage students’ self-reflection and cross-cultural examinations
- Allow more time for students to select and create creative work
- (language) Used more authentic texts (e.g., newspapers) rather than textbook examples