



West Liberty University Program Review

Assessment Update

Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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The assessment process within the Social Science has been transformed in recent months. These changes have been inspired by former program reviews, increased understanding and participation in overall university / general studies assessment goals, and following successful assessment examples in place in other programs such as Education and Psychology. This process will continue to evolve and mature in the future but it is the belief of the Social Science faculty that the steps outlined in this report show that we have substantially improved our assessment process recently and look to find other avenues to continue this trend.

Social Science Program Goals:

1. Graduating students will demonstrate knowledge of the fundamental concepts, terminology and history of the social science disciplines.
2. Graduating students will demonstrate critical thinking and apply appropriate analytical methods to a range of topics and issues within social science disciplines.
3. Graduating students will effectively communicate concepts in the social sciences.

The Social Science faculty recently approved the adoption of new, more streamlined program goals. The five previous program goals have been condensed into three goals, maintaining the key components of the previous set while making it easier for students to remember and understand the program goals. Students are introduced to the program goals through syllabi for each course within the social science program and more thoroughly engage with the goals in our portfolio and capstone courses. By reducing the number of goals we anticipate not only more students being able to identify the program goals but also understanding how the courses in the Social Science program prepare them to meet these goals.

Assessment Measures

Recently, several direct measures of student learning have been introduced or improved upon. The comprehensive exam has been improved to better assess student knowledge, we have recently started administering the Cornell Critical Thinking Exam, Level Z to assess our student's critical thinking skills and each of the program goals are assessed through the Live Text based Social Science Portfolio. The program has developed a multifaceted approach to assessment that will provide a more meaningful assessment of student learning.

To assess the knowledge of the students in the Social Science program, and address the first program goal, students must take a comprehensive exam. This exam was created by the faculty in the social science program to reflect the learning that occurs in the Social Science Core



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curriculum. These are classes that each social science student must take, regardless of concentration. These courses provide the knowledge base for a social science education. Students in these courses learn about the history, perspectives, methods and theories of the various social science disciplines. While this measure was only created a few years ago, the faculty in the social science program decided it was in need of an update for Fall 2014. The update was necessary to remove questions in the Economics 101 section, as that course is no longer required as part of the Social Science Core. Now, the current comprehensive exam again reflects the Core courses and assesses student learning from that component of program. As of the beginning of Spring 2015 seventeen students have taken the comprehensive exam, averaging a score of 75.5%. In the coming semesters we anticipate between five and ten students taking the comprehensive exam each semester. These numbers will provide us with meaningful data to not only assess the student's learning but also ourselves as faculty members. We can make changes in the curriculum if and when we find parts of the comprehensive exam on which students are struggling.

To address the second program goal, which deals with critical thinking skills, the Social Science program has recently added the Cornell Critical Thinking Test, Level Z. Other programs at West Liberty and other institutions use the Cornell tests to assess critical thinking. This provides several benefits for our program assessment. First, it meant that we did not have to create a measure from scratch, but were able to use one that has already been vetted and used with success elsewhere. Secondly, it will allow us to compare our students to other programs across the University, state, and country. The critical thinking test will be administered twice, which will also allow us to look at the growth in critical thinking skills as our students progress through the program. Here is a description of the test currently administered. "Level Z includes the following skills: Induction, Deduction, Credibility, Identification of Assumptions, Semantics, Definition, and Prediction in Planning Experiments" (<http://www.criticalthinking.com/cornell-critical-thinking-test-level-z.html>).

As the critical thinking test is a new measure for the program, only 3 students have taken the critical thinking exam so far. Those three students have averaged a 61% on the exam, as a first time benchmark. More students will be taking the exam for the first time this semester and in coming semesters we will begin to see students taking the exam for a second time. When the test is administered a second time, when the students have nearly completed the social science program, we anticipate the students will show improved critical thinking skills.

The assessment portfolio remains the most thorough and varied assessment of our students' learning. The portfolio assesses all three program goals, multiple times, and is especially useful for assessing the knowledge beyond the Social Science Core, and the Communication program goal. The portfolio has been utilized for three semesters, improving with each submission as



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students become more comfortable with Live Text and more familiar with how the portfolio process shows their mastery of our program goals.

Students must address the knowledge program goal through the presentation of artifacts in the Live Text portfolio. The term “artifacts” means any assignment, paper, presentation, PowerPoint, Prezi, project or other document that the student chooses to show his / her mastery of the Program Goals. A minimum of two artifacts must be included in the portfolio for each program goal. Also, a rationale statement explain why the chosen artifact is appropriate is required to accompany each artifact. The terms artifact and rationale statement are congruent with the terms in the College of Education content portfolios. This was done deliberately because most of the upper level courses in the Social Sciences are populated with both social science majors and social study education majors. With students sharing classes it made sense to share terminology so in class we could discuss assessment portfolios with the students and the terms would mean the same to the student regardless of major.

The artifacts that students upload to the LiveText portfolio, as well as the required “Senior Essay in Major” allow the student to show learning beyond the Comprehensive Exam. Through the artifacts and essay, they can include advanced theories and methodologies learned in their major courses beyond the Social Science Core.

Two of the artifacts must also address the communication program goal. Most artifacts address written communication but at least one must showcase the student’s oral communication skills. The student is required to upload a video of a presentation given in an upper level course. To this point students have been assessed via the approved WLU written and oral communication rubrics, however we are in the process of approving a unique rubric for the Social Science Portfolio that can be used for all the program goals.

The chosen artifacts and rationale statements pertaining to the program goals are not the only components to the Live Text portfolio. The student must also complete a section titled Senior Reflections. Other than the Senior Essay in Major, most of the items in this section could be classified as non-direct forms of assessment. They include the student’s resume, a document outlining their reflections and growth through the program, and a discussion of the student’s career / continuing education goals.

As mentioned above, all portfolio submissions to this point have been assessed through the General Studies rubrics such as written communication, oral communication, similar to the assessment of the senior capstone projects that predated the portfolio. Currently, the social science faculty in the process of approving a new, unique rubric for the social science portfolio and a draft of that rubric is attached to this report.



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Location of Measures

Currently, assessment measures are mostly located in two social science courses, SS 102 (1 credit hour portfolio) and SS 480 (2 credit hour senior capstone), which are required for all students in the social science program. While taking SS 102, toward the beginning of their time in the program, the students learn how to create and manage their Live Text portfolio and also take the Cornell Critical Thinking Test for the first time.

Most of the measures are located in the senior capstone. Here students have their portfolio evaluated by the faculty, take the Cornell Critical Thinking for the second time, and complete the comprehensive exam. An exit interview for graduating students at the conclusion of the capstone course is being introduced for the Spring 2015 semester.

In the future we will look to place assessment measures in more diverse parts of the social science program. Some possibilities the social science faculty have discussed include placing some assessment within the advising process and the potential movement of the comprehensive exam to the SS 102 course or some other mid-point assessment. We believe that advising and assessment should not be separated, but thought of as two parts of the same objective of providing our students with the education that they desire and deserve. By bringing some assessment into advising, students (and faculty) will see assessment as an ongoing process, evaluated each semester, not just something that bookends the program in the two SS courses. This could be accomplished by requiring the students to share progress on their portfolio with their advisor before receiving their scheduling pin number. Since there could conceivably be several years between the student's completion of SS 102 and their enrollment in SS 480 this addition could promote more discussion and engagement between the student and his or her advisor regarding assessment.

Another potential change could be the movement of the comprehensive exam from SS 480 to an earlier point in the program. Since the comprehensive test assesses student learning in the Social Science Core, it may be better to administer the test closer to the time when students finish those core courses. Currently the nature of our curriculum prevents us from having a single, predictable point in which our students will finish those core courses. Students are able to take those core courses at any point in program, and particularly those courses that are not part of the student's concentration are not completed as soon as those within the concentration. One solution would require the student and advisor to attempt to schedule those core classes as early as possible and the advisor administer the comprehensive exam to the student upon completion to those courses.



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Timeline for Assessment Implementation

The portfolio, critical thinking examinations and updated comprehensive exam are already in place. The newly developed rubric for the Social Science Portfolio and the exit interviews with graduating students will be implemented for the first time in spring 2015. Other assessment goals are admittedly long term projects, such as the inclusion of more assessment into the advising process, outreach and communication with our alumni, and the review of assessment data and any curricular changes that may be derived from that data.

Implementation of Program Reviews

Currently most of the assessment measures are administered and maintained by the assessment coordinator, who serves as the instructor for the SS 102 and SS 480 courses. In these courses the students take the exams and produce the portfolio. The student's advisors are also involved with assessment through the review of the portfolios and utilization of the new rubric. As the assessment process progresses and improves we envision that more social science faculty will engage with the assessment data and address any deficiencies found through the process. Since most of the social science faculty teach general studies courses as well, they are becoming familiar with the assessment process not just on the program level but at the university level as well. This will create a culture of assessment that should get all the program faculty members involved. This is already being seen to some extent but more frequent meetings between the assessment coordinator and the faculty, which are currently being planned, should help expedite this process.

Previous Reviews

The social science program has previously been critiqued for a few assessment components that were seen as lacking or underdeveloped. First, the location of measures had until recently been exclusively at the end of the student's tenure in the program. We had no midpoint or starting point assessment measure. We have addressed this issue by requiring SS 102 for all majors. In this course the student's set up a Live Text account, familiarize themselves with the program goals and the portfolio process and take the critical thinking test for the first time. The program may implement more early or midpoint assessment measures in the future, or focus on the assessment in advising which would provide for continuous engagement throughout the student's time in the program. Another critique of the program was the lack of indirect assessment measures. We have begun addressing this by implementing the exit interview for those graduating students in Spring 2015 and more interaction between the student and advisor pertaining to assessment should allow us to strengthen this component as well. The



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final criticism was our lack of communication with alumni of the program. We keep up with some students through informal means such as email or even Facebook but as of yet do not have a good strategy when it comes to tracking and communicating with our former students. This spring the faculty members will meet to address this shortcoming. We plan on contacting graduates from the last ten years and keeping a spreadsheet of current / permanent contact information as well as career / continuing education information for as many students as we can, and to discuss these issues with students during the exit interviews to increase the post-graduation communication between the program and future graduates.

Appendix

Social Science Program Portfolio Rubric (DRAFT)

Program Goals	Element	Advanced	Proficient	Adequate	Limited	Inadequate
Communication	Oral Delivery	Delivery techniques (posture, gesture, eye contact, vocal expressiveness) make the presentation compelling, and the speaker appears polished and confident	Delivery techniques (posture, gesture, eye contact, vocal expressiveness) make the presentation compelling and the speaker appears comfortable	Delivery techniques (posture, gesture, eye contact, vocal expressiveness) make the presentation understandable and the speaker appears tentative	Delivery techniques (posture, gesture, eye contact, vocal expressiveness) detract from the understandability of the presentation and the speaker appears uncomfortable	
	Central Message	Central message is compelling (precisely stated, appropriately repeated, memorable and strongly supported.)	Central message is clear and consistent with the supporting material	Central message is basically understandable but is not often repeated and is not memorable	Central message can be deduced, but it is not explicitly stated in the presentation or paper	There is no identifiable central message
	Content Development	Uses appropriate, relevant and compelling content to illustrate mastery of the subject, conveying the writer's understanding and shaping the whole work	Uses appropriate, relevant and compelling content to explore ideas within the context of the discipline and shape the whole work	Uses appropriate and relevant content to develop and explore ideas through most of the work	Uses appropriate and relevant content to develop simple ideas in some parts of the work	No appropriate or relevant content is developed in the portfolio
	Syntax / Mechanics	Uses graceful language that skillfully communicates meaning to readers with clarity and fluency, and it is virtually error-free.	Uses straightforward that generally conveys meaning to readers. The language in the portfolio has few errors.	Uses language that generally conveys meaning to readers with clarity, although writing may include some errors.	Uses language that sometimes impedes meaning because of errors in usage.	The meaning is undeterminable and the portfolio is full of writing errors
Knowledge / Critical Thinking	Self-Awareness	Effectively addresses significant issues in the social sciences based on articulating one's identity in a	Evaluates the global impact of one's own and other specific actions to on the	Analyzes ways that human actions influence the natural and human worlds	Identifies some connections between individual decision-making	Fails to identify any connections between the social sciences and their own



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		global context	natural and human world		and the topical concerns of the social sciences	lives.
	Cultural Diversity	Adapts and applies a deep understanding of multiple worldviews, experiences, and power structures while initiating meaningful interaction with other cultures to address significant global problems	Analyzes substantial connections between worldviews, power structures, and experiences of multiple cultures historically or in contemporary contexts, incorporating respectful interactions with other cultures	Explains and connects two or more cultures historically or in contemporary contexts with some acknowledgement of power structures, demonstrating respectful interaction with varied cultures and worldviews	Describes the experiences of others historically or in contemporary primarily through one cultural perspective, demonstrating some openness to varied cultures and worldviews	Demonstrates no openness to other cultures or worldviews.
	Understanding Systems	Uses deep knowledge of the historic and contemporary role, and differential effects, of human organizations and actions on global systems to develop and advocate for informed, appropriate action to solve complex problems in human and natural worlds	Analyzes major elements of global systems, including their historic and contemporary interconnections and the differential effects of human organizations and actions, to pose elementary solutions to complex problems in the human and natural worlds	Examines the historical and contemporary roles, interconnections, and differential effects of human organizations and actions on global systems within the human and natural worlds	Identifies the basic role of some global and local institutions, ideas, and processes in the human and natural worlds	Fails to identify basic roles of institutions, ideas or processes
	Civic Knowledge	Connects and extends knowledge (facts, theories, etc) from one's own academic study/field/discipline to civic engagement and participation in civic life, politics and government	Analyzes knowledge (facts, theories, etc) from one's own academic study / field / discipline making relevant connections to civic engagement and to one's own participation in civic life, politics and government	Begins to connect knowledge (facts, theories, etc) from one's own academic study / field / discipline to civic engagement and to one's own participation in civic life, politics and gov't	Begins to identify knowledge (facts, theories, etc) from the social science program which are relevant to civic engagement and participation in civic life, politics and gov't	Fails to identify any knowledge from the program which are relevant to any aspect of civic engagement