1. **What question or issue were you addressing with this activity?**
   The department worked on five main assessment activities during the 2008-2009 academic year:
   a. As part of the department’s self-study and program review, which took place during the 2008-2009 academic year, the department reviewed the structure of the major;
   b. The department reviewed and revised its learning goals and began a conversation about how best to assess student learning in HRS courses (both GE and the major;)
   c. The department assessed the curriculum’s alignment with General Education and the Baccalaureate Learning Goals;
   d. A panel of three HRS faculty members conducted a “blind” evaluation of student papers from three sections of HRS 190: Topics in Humanities and Religious Studies using the course’s research paper rubric.
   e. The faculty began a focused review of the LIBA Master’s Program. The LIBA program was included in the HRS department’s self-study and program review for the first time since its inception.

2. **What data did you collect to address this question or issue?**
   a. For the self-study, the department reviewed the factbooks for 2007 and 2008 prepared by OIR:
      i. One possibly pertinent piece of data was presented in the “Process: Curriculum and Instruction” section of the factbook, which revealed that HRS majors generally and consistently (over the past 10 years) enroll in slightly fewer units than the College and University mean, despite the fact that 2/3 of our majors were identified as full-time.
      ii. The department also reviewed the factbooks’ data on enrollment patterns for the past 5 and 10 years.

OIR also administered an alumni survey which the faculty reviewed as part of the self-study process.
b. Since 98.3% of the department’s courses are in General Education, in October 2008, the department developed a revised set of learning goals that infused a number of GE area C outcomes with other departmental learning and teaching goals. This activity drew on models from departments of humanities and religious studies on other campuses. As part of the self-study and program review process, the department also received significant feedback on its 2007-2008 assessment report in October 2008 from Professor Terry Underwood, the Faculty Assessment Coordinator.

c. Based on the completion of the department’s General Education Program’s Area C assessment, the department’s 2007-2008 assessment report made a preliminary case that, “without exception, HRS faculty were able to offer specific examples of assignments and activities linked to the department’s goal of cultural literacy, the GE Area C (Arts and Humanities) learning goals and the Baccalaureate Learning Goals for “Cultural Legacy.” This information confirmed the department’s sense that the emphasis on cultural literacies which is present in the department’s course matrix is actually reflected in the department curriculum.”

d. A group of three HRS faculty members read a random sample of 15 papers drawn from three sections of HRS 190: Topics in Humanities and Religious Studies. The papers were drawn from sections with different topics and did not include students’ names. All the readers used the HRS 190 rubric as the basis of their evaluations.

e. A committee of faculty reviewed graduate study in the humanities across the nation and examined successful graduate programs in the CSU system.

The department also benefited from collaborative conversations with and detailed reports from the program review team and external consultant, Dr. Joel Zimbelman.

3. What did the data tell you?

a. Curriculum structure and GE alignment

i. This piece of information may suggest that students in HRS encounter structural impediments to truly full-time enrollment that might be meaningfully addressed by changes in the ways the department plans its course offerings and/or semester schedules.

ii. The HRS faculty has made strategic decisions in terms of upper division course offerings which are part of the General Education program---in general, HRS courses are well-enrolled (as a matter of fact, HRS courses are consistently larger than the College or University average.)

HRS 10 has seen a dramatic reduction in the number of students it serves.
b. The dean’s response to the department’s 2007-2008 assessment report, the department’s 2008-2009 self study and program review and Dr. Underwood’s review, all highlight further work the department needs to undertake to clarify the steps the department will undertake to improve the learning of students in HRS classes. Dr. Underwood puts the issue in particularly pungent terms: “The fact that 20-40% of HRS students are experiencing some level of failure to accomplish the learning outcomes is salient.”

c. The department’s alignment with GE Area C and the Baccalaureate Learning Goals emphases on cultural literacy provides HRS students with rich opportunities to explore multiple perspectives a number of important areas of human experience and expression, such as religion and spirituality, identity, culture, and aesthetics.

That assessment activity also identified student reading and study skills as impediments to achieving course and program learning goals. The department could move to review another, different learning goal or activity in the coming academic year.

d. The panel’s reading of student papers revealed a weakness in the ways in the final research paper assignment in all three sections of HRS 190. As a result of a discussion of the panel’s findings, the department’s faculty agreed that the final paper assignment should offer students the opportunity to most strongly demonstrate their abilities to synthesize the texts, methods and theories that they encountered during their undergraduate careers. A revised assignment was developed by the faculty member teaching the class in spring 2009 in consultation with other department faculty.

e. Examination of the LIBA degree, student applications, performance and progress suggest that the program should be reformed to 1) take best advantage of Sac State faculty resources, 2) provide a stronger pre-professional preparation or focus on preparation for further graduate work, and 3) draw a more prepared student body. The LIBA program or any revised program proposal (like most graduate programs on our campus) needs to develop a clear set of learning goals and an assessment plan.

The program review team report acknowledged that the HRS department had made significant progress in assessing GE and the undergraduate major. However, the team also felt, “a great deal of work is still needed for this department to build the capacity to promote and oversee a sustainable program review and program assessment. . .we do not think the present assessment plan is the best option at the moment.” The department needs to make better use of the support resources available to it (in the person of Professor Underwood and the newly appointed College of Arts and Letters Assessment consultant) in order to prepare a new, comprehensive and realistic assessment plan.

4. **As a result of faculty reflection on these results, are there any program changes anticipated?**
a. **If so, what are those changes?**

The faculty will meet on June 12, 2009, and over the course of the fall semester, to revise the department’s curriculum, for the major, graduate study and general education. Discussion will also include reflection on the program review team’s recommendation that the department focus and refine its learning goals and assessment plan.

Professor Underwood suggested, “HRS might consider developing and implementing a common instructional and assessment plan aimed at improving students’ capacity to read critically and creatively and to integrate and synthesize information across texts and experiences. At a minimum it appears that student learning could benefit from instructional plans that take into account students’ strengths and weaknesses in reading strategies and comprehension. Content teaching objectives could remain in the purview of individual faculty while reading and literacy objectives could cross the program.” Professor Underwood is working on the “GE Reads” initiative and given the faculty’s sense of the weakness of student reading skills, the department will benefit from those materials and his expertise.

The faculty discussion of HRS 190 revealed some faculty dissatisfaction with the class. As part of the focus on curriculum revision planned for summer and fall 2009, some adjustment in the organization and learning goals of the course is likely. It may be that the goal of student experience of and demonstration of the cross-fertilization of the perspectives of humanities and religious studies which was one of the core goals of the class is not being accomplished (and may not actually be the best use of our students’---or faculty’s---time.) This conversation will continue into fall 2009 and may lead to a change in the major’s core requirements.

A group of HRS faculty members are currently preparing a substantive program change proposal for the LIBA program. The faculty’s intention is to propose a Humanities Master’s degree curriculum to replace the current LIBA program.

b. **How will you know if these changes achieved the desired results?**

An improved HRS assessment plan would yield timely, meaningful and consistent information about student performance, both in terms of specific course goals and the department’s learning goals.

An improved, explicit, and clear alignment between the HRS program of courses and revised learning goals could improve the department’s ability to develop and implement a sustainable and helpful assessment plan.
Evaluation of student work in future sections of HRS 190 would reveal higher levels of understanding of the concepts, methods and theories of the fields of humanities and religious studies and an enhanced ability to do interdisciplinary work.

A revised master’s program draws students who are better prepared to do graduate level work, leading to a pool of more qualified applicants and improved completion rates. Such students would also produce better quality theses and examinations.

5. What assessment activities are planned for the upcoming academic year?

While the department has not formalized a plan at this point, in his assessment review, Professor Underwood made a number of suggestions that are worth serious consideration:

HRS may want to develop a plan for student surveys, interviews, and focus groups. Such a plan could open the aperture of assessment and cast light on why and when some students are “giving up.”

HRS could consider designing and using a few common reading assessments that do not intrude too much and that provide a data source to draw evidence of educational effectiveness regarding reading.

Some evidence of collaborative analysis of student work shows up in a few of the reports, but little evidence could be found to support the claim generally that anyone beyond the report writer contributed to the analysis and interpretation. HRS might focus some attention on developing ongoing collaborative structures that bring faculty together to examine student work.

Certainly, at a minimum, in the 2009-2010 academic year, the HRS department will begin to more effectively draw on the resources and support mechanisms available to it to develop and implement a more “strategic” (to use the language of the program team report) and systematic set of assessment activities for the undergraduate major, graduate program and general education. In doing so, the department will seriously consider the program team’s recommendation to establish “reasonable learning goals, measurable learning objectives, and good rubrics.” A basic, first step will be the creation of “one set of reasonable student learning outcomes that include key knowledge, skills and values the department expects its undergraduate majors to learn and demonstrate.”

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