Department of Humanities and Religious Studies
ANNUAL ASSESSMENT REPORT
2009-2010
Option 2: Exemplar submission

1. What question or issue were you addressing with this activity?
The Department focused on the organization of the major and its effect on student performance in each of the programs’ concentrations (Humanities and Religious Studies)

2. What data did you collect to address this question or issue?
Drawing on the information generated as part of the 2008-2009 program review (in particular the program review team report and student survey), faculty members discussed student performance in HRS 190: Topics in Humanities and Religious Studies, which serves as a capstone course for majors and the skills demonstrated by HRS majors in the department’s General Education courses;

One HRS faculty member participated in the “GE Reads” project and shared that group’s activities and findings with the department;

The faculty also reviewed the course matrix which the department prepared in 1999 as the framework for organizing assessment of HRS courses.

3. What did the data tell you?
The HRS program review found confusion in the department’s structure of multiple learning goals and a report by the University Assessment Coordinator suggested that the department consider what levels of student achievement should be considered “good enough.”

The student survey revealed that students continue to find the major too heavily saturated with what often turn out to be, for them, “introductory” courses because of the major’s overlap with the department’s GE offerings.

The faculty determined that student work in the capstone class does not consistently demonstrate the level of analytical reading and writing skills which the faculty commonly expects of HRS graduates in both concentrations. Discussion among the faculty revealed a common sense that many students in HRS classes (both majors and GE students) are not completing the reading necessary to allow them to be successful in their classes.

The HRS faculty also began to revise the course matrix in light of the new learning goals and additions and deletions to the department curriculum since 1999.

4. As a result of faculty reflection on these results, are there any program changes anticipated?
Yes

a.) If so, what are those changes?
In the 2009-2010 academic year the HRS faculty spent a significant amount of time reviewing and revising the department’s learning goals—reducing the multiple learning goal frameworks to a single list of program learning goals:
- Demonstrate knowledge of human cultures, their values and forms of expression;
• Demonstrate analytical reading, critical thinking skills and effective communication skills (both written and oral) of a variety of texts;
• Appreciate the importance of life-long learning;
• Demonstrate an ability to undertake synthetic and cross-disciplinary study and learning

The faculty also proposed significant revisions to major program:
  ▪ Reduction of units for major from 45 to 39;
  ▪ Reorganization of concentration core and electives to focus on religious studies and humanities as two more separate courses of study, which is a change from the more blended curriculum of the past several catalogs;
  ▪ Updating of electives list to reflect courses added to the curriculum since 2008;
  ▪ Removal of courses from of electives lists of each concentration that do not have appropriately focused objectives;
  ▪ Revision of some course prerequisites;
  ▪ Revision of capstone (HRS 190) into a set of junior-level seminars organized to offer opportunities to build content knowledge and develop skills in concentration’s methods and approaches.

The program change proposal was held up at the University Curriculum Committee level at the end of the spring 2010 semester, but consultation with the Committee suggests that their concerns can be swiftly addressed at the start of the fall 2010 semester by minor revisions to the proposal for HRS 190.

b.) How will you know if these changes achieved the desired results?
Two sets of “desired results” would demonstrate that these changes were effective:
At the department level, the simplified learning goals will allow the faculty to construct a meaningful, implemented, regular and sustainable assessment plan drawing on an updated program course matrix:

For students, the proposed revised program will provide a structure that provides more opportunities to ensure that students meet the department’s learning goals at both an acceptable level for baccalaureate students and in sufficient numbers to demonstrate that the program effectively prepares students of humanities and religious studies.

c.) What assessment activities are planned for the upcoming academic year?
The structure of assessment activities in the HRS Department continues to be an area of concern. The department plans to formalize an assessment committee structure and charge, as it has become increasingly clear that the department chair cannot be the sole “driver” of a successful departmental assessment plan.

In the coming academic year, the department faculty plan to complete a revised course matrix that includes some sense of the levels (introductory, developed or mastery) at which students are expected to demonstrate their acquisition of the skills, knowledge and attitudes which are the foundation of the major’s learning goals. This matrix will provide the department with an overview of its current curriculum and its alignment with the revised learning goals. The updated matrix may also help the department develop and implement a more regularized set of assessment activities.

The department is also very interested in pursuing the issue of reading---both in terms of the level of students’ analytical skill and their commitment to actually doing the reading assigned for their
classes. To assess student reading, the department plans to administer a student survey (drawing some questions about engagement from the NSSE survey) and a short pretest in several classes during the opening week of classes to gauge student content knowledge. The pretest will be offered again in those classes as a post-test at the end of the term. The department will consult with the University Assessment Coordinator to draw on his expertise and the findings of the “GE Reads” project in developing both the survey and test materials.

Jackie R. Donath  
Professor and Chair  
Department of Humanities and Religious Studies  
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