

Assessment Report

Western Culture and Civilization Pilot Project for General Education Assessment

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In the spring of 2004 the Vice Provost for Planning, Assessment, and Information Resource Management and the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences convened a group of faculty who taught courses that met the Western Culture and Civilization requirement. This meeting was part of a larger initiative directed at devising an assessment plan for Cleveland State University's General Education requirement. Two pilot projects—one on the Western Culture and Civilization requirement, the other on the Social Sciences requirement—were outlined. This report summarizes the findings of the Western Culture and Civilization pilot project.

General conversations

At a lunch meeting in February 2004 facilitated by Associate Professor Elizabeth Lehfeldt (HIS), a group of approximately 20 faculty who taught courses that met the requirement discussed our expectations for these courses. Several conclusions resulted from these discussions:

1. Despite a remarkable diversity in the subjects and content taught, the instructors universally communicated the importance of these courses in teaching basic skills (writing, critical thinking).
2. Many of the courses that meet this requirement are introductory, survey-level courses. Thus, many instructors believed that beyond their content, these courses performed an important role in acculturating students to learning in a college environment.

3. There was strikingly little discussion of the content goals of these courses. This is due perhaps to the immense diversity of courses that meet this requirement. Finding the common content ground in courses ranging from the first half of the History of Western Civilization survey to 200-level English course in African-American literature is quite difficult.

In the summer of 2004 the Provost sponsored a dinner gathering, hosted by the Associate Dean for Curriculum in CLASS, Jeffrey Ford. The intention of this gathering was again to foster general faculty discussions about the common goals and expectations for the two pilot project requirements. This conversation was less directed than the spring lunch and did not really result in specific findings.

Working group

In the fall of 2004 Associate Professor Elizabeth Lehfeltdt (HIS) served as the convener for a working group of faculty (attendance at meetings ranged from 5-8) currently teaching or scheduled to teach in spring 2005 courses that met the Western Civilization requirement. This was a multi-disciplinary group, drawing together faculty in History, Philosophy, English, Political Science, and Modern Languages. Over the course of six meetings the group:

1. Examined the current criteria for Western Civilization courses. It was noted that the existing criteria define courses based primarily on course content as revealed in course syllabi. The existing criteria say nothing about student learning outcomes.

2. Acknowledged the inherent difficulty of identifying common content goals across such a wide range of courses.
3. Decided that each instructor would identify a theme outlined in #3 (see Attachment #1) of the existing criteria, around which they would develop a specific assignment to be used in their course.
4. Developed an assessment plan linked to these theme/assignment pairings (see Attachments #2a-d for examples).
5. Met to approve each of these assessment plans.
6. Developed a general assessment rubric that could be applied to all of the assessment plans (see Attachment #3).

Assessment in action

During the spring semester 2005 three instructors (an additional fourth instructor had already implemented his assessment plan during fall 2004) implemented their assessment plans in their Western Civilization courses. At the end of the semester they collected random samples (five papers) of these assignments. After the end of the semester the participating faculty had two meetings. At the first meeting we each described our assignment and its implementation in greater detail. We then each took another instructor's random sample to be evaluated using the approved rubric. At the second meeting we discussed our findings.

Findings

raw data:

SPN 345 (instructor: Gingerich, evaluator: Lehfeldt)

paper #1: 3.5

paper #2: 1

paper #3: 3.5

paper #4: 3.5

paper #5: 3.5

HIS 101 (instructor: Lehfeldt, evaluator: Mastboom)

paper #1: 4

paper #2: 3

paper #3: 2

paper #4: 5

paper #5: 3

HIS 111 (instructor: Goldberg, evaluator: Gingerich)

paper #1: 4.5

paper #2: 3

paper #3: 2.5

paper #4: 3.5

paper #5: 3

HIS 102 (instructor: Mastboom, evaluator: Goldberg)

paper #1: 2

paper #2: 3

paper #3: 2

paper #4: 4

paper #5: 5

raw data interpretation:

Although based on fairly small samples, the results of the assessment exercise reveal that on average, students demonstrated competent knowledge of the material. In addition, one quarter of the students sampled demonstrated either above average or exceptional knowledge of the material. Only one of the samples indicated inadequate knowledge.

discussion points:

1. Benefits of this assessment exercise: promotes a more self-conscious attitude towards teaching and the crafting of assignments; encourages faculty discussions of courses and teaching across departments.
2. By discussing the goals and themes of courses intended to meet this requirement, the participating faculty believe that there are some courses that may need to be de-certified for meeting this requirement. There are so many courses that meet this requirement it has been watered-down to the point of being somewhat incoherent.

3. In assessing the random samples and using the rubric, some wondered what the standard benchmark for this kind of assessment ought to be. It was suggested that beyond an independent evaluation of the papers against the criteria of the rubric, an additional useful consideration would be the extent to which students demonstrate knowledge and skills that would separate them from someone who has not attended a four-year college/university.

**Western Culture and Civilization
General Education assessment**

from requirement to course to assessment

draft assessment model

building from general themes of the requirement to course-specific assessment in
HIS 101, Western Civilization I

Western Civilization I

general theme:

the tension between individuality and the idea of community (taken verbatim from the existing criteria)

general goal:

Students will demonstrate specific knowledge of how the tensions between individuality and the idea of community shaped developments in Western civilization.

course-specific goal:

Students will demonstrate specific knowledge of how new ideas about the worth and dignity of the individual during the Renaissance clashed with earlier medieval ideas of community.

instrument:

Students will do an in-class writing assignment based on this theme.

Western Culture and Civ Assessment

assessment rubric: to be applied to papers and essays identified as assessment instruments for Western Culture and Civilization requirement

5 = student demonstrates exceptional knowledge of theme, is able to make a cogent argument about the theme that includes original ideas (does not simply "list" relevant information), supports his/her argument with specific examples/illustrations; all factual information is correct

4 = student demonstrates an above average knowledge of theme, makes a cogent argument using specific examples/illustrations (does not simply "list" relevant information); all factual information is correct

3 = student demonstrates a competent knowledge of the theme; the argument is cogent, but the illustrations/examples may not include as much detail or precision as a 5 or 4 assignment

2 = student demonstrates a cursory knowledge of the theme but does not develop a cogent argument and/or does not use enough or any specific illustrations/examples to support his/her argument; there may be factual errors

1 = student does not demonstrate adequate knowledge of theme; there may be incorrect or imprecise information