Student Learning Assessment Report

Submitted by: Dr. Lucille Guss, Chair, Liberal Studies
Date: September 30, 2013

BRIEFLY DESCRIBE WHERE AND HOW DATA AND DOCUMENTS USED TO GENERATE THIS REPORT ARE BEING STORED:
The documents used in this report are stored in the office of the Chairperson of Liberal Studies. They include the syllabi for the required LS300, LS 400, LS 400 PACE, and LS 420 courses. (See Appendix for syllabi details.) In addition they include student portfolios from current offerings of the LS 420 course; data from the LS 420 oral presentations evaluations; employer evaluations of Liberal Studies interns; and data from the alumni and graduating senior surveys.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The B.A. in Liberal Studies program is offered by the School of Arts and Sciences. In the 2012-2013 academic year, the program enrolled 47 students in the fall, 49 students in the spring, and 30 students in the summer (65 unique students) and awarded the B.A. Degree in Liberal Studies to 21 students. The program is designated a “degree completion program” whose curriculum is designed to appeal to adult students who have earned some college credits in another time and place and are most likely currently employed full-time. These individuals seek a diverse curriculum that permits application of both previous and newly earned credits to degree completion. In the last few years, the age demographics have changed; more students in their late 20s to early 30s as opposed to 40s-60s (predominately women) are now entering the program. This group includes Iraqi and Afghan veterans. These students are still very interested in a degree completion program, but are more open to fresh career paths as they have not been in the marketplace as long as previous Liberal Studies adult learners have been. Currently enrolled Marymount students who wish to change majors also find in the Liberal Studies program a way to utilize credits already earned while undertaking a new area of concentration.

The curriculum requires completion of (1) the Liberal Arts core, (2) concentrations in two separate fields, (3) a triad of courses specific to the Liberal Studies student learning outcomes assessment, and (4) electives. Concentrations may be chosen from Biology and related sciences, Business and related fields, Communication, Fine and Applied Arts, Gender and Society, Health Sciences, Humanities, Graphic Design, History, Humanities, Information Technology, Mathematics, Philosophy/Religious Studies/Theology, and Psychology/Sociology/Criminal Justice. The two concentrations require 21 credits in each, 9 of which must be in courses numbered 300 and above. The Liberal Studies triad includes LS 300: Readings and Portfolio Development, LS 400: Internship, and LS 420: Senior Seminar, the capstone course. LS 300 is designated a writing intensive course; LS 400 an experiential course; and LS 420 both a writing intensive and an inquiry course.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

LS 420 IS THE CAPSTONE COURSE OF THE LIBERAL STUDIES PROGRAM. THE PURPOSE OF ITS 25-PAGE SENIOR THESIS IS TO SHOWCASE THE STUDENT’S ABILITY TO INTEGRATE LEARNING IN THE TWO MAJOR SEQUENCES. THE OBJECTIVE IS TO DEMONSTRATE THAT THE STUDENT KNOWS HOW TO ACCESS SIGNIFICANT SCHOLARSHIP IN EACH FIELD AND TO THINK AND WRITE CRITICALLY ON A SUBJECT THAT NECESSITATES SCHOLARLY RESEARCH THAT ELICITS CONTROVERSY, OPPOSING/OR MULTIPLE POINTS OF VIEW, AND THAT CALLS FOR ACTION OR A SOLUTION. THE COURSE ALSO REQUIRES AN ORAL PRESENTATION BASED ON THE STUDENT’S FINDINGS.

List all of the program’s learning outcomes: (regardless of whether or not they are being assessed this year)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Outcome</th>
<th>Year of Last Assessment</th>
<th>Year of Next Planned Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outcome One: Critical Thinking and Judgment</strong></td>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>2014-2015*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students must devise their own research question on a current, controversial issue in their field of inquiry that embraces their two fields of concentration in the Liberal Studies Program and that requires sources from these two fields to investigate that issue.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outcome Two: Scholarship</strong></td>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>2014-2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students must perform academic research using university academic databases specific to their two fields of inquiry to investigate their thesis, exploring both sides of the issue and/or multiple viewpoints.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students must produce a well-structured and documented 25-page paper that conforms to an appropriate documentation style and is written in clear and concise prose.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students must present their findings orally to their peers and be prepared to respond to a question-and-answer session following the presentation. Students must also demonstrate competence in the use of technology to enhance research, writing, and speaking.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* This year Liberal Studies will undergo SACS 5-year review and, consequently, is not required to submit an assessment report for 2013-2014; our next report will be 2014-2015.
Describe how the program’s outcomes support Marymount’s Mission, Strategic Plan, and relevant school plan:

The Liberal Studies Bachelor of Arts program supports both Marymount’s Mission and the Strategic Plan that are woven through the entire required curriculum. These components include the following: (1) the Liberal Arts tradition; (2) an enhanced intellectual experience; (3) development of inquiry skills; (4) capitalizing on the Washington area resources; and (5) building community through volunteer activities. Each of these components is highlighted in courses. (See Appendix for illustration in LS 300, LS 400, and LS 420 syllabi.)

The Liberal Studies program supports the Liberal Arts tradition. Humanistic ideals are stressed in counseling sessions and in LS 300 and LS 420 classes. In research and writing, we encourage academic integrity, self-actualization, striving for high ideals, and visualizing the world not as it is but as it can be. Above all, we encourage students to keep an open mind. During the first discussion on topic selection, students are told to forgo how they usually approach a research paper—decide on a thesis and then write the paper. Instead, we ask them NOT to form a conclusion; rather they are to generate a research question, which will engender other questions, which, in answering, will eventually lead them to a reasoned and tested position. Thus, students are encouraged to approach new subjects in a novel way, to formulate simple questions that lead to the heart of the inquiry, and to gather and analyze materials to test the validity of possible solutions. Liberal Studies stresses Inquiry.

Liberal Studies Students also recognize the interdependence of disciplines and the necessity to approach an issue using strategies from various fields to arrive at an informed conclusion.

In short, the Chair tells students to value their Liberal Studies degree. A recent survey of CEOs by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (2013) found that 74 percent of these executives said “they would recommend a 21st-century liberal education in order to create a more dynamic worker.” Although STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering, and math) are important, they have “sucked all the oxygen out of the room and crowded out investment in other areas like history, literature and political science.” I then point out that the article calls for exactly the kind of education our Liberal Studies majors receive: “Ninety-five percent of those surveyed said they look for college graduates who can think clearly and solve problems and be able to translate their ideas with good oral and communication skills.” (Mark Koba, “Why Businesses Prefer a Liberal Arts Education.” CNBC. 15 Apr. 2013. Web. 28 Aug. 2013.)

In line with Marymount’s Mission and Strategic Plan, Liberal Studies also emphasizes research and inquiry into moral and ethical topics across the various disciplines in the students’ concentrations. For example, in the 2012-2013, senior theses dealt with such
topics as the individual’s right to privacy and cybervetting; the disparity between the Catholic Church’s position on spousal abuse and divorce within Catholic marriage and what the laity believes the Church promulgates; the exploitation of incarcerated prisoners by big business; and sex and labor trafficking of children in 21st century America. In their choice of topics, students in Liberal Studies exhibit respect for the dignity of man and the uniqueness and value of the individual. The moral and ethical dimensions of a problem are considered.

The Chair wishes to point out that the paper on the Catholic Church’s position on spousal abuse was dual submitted as part of the Honors Program—a first since the Chair took over three years ago. The Chair was graciously included in the student’s defense along with the three faculty members on the student’s committee. Our grades were separate. This thesis may also be expanded to provide a much-needed handbook for the Catholic laity.

In contrast to other years, only 1 student was involved in a humane internship: Safe Shores: The DC Children’s Advocacy Center—Victim Services. Internship were predominately in business, fashion, art and graphic design, and sports marketing. One student worked for an online women’s shopping boutique (see Internships).

Washington area resources were also utilized. The Chair and her students were invited to attend a Women’s History Month event at the White House. Along with students from Georgetown and George Washington Universities, our students were shown excerpts from the acclaimed documentary, Makers: Women Who Make America, which is still being aired on PBS. The screening was followed by a panel discussion featuring women who appeared in the film. They answered questions proposed by a moderator as well as inquiries from the audience. Our students were impressed by the women’s wit and intelligence and amused by anecdotes from the early women’s movement (the section aired). The experience was one the students said they would always remember.

Provide a brief description of the assessment process used including strengths, challenges and planned improvements:

The assessment process includes the following components: (1) review of the junior and senior portfolios by faculty teaching in the program; (2) evaluation of the senior thesis by the program Chair person and by a faculty member in the student’s concentration; (3) evaluation of the oral presentations by both students in the LS 420 course and the professor teaching the course; (4) evaluations by work-site mentors of seniors who complete the LS 400 internship; (5) evaluation by the Chair of essays of internship students, describing and evaluating their internship experience; and (6) evaluation by the Chair of essays for LS 400 PACE (Portfolio Assessment and Credit by Examination)—credit for work and life experiences for students through portfolio assessment in lieu of an internship). (Students desiring to take LS400 PACE must have the approval of the Chair of Liberal Studies and/or the Associate Dean of Arts & Sciences.)
Describe how the program implemented its planned improvements from last year:

There were two major recommended changes implemented in the spring semester 2013.

First, the program initiated discipline-specific Senior Seminar 2nd readers. The move was highly successful. The process began by having students submit the name of a professor in their concentration(s) whom they wished to have as a second reader for their thesis (the Chair acting as the primary reader and grade-giver). The Chair then wrote to each professor, explaining that the Liberal Studies students write a 25+ paper combining their two concentrations; informing them that they would be in a pilot program; apprising him/her that the student had suggested him/her as a possible second reader; and providing the rubric he/she would be asked to complete and return by a predetermined date after reading and correcting the paper. This rubric was sent with this letter so professors would know exactly what they were committing themselves to do. They would receive a $100.00 stipend for participating. (See Appendix for letter and rubric.) The initial mailing was well received. Eleven of the 12 professors approached agreed to participate. The professor who could not cited a program he would be involved in at the end of the semester; he did not feel he could commit himself for that time.

At the end of the semester, all appraisals were received on time and except for one (whose comments were truncated but who nonetheless read and corrected the essay itself in an exemplary manner) were well done.

What would I do differently?

- I would have students submit their tentative thesis to their 2nd reader for comment/approval.
- I would have students arrange one meeting with their advisor at the point where they are developing their outline to ensure they had considered all major arguments.
- I would ask professors to provide a grade; some did, some did not. I did not provide a space for one on the rubric I prepared; in the future, I will.
- I had sent out the rubric about 6 weeks before the papers were delivered to the readers; some professors had forgotten about and some could not find it. In the future, I will resend the rubric as the semester ends.
- I will ask the 2nd reader to send the corrected paper and evaluation simultaneously to the student and me instead of sending it to me and then my forwarding it to the student.

What I have learned?
To begin, I know what I have NOT learned, and, that is how useful the students found the second readers’ evaluations as there was no feedback from them. The semester ended, and most had graduated. I will have to devise an evaluative sheet for students to complete about the value of having a 2nd reader and ask them to return it to me when they receive the 2nd reader’s assessment.

I was reassured that my evaluations of the students’ papers were in harmony with the assessments of the discipline-specific professors, and that my grading was neither too harsh nor too lenient. A good paper was a good paper whoever read it!

Second, the Liberal Studies program required students for the first time to submit electronic portfolios. Early in the semester, the Chair met with the Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL). After exploring several avenues, the Center established a site for the course that would be available only to those students in the Senior Seminar course. Students would need to submit their URL for their Portfolio to the Center who would enter it into the site. The students attended a training session in the CTL and, at the end of the course, all successfully completed the process. However, the Chair will not begin archiving Portfolios until Fall 2013. The format available in the site that the CTL provided called for items, such as cover page photos, which were too informal for a scholarly portfolio. At the end of the semester the Chair attended a faculty workshop dealing with portfolio preparation. The format presented (for tenure but could be adopted for students) was ideal for the Liberal Studies program, and the presenter graciously agreed to assist in setting up the portfolio format and training the Liberal Studies students. Both LS 300 and LS 420 students will receive this training this fall.

Provide a response to last year’s University Assessment Committee review of the program’s learning assessment report: (List each recommendation and provide a specific response to each).

The University Assessment Committee deemed the 2011-2012 report to have met all the standards of the assessment process.

The other recommendations were also complied with:

- The 2012-2013 report was typed using both upper and lower case.
- The 2012-2013 report attempted to focus more on results from measures then providing anecdotal information about student and included more information on internships.
Outcome and Past Assessment

Learning Outcome 1: critical thinking and independent judgment

Is this outcome being reexamined? □ Yes  □ No

If yes, give a brief summary of previous results (including trends) and any changes made to the program.

Assessment Activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome Measures</th>
<th>Performance Standard</th>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct Measure: Senior thesis in capstone course, LS 420: Senior Seminar</td>
<td>Must meet topic selection criteria: (1) current, controversial subject (2) combines both concentrations (3) clearly articulates a thesis (4) assumes correct persona and tone The thesis is rated from excellent to unsatisfactory when compared to “LS 420 Senior Seminar Thesis Evaluation”</td>
<td>Theses submitted at the conclusion of LS 420 course</td>
<td>(1) Analysis linked to LS 420 Senior Seminar Evaluation Criteria (see Appendix), to corrected papers, and to written evaluations of the completed thesis (see Appendix) (2) Findings in Spring 2012-2013 were as follows: Of the 11 theses submitted • 4 exceeded all expectations (Outstanding-Excellent: 1A, 3 A-s) • 5 exceeded expectations (Good 1 B+, 2 B’s, 2 B-’s) • 2 met expectations (Satisfactory 2 C’s)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection:
- Discuss the data collected and student population

Analysis:
1) Describe the analysis process.  
2) Present the findings of the analysis including the numbers participating and deemed acceptable.

Interpretation of Results
Extent this Learning Outcome has been achieved by students (Use both direct and indirect measure results):

Analysis shown is based on the work of 11 students from the spring semester LS 420 Class. Of the 11 theses submitted, 4 exceeded all expectations (Outstanding-Excellent: 1A, 3 A’s); 5 exceeded expectations (Good 1 B+, 2 B’s, 2 B-‘s); and 2 met expectations (Satisfactory 2 C’s).

While this year’s outcome does show improvement in that all students completed the course on schedule (in 2011-2012, 3 F’s for failing to hand in a paper and 1 incomplete for not finishing it on time were given), the Chair feels that the number of students writing B papers was too high and that by this point in their training no student should receive a C in the course. In 2011-2012, of the 7 theses graded, 5 theses rated excellent, 1 thesis rated good, and 1 rated unsatisfactory. This year many of the theses were lackluster. Few students did more than one draft; most left completion of their paper to the end of the semester.

While a B is a decent grade, this distribution of grades is troubling to the Chair and needs to be addressed. Is my perception of a generally lackluster class the cause of this outcome? To what degree are the disappointing numbers Liberal Studies’ and hence the Chair’s fault? We had difficulty with a professor teaching LS 300 in fall 2012 who was not asked to return. In that class there was great discontent. Morale was low, and little was learned. Those students who failed retook LS 300 in the Spring; the others went on into my class, LS 420. For the most part, these students did not have the foundation for LS 420 that LS 300 provides. Except for a few, I certainly did not reach this group. I had failed them, too, in a different way. The previous semester, I had answered complaining emails, meet with students, visited the LS 300 classroom, and talked to superiors. I followed all the rules. In the end, nothing was done. I believe that in the spring, students from that LS 300 who passed into my LS 420 for the most part just wanted to finish another Liberal Studies Portfolio course quietly and without controversy and graduate. This does not entirely explain the less than stellar grades—I wasn’t pleased with the quality of the thought, the development of the ideas, the level of the writing, or the care taken with the documentation. For most, there was no drive for excellence, no investment of the self. I cannot blame all of this on one class of a less-than-successful teacher. In fact, a student given a D in LS 300 received the sole A in LS 420. In the end, my LS 420 students were unimaginative, did not challenge themselves, and had poor skills. And I certainly did not inspire them, motivate them, or overcome faulty training.

We now have a better fit for our LS300 course—a lawyer turned humanities professor in mid-life, a perfect model for Liberal Studies students. The LS 420 class this semester is a lively and involved group. I still feel I let down the students and will continue to feel so until all those involved graduate.
Program strengths and opportunities for improvement relative to assessment of outcome:

From the beginning of the semester, the Chair stressed the importance of completing the thesis paper in the semester and avoiding receiving an “F” for the course. I pointed out that if a student failed to complete LS 420 the second time taking the course, they would not be allowed to re-enroll in the Senior Seminar and other arrangements would have to be made through an Independent Study. I also cautioned the students that an “I” was awarded only under exceptional circumstances and only with the approval of the Dean of Arts and Sciences. These tactics apparently worked, as there were no “F’s” or “I’s” for unfinished seminar papers, and I stress these facts in future classes as students did not see any real penalty for not completing the course.

All students were able to find a topic which combined both areas of concentration and necessitated exploring multiple viewpoints. In Spring 2013 the pairings were Sociology/Business; Psychology/Sociology; Fine Arts/English; (2) Fine Arts/Graphic Design; History/Art; Information Technology/Graphic Design; Communications/Business; Business/History; and Fashion Design/Fine Arts.

Discuss planned curricular or program improvements for this year based on assessment of outcome:

Despite the Chair’s attempt to adhere to stricter due dates for incremental submission and conferencing of sections of the paper, the number of students who failed to avail themselves of tutorials scheduled throughout the semester was disheartening. Several students were employed full- or part-time while carrying heavy class schedules. All seemed to be besieged by responsibilities. I had even prepared for 9-to-9 conferencing the last week of school, which did not materialize. I had never had this problem previously. In fact, the Chair believes these tutorials are the program’s greatest strength. Student tutorials with the Chair are offered throughout the Semester. Most students schedule 2, 3, or 4 tutorials (usually lasting an hour each) during which the instructor answers students’ queries, helps clarify a paper’s direction, and--most relevant to this outcome--critiques the written work-in-progress at various stages of its evolution. At the final tutorial, the essay in its entirety is examined one last time (reviewing organization, style, internal documentation, and final bibliography) before being submitted for grading. Thus, students write and re-write their essays until they are satisfied, and each paper undergoes multiple revisions. The chair feels that this approach reinforces Marymount’s commitment to the writing process, and best suits the needs of students at this level.

A Humanistic ideal underpins all that occurs in the course. Students are urged to envision their work not as it presently is, but as it can be.

As I have mentioned, there is a different tenor to my fall 2013 class, but I will strictly enforce at least 3 conference visits of 1 hr. each. I will neither prod nor scold. I will matter-of-factly expect compliance. I have already met with every student (this doesn’t count as 1 of the 3) to discuss his/her thesis question. Everyone set up his/her conference time and came prepared with materials to discuss.
Academic Year: 2012-2013  
Program: Liberal Studies  

### Outcome and Past Assessment

**Learning Outcome 2: SCHOLARSHIP**

**Is this outcome being reexamined?**  
☐ Yes  ☒ No  
If yes, give a brief summary of previous results (including trends) and any changes made to the program.

---

#### ASSESSMENT ACTIVITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome Measures</th>
<th>Performance Standard</th>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Direct measure: senior thesis in capstone course** | Must demonstrate the ability to perform academic research using university catalogues and academic databases | (1) Direct observation of students during library workshops  
(2) Ongoing assessment of the working bibliography | Must attend library workshops and demonstrate ability  
(1) to navigate the library’s catalogue (both books and academic databases)  
(2) to use the resources of the consortium  
(3) to use “find it” to locate articles not available full-text online  
Findings: 100% of the students demonstrate competence in these areas. |
| (1) Must show evidence that the student has sought out significant scholarly sources specific to the two fields of inquiry;  
(2) Must produce a final bibliography (“works cited”) of at least 15 scholarly sources in both fields cited within the text of the paper itself. | (1) Direct observation of students during library workshops  
(2) Evaluation of the thesis submitted at the end of the LS 420 course | (1) Must produce a final bibliography of at least 15 items of scholarly sources in both fields.  
(2) To initiate research, employs “library guides” to the various disciplines and other reference materials.  
(3) Utilizes databases linked specifically to the two fields of inquiry.  
(4) Knows how to evaluate the quality of a source.  
(5) Uses referred sources.  
(6) Recognizes the important authorities in a field.  
Findings: Of the 11 theses submitted |
Evaluation is based on the quality and quantity of the sources, their relevance, their thoroughness, their timeliness, and their contribution to advancing the argument.

Source evaluations range from excellent to unsatisfactory and are linked to “LS 420 Senior Seminar Thesis Evaluation Criteria,” “LS 420 Evaluation Rationale,” corrected student papers, and the instructor’s written evaluation of the student’s thesis.

Must demonstrate evidence of the critical ability to think and write on a topic that explores multiple points of view.

The quality of the argument is rated from excellent to unsatisfactory and is linked to “LS 420 senior Seminar Thesis Evaluation Criteria,” “LS 420 Evaluation Rating Rationale,” the corrected paper, and the instructor’s written evaluation of the student’s thesis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thesis submitted at the end of the semester.</th>
<th>Findings: Of the 11 theses submitted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 4 exceeded all expectations (Outstanding-Excellent: 1A, 3 A-s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 5 achieved expectations (Good 1 B+, 2 B’s, 2 B’s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 2 met expectations (Satisfactory 2 C’s)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• 4 exceeded all expectations (Outstanding-Excellent: 1A, 3 A-s)
• 5 achieved expectations (Good 1 B+, 2 B’s, 2 B’s)
• 2 met expectations (Satisfactory 2 C’s)
| Based on arguments presented, must call for action or a reasoned solution | Performance is rated from excellent to unsatisfactory based on the writer’s ability to marshall the facts, to compare and contrast his/her views with the views of others, to refute opposing arguments, and to recommend what action should be taken. Evaluation is linked to “LS 420 Senior Seminar Thesis Evaluation Criteria,” “LS 420 Evaluation Rating Rationale,” graded papers, and instructor’s written evaluation of the student’s thesis. | Findings: Of the 11 theses submitted
- 4 exceeded all expectations (Outstanding-Excellent: 1A, 3 A-s)
- 5 achieved expectations (Good 1 B+, 2 B’s, 2 B’-s)
- 2 met expectations (Satisfactory 2 C’s) |

**Interpretation of Results**

**Extent this Learning Outcome has been achieved by students** (*Use both direct and indirect measure results*):

Attendance at all Library sessions was 100%. All students exhibited the ability to use the library catalogue for locating books and academic databases; listed at least 15 books/academic articles in their Works Cited included bibliography in both concentrations; and selected sound references. (Internet articles, unless academic, are not to be used.) While encouraged to use the documentation style of their discipline, as mentioned previously, students largely chose to use MLA; internal documentation and Works Cited were executed unevenly (on average a B). The level of the argumentation, the refuting of opposing arguments or the evaluation of multiple views, the arriving at a reasoned conclusion, the style of the writing-- all meet within the parameters of 1 A, 3 A-s, 1 B+, 2 B’s, 2 B’-s, 2 C’s (4 Excellents, 5 Goods, 2 Satisfactories). As I stated last year, assigning a letter grade or a rating a thesis does not adequately assess the merits of a paper. For 2012-2013 there were variations in scores
from A to C for different aspects of the grading within one essay. No essay exhibited the intellectual strength and uniform quality that I had seen in 5 of the 7 essays evaluated the year before. There were instead other joys-- the pride of a student with a Criminal Justice concentration (an Iraqi vet) who was thrilled with what he had accomplished (an A- on a paper on human trafficking—slavery—which he had witnessed in Africa). He had worked hard on the paper, had become interested in human rights violations, and was now considering applying for a position as a Regional Security Officer American Embassies in Africa and the Middle East. How do we grade such a paper? What would be the ultimate impact of this work?

**Program strengths and opportunities for improvement relative to assessment of outcome:**

Each step of the research process is discussed, and selection of a topic figures largely in the first weeks of the semester. Gathering, organizing, and shaping materials into a readable document are stressed from the beginning and viewed as a seamless whole. Students are encouraged to be open-minded and intellectually honest when dealing with opposing viewpoints. Students must establish their own credibility by identifying and refuting divergent positions logically, by recognizing how their readers most likely will react to their assertions, and by offering a reasoned alternative –all in the form of a well-crafted argument.

Students are encouraged to think of themselves as researchers.

The Chair values the services rendered by the staff of the Library and Learning Services to LS Senior Seminar students. LS 420 students have at least 3 library sessions of 3 hours each. Students are at the Library with their approved topic by the third week of school, and, with the help of our Liberal Studies librarian, are refining their topic question and beginning to gather their working bibliography. They return 3 weeks later to flesh out their outline and before midterms to shore up their research. During these sessions, the librarian and teacher work one-on-one with every student, trying to meet his/her needs and to provide direction. This interaction at the Library sessions encourages students to become involved in other students’ topics and creates cohesiveness in the class.

In those first few weeks the student also schedules a tutorial with the Chair. Working with the internet and the library catalogue and using listing and clustering, the student and the Chair explore collaboratively if the student’s ideas will suggest avenues of development that will lead to an arguable thesis. The class returns to the library for another session to gather their working bibliographies. Reading Begins. Two weeks later, the student must present a preliminary outline for the paper. Using these outlines, the Chair shows the student how the paper is going to be written in sections—the student’s fear of the 25+-page paper dissipates. At this point (in the future) the student will also meet with the 2nd reader to help clarify and focus the thesis and to strengthen the outline. The Research Librarian assigned to Liberal Studies generously makes herself readily available to the students, often working one-on-one in individual sessions with those needing additional help.

While students can easily seek online help to format a citation, two 3-hour class sessions are devoted to citations for books, print articles, newspapers, electronic sources, and other print and non-print sources as on-line citation help sites are not always accurate. Students also receive instruction on internal documentation and reference pages.
Academic integrity is discussed and a workshop is given on plagiarism.

Discuss planned curricular or program improvements for this year based on assessment of outcome:

As mentioned, in between the early library sessions, the students will have 2 conferences with me: (1) to approve their topic and (2) to go over their outline, and one conference with their 2nd reader: (1) to finesse their thesis and (2) to give advice on major topics to be included in the outline. I am debating whether it is more important to use the 2nd readers’ time and expertise to help form the paper rather than to read it afterwards and grade it. More contact and discussion between the student and his discipline-specific reader throughout the semester seems preferable and of more value than a student’s looking at a grade on a paper at the end of the semester. Perhaps I will use the 2nd professor predominately as reader the fall semester and then principally as sounding board and mentor the spring semester and find out which set-up the students prefer.
Learning Outcome 3: STYLE

Is this outcome being reexamined? ☐ Yes ☑ No

If yes, give a brief summary of previous results (including trends) and any changes made to the program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outcome Measures</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explain how student learning will be measured and indicate whether it is direct or indirect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct measure: students must produce (1) a well-structured, (2) cogently written (3) and correctly documented essay that conforms to the appropriate documentation style</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Academic Year: 2012-2013  
Program: Liberal Studies

**Assessment Activity**

**Interpretation of Results**

**Extent this Learning Outcome has been achieved by students** (*Use both direct and indirect measure results*):

The Chair has always stressed to students that if the paper is poorly written than the value of the argument is diminished. In 2012-2013, only 4 students’ prose was in the very good range; 4 were in the good range; and 3 were in the satisfactory range. The less than stellar writing was the direct result of failing to have their papers conferenced and failing to revise them. The papers were marred by faulty structure, undeveloped paragraphs, confusing sentences, poor grammar, and infelicities of language that detracted from the writers’ arguments and undermined their authority. The focus shifted from what to how it was being said.

**Program strengths and opportunities for improvement relative to assessment of outcome:**

In past assessments, the Chair has stated that she uses a “back-to-basics” and a “hands-on-approach.” Nowhere is this more true than in teaching the writing process. The Chair tells her students that to be able to write well is to have power, and that writing is a skill that can be taught. Class sessions focus on writing introductory paragraphs, structuring and developing paragraphs, creating transitions between paragraphs, writing conclusions, integrating quotations, using ellipsis, etc. A thorough review of grammar is also presented incrementally throughout the semester. Students must be aware that, in the end, all their work will come to naught if they do not present their results in a well-structured, well-written, and cogently argued prose document. A research project is not merely amassing knowledge—but the communication of that knowledge. Nothing has the power of the written word. Has any painting or work of music, however influential, however ineffable, had the power to change the world like the written word? The Chair tells her students writing is not only a gift of the gods to a chosen few but a skill that can be taught and learned. Everyone cannot be Shakespeare, but we all can be lucid, logical, convincing writers.

**Discuss planned curricular or program improvements for this year based on assessment of outcome:**

Clearly more revision work is needed. The Chair is going to introduce 15 minutes of writing/revision work into each class. A series of paragraphs will be taken from past LS 420 papers, and students will be asked to revise them. Group work will be involved. This, in addition to the grammar, will let the students rid themselves of common mistakes writers make (such as “that” for “who”) and help them unravel knotty sentences. In both the Senior and Alumni Surveys, students expressed an interest in more collaborative work. It is difficult to have peer review of work completed, as students in LS 420 cannot exchange a completed 5-page paper for another student to critique. However, short writing workshops in class might work.
Learning Outcome 4:

Is this outcome being reexamined? ☑ Yes ☐ No

If yes, give a brief summary of previous results (including trends) and any changes made to the program.

Assessment Activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Standard</th>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Define and explain acceptable level of student performance.</td>
<td>Discuss the data collected and student population</td>
<td>1) Describe the analysis process. 2) Present the findings of the analysis including the numbers participating and deemed acceptable.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students must present their findings orally to their peers and to the professor and must be prepared to respond in a question-and-answer session immediately following the presentation. Their performance is rated by both their peers and the professor. The defense lasts ½ hr.

Performance standard for excellent/very good would be a preponderance of 4 & 5 ratings with strong responses to student questions, revealing additional background information not revealed in presentation and the student’s ability to think on his/her feet and to express a nuanced understanding of his/her topic. (See Appendix for Oral Presentation Grade Sheet)

Performance standard for passing would be a preponderance of 3 ratings and good responses, often merely reiterating what was already said but able to explain the major arguments presented and his/her position adequately.

Performance standard for poor would be a preponderance of 2 & 1 ratings and simple responses to questions, failing to explain his/her position adequately, or illuminate an area of inquiry when questioned.

Written comments also are provided by the professor.

11 Oral Presentation given, followed by question-and-answer session, the defense to last ½ hour

(1) Analysis linked to LS 420 Senior Seminar Oral Presentation Evaluation Criteria (see Appendix)

(2) Findings in Spring 2012-2013 were as follows:

- 2 Excellent (1 A; 1A-)
- 8 Very Good/Good
- 1 Passing (C+)
**Interpretation of Results**

**Extent this learning outcome has been achieved by students (use both direct and indirect measure results):**

**THE ORAL PRESENTATION:** In 2011-2012, 7 oral presentations received the Excellent/Very Good rating. While in 2012-2013 the majority of the oral presentations received A and B ratings, the Chair has listed the precise number of students receiving a particular grade because, like the essays, there was a marked decline in the quality of their defenses—a shift from A’s to B’s. Usually, students raise their overall grades by giving superior presentations. Here only 2 of the 4 students who received Excellent ratings for their thesis received A’s in their oral presentations (the A received the A; the A received the A-). It must be remembered that the students were asked to grade their peers. Every number was computed, and an average was arrived at. Usually, students are fair in their grading. In giving the grades they did, the students in their way expressed that they were not impressed by the work done by their peers. Again, a B is a decent grade, but students in their Senior Seminar should excel.

The question-and-answer segment was fully utilized and allowed students to present material that had not been highlighted in their presentations. It also revealed the complexity of the topics they had chosen and avenues for further research. Some topics were better appreciated than others not because of the value of the topic but because of the quality of the presentation.

**TECHNOLOGY:** That only 4 of 11 used PowerPoint, as opposed to 6 of 7 last year, also reveals a falling off. I do not mandate that students use this technology because at times it leads to their simply reading from the slides. I do encourage other media be used which frequently works with students’ theses in Liberal Studies. The paper cited last year on “Subliminal Advertising” referenced art works, photographs, and video recordings. I also think hand-outs work well. However, only 1 student did an outstanding job on her presentation using technology (the A-); the other student (given the only A) presented an extremely tight and clearly articulated presentation without aids that impressed the students.

**All the students did an excellent job, successfully launching their completed Portfolios electronically.**

**Program strengths and opportunities for improvement relative to assessment of outcome:**

The only way to improve the Oral Presentations is to improve the students’ passion for their topic. If they are invested in the subject matter, this enthusiasm will spill over into all aspects of the assignment. They did not convey their position cogently to the class because they never fully internalized the subject matter. Their presentations were unfocused. The students did not establish their authority.

**Discuss planned curricular or program improvements for this year based on assessment of outcome:**

The ½ hr. format will continue for oral presentations. Although several handouts were given to the students, increased guidance will be given when preparing for the oral presentation.

This year LS 420 will be submitting electronic portfolios that will be archived. As mentioned previously, instruction for students will be provided through CTL.

Students continue to be encouraged to seek out instruction in REF Works (offered at the library) and PowerPoint (through scheduled workshops offered by ITS).

*A complete student learning assessment report includes appendix of rubrics, survey questions, or other relevant documents and information.*