

## STUDENT LEARNING ASSESSMENT REPORT

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**PROGRAM:** Liberal Studies  
**SUBMITTED BY:** Robert M. Otten  
**DATE:** September 18, 2017

### **BRIEFLY DESCRIBE WHERE AND HOW ARE DATA AND DOCUMENTS USED TO GENERATE THIS REPORT BEING STORED:**

The documents used in this report are stored in the office of the chair of Liberal Studies. They include the 2016-2017 syllabi for the required LS 300 and LS420 courses; copies of the 2016-2017 student senior theses (15); the completed evaluation forms and the written summary evaluation provided for each student (15); the rubric for evaluation of the senior theses; the rubric for the evaluation of resumes in the senior portfolios; and the complete "2016 Marymount Alumni Data by Program," as tabulated by the Office of Planning and Institutional Effectiveness.

The following documents appear in the appendix to this report: the LS300 and LS420 syllabi; the rubrics for the senior thesis and the senior resume; and the first page of the *2016 Alumni Data by Program*.

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**Program description from the Course Catalog:** Please copy and paste the current year's catalog description of this program. This is generally a one-two paragraph description immediately following the name of the program. Please be sure to include the listing of program outcomes as printed.

Liberal studies is unique at Marymount in that it provides a broad general education and the opportunity to gain knowledge in two major fields, designated as concentrations. Some examples of concentration options are biology/physical sciences, business and related fields, communication, English, fine and applied arts, gender and society, graphic design, history, humanities, information technology, mathematics, philosophy/religious studies/theology, politics, and psychology/sociology/criminal justice. Other concentrations may be considered.

Liberal studies can serve as a degree completion program for transfer and nontraditional students with previously earned college credits and full-time work experience. The program provides an efficient way to maximize the number of transfer credits and/or shorten the time required for graduation in a single discipline. The program is also desirable for students who have more than one specialized interest or who alter their academic goals or career ambitions after matriculation.

The liberal studies program consists of three components: the Liberal Arts Core, the two concentrations, and the liberal studies triad (LS 300, LS 400, and LS 420).

Upon successful completion of the liberal studies program, students will be able to

- demonstrate appropriate levels of knowledge of content from two areas of concentration;
- apply and integrate methods from different disciplines in research and analysis that examine an issue from multiple perspectives, effectively incorporating and synthesizing information from two different disciplines;

- find, use, and evaluate a variety of sources of information and demonstrate competence in a documentation style appropriate to their discipline;
- produce a well-structured and well-written argumentative essay of substantial length that supports students' claims, evaluates opposing and/or alternate viewpoints, and reaches a conclusion logically arising from the discussion;
- communicate ideas clearly in an oral presentation, defending conclusions effectively and responding extempore to questions and critiques; and
- demonstrate an understanding of the value of lifelong learning by articulating how educational experiences relate to careers and daily life.

The e-portfolio contains a collection of experiential and scholarly writings, including a lengthy senior thesis. The topic of this paper involves the student in conducting scholarly research integrating knowledge of the student's two fields of concentration. The e-portfolio is often sent to prospective employers to demonstrate students' high level of research and writing skills and knowledge of the controversial issues in their fields of concentration.

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

Learning Outcome	Year of Last Assessment	Assessed This Year	Year of Next Planned Assessment
demonstrate appropriate levels of knowledge of content from two areas of concentration;	New in 2016; not previously assessed	2017	
apply and integrate methods from different disciplines in research and analysis that examine an issue from multiple perspectives, effectively incorporating and synthesizing information from two different disciplines;	2016		2019
find, use, and evaluate a variety of sources of information and demonstrate competence in a documentation style appropriate to their discipline;	2016		2019
produce a well-structured and well-written argumentative essay of substantial length that supports students' claims, evaluates opposing and/or alternate viewpoints, and reaches a conclusion logically arising from the discussion		2017	
communicate ideas clearly in an oral presentation, defending conclusions effectively and responding extempore to questions and critiques			2018
demonstrate an understanding of the value of lifelong learning by articulating how educational experiences relate to careers and daily life.			2018

**Describe how the program's outcomes support Marymount's mission, strategic plan, and relevant school plan:**

**Mission:** The Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies reflects the institution's committed to the tradition of liberal arts with a strong foundation on the study of arts and sciences. In its stated emphasis in offering "career preparation and opportunities for personal and professional development," the program acknowledges that the foundation of a liberal arts degree prepares students for different careers where analytical ability, effective oral communication and persuasive writing skills are valued.



The program stresses academic integrity, discipline, self-actualization, and perceiving the world not as it is, but as it can be: a classical humanistic ideal. The program encourages students to keep an open mind when examining issues. Beginning in the introductory LS400 and culminating in the capstone LS420, students must consider opposing or alternate viewpoints when examining controversial issues in their fields and use logic and reason to establish their position. Students also seek internships that reflect Marymount's Mission. Students have worked with autistic children, Washington youth on parole, and African children in an inoculation program sponsored by UNICEF and have examined the relationship of battered women and the position of the Catholic Church on divorce. Although most Liberal Studies students work part-or-full-time, their resumes almost always list volunteer activities, often spanning years. Students have volunteered in campus ministry missions both at home and abroad, in Special Olympics, teaching bible classes, and mentoring disadvantaged youth. The Liberal Studies objectives and goals and the students' social commitment fit well within the scope of the University's Mission.

**Strategic Plan:** The senior capstone seminar, in particular, offers students opportunities for extensive research, enhancing the intellectual experience by stressing sound research methodology and by encouraging a multidisciplinary approach to problem solving. Students are to choose current, controversial issues in their fields to explore and, where applicable, to consider the moral and ethical aspects of the subject. Students have chosen such topics as the reintegration of Holocaust survivors into society following World War II; the ethical dimensions of the Patriot Act; exploitation of the incarcerated by Big Business; and human trafficking. Library workshops supervised by Liberal Studies' designated librarian and the instructors reinforce the development of inquiry skills. In their writings, students are encouraged to seek academic excellence, a value made evident through the multiple revisions of students' papers that lie at the heart of Liberal Studies' portfolio classes. Students are encouraged to utilize Washington area resources--institutions such as the Smithsonian, the Holocaust museum, the Library of Congress--for research and the innumerable government and private sector opportunities for internships. The program is student-centered; the individual and his/her creative efforts are prized and his/her potential recognized. Frequent tutorials stress one-on-one interaction between teachers and students. Diversity--whether of cultures or viewpoints--is valued. Finally, the program includes career preparation. One-on-one evaluation of resumes as well as the production of a letter of application are built into the syllabi; speakers from the Career Center give in-class informational sessions to students on topics such as securing internships, finding jobs, and becoming familiar with the resources available to Marymount students as alumni. With guidance from Career Services, students seek internships that prepare majors for further study and careers in education, nonprofit and humanitarian institutions, government, and business.

**Provide a brief description of the assessment process used including strengths, challenges and planned improvements and provide evidence of the existence of a culture of continuous improvement based on assessment:**

The assessment process includes the following components: 1) careful monitoring of the production process of the senior essay, ensuring that students understand the writing process, beginning with selection of the topic to the submission of the final copy following appropriate formatting and documentation rules; 2) observation of students and hands-on mentoring by research library and chair in library workshops; 3) regular and detailed feedback on the developing senior thesis by the senior seminar instructor Is and by a final written of the senior thesis by an outside evaluator; and 4) evaluation of the career portfolio by the senior seminar instructor.

The description of the assessment process has been rewritten to reflect two important clarifications. The third component now specifies that the senior seminar instructor provides feedback on the developing thesis and an outside reader evaluates the final version. The fourth element has been revised to make clear that the senior seminar instructor evaluates the career portfolio that is designed to be a persuasive document to assist the student establishing a career.

**Describe how the program implemented its planned improvements from last year:**

Outcome	Planned Improvement	Update <i>(Indicate when, where, and how planned improvement was completed. If planned improvement was not completed, please provide explanation.)</i>
find, use, and evaluate a variety of sources of information and demonstrate competence in a documentation style appropriate to their discipline	Clarify the ways in which LS300 builds on informational literacy skills from EN102 and then how LS420 builds on LS300.	The instructors of LS300 and LS420 met during the summer in May and in August. The first meeting required a line-by-line comparison between the syllabi of LS300 and LS420 in order to determine where LS300 failed to prepare students for tasks in LS420 and where activities in LS420 repeated tasks in LS300 without advancing the intellectual challenge of a task. The second meeting resulted in changes to the definition of the argumentative essay in LS300 to better prepare for the thesis in LS420 as well as better explanation of the items included in the portfolios required in LS420. A decision was made to require a physical portfolio for which qualitative standards of appearance could be articulated. Neither instructor judged himself/herself capable of providing meaningful instruction in enhancing the qualitative appearance of an electronic portfolio. Library instruction on RefWorks was included. Students in LS420 were required to give instructor access to their RefWorks folder.
apply and integrate methods from different disciplines in research and analysis that examine an issue from multiple perspectives, effectively incorporating and synthesizing information from two different disciplines	In LS420 more attention to critical thinking tasks.	In 2016-2017 LS420 began identifying a text for each semester that provided the opportunity to look at contemporary issues approached from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. In the Fall semester, the text was <i>There is Life After College</i> which explores the translation of skills learned in college to a career. In the Spring semester the text was <i>blink!</i> , a study of imagination and intuition in thinking.
find, use, and evaluate a variety of sources of information and demonstrate competence in a	Increase both peer feedback and instructor feedback by one additional period of instruction.	One class meeting previously devoted to individual conference with the instructor was

Outcome	Planned Improvement	Update <i>(Indicate when, where, and how planned improvement was completed. If planned improvement was not completed, please provide explanation.)</i>
documentation style appropriate to their discipline;		replaced with a class meeting in which each student presented to the class a scholarly article from each field of concentration. The purpose of the exercise was for each student to articulate the understanding of “scholarship” as practiced in the concentrations.
apply and integrate methods from different disciplines in research and analysis that examine an issue from multiple perspectives, effectively incorporating and synthesizing information from two different disciplines	Establishment of advising guidelines fort advisors. NOTE: Although this improvement was tied to the asse4ssment of outcome 1 in last year’s report, the connection between the activity and the outcome is no longer clear to me. The improvement is important without any connection to the outcome, however.	A draft of guidelines for enhancing advisor use of paperwork and Marynet resources was completed. Then in early summer advisors were informed that through the use of Box advising materials would go paperless and that the online Student Planner would replace Marynet. The chairperson decided to postpone issuance of guidelines until he can provide guidance to the skillful use of the new system.
find, use, and evaluate a variety of sources of information and demonstrate competence in a documentation style appropriate to their discipline;	1.Require the use of software such as RefWorks that manages citations and bibliography in both LS300 and LS420. 2.Increase the presence of library instruction and the librarian in support student use of such software.	1.Library instruction on RefWorks was included. Students in LS420 were required to give instructor access to their RefWorks folder. 2. Library sessions were held in both the Fall and Spring semesters. A library liaison was appointed for the course and was available to students as was a “Lib Guide” created especially for this section.

**Provide a response to last year’s University Assessment Committee review of the program’s learning assessment report:**

**UAC (Summary)** I appreciate the compliment to the revisions. The recommended change was made to the Mission language.

**UAC (Implemented Improvements)** I will strive to keep descriptions of planned improvements direct and simple.

**UAC (Outcomes)** While the outcomes as written apply well to the Senior Seminar and its attendant thesis, the outcomes should be revised to account for student learning in LS300 and LS400.

**UAC (Measures and Targets)** As future measures are contemplated, I will endeavor to keep the emphasis on traits, as suggested.

**UAC (Results and Implications)**

**UAC (Improving Effectiveness)** I will endeavor to think of improvements beyond LS420 by a revision of outcomes to include LS300 and LS400 and to include attention to the concentrations. The current configuration of concentrations is so diverse that it is difficult to assess, but the matter needs attention sooner rather than later.

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**Outcomes Assessment 2016-2017**

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**Learning Outcome 1:**

demonstrate appropriate levels of knowledge of content from two areas of concentration;

**Assessment Activity**

<b>Outcome Measures</b> <i>Explain how student learning will be measured and indicate whether it is direct or indirect.</i>	<b>Performance Standard</b> <i>Define and explain acceptable level of student performance.</i>	<b>Data Collection</b> <i>Discuss the data collected and student population</i>	<b>Analysis</b> <i>1) Describe the analysis process. 2) Present the findings of the analysis including the numbers participating and deemed acceptable.</i>
Student learning is measured by evaluation of the senior thesis through the section of the thesis rubric "Topic Analysis" (direct).	60% of the scores will be "very good" or "excellent"	Data was gathered from the scored rubrics for 15 senior theses by two evaluators	1. Scores from two evaluators were recorded in a spreadsheet, added together, and the percentage of scores at each rating point (excellent, very good, satisfactory, unsatisfactory, failing) were calculated.  2. There were four criteria reviewed under "Topic Analysis." 80% under "appeals to current interest" met the standard. 70% under "integrates two concentrations" met the standard. 57% under "generates arguable claims" met the standard. 47% met the standard under "provides new information". Overall 63% in this category met the standard
Student learning measured by evaluation of the resume in the portfolio through the	80% of the scores will be "average" or "excellent"	Data was gathered from the scored rubrics for 13 senior resumes by two evaluators	61.% of the scores for "education" rated the aspect "average or excellent".

<b>Outcome Measures</b> <i>Explain how student learning will be measured and indicate whether it is direct or indirect.</i>	<b>Performance Standard</b> <i>Define and explain acceptable level of student performance.</i>	<b>Data Collection</b> <i>Discuss the data collected and student population</i>	<b>Analysis</b> <i>1) Describe the analysis process. 2) Present the findings of the analysis including the numbers participating and deemed acceptable.</i>
section of resume rubric “education” (indirect).			

### Interpretation of Results

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

The data indicate that overall students met the performance standard for this outcome by achieving a 63% score when the results for the four criteria evaluated under “Topic Analysis” are combined. Looking at the separate scores, however, shows that results in two criteria noticeably exceeded the performance standard and two fell noticeably below it. The different scores suggest that students exceed the standard in conceptualizing the thesis [“current interest”] and finding a focus for investigation (“integrating two concentrations”), but they fall below it in executing the thesis successfully (“arguable claims” and “new information”). A gap between aspirational design and routine execution of written projects happens frequently to all writers, of course, so this gap is not abnormal..

The indirect measure used for the first this year, assessing the resume which is part of the student’s final portfolio, was chosen because in both LS300 and LS420 a representative of the Career Center gives a class presentation on resume-writing and offers to assist individual students in preparing the resume used in finding an internship. A focus of this presentation is making clear in the resume the skills and knowledge gained from the student’s concentrations. The Career Center developed a resume rubric which was used in this assessment. The rubric was used by both the Liberal Studies chairperson and by a Career Center specialist. The evaluators’ results found the students missing the performance standard by a substantial margin of 19%. Further analysis of the data suggests that the students least likely to score well in “education” were older degree completers; these students, often already established in their careers, were less likely to follow the suggestions for putting specific information about the concentrations in their resumes.

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

In 2016-2017 the senior seminar syllabus added an explicit step in the composition process of the thesis, the writing of a thesis proposal. This activity may account for the strong performance in conceptualizing the topic of a thesis indicated by the data.

The use of an outside evaluator to assess student resumes was extremely helpful. The evaluator has expressed a willingness to continue in this role; the results of the assessment will be shared with her. The improved articulation of the syllabi for LS300 and LS420, discussed above, includes specific instructions for the development of the resume from one course to the next. The Career Center presenter on resumes has agreed to remain active in instructing and in assessing Liberal Studies students.

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

If a more focused assignment, the thesis proposal, produced positive results in the planning and design of a topic, it makes sense to design a more focused assignment for improving the quality of the claims generated and the new information offered. LS420 will be offered only in Spring 2018, and the instructor will design an assignment that focuses on these aspects as a specific step in the thesis-composition process. In addition, the instructor will use the terminology of the rubric in leading discussions of the course text. By asking students to notice and articulate concepts in the reading related to “arguable claims” and “new information”, the course should better prepare them to apply these concepts to their own work.

The LS420 instructor will visit each section of LS300 (usually one a semester) to meet students, discuss how the senior seminar will build on the scaffold of LS300, and improve the students’ awareness of expectations for the senior thesis.

To assess the impact of coordinating LS300 and LS420 portfolios, the portfolios of all students in both classes will be collected and evaluated.

**Learning Outcome 2:**

produce a well-structured and well-written argumentative essay of substantial length that supports students' claims, evaluates opposing and/or alternate viewpoints, and reaches a conclusion logically arising from the discussion

**Assessment Activity**

<b>Outcome Measures</b> <i>Explain how student learning will be measured and indicate whether it is direct or indirect.</i>	<b>Performance Standard</b> <i>Define and explain acceptable level of student performance.</i>	<b>Data Collection</b> <i>Discuss the data collected and student population</i>	<b>Analysis</b> <i>1) Describe the analysis process. 2) Present the findings of the analysis including the numbers participating and deemed acceptable.</i>
Student learning is measured by evaluation of the senior thesis through the section of the thesis rubric “Claims Analysis” (direct)	60% of the scores will be “very good” or “excellent”	Data was gathered from the scored rubrics for 15 senior theses by two evaluators	1. Scores from two evaluators were recorded in a spreadsheet, added together, and the percentage of scores at each rating point (excellent, very good, satisfactory, unsatisfactory, failing) were calculated.  2. There were four criteria reviewed under “Claims Analysis.” 50% under “is substantial; presents facts, definitions, values, & policies” met the standard. 50% under considers and evaluates objectively opposing and/or multiple viewpoints” met the standard. Overall 50% in this category met the standard
Student learning is measured by evaluation of the senior thesis through the section of	60% of the scores will be “very good” or “excellent”	Data was gathered from the scored rubrics for 15 senior theses by two evaluators	1.Scores from two evaluators were recorded in a spreadsheet, added together, and the percentage of

<b>Outcome Measures</b> <i>Explain how student learning will be measured and indicate whether it is direct or indirect.</i>	<b>Performance Standard</b> <i>Define and explain acceptable level of student performance.</i>	<b>Data Collection</b> <i>Discuss the data collected and student population</i>	<b>Analysis</b> <i>1) Describe the analysis process. 2) Present the findings of the analysis including the numbers participating and deemed acceptable.</i>
the thesis rubric “Organization & Style” (direct)			scores at each rating point (excellent, very good, satisfactory, unsatisfactory, failing) were calculated.  2. There were five criteria reviewed under “Organization & Style.” 47% under “Paper is well-organized and tightly structured” met the standard. 50% under “Paragraphs are fully developed” met the standard. 40% under “Argument is fully articulated and convincing” met the standard. 43% met the standard under “Paper comes to a reasoned conclusion”. 43% under “Thesis meets length expectations’ met the standard. Overall 45% in this category met the standard
Student self-assessment of critical thinking skills in the Graduating Student Survey and the Alumni Survey (indirect)	60% of the scores will be “good” or “excellent”	2016 Alumni Data by Program (N=16)	In the <i>2016 Alumni Data by Program</i> 56.3% judged themselves prepared to “develop a coherent argument” and to “solve problems in your field of knowledge and skills.” 66.2% judged themselves able to “find appropriate sources of information.”

**Interpretation of Results**

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

All three measures indicated that students are not meeting the standard. The indirect data show that students report a sense of achievement in writing work that demonstrates their ability to make and substantiate an argument which is close to the performance standard. The direct measures show that faculty evaluate student writing achievement more critically, judging success at a much lower rate than the expected performance. One possible explanation is that the expectations for writing critically and thoughtfully in the business or professional world is lower than in the University. Students may be finding that the skills learned to meet high faculty expectations, even if not completely mastered in school, nonetheless are sufficient for more positive performance after graduation.

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

The data confirm that the senior thesis is a rigorous intellectual exercise for students. The thesis requires students to articulate the individual interests and methods of their concentrations and strive to integrate them in a thoughtful, objective, substantial inquiry proposing a solution to a problem or clarifying a complex issue. The thesis requires students to articulate the unique insights and distinctive set of skills that their co-disciplinary study has given them. The



thesis is an appropriate culmination to a degree whose benefits and impact can be articulated only by the person who has chosen and experienced a unique combination of courses.

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

For AY2017-2018 the School of Arts and Sciences increased the requirement for hours given to assignments and/or student interaction away from the internship site. For the Liberal Studies internship, LS400, this requirement was implemented beginning in the Summer 2017 with a series of 8 writing assignments, addressing workplace issues such as supervisory techniques, ethical behavior and online corporate identity. Interns are required to write responses and exchange them with other current interns for comment and discussion. For Fall and Spring semesters these assignments will be restructured so that at least 3 of the 8 will require students to write with attention to skills articulated in outcomes assessed this year. Thus the writing in internship can become a measure of the skills heretofore only evaluated in LS420 and see if they persist in less writing tasks less formal than the thesis.

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**i. Curriculum Map**

*These will be sent for review and feedback to the Liberal Arts Core Committee.*

**UNDERGRADUATE CURRICULUM MAP**

**Degree Program: Liberal Studies**

**Year:2017**

**Program Outcomes:**

<b>Program Outcome</b>	<b>Critical Thinking</b>	<b>Inquiry</b>	<b>Information Literacy</b>	<b>Written Communication</b>
demonstrate appropriate levels of knowledge of content from two areas of concentration;	LS300 LS420			
apply and integrate methods from different disciplines in research and analysis that examine an issue from multiple perspectives, effectively incorporating and synthesizing information from two different disciplines;	LS300 LS420			
find, use, and evaluate a variety of sources of information and demonstrate competence in a documentation style appropriate to their discipline;			LS300 LS420	
produce a well-structured and well-written argumentative essay of substantial length that supports students' claims, evaluates opposing and/or alternate viewpoints, and reaches a conclusion logically arising from the discussion;				LS300 LS420
communicate ideas clearly in an oral presentation, defending conclusions effectively and responding extempore to questions and critiques		LS300 LS420		
demonstrate an understanding of the value of lifelong learning by articulating how educational experiences relate to careers and daily life.				LS300 LS420

**Curriculum Map:**

*For each course, indicate which competencies are included using the following key. Please refer to the director of assessment in Planning and Institutional Effectiveness if you need more detailed explanation of the four core competencies.*

*Level of instruction: I – Introduced, R-reinforced and opportunity to practice, M-mastery at the senior or exit level*

*Assessment: PR-project, P-paper, E-exam, O-oral presentation, I-internship, OT-other (explain briefly)*

Required Course	Critical Thinking		Inquiry		Information Literacy		Written Communication	
	Level	Assess	Level	Assess	Level	Assess	Level	Assess
LS300	R	PR, P	I	PR, P	R	P	R	P
LS420	M	PR, P	M	PR, P	M	PR, P	M	PR, P