

STUDENT LEARNING ASSESSMENT REPORT

PROGRAM: Liberal Studies
SUBMITTED BY: Robert M. Otten
DATE: September 15, 2018

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 2017-2018 syllabi for the required LS 300 and LS420 courses; copies of the 2017-2018 student senior theses (16); the completed evaluation forms and the written summary evaluation provided for each student (16); the rubric for evaluation of the senior theses; and the *complete 2017 Marymount Alumni Data by Program* and *2017 Liberal Studies Supplemental Report* as tabulated by the Office of Planning and Institutional Effectiveness. In anticipation of using materials from all three Liberal Studies core courses, the program director has begun to collect and store portfolios from LS300 Liberal Studies Readings, LS400 Internship and LS420 Senior Seminar.

The following documents appear in the appendix to this report: a description of the portfolios in LS300 and LS420; the LS300 and LS420 syllabi; the rubric for the senior thesis; pages 1-2 of the *2017 Alumni Data by Program*; and the *2017 Liberal Studies Supplemental Report*.

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 serves primarily as a degree completion program for transfer and nontraditional students with previously earned college credits and full-time work experience. According to the Liberal Studies Supplemental Report, 18% of Liberal Studies students started at Marymount while 82% transferred to Marymount from another school. The program provides an efficient way to maximize the number of transfer credits and/or shorten the time required for graduation compared to majoring in a discipline. Beginning in 2018, a student must complete 40 college credits before admission to the program.

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

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;	2017		2020
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	2018*	2021

Learning Outcome	Year of Last Assessment	Assessed This Year	Year of Next Planned Assessment
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		2020
communicate ideas clearly in an oral presentation, defending conclusions effectively and responding extempore to questions and critiques			2019*
demonstrate an understanding of the value of lifelong learning by articulating how educational experiences relate to careers and daily life.		2018	2021

***Note: Because the Chairperson/Senior Seminar Instructor had to be replaced in early January for medical reasons, resulting in an interim instructor, no data was recorded for the fifth outcome because no rubric had been developed by the time of oral presentations. Thus an evaluation of the third outcome, for which a rubric already existed, was substituted for this year's assessment.**

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. These qualities are classical and classic humanistic ideals. The program encourages students to keep an open mind when examining issues. Beginning in the introductory LS300 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 commitment to service. Students have worked with autistic children, Washington youth on parole, and African children in a UNICEF inoculation program 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>
<p>Outcome 1 demonstrate appropriate levels of knowledge of content from two areas of concentration;</p>	<p>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.</p>	<p>Complete This assignment was incorporated into the Spring 2018 syllabus and will also be used in all syllabi henceforward.</p>
	<p>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 students’ awareness of expectations for the senior thesis.</p>	<p>Complete The Fall section of LS 300 was visited. The Spring section was cancelled due to low enrollment. The topic of previewing LS420 is now a syllabus item in LS300.</p>
	<p>To assess the impact of cording LS300 and LS420 portfolios, the portfolios of all students in both classes will be collected and evaluated.</p>	<p>Incomplete In anticipation of this activity, the portfolios of all students in both classes were collected for 2016-17 were collected to provide baseline data. Just prior to the start of the SP18 the assigned instructor for LS420 went on medical leave. A different instructor picked up the course, teaching for the first time, and used a syllabus written prior to the coordination activity. In 2017-2018, the same instructor is teaching LS300 (fall) and LS420 (spring) with the coordinated statements. Portfolios will be again collected in two formats (print and electronic) in both courses in 2017-2018. Results will be analyzed and reported in the next assessment cycle.</p>

Outcome	Planned Improvement	Update <i>(Indicate when, where, and how planned improvement was completed. If planned improvement was not completed, please provide explanation.)</i>
<p>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</p>	<p>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</p>	<p>Complete This year instructions for 3 assignment sin LS400 now require attention to claims analysis and evaluation of competing viewpoints and require a conclusion.</p>

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

UAC (Summary) I appreciate the compliment.

UAC (Implemented Improvements) Thanks for the kind words.

UAC (Outcomes) I did not submit revisions of outcomes in 2017-2018 regarding “appropriate” and “knowledge” but will do the revisions this year.

UAC (Measures and Targets) I dropped the resume as a measure and look to develop measures using materials from LS300 and LS400.

UAC (Results and Implications) The suggestion to look at earlier intervention in the program has in fact happened with attention to LS300 and LS400. In terms of curriculum planning LS300 is supposed to occur with two semesters intervening before ls420. The reality of the student

population—external transfers who enter anywhere between 45 and 84 credits and internal transfers who enter the program as late as senior year—makes designing interventions more challenging.

UAC (Improving Effectiveness) I appreciate the compliment, but I confess I have an advantage in that such a limited program has inherently fewer opportunities for change, making the opportunities relatively easy to find.

Outcomes Assessment 2017-2018

Learning Outcome 1:

find, use, and evaluate a variety of sources of information and demonstrate competence in a documentation style appropriate to their discipline;

Assessment Activity

Outcome Measures <i>Explain how student learning will be measured and indicate whether it is direct or indirect.</i>	Performance Standard <i>Define and explain acceptable level of student performance.</i>	Data Collection <i>Discuss the data collected and student population</i>	Analysis <i>1) Describe the analysis process. 2) Present the findings of the analysis including the numbers participating and deemed acceptable.</i>
1. Student learning is measured by evaluation of the senior thesis through the section of the thesis rubric "Scholarship" (direct).	60% of the scores will be "very good" or "excellent"	Data was gathered from the scored rubrics for 16 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 4 criteria reviewed under "Scholarship." 63% of the scores under "Scholarship from both concentrations" met the standard. 63% under "is sufficient & equal in both concentrations" met the standard. 69% under "is evident in the quality of sources" met the standard. 50% under "critical analysis of sources" met the standard. Overall 61% of scores met the standard.
2. Student learning measured by evaluation of senior thesis through the section of the thesis rubric "format and documentation." (direct)	70% of the scores will be "very good" or "excellent". The expectation is higher for this measure because documentation style and format has clearly defined	Data was gathered from the scored rubrics for 16 senior portfolios 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.

Outcome Measures <i>Explain how student learning will be measured and indicate whether it is direct or indirect.</i>	Performance Standard <i>Define and explain acceptable level of student performance.</i>	Data Collection <i>Discuss the data collected and student population</i>	Analysis <i>1) Describe the analysis process. 2) Present the findings of the analysis including the numbers participating and deemed acceptable.</i>
	professional standards. In addition, software exists to assist students in producing correct citation and reference formatting.		2. There were 3 criteria evaluated under “format and documentation.” 69% of the scores under “used an appropriate and recognized documentation style” met the standard. 69% of the scores under “used an appropriate and recognized style for internal documentation” met the standard. 56% of scores under “included Works Cited or reference page correctly” met the standard. Overall 65% of scores met the standard.
3. Student self-assessment of research and documentation skills in the Alumni Survey (indirect)	60% of the scores will be “very good” or “excellent”	Data from 2015, 2016 & 2017 Alumni Data by Program (N=22,16,12 respectively)	1. Data was aggregated by the chairperson for two Survey responses related to “skills”. 2. A three-year average of 74.8% of respondents rated the preparation of their education to “to find appropriate sources of information” as “good or excellent”. A three-year average of 73.5% of the respondents rated the preparation of their education “to evaluate the quality of information.”
4. Student self-assessment of the learning outcome on the 2017 Liberal Studies Supplemental Report	80% of respondents will indicate that they feel the “Liberal Studies program helped you achieve the . . . learning outcome [demonstrate competence in a documentation style appropriate to their discipline]”,	Data was compiled from the Liberal Studies Supplement Report to the 2017 Alumni Survey (N=9)	44.4% of respondents indicated that they achieved the standard to a great extent.

Interpretation of Results

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

Measure one indicated that students overall met the 60% performance standard with 61% scores of “excellent and very good”, but it also indicated that student performance was noticeably weaker under the fourth criteria, “critical analysis of sources.” This dramatically lower level of accomplishment suggests that students are not used to or practiced in the critical analysis of sources. A review of the syllabus shows that the instructor in LS420 does review the rubric

for evaluating the senior thesis with students. In preparing students to evaluate sources in their concentrations, one class meeting is devoted to students presenting models of professional research in their disciplines as well as examples of their own research work in each of their concentrations. In addition, a preliminary annotated bibliography of sources is required as part of the thesis proposal. However, these two activities assignment do not seem to be accomplishing the task of having student engage in the critical analysis of sources in their thesis.

Measure 2 indicates that according to two criteria, “recognized documentation style” and “internal citation style” students scored within 1% of the 70% performance standard. But performance under a third criteria, “Works Cited and Reference page” format was significantly lower and reduced overall achievement to 65%. This result is puzzling since formatting a list of sources requires only the adherence to a clearly defined and widely taught documentation style. This should be the easiest part of using a documentation system. On the other hand, making sure all the punctuation, abbreviations, and sequencing required in a bibliographic entry is the kind of tedious task that student/human nature struggles to do well..

Measures 3 and 4 present paradoxical results. Measure 3 is evidence that alumni have a great deal of confidence in the skills of the collection and analysis of information. Measure 3 is noticeably higher than the faculty performance standard for the skill. Measure 4, which is a small sample, shows a majority think they have not achieved the standard.

The discrepancy suggests that these data, both of whose use is new this year, should be observed regularly in the future in order to see whether a pattern emerges. I will risk a first, tentative interpretation. Measure 3 reflects this reality: the academic standards for the collection, and analysis of data are similar to standards in business, government, the military and other work sectors. But the standards for reporting results (i.e., documentation) are much more formal in the academy than elsewhere. As a result students find themselves in the workplace well equipped to collect and analyze information but have been freed from the burden of rigid and detailed documentation styles. Thus alumni rate their preparation highly. However, when asked to reflect upon the learning outcome which seems in retrospect to stress the intricate presentation format required of them as students, respondents remember the tediousness of getting documentation right and devalue the academic experience in a workplace that makes no equivalent demand for standardized format.

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

In both LS300 and LS420, there is already discussion, practice and feedback of research methods. These activities cover the items in the rubric used to evaluate the senior thesis for a grade and to assess the senior thesis for learning outcomes. The results of this year’s assessment suggests that the critical analysis of sources does not receive enough attention. Given that sections of LS core courses never enroll more than 20 students (8-16 is the range) all assignments should receive significant amounts of feedback from the instructor and from peers.

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

The assignments in LS300 and LS420 regarding research conventions in their disciplines and in review of student’s own previous research work will be revised to include specific attention to the critical analysis of sources. At least one assignment should be designed to practice critical analysis. To assess the impact of coordinating LS300 and LS420 portfolios, the portfolios of all students in both classes will be collected and evaluated for common exercises, expectations, and rubrics regarding documentation.

The issue of how academic research skills and expectations translate into activities in the workplace will be addressed in a revision of at least 2 LS400 internship assignments out of 8. Normally these assignments are posted in Canvas and receive peer feedback asynchronously. For critical analysis issues, perhaps the feedback should be given synchronously which would allow for multiple reinforcements of the idea that critical analysis is important. Most students do their internship before LS420 or in the same semester as LS420 so that the additional activity should impact student performance on the thesis.

Revise the language in this learning outcome as was suggested in the 2016 rubric from the University Assessment Committee.

Learning Outcome 2:

demonstrate an understanding of the value of lifelong learning by articulating how educational experiences relate to careers and daily life

Assessment Activity

Outcome Measures <i>Explain how student learning will be measured and indicate whether it is direct or indirect.</i>	Performance Standard <i>Define and explain acceptable level of student performance.</i>	Data Collection <i>Discuss the data collected and student population</i>	Analysis <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 Choice" (direct)	60% of the scores will be "very good" or "excellent"	Data was gathered from the scored rubrics for 16 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 two criteria reviewed under "Topic Choice." 63% of the evaluations under "suitable for scholarly research" met the standard. 63% under "treats controversial or debated topic" met the standard. Overall 63% of the scores in this category met the standard.
Student self-assessment of applied skills as reported in the 2017 Alumni Survey (indirect)	60% of the scores will be "good" or "excellent"	Data was collected from the 2017 Alumni Survey from two items new in 2017 list of skills rated by students: "Work collaboratively with people from diverse backgrounds" and "Apply education to serve others in your community" (N=12)	1. Data was aggregated by the program chairperson from the individual annual reports. 2. 83.3% of respondents indicated that they believed their education prepared them to work with people from diverse backgrounds." 75% of respondents indicated that they believed their education prepared them to 'apply education to serve others in the community.'" Both numbers exceed the standard.

Outcome Measures <i>Explain how student learning will be measured and indicate whether it is direct or indirect.</i>	Performance Standard <i>Define and explain acceptable level of student performance.</i>	Data Collection <i>Discuss the data collected and student population</i>	Analysis <i>1) Describe the analysis process. 2) Present the findings of the analysis including the numbers participating and deemed acceptable.</i>
Student self-assessment of close relationship between college field/specialization to first professional position "in Alumni Surveys 2015-2017. (indirect)	50% of the scores will be "directly related" or "somewhat related". Because Liberal Studies is by nature a generalist degree rather than a field focused on an expertise, there is a low expectation of a clear relationship between field of study and first professional job.	Aggregate data from 2015, 2016 & 2017 Alumni Data by Program (N=16, 14, 19 respectively)	1.Data was aggregated by the program chairperson from the individual annual reports. 2. 47.1% of respondents indicated they believed that their education was directly related to their first professional job. 29.4% judged their field of study "somewhat" related. 23.4% judged their field of study "not related." Thus the performance standard was noticeably exceeded with 76.5% positive assessment.
Student self-assessment of the learning outcome on the 2017 Liberal Studies Supplemental Report (indirect)	60% of respondents will indicate that they feel the "Liberal Studies program helped you achieve the . . . learning outcome [Demonstrate an understanding of the value of lifelong learning] ."	Data was compiled from the Liberal Studies Supplement Report to the 2017 Alumni Survey (N=9)	66.7% of respondents indicated that they achieved the standard to a great extent.

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 meeting the standard. It is clear, however, that the direct measure considers aspects of the thesis (scholarly topic and controversial issue) which can certainly apply to careers and to daily life but need not necessarily apply. Several topics that senior students investigated in their thesis clearly relate to career preparation (e.g., an investigation of current and developing e-currencies which will require cybersecurity expertise) while others related to daily life (an investigation into counseling resources available to the children of military personnel facing multiple deployments). But others topics addressed issues related to scholarly debates (e.g., the origins of the 1948 general Agreement on Trade and Tariffs) or historical events (what "national security" meant in Civil War Washington DC).

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

The senior thesis is the capstone of the Liberal Studies degree both in academic challenge and in the ability of each Liberal Studies major to articulate the value of his/her degree. The term “Liberal Studies” communicates little to potential employers or graduate/professional school admissions offices. Because of the variation in concentrations and course selection, each Liberal Studies degree is unique. Only the student who has completed the degree can explain what level of discipline expertise and what value in interdisciplinary thinking the student has achieved. The senior thesis--the best representation of the student’s thinking, research and articulation skills-- is the cornerstone of the degree and thus deserves to be at the center of assessment of the program.

In the case of this learning outcome, however, the first measure is a weak direct measure. The senior thesis does not seem like the appropriate source of information relative to this outcome because it is such a traditional academic exercise with research topics which may not carry implications for careers and daily life. Students who complete the internship submit an essay reflecting upon the impact of the experience of the internship upon their learning and their career. The prompt for the essay is currently rather broad and generic, but it should be rewritten to focus student thinking and provide an improved assessment measure.

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

Re-evaluate the senior seminar thesis rubric to improve its value in evaluating all program outcomes.

To add another direct measure of this outcome. revise the prompt for the internship self-evaluation in LS400 so that students address the learning outcome as one topic in their report.

Appendices