

Liberal Studies Learning Outcomes Assessment Project 2005 -2006

The Liberal Studies program at CSUCI was designed around philosophical commitments in five broad areas. They are congruent with the mission of the University, and are as follows:

- A commitment to the development of content knowledge – breadth and depth;
- A commitment and respect for diversity of all students;
- A commitment to scholarship, teaching, and active, lifelong learning
- A commitment to excellence across program areas;
- A commitment to active involvement with the surrounding community.

CSUCI has adopted a six-part conceptual framework for assessing and evaluating the effectiveness of its Liberal Studies Programs. These six steps form a cycle that will be repeated many times across the years. They represent a commitment to continuous evaluation and improvement. They are embedded in the fabric of our day-to-day operation. Further, the faculty has accepted that the quality and nature of academic programs are not sufficient measures, by themselves, against which to judge the effectiveness of our efforts. Rather, we must assess the knowledge, skills, competencies and dispositions of our graduates in relation to the learning objectives that we have established for the Liberal Studies program, and relate them to the educational experiences that we have designed. We must continually “tune” our curricula to meet the changing needs of the communities that we serve with our Liberal Studies programs.

The six steps are as follows:

- Operationally define measurable learner outcomes that we wish for our graduates;
- Identify the measures that we will use to determine the degree to which these learner outcomes are being realized;
- Conduct assessments using the measures identified;
- Evaluate the degree to which we have achieved the learner outcomes that we established for our program;
- Use the resulting data to inform decision making regarding content and pedagogy; and,
- Institutionalize feedback mechanisms to ensure that these data will be used to modify practice.

Liberal Studies Program Goals and Student Learning Outcomes

Four program learning outcomes have been identified for graduates from Liberal Studies. They were derived from the Liberal Studies Learning Outcomes currently published in the University Catalog 2006 – 2007. These revised program learning outcomes will be published in the 2007 – 2008 University Catalog. Our graduates will be able to:

- **Evaluate effectively oral or written communication for accuracy of content, logic of argument, and clarity of reasoning;**
- **Demonstrate high levels of computer literacy, information literacy, and technological literacy;**
- **Compare and contrast cultures and their customs regarding race, class, ethnicity, gender, and language and discuss societal issues that may arise;**
- **Demonstrate content area knowledge related to the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) content standards for the Multiple Subject Teaching Credential.**

The four program learning outcomes were identified during a University-wide assessment activity in spring 2005, and embedded within the Liberal Studies Plan for Assessment of Student Learning outcomes. (Exhibit) The assessment and evaluation plan is presented in a grid format illustrating how the four student learning outcomes will be assessed over a period of 4 years.

Where ever possible, the Liberal Studies assessment plan is designed to use data and products that are already required elements of programs. These data sets represent authentic measures of student performance. However, we also believe that it would be beneficial to have assessment data from standardized instrument(s) in addition to these authentic measures. Our initial efforts were focused on the following program outcome:

Our graduates will be able to evaluate effectively oral or written communication for accuracy of content, logic of argument, and clarity of reasoning.

Because all of our native freshmen must complete a freshman level class in critical thinking, our initial assessment and evaluation of critical thinking and reasoning skills was associated with this class. After a brief examination of the literature we elected to use the **California Critical Thinking Skills Test**. (The California Academic Press – <http://insightassessment.com>)

California Critical Thinking Skills Test

Construct and Content Validity: The CCTST is based on the conceptualization of critical thinking articulated in the Expert Consensus Statement on College Level Critical Thinking (1990) known as [The Delphi Report](#). This concept was supported by an independent replication research study of policy-makers, employers, and academics which was conducted at Penn State University, sponsored by US Department of Education.

Scores Reported: The CCTST Total Score targets the strength or weakness of one's skill in making reflective, reasoned judgments about what to believe or what to do. The CCTST generates several scores relating to critical thinking.

- Overall critical thinking skills **total** score and norm-group percentile.
- Sub-scale scores by the classical categories of **Inductive Reasoning** and **Deductive Reasoning**.
- Sub-scale scores by the contemporary categories of **Analysis, Inference, and Evaluation**.

The test was administered to all students registered in UNIV 110 Critical Thinking in Interdisciplinary Contexts in Spring semester 2006 and Fall semester of 2005 using a pretest-posttest format. The essential finding from these assessments was that there was no significant difference in the students' critical thinking and reasoning skills after the 16 week critical thinking class. (See data below)

These data by themselves are insufficient to make any recommendation regarding the nature and levels of learning in the critical thinking class. The data are confounded by the fact that only 50% of the students elected to take both the pretest and the posttest.

Assessment using this instrument has not occurred in Fall semester 2006 for two important reasons:

- Funding for this aspect of assessment was not included in the budget process for 2006 – 2007,

- A university-wide examination of General Education resulted in University support for a pilot program using an ETS test - *Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress (MAPP)* - a test designed to measure student learning in general education in three areas: mathematics, writing, and critical reading and thinking. After examining the test scores from the pilot group, it was determined that the constructs measured on the critical reading/thinking section of the MAPP focused on similar concepts as taught in the critical thinking section of the general education program. And, by careful sampling, it would be relatively easy to disaggregate student sub-populations, including Liberal Studies majors, to create portraits of students completing the GE Program as well as examine critical thinking skills at other important landmarks in students' programs.

While no decision has been made regarding the adoption of MAPP as a university wide measure of academic skills, it seems likely that it will become the instrument of choice, at least in the early stages of program assessment and evaluation at CSUCI.

Conclusions and implication for the Liberal Studies Program

At this stage of development of our assessment and evaluation activities within Liberal Studies, it would be unwise to draw any conclusions regarding the program. There is simply insufficient data to justify any action. New and different data will be derived from MAPP scores, if MAPP is adopted by the University. It will be these data over time that will inform our decision making regarding pedagogy and programs.

However, there is much to be gained from a thoughtful analysis of what we have learned about student willingness to take tests, and the various incentives that we might adopt to help us generate more complete data sets in the future. The Liberal Studies program in particular, as well as the University as a whole, needs to reflect on the costs of assessment and evaluation in fiscal terms, as well as in human resource terms, and plan accordingly. Considerable resources will be needed to fully implement the assessment plans of the various academic programs. Identifying and planning their allocation are very important steps that must occur if we are to successfully meet the assessment and evaluation expectations of an accredited university.

Although our current programmatic data are very limited, there is much to inform us regarding the manner in which we design and collect our data sets in the future, and we have sufficient data to create the mechanisms needed to institutionalize feedback loops in our assessment and evaluation programs. The Liberal Studies Implementation Plan for the Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes (Exhibit) proposes that five members of the Liberal Studies Advisory Committee (LSAC) meet for one or two days in the intersession between Fall and Spring semesters to evaluate annual assessment data, and reflect on what we have learned. The product from this meeting will be a series of recommendations directed to the entire LSAC during the course of the Spring semester. This will provide a regular mechanism that ensures that assessment and evaluation data guide our decision making in pedagogy and programs.