Assessment of Student Learning Plan (ASLP): Academic Programs   artz,5/19/15

2014-15 Academic Year

According to the NEASC accreditation commission, our campus must show that we are engaged in a comprehensive and systematic approach to program review and the assessment of student learning across all academic programs. To comply with these national assessment standards, every academic department/program is being asked to document how they assess student learning in their program, and how they are using the results for improvement.

Please review your assessment process during this past academic year (2014-15), and complete this form the best way you can, then send to the Office of Academic Assessment.

*This completed ASLP will become a component of your department's Program Review process and may also be utilized as part of your department's Core course assessment work.

The information will be reviewed by USM's Assessment Committee, and placed into the Campus-wide Assessment Report for accreditation purposes.

* Please return form by intercampus mail or email to: Susan King, Office of Academic Assessment, Rm 628 Law Bldg, Portland campus.   (Email) susank@usm.maine.edu   (Phone) 780-4681

Due: May 29, 2015

A. College, Department/Program, Date

College   Provost
Department/Program   Honors Program
Date   4/27/15

B. Contact Person for the Assessment Plan

Name and title   Nancy Artz, Honors Program Director

C. Degree Program

Name of Degree Program: No degree awarded. Student awarded …
  - General University Honors (thesis track, includes Honors Core & thesis below)
  - Honors Core Curriculum (non-thesis track)
  - Honors Thesis (thesis only)

D. Assessment of Student Learning in Your Program

Step 1: Identify Student Learning Outcomes (What are students able to do by the end of your program?)

a. *List 3-5 of the most important student learning outcomes for your program.*

Honors Program Learning Outcomes

Note: these are key outcomes to be assessed; the full range of honors education outcomes is not listed.

Students completing the **non-thesis track** should be able to …

1) **hone their own thoughts and positions on complex, multi-faceted issues** by considering diverse perspectives and conflicting-yet-plausible ideas;

2) **communicate in writing at a level suitable for public audiences** (mastery of writing mechanics – grammar, punctuation, spelling, word usage, citation – and ability to communicate ideas in readable text can help students achieve goals such as publishing a thesis, writing letters-to-the-editor to engage in public discourse, using a resume and cover letter to gain employment, etc.);

3) **demonstrate information literacy** (i.e., ability to recognize when information is needed and to locate, evaluate, and use the needed information effectively); and

4) **demonstrate public scientific literacy** (i.e., has a level of understanding needed by citizens to follow and discuss public policy; in other words, has sufficient understanding of how science works via the scientific process and knows basic vocabulary/facts/concepts so they can follow science news reports, distinguish pseudoscience from scientific claims, make sense of disputes about claims, participate in public policy discourse, and make solid choices in daily life).

IN ADDITION, students completing the **thesis track** should <u>also</u> be able to …

5) **complete a sustained, self-directed project substantively revised based on feedback** (requiring imagination, the use of multiple perspectives, research findings, and conceptual frameworks – *whether interdisciplinary or disciplinary* – to develop understanding and create new insight).

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b. *Then, identify which student learning outcomes were assessed this past academic year. (One or more of the outcomes and corresponding assessment plans could come from your department's CORE Course Blueprint(s).*

Outcome 5 (which somewhat subsumes outcomes 1, 2, and 3) was selected for assessment in 2014-2015:

Thesis-track students complete a sustained, self-directed project substantively revised based on feedback (requiring imagination, the use of multiple perspectives, research findings, and conceptual frameworks – whether interdisciplinary or disciplinary – to develop understanding and create new insight).

Note: All five program learning outcomes were assessed the prior year (2013-2014) as part of a formal USM Academic Program Review. See the appendix for excerpts of our March 2014 Self Study Report.

Step 2: How and When were the Learning Outcomes assessed?

a. *Briefly describe the assessment tools, measures, or forms of evidence that were utilized to demonstrate students' accomplishment of the learning outcomes selected.*

Direct assessment: The appended rubric was drafted to assess achievement of outcomes 1, 2, 3, and 5 in thesis work. The rubric was designed primarily to assess completed, traditional theses.

An attempt was made to make the rubric sufficiently general to be useful in assessing mid-stage thesis work (i.e., at the end of HON 311-Honors Thesis Workshop, students submit a thesis prospectus that summarizes work already completed and presents a plan for thesis completion in a later semester). Only a token effort was made to design the rubric to assess alternative thesis approaches involving creative endeavors and action research)

b. *Briefly describe when and how you implemented the assessment activity.*

The Honor Program Director and Assistant Director used the thesis rubric to assess all theses defended during the 2014-2015 academic year and all theses prospectuses submitted in spring 2015. If a student's final work was not submitted before May 8th, the last draft was used.

Step 3: Process of Using the Assessment results to Improve Student Learning

a. *Briefly describe your unit's process of reviewing the program assessment results, and how you expect to improve student learning.*

The Director and Assistant Director orally resolved discrepancies in how to score student work. The results are documented in the attached rubric.

IMPROVEMENT:

o The rubric was revised to better reflect what we want in thesis work. The Director recommends that the Assistant Director have HON 311 students self-assess their performance using the rubric to help them understand where they need to develop.

o Given the small N and the fact that the curriculum program has been revised since many of the students began the program, it is appropriate to monitor trends for another couple of years before making drastic revisions. However, the weak writing performance of both prospectus students reinforces our new tactic of cross-listing ENG writing courses and our new advising policy of advising thesis students to enroll in a writing course before or during their thesis work. The next Director should review the results with the Honors Council in fall to consider program/curricular changes and encourage more faculty to stress information literacy in their courses.

E. **Other Course Assessment Activities:**

If your department/program is unable to complete any of the above steps, are you able to report any assessment-related activities at the Course-Level; for example: created grading rubrics to use in required courses, examined student progress in an entry-level course, developed a new course, redesigned a course to include community-based learning, etc. Briefly explain.

In Spring 2015, Prof. Goodale drafted a Core Blueprint for HON 207. The next director will need to work with the professor to revise the blueprint before submission to the Core Curriculum Committee.

See appendix for the assessment sections of the March 2014 Self Study Report written for the Honors Program's 2013-2014 Academic Program Review (Honors did <u>not</u> submit an ALSP report that year).

F. Are there "community engagement" activities integrated in your departmental curriculum?

   a. *Please indicate which of the components, listed below, are <u>included</u> in your program's curriculum, and then indicate if the activities are <u>required or optional</u> for students in your major.*

Community Engagement Activity — *Included* — *Required/Optional*

Community Engagement Activity	Included	Required/Optional
Student Research (related to a community-based problem)	yes	R - HON 201
Student-Faculty Community Research Project	rare	O - HON 321
Internship, or a Field Experience	rare	O - HON 359
Independent Study (community-related project)	rare	O - HON 331 or 359
Capstone Course (community-related project)	yes	O - thesis
Service-Learning (a component of a course)	yes	O – included in various courses
Study Abroad, or an International Program	___	(*not yet; planned for FY16 as alt. capstone*)
Interdisciplinary Collaborative Project (community related)	rare	O – HON 359
Student Leadership Activities (related to a team project)	yes	O – in some courses
Students/Faculty Community Leadership (Advisory boards, committees, conference presentations)	yes-subset	R- required for scholarship students O- nonscholarship student

Other Activities (not mentioned above):
Students are encouraged to participate in the Honors Student Organization (which engages in service some years), USM Day of Service, Northeast Regional Honors Conference. The Honors Program has attempted to form ongoing service partnerships with Parkside Neighborhood Association and the Casco Bay Estuary Partnership, which have been used to varying degree for service learning in courses and Honors Student Organization service.

Please list the courses (i.e. EDU 400) that have a "community engagement" activity in your program:

   Entry-level courses: HON 103; some sections of HON 101.

   Mid-level courses: HON 201

   Upper-level courses: HON 359; some students in HON 321, 331, HON 311/411/412

Additional Comments:
The appended materials include a description of assessment activities conducted in 2013-2014 (i.e., excerpts of the Honors Program's March 2014 Self Study Report written as part of a USM Academic Program Review). The Honors Program did <u>not</u> submit an ALSP report that year)

Thanks for your cooperation!

B. Learning Outcomes and Assessment (*work with Assessment Office & Core Curriculum*)

1) Student learning outcomes including knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

As part of the self-study process, the Honors Council identified program-wide learning outcomes. We began by focusing on our non-thesis track (i.e., outcomes met through pre-thesis coursework). We engaged in a generative process that identified over 30 separate outcomes (*see Appendix K*). We then mapped how various courses foster achievement of these outcomes; this process made clear that some outcomes were aspirational more than actually expected.

Given the Assessment Office's recommendation to focus on 3-5 program outcomes, we condensed our list to the vital few that we will assess (*see table below*). Our paring process was guided by a review of common foci for honors programs across the country[1] as well as consideration of 1) the type of students we want to attract, 2) existing themes throughout our curriculum, and 3) what should differentiate an honors student walking across the graduation stage from another graduate with the same major.

Honors Program Learning Outcomes

Note: these are key outcomes to be assessed; the full range of honors education outcomes is not listed.

Students completing the **nonthesis track** should be able to …

6) **hone their own thoughts and positions on complex, multi-faceted issues** by considering diverse perspectives and conflicting-yet-plausible ideas;

7) **communicate in writing at a level suitable for public audiences** (mastery of writing mechanics – grammar, punctuation, spelling, word usage, citation – and ability to communicate ideas in readable text can help students achieve goals such as publishing a thesis, using a resume and cover letter to gain employment, writing letters-to-the-editor to engage in public discourse…);

8) **demonstrate information literacy** (i.e., able to recognize when information is needed and able to locate, evaluate, and use the needed information effectively); and

9) **demonstrate public scientific literacy** (i.e., has a level of understanding needed by citizens to follow and discuss public policy, which means the individual has sufficient understanding of how science works via the scientific process and knows basic vocabulary/facts/concepts so they can follow science news reports, distinguish pseudoscience from scientific claims, make sense of disputes about claims, participate in public policy discourse, and make solid choices in daily life).

Students completing the **thesis track** should also be able to …

10) **complete a sustained, self-directed project substantively revised based on feedback** (requiring imagination, the use of multiple perspectives, research findings, and conceptual frameworks – *whether interdisciplinary or disciplinary* – to develop understanding and create new insight).

Our articulation of program outcomes does not lessen the need for honors courses to meet USM Core Curriculum outcomes. Our courses are reviewed by the Core Curriculum Committee to ensure that each

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[1] Common foci for honors programs are Critical Thinking, Interdisciplinary Learning (making connections, reaching intentionally across borders), Independent Research, and Leadership (source: Lanier's handout on NCHC's Best Practices for Developing a Coherent Honors Curriculum).

course addresses specified Core outcomes. Our articulated outcomes are definitely compatible with Core outcomes, but they highlight the unique focus of the USM Honors Program.

2) Map of student learning outcomes identifying learning experiences that support specific outcomes and where in the curriculum an outcome is introduced, reinforced, and mastered.

As part of our self-study, the Honors Council has engaged twice in a course mapping process. The first time was an informal process to see how various honors experiences (*required courses, electives, thesis work, co-curriculum)* support the dozens of initially-identified program outcomes. This process was preliminary in that terms were not defined and not all instructors participated. That said, the first mapping exercise led to these conclusions:

- Honors faculty members indicate that a wide range of knowledge/skills/predispositions (loosely corresponding to USM Core outcomes) are introduced and reinforced in pre-thesis coursework, and strengthened by thesis work.

- While pre-thesis courses prepare students for thesis work, students might benefit from making this preparation more deliberate. Indeed, our discussions on program outcomes highlighted the extent of the program's evolution. Before the honors curriculum was redesigned to attract more students and faculty (i.e., thesis no longer required, courses aligned with USM Core requirements, and need for curricular flexibility jettisoned the fixed, four-semester sequence of coursework), our thesis outcomes and our program outcomes were the same (*see Appendix G*). Arguably, the faculty used to attend more to how pre-thesis courses prepared students for thesis work and attend less to outcomes peripheral to thesis work (e.g., wellness, intersectionality awareness, public scientific literacy, moral reasoning, systems thinking, informal leadership, and transferring learning into action). Perhaps a lessening of curricular integration or coherence is an inevitable consequence of program expansion. Regardless, the Honors Council is reminded of the importance of regular, explicit discussion of how pre-thesis courses prepare students for thesis work. One idea for enhancing integration and coherence would be to add thesis preparation learning objectives in our required courses:

    o First year (HON 101) – learn to pose questions, to challenge either/or thinking, to probe;

    o Second year (HON 200/210) – learn to draw on multiple perspectives and to theorize; and

    o Third year (HON 310) – learn to engage multiple perspectives, locating places of tension, conflict, overlap, and salience.

    This type of sequential skill development would prepare students for the thesis work of posing questions, integrating material, articulating insights, and forming new knowledge. Pre-thesis courses should also encourage students to seek assistance on major projects routinely – too many students approach thesis work as a solo endeavor rather than a collaborative process strengthened by dialogue.

- The expected level of student mastery on various thesis outcomes was remarkably similar for interdisciplinary theses and disciplinary-based theses. Thus, our long-standing thesis outcomes appear applicable to both types of theses.

As noted, the numerous initial program outcomes were condensed into a more manageable, better-defined list of outcomes that would form the foundation of our assessment plan. Thus, we redid the course mapping exercise using our short list of outcomes. Instructors were asked if their course *introduced (I), reinforced (R),* or *generated mastery (M)* of each program outcome. Moreover, instructors were asked about course characteristics that are likely "inputs" leading to learning outcomes. For example, instructors indicated if students in their courses "engaged in writing" at a *minimal (+), moderate (++), or extensive (+++) level*, which relates to the learning outcome of strong written communication skill. Here is our map to date (*see Appendix L for description of course activities and assessment*):

LEARNING OUTCOME MAP: Learning Outcome is… I = Introduced R = Reinforced M= Mastered Course has input + minimally ++ moderately +++ extensively HON requirements:	INPUT: exposed to multiple perspectives & ways of thinking	INPUT: have opportunities to share their ideas with each other	INPUT: given dialogue instruction or feedback to improve ability & predisposition to engage in active listening, respect others' views, & build upon others' comments	OUTCOME: hone own thoughts and positions on complex, multi-faceted issues by considering diverse perspectives & conflicting, yet plausible ideas	INPUT: engage in writing.	INPUT: given writing instruction or feedback to improve writing skills.	OUTCOME: communicate in writing at a level suitable for a public audience	OUTCOME: demonstrate information literacy	OUTCOME: demonstrate public scientific literacy	OUTCOME: complete a sustained, self-directed project substantively revised based on feedback
HON 101 (EYE): Myths, Monsters,…	++	+++	++	I/R	+++	+++	I/R	I/R	n/a	I
Foundings…	+++	+++	++	I	+++	++	I	I	I	*tba*
Culture/Identify/Education	+++	+++	+++	I	+++	+++	I/R	I	n/a	*tba*
HON 200/210 (Science Exploration)	++	+++	++	R	++	++	I/R	R	I→R	I/R
HON 310 (Ethical Inquiry) + (Int'l) 9 Billion People, 1 Damp Rock Africa, Exile, Social Justice	+++	+++	+	M	+++	++	R→M	R	R	I
	+++	+++	++	M	+++	+++	R	M	n/a	M
Required Elective										
HON 100 – Writing	+++	+++	++	R	+++	+++	R	R	n/a	*tba*
HON 102 – Cultural Interp.	+++	+++	+++	I/R	++	++	R	I→R/M	R	I
HON 103 – Socio-Cultural Anal.	+++	++	++	I/R	+++	++	R	I/R	n/a	I
HON 105- Quant Reasoning	++	+++	+	I	++	++	I	I	n/a	*tba*
HON 175 -Creative Expression	++	+++	+++	R	++	+++	M	R	n/a	R/M
HON 207 - Creative Expression	+++	+++	+++	R/M	+++	+++	R/M	R	n/a	*tba*
HON 351 – Cluster	+++	+++	+++	R	+++	+++	R	R	n/a	*tba*
co-curriculum	++	++	+	I/R	+	n/a	I/R/M	I/R/M	n/a	I/M
Thesis — interdisciplinary	+++	+++	+++	M	+++	+++	M	M	depends on topic	M
Thesis — disciplinary (in the major)	varies	+++ [2]	varies	varies	+++	+++	M	M	depends on topic	M

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[2] A thesis student shares ideas with committee members, but probably not other students as occurs in HON 311.

It is clear that the faculty believes that students in our courses are expected to develop and demonstrate our desired program-level learning outcomes. That said, some program outcomes are somewhat aspirational: mastery of informational literacy is not expected in the nonthesis track nor is mastery of public scientific literacy expected in either track. This may be because our definitions for these literacies were drawn from the academic literature. The Council either needs to reword the outcomes to match what we expect students to achieve in our program or revise the program so students achieve full mastery (e.g., require additional coursework developing information literacy and public scientific literacy).

<u>Indirect Assessment Results on Learning Outcomes</u>

The survey administered in fall 2013 honors courses (*see Appendix I*) provides student perceptions relating to our program outcomes. The focus on the survey was advising and program quality, but questions were included that relate to our first three program-wide learning outcomes (hereafter, PO1 – honing thoughts on complex issues by considering multiple perspectives, PO2-writing well, PO3- information literacy) and course characteristics expected to foster those learning outcomes.

Students were asked if various phrases were better descriptions of honors courses or nonhonors courses (or if honors and nonhonors courses were similar on that dimension). Each descriptor was phrased as an academically desirable course attribute. On every attribute, almost all students perceived honors courses as equal to or better than nonhonors courses (as opposed to worse than nonhonors courses; *see Appendix I for all results*). The attributes most often used to distinguish honors from nonhonors courses were "**courses emphasize writing, dialogue, questioning & complex thinking**" [PO1&2] and "**you are expected to develop and share your own ideas**" [PO1] (73% and 67% of students, respectively, said these descriptions were especially true for honors courses, while no students said these phrases were better descriptors of nonhonors courses). The majority of students also differentially described honors courses as "**you improve your analytical and critical thinking skills**"[PO1] (62%), "**you are exposed to diverse perspectives and ways of thinking**"[PO1] (62%), "teachers hold students to high academic standards" (62%), "**you improve your writing skills**" [PO2] (54%), "you learn from other students in class" (54%), "interaction among students is friendly and supportive" (51%), and "you receive individualized attention from teachers" (50%).

The results are evidence that the majority of students perceive honors courses to focus more than nonhonors courses on developing the skills to meet our first two leaning outcomes: PO1 - honing thoughts on complex issues by considering multiple perspectives and PO2 - writing well.

The results were positive, but not as strong for the one phrase relating to PO3 - "you learn to recognize when information is needed and how to find and evaluate it." Forty-two percent of students said that honors courses developed this skill more than non-honors courses. Fifty-five percent said that honors courses and nonhonors courses were similar in developing this skill. This is consistent with the course mapping exercise reported above, which showed we address information literacy across the honors curriculum, but do not expect nonthesis students to master information literacy. The survey did not ask about PO4 – scientific literacy or PO5 – sustained, self-directed projects.

As an aside, it is interesting to note the two courses attributes that were <u>least</u> likely to differentiate honors courses from nonhonors courses (and, for 12-18% of students, were more likely to describe <u>non</u>honors courses):

- "you spend 5+ hours per week on out-of-class assignments in a typical course" (20%) – this is consistent with NCHC's common refrain that honors courses don't necessarily require more work, just different work; and
- "you study with students outside of class" (25%) – while the honors program values collaborative learning (which is borne out by the results reported above on learning from other students in class and friendly interaction of students), it may be that nonhonors courses employ more group projects as a result of larger class sizes.

3) Assessment plan for student learning outcomes

Assessment of Student Learning Plan - ASLP: In accordance with NEASC accreditation, USM recently instituted an ASLP process so that every academic program develops and implements a plan to assess program-wide learning by students. The Honors Program was asked in August by the USM Office of Academic Assessment to develop and submit an assessment plan within the year.

As described above the Honors Council has completed the first ASLP step of listing "3-5 of the most important learning outcomes in our program." One to two program outcomes are to be assessed each year, so our next step is to select what will be assessed first.

Our plan for this semester is to develop assessment rubrics for each of our five program outcomes (i.e., honing thoughts, writing, public scientific literacy, information literacy, completed self-directed projects). At a minimum, these rubrics will be used to assess skills demonstrated in all theses submitted this year.

One idea is to use the rubrics to assess responses to a prompt such as "what does it mean to be educated?" The prompt would be administered at the end of the nonthesis track (HON 310) to see if program outcomes have been met in the nonthesis track. We could also administer the prompt at the beginning of our first required course (HON 101) to gage improvement over time. This would be particularly revealing if we compared the results to a sample of nonhonors students in nonhonors Core courses (i.e., beginning of EYE 1XX and end of EISRC 3XX).

Eventually, we may attempt direct assessment in which assessors observe student interaction in classes. We will continue to use indirect measurement (i.e., surveys of students and alumni) to measure perception of student development and the honors experience.

Assessment Rubric: Honors Program Learning Outcomes #1, 2, 3 and 5 -- For Assessment of Thesis or Thesis Prospectus Work[3]   *Artz, 5/12/15*

Assessment criteria	UNACCEPTABLE	MEETS	EXCEEDS
Self-directed & Student imagination required [*Prospectus: as evidenced in HON 311*]	Substantially faculty-directed, dependent on faculty imagination, or included faculty work √	Self-directed work based on student imagination (with faculty guidance) * *	Truly independent, creative work √ *
Conceptual frameworks [*Prospectus: as evidenced in HON 311*]	Not conceptual	Conceptual framing meets basic disciplinary standards √ * * *	Conceptually driven √
Secondary research & Information literacy (*i.e., able to recognize when info is needed and able to locate, evaluate, and use the needed info effectively*) [*Prospectus: as evidenced in HON 311*]	Info incomplete or not evaluated or used √ *	Reasonable handling of literature and information √ * *	Professional-level handling
Honed own thoughts/ positions on complex, multi-faceted topic by considering diverse perspectives and conflicting-yet-plausible ideas [*Prospectus: as needed, "promise of…"*]	Hard-to-discern or shallow position, single perspective; did not engage with other perspectives	Supported position, considered diverse perspectives √ √ * * * [or delved deeply in discipline, briefly acknowledging alternative perspectives]	Integrative or synthetic position
Developed understanding or created new insight from primary research [*or produced creative or synthetic project*] [*Prospectus: as needed, "promise of…"*]	Description of basic, existing ideas and/or superficial primary research or research that only creates insight new to student (not academia). *IRB protocol violated*	Created new insight from primary research. √ √ * * *Met IRB protocol*	Notable contribution to literature *
Sustained Project [*Prospectus: as evidenced in HON 311*]	Not submitted; Late; Binge writing; Limited revision, ignored key feedback. *	On time, perhaps with some last-minute rushing. Substantive revision, driven by feedback √ *	On time with steady progress. √ * Multiple rounds of substantive revisions driven by multi-stakeholder feedback
Written communication suitable for public audience (*i.e., level expected to achieve goals such as publishing a thesis, using a resume and cover letter to gain employment, writing letters-to-the-editor to engage in public discourse*) **Writing mechanics:** grammar, spelling, punctuation, word usage, citation	Thesis: not publishable; many pages with errors Prospectus: needs substantial revision √ √	Thesis: clean -- few mechanical errors (*?) Prospectus: mostly clean mechanics	Thesis: professional copy-editing level * * Prospectus: few, if any, errors
Communicated ideas in readable text	Editing necessary √ √	Further editing unnecessary *	Polished text * *

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[3] Rubric was primarily designed for traditional thesis work, so it will likely need to be revised to accommodate creative projects and action-research