College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences (CAHS) Programs

Program Improvement Report - Summer 2019

This summary report describes the evidence that assessment results are being used for program improvements in the CAHS academic programs, as reported by the departments' Assessment of Student Learning Plans (ASLP) forms for the 2018-19 academic year.

ART Programs

In all the Art programs, the full time art faculty reviewed and discussed the assessments of art classes and portfolios.   a) Assessment of student self-portraits in the ART 151 classes continued from last year, and was part of the department's efforts to strengthen emphasis on perceptual drawing skills. Overall, students' skills improved markedly by the end of the semester indicating that students are getting quality instruction in ART 151. b) All ART 141 vocabulary quizzes continue to show marked improvement, and standard terms scored in the mid-80s to 90s at the end of the semester indicating strong teaching of 2d design at the foundation level. Terms relating to "color" scored somewhat lower this past year, indicating a need to reconsider the teaching of color in this class.   c) The portfolios showed marked improvement in presentation skills as a result of increased emphasis laid on their importance this year. More students attended the pre-portfolio presentation workshop and submitted strong, well-presented portfolios.

In the Art & Entrepreneurial Studies program, the questionnaire in the Advanced Studio Capstone classes elicited a very wide variety of responses, but a number of students' responses indicated there is a need for more serious reflection and greater development of the way they think about the intended viewers of their work, and also how they project their work out into the world.

In Studio Art program, the full time faculty collaborated on the assessments of studio art classes, portfolios and the BFA exhibition and critique. Assessment of the first presentations and final critiques of the annual BFA Exhibition show that work in the Senior Seminar greatly improved students' ability to meet the program outcomes. In response to last year's assessment results, this year particular attention was paid in the Senior Seminar regarding the outcome of developing the verbal and analytic skills.

For Art History, the two tenured faculty reviewed and scored all papers and tests submitted for assessment. Certain skills were identified as requiring further development, which were the ability to discuss artworks in relation to cultural context and period characteristics, and research skills.

The following improvements will be made: 1) to continue to require classes at all levels to regularly assign tests and papers that require students to discuss artworks explicitly in relation to period characteristics and cultural context, and 2) to continue to assign research projects in upper level classes

and work to ensure that students are given all the necessary tools and instruction to develop research skills.

In the Art Education program, the one full time and one part-time faculty members are in charge of teaching and overseeing student learning. At the end of each art education class, the students are required to present their portfolios and share the growth made towards the required learning objectives and teaching standards. Both art education faculty, peers and mentor teachers review the portfolios with each student and provide feedback and direction on further growth. After the last class (AED 421/400), the students formally presented all their learning – from the last 4-6 semesters of work-- and the art education faculty, along with input from mentor teachers in K-12 or community settings, use the portfolio to assess graduation from the program.

Changes are made each semester based on the challenges articulated by the students when presenting their portfolios. The Art Education program has added two new courses in order to better meet the needs of program objectives and the School of Education required standards. Students were asking for more teaching practice and lesson plan support. So AED 222 and AED 400 are new courses that provide students with additional experience, and help them better meet the required AED/SED standards.

Summary: The Art programs made program-level curriculum changes based upon their assessment data (portfolios, capstones, exhibitions, and classroom artifacts). One of the program changes was to add new courses to give students more practical experience for meeting the educational standards. The course-level changes included assignment revisions in some courses to help students met the stated learning outcomes.

Communication & Media Studies

For the Communications degree program, we focused on the direct assessment in CMS 495 (Theories of Communication) and our program outcome #6: "to demonstrate the ability to be self-reflective about one's learning."   This course requires students to work toward a personal response to a capstone prompt by completing weekly essays designed to emphasize reflection, both on their overall learning experience while at USM and in the major. The course also requires students to complete a literature review, which is considered their "significant work". Both types of work were reviewed by the faculty to assess the achievement of the learning outcome #6. It was clear to the program faculty that the learning outcome was achieved, but lead to a further discussion of better preparation for the task of the literature review. The Assessment goals for 2019-20 are: to coordinate all sections of CMS 200 (Research Methods in Communication) to cover this aspect of theory development.

For the Media Studies degree program, we focused on the direct assessment in CMS 400 (Senior Project) and our program outcomes #4 and #5: "student agency & integration of skills, and issues of importance." Our assessment activities included defining the characteristics of a "signature work" and creating an evaluative rubric. We decided to use the fall section of CMS 400 to pilot test both the definition and the rubric. Discussions revealed that the outcome "Student Agency and Integration of

Skills" is easily understood by students, but the "Issues of Importance" outcome was more difficult for them to integrate with the projects and classroom discussion. While the criteria for assessing projects (i.e. clear communication objectives/ produces for specific target audience/effectively uses the grammar and codes media production/aesthetically pleasing) are on-target, the evaluative instrument needs to be revised from Likert-scales to descriptions (e.g. Distinguished, Proficient, Marginal, Unacceptable). Assessment goals for 2019-20 are: (a) to implement a revised rubric for CMS 400, and (b) to assess CMS 450 on program learning outcomes #4 and #5.

Summary: The Communication & Media Studies department made program and course level changes based upon the results of the course-embedded assignments. Changes included coordinating all sections of their intro research methods course to help students meet one of their program outcomes, and implementing a revised rubric in their upper-level course.

Creative Writing

In the Creative Writing (masters) program, there are five program outcomes. One of the outcomes "using the MLA format in critical writing" was assessed this past academic year by the faculty mentors. After observing that graduating students struggled to format using MLA style, we required that first and second semester students write their annotations in MFA format. This outcome was measured at mid-term and at the end of the semester when student theses were reviewed by faculty mentors, 2nd readers, and program administration.

The program director meets biannually with the Faculty Advisory Committee to discuss matters of curriculum, including the learning outcomes. Starting in the upcoming academic year, in response to faculty concerns, the courses CRW 501 and 502 were modified to introduce MLA formatting into all critical writing exercises.

Summary: The Creating Writing department made a curriculum change based upon their review of student theses; i.e. two entry-level courses were modified for the upcoming year to ensure students were getting enough knowledge regarding the MLA format.

Criminology

The Criminology department redesigned their program-level student learning outcomes during the past academic year, and decided to use the capstone experience for the program assessment. In the spring 2019 semester, all of the full-time faculty began to review the quality of the capstone research papers and will continue this process each semester. Once the faculty read and analyze a systematic random sample of papers, program improvements will be in the 2019-20 academic year based upon reviewing these results.

Summary: The Criminology department recently made a program-level decision to start reviewing capstone research papers to assess their revised program learning outcomes. The assessment results will be reviewed in early fall 2019 for making any program improvements.

Economics

The Economics degree program has five newly designed program outcomes, and all of them were assessed in the two entry-level economics courses, during the past academic year.

We developed a pre & post assessment tool, which was administered for the first time in the spring 2019 semester. The tool consisted of a six-question Likert scale, and included all of the student learning outcomes in the questions, with some questions assessing more than one outcome.

Data were captured to determine if and to what degree the program outcomes were successfully met. Two sections of ECO 101 and one section of ECO 102 were assessed to gather preliminary data. Based upon the results and ongoing discussions, this pilot program will be modified and then similar tools will be created for other course offerings.

Summary: The Economics department made program-level changes in the past year, which included creating new program outcomes, as well as developing and implementing their new assessment tool in the spring semester. After the assessment results are reviewed, modifications will be made in the curriculum for the upcoming year.

English

The English department decided to assess whether or not our students are learning to use the MLA style guide properly (one of the program outcomes). More specifically, whether or not students are able to gain facility at using in-text citation and in constructing a Works Cited page. Other aspects of correctly documenting sources will also be assessed, such as the ability to find and identify sources that are appropriate for the research you are conducting.

During the fall 2019 semester, we plan to develop a quiz or exercise to give to all ENG 140 students at the beginning and at the end of the course to test their knowledge of MLA style and to see if they can use it correctly. A committee will then tabulate the data and prepare a report to the English department on whether or not MLA is actually being learned by English majors early in their sequence of English classes.

We plan to use the data from the ENG 140 course to decide if steps need to be taken to reinforce research skills in the major. Depending upon the results, we might decide to test other outcomes as well. For example, we might review the specific course outcomes for ENG 245 or other general program-

level outcomes—perhaps using some combination of tests, and review (by committee) some anonymous student papers.

Our goal is to examine those courses that are required of all English majors—ENG 140, which is a course in close reading; ENG 245, the gateway to the major; and the Senior Seminar, our capstone course—to see if certain common skills are being acquired and developed by students. In seeking to examine the research skills of students in ENG 140, we want to know why some students seem to advance in the major without ever acquiring the ability to learn and implement a style guide. All students should be exposed to this skill set in ENG 100, yet we have noticed that some students in ENG 140 needed to have the skills taught again. We might try to allow for more time in the ENG 140 course to be devoted to MLA style or the data might help support our plans for a new two-semester expansion of ENG 100 (Intro to College Writing).

Summary: The English department is currently planning course-level changes in the required courses for English majors to assess whether they are understanding how to use the MLA style guide properly. The development and implementation of a new assessment method (a quiz or test) is scheduled for the fall semester to fully assess this program-level outcome.

History

In the History program, students are currently assessed on the shared learning outcomes via their performances on papers, exams, oral presentations, final projects, etc. Individual faculty members also have learning outcomes related to the common program outcomes on their course syllabi. Some faculty have students do a self-assessment related to their progress towards the goals, as well as incorporating peer assessment. Others offer reflective assessment at the end of a course to engage the students in a discussion of whether or not they met the course objectives (which align with the larger department objectives).   During the past year, a scoring rubric for the HTY 200 final paper was utilized throughout the semester for both the fall and spring semesters. The expectations for the assignments were made clear on assignment sheets and syllabi.

The History department has a faculty retreat at the end of each academic year in which curricular discussions and changes are made for the following year. In addition, the individual faculty will review the feedback they received from student online course evaluations to improve future performance and make course adjustments for future sections.

We are working on a long-term data collection project via senior seminar or capstone final papers and projects (HTY 400) for collective assessment. A rubric is currently being designed this summer. Data generated from the evaluation of HTY 400 capstone projects will be used to modify the 100 and 300-level courses, and HTY 200. In these courses, the following objectives are introduced to students: engage in historical inquiry, research, and analysis; understand the dynamics of change over time; explore multiple historical and theoretical viewpoints that provide perspective on the past, and recognize where they are in history; seek a variety of sources that provide evidence to support an

argument about the past and develop a methodological practice for gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence; recognize and practice historical thinking as central to engaged citizenship in their application of historical knowledge and analysis to contemporary social issues and contemporary dialogue.

Summary: The History department is making a program and course level change by creating and using a rubric for their capstone papers/projects to use in the upcoming academic year, based upon their data collections. In addition, adjustments will be made in courses based upon student feedback.

Music Programs

For all the Music programs, weekly faculty meetings are a place where results of the routine assessments are discussed, student petitions are heard, and decisions are made. This is an ongoing process throughout the year.

The Fundamentals exam in the music theory sequence is an exam that is a barrier exam for entrance into MUT 101. This exam is a timed exam on fundamentals, such as key signatures, scales, intervals, chords, and rhythm. Its purpose is to ensure that students are fluent in these basics before they embark on higher level thinking in the future theory classes.

For the <u>BA in Music degree,</u> changes to the Fundamentals exam and the preparation is being implemented to further strengthen student fluency with seventh chords in order to better prepare them for the third semester in the theory sequence. Capturing data on SAT Math scores, theory and aural skills entrance exams and results of first semester success has led to an increased number of students being directed into MUS110 rather than starting with MUT 100.

For the <u>Music Performance</u> program, some of the scoring rubrics used for the baseline assessments are over 10 years old and contain a wealth of data regarding scores and student success. Regarding improvements based upon these assessments, one of the changes included breaking the voice lessons into hour lessons and half-hour coaching each week. Also, a new course, MUS 440 (Studio Class) was created to give students more experience performing in front of each other. New materials were selected by music theory faculty for the "music theory & aural skills" sequence.

For the <u>Music Education</u> program, the recently implemented improvements include changing the Music Education juries to every semester rather than one a year. This adds a formative assessment for each music student and helps them scaffold to the summative assessments at their spring juries and recital. Also, the Professional Seminar IV has been altered to include more basic conducting techniques to aid with Instrumental and Choral Conducting in their junior year.

Summary: The Music department made program-level improvements this year; such as: making changes in their entry-level Fundamentals exam and basic assessment scoring rubrics, based upon their assessment results. In addition, they added a new studio course and included more formative assessments to their seminar courses.

Philosophy

The Philosophy department assessed one program outcome this past year, "intellectual curiosity and creative engagement towards the world in which they live."   To assess this outcome, we looked at student attendance at philosophy events, conferences, and lectures, as well as talked to students at philosophy symposium meetings, during the academic year.   The program faculty meet annually to have a discussion about the assessment results.   Our department has changed its "history of philosophy" requirement to require four courses in the history of philosophy. This replaces the two required courses, PHI 310 and PHI 330 and the two electives. The reason for this change is that the required courses are not offered frequently enough and are sometimes a barrier for graduation.

Perhaps our strongest assessment at the course level are the capstone courses, the senior seminars, and senior thesis, as well as the Mackensen Award. Theses and entries for the Mackensen award are read by the entire faculty and serve as an ongoing project to assess our students and our program. Of course there is a sample bias in the senior thesis because only a handful of the most dedicated students endeavor to write one, and the Mackensen Award contenders are selected from the graduating seniors with the highest GPA. We correct for this by offsetting the sample with a random selection of papers from the senior seminars that are read by the entire faculty. This allows for a more thorough survey. The department has planned to do this again next year.

Summary: The Philosophy department made a program curriculum change (adding additional history courses to replace other courses), based upon their assessment results (student feedback) . Also, the department will continue to review their senior seminar papers during the upcoming year for the Mackensen award.

Political Science

In the Political Science program, course-embedded assignments are given regularly throughout the semester in all classes. Scoring rubrics are routinely used by faculty to measure learning outcome achievement and promote unbiased assessment. Program faculty share a commitment to incorporate the outcomes of effective writing and applying evidence into the scoring rubrics across courses. In addition, student self-assessments (course evaluation data) collected at the end of each semester are also used by the program.

Recent changes at the macro-level included a new version of the POS 102 People and Politics course by receiving the Core Curriculum's "Quantitative Reasoning" designation in order to strengthen the achievement and assessment of this outcome. Another recent change was to allow students the opportunity for an accelerated 4+1 Masters in Policy degree. This change supports the outcome of applying research skills to the community. In the upcoming year, we will also incorporate a change in measuring non-coursework proficiency in foreign language for students in the International Studies Track, which supports the outcomes of demonstrating written and oral communication.

Other improvements include offering a new "Machiavelli" course (POS 399) as an experimental course, which provides a valuable research-based capstone option and integrates historical, theoretical, and political analysis.

In the POS 104 International Relations course, students participated in a service-learning component by working 15 hours in an international aid organization. This course has been providing leadership for the USM Maine Model United Nations program which involves at least 600 high school and junior high school students. The Model United Nations program has a well-established record of success as the largest service-learning program at USM and has helped students achieve the outcome of improving critical thinking by encouraging them to think for themselves while respecting the views of others.

Summary: The Political Science department made a few program-level changes; i.e. revised one of their courses, offered a new research-based capstone course, and added an opportunity for students to have an accelerated master's degree, based upon their assessment data. Also, the department plans to continue providing leadership for the USM Maine Model United Nations program; as the data shows that students improve their critical thinking skills by participating.

Sociology

The Sociology Program faculty, as a whole, reviewed the learning outcomes in the major and reviewed the capstone work to ascertain whether program learning outcomes were being met. Some faculty attended the undergraduate research conference held in the spring to observe oral presentations of sociology student research. In addition, a survey focused on community engagement outcomes was administered in several courses featuring required community engagement activity.

During the past year, individual faculty members participated in a course assessment which involved the students in SOC 301 (Qualitative Research Methods) to present their work at the annual undergraduate research conference (Thinking Matters). The purpose of the assessment was to ascertain whether sociology majors are successfully achieving the program learning outcome focused on both written and oral presentation of student research. The student presentations indicated that they are effectively learning how to deliver original research in both written and oral format.

Based on the faculty review of student work in the 2019 Capstone seminar, the Sociology program has determined that Capstone assignments were effective assessing program-level learning outcomes.

Lastly, the Sociology department participated in a project which was a part of a Title III Democracy and Diversity initiative. This project involved administering a Community Engagement Survey (measuring community engagement, student learning, community belonging, academic engagement, retention and success) in selected Sociology and Social & Behavioral Sciences classes in the fall 2018 and spring 2019 semesters. The results are currently being analyzed and will inform future community-engaged learning and scholarship in the program.

Summary: The Sociology program plans to make program-level changes in their curriculum in regard to community-engaged learning. They will review the student feedback this summer from the Community Engagement Survey, then make the appropriate improvements during the upcoming year.

Theatre

The Theatre department created and implemented an entire new curriculum that went into effect in fall 2018. Four program outcomes were assessed during the academic year.

Individual capstone projects were publicly presented and reviewed by faculty at the end of the fall 2018 semester. In addition, individual portfolios reviews and "cattle call auditions" were conducted at the end of the spring 2019 semester and were reviewed by the faculty group of each track. Rubrics were used for both "cattle call" auditions and portfolio reviews.

Students participating in our public main stage productions (acting and design/tech) received individual coaching and mentoring on a daily basis and received a performance critique by faculty as part of their production assignment grading.

Through the faculty committee, the detailed assessment process is currently being reviewed and a publication of the new department handbook for fall 2019.

Also, the department is currently reviewing some of our electives at the mid-level which will have a direct community engagement, Creative Drama is one example. In our public performance schedule, we offer a Public Showcase which reflects work undertaken in the course of a semester, as well as special performances for the area middle and high school students with a follow-up Q & A.

With the implementation of the new curriculum and the Tracks in Acting/Directing, Design/Technology and History/Literature, each 'faculty group' will be working on the progression of curricula and assessment related activity for each degree track in the coming year.

Summary: The Theatre department completely revised their curriculum in the past year and is currently reviewing their assessment results. Plans are underway to make several program-level changes, including reviewing their assessment process, creating a new handbook, examining the elective courses that have a community engagement component, and working on assessment activities for their new degree tracks.