

SOCIAL SCIENCES DEPARTMENT

Unit-Level Assessment Liaison Report

Spring 2016

Liaison Project Start Date (Semester/Year): Spring 2016

Liaison Report prepared by Janette Gayle

I. Department Buy-In and Outcome Definition

The unit level assessment project for the Social Science Department (SSD) was introduced to the department's faculty via email in early February 2016. It should be noted that the SSD encompasses six disciplines: Anthropology, History Economics, Political Science, Psychology, and Sociology. After consultation with Dr. Domenico Ferri, chair of the department, it was decided to start the assessment with History. Because several fields of history are taught at HWC (U.S., African American, Latin American, African, and World History), the challenge was to create an assessment tool and rubric that would apply to all history courses.

It was decided that the best way to proceed was to form a small informal steering committee composed of faculty representing some of the different fields of history taught at HWC. Two faculty members, Nick Ceh (World History) and Stephen Burnett (U.S. History) volunteered to serve on the committee with the Unit Level Liaison, Janette Gayle. The committee met once per week to brainstorm ideas and to put together and implement the project. Minutes from the meetings are emailed to History faculty members in order to keep them abreast of the committee's progress.

Adapting an assessment tool developed by history faculty at four-year colleges, the steering committee identified five essential skills we would want students to be able to demonstrate at the end of any history course: The ability to (1) craft a thesis statement; (2) distinguish between primary and secondary sources and properly cite them; (3) use primary and secondary sources to support an argument; (4) understand and identify the factors that cause change and continuity over time; (5) demonstrate knowledge of specific historical content and context.

II. Assessment Research and Design

The steering committee created a rubric to determine measureable outcomes. The steering committee then engaged in a process of refining the rubric. Based on feedback from members of the Assessment Committee as well as faculty who attended the Assessment

Workshop at Harold Washington College in April 2016, it was decided to narrow the focus of this particular assessment to three of those five outcomes and to adjust the scope of the rubric accordingly to measure students' ability to: (1) Craft a thesis statement; (2) Distinguish between primary and secondary sources and properly cite them; and (3) use primary and secondary sources to support an argument. Each skill is assessed along four levels of achievement: Exceeds expectations – 3 points; Meets expectations – 2 points; Emerging skills – 1 point; Does Not Meet Expectation – 0 points (Appendix A).

III. Pilot Assessment Tools and Processes

The pilot project was launched in the final two weeks of spring 2016 semester and will use the rubric to assess students' final essays in the following courses:

History 111 sections D & WW2 (US History Survey I)

History 112 sections C & E (US History Survey II)

History 115 sections K & Q (African American History Survey II)

Approximately 100 students will be part of the pilot project, so we are hopeful that the pilot will generate statistically significant data.

IV. Administer Specific Assessment

Using the rubric, each professor will assess only their students' essays. There was a norming session to make sure that the professors are applying the rubric consistently. However, it must be borne in mind that as History is a social science or humanity, as opposed to a hard science and that the objects being assessed are essays total objectivity is not possible. The findings will be entered on an Excel spreadsheet that will be submitted to the Assessment Committee's data analysis team.

V. Data Analysis

In addition to an analysis of the raw data based on the rubric, we will also request that the data analysts consider breaking the data along the following demographic lines: (1) Gender of student. (2) Age of student. (3) Is this the first history course the student has taken? (4) Has the student taken English 101? (5) Has the student taken English 102? (6) What semester is the student in? Having this information pulled during the data analysis phase based on student ID numbers instead of requesting this information directly from students while they take the assessment will prevent "stereotype threat" for students taking the test and will help us understand the results.

The prospective plan for fall 2016 is two-fold: (1) to administer the assessment to students at the beginning and at the end of the semester to gauge their progress. All participating instructors will give a shared introductory writing assignment in the form of a short essay that will include a thesis and necessitate the use of primary and secondary sources to support an argument. The essays will be assessed based on the rubric. Over the next ten or twelve weeks, these skills will be intensively taught along with course content. Toward the

end of the semester, a second essay will be assigned and assessed. A comparison of the results of the first and second assessment should give instructors a good indication of students' success/progress in attaining the skills being measured. (2) To expand the skills measured to include the last two skills or Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) identified by the steering committee: Understand and identify the factors that cause change and continuity over time, and demonstrate knowledge of specific historical content and context. In contrast to the first three skills, which were measured in an essay, the nature of these two skills lend themselves to being measured in a Multiple Choice or Fill in the Timeline test format.

VI. Supporting Evidence-Based Change (Use of Findings)

History is much more than learning historical content. Rather, history is also learning how to make a persuasive argument based on evidence. The results of the assessment will give instructors a clear indication of students' ability to understand the content of the history courses in which they enroll, but also how to form a thesis and how to support an evidence-based argument using primary and secondary sources correctly cited. The results of the assessments will help instructors focus on areas in which students show weaknesses and will help instructors develop and hone their pedagogical skills toward effective teaching and student learning. We suspect that this will steer history instructors toward assigning more writing exercises rather than relying heavily on multiple-choice exams to test student learning. We also think that the findings will suggest that completion of English 101 should be a requirement for History courses, as to succeed in these courses students need to be able to express their ideas in writing.

Success Factors

While we are in the embryonic stage of the unit level assessment project for the Social Science Department (SSD) we can count the following four factors as successes: First, the establishment of a steering committee composed of history instructors (full time and adjunct) to create and administer the History assessment. The committee has met each week, and each member has made valuable contributions to the project. Second, by informing the faculty about the project via word-of-mouth and email the committee has raised awareness about the project and the work of the Assessment Committee more generally. Third, creating the rubric that will be used in the pilot project in spring semester 2016. And finally, planning and implementing the pilot project.

Recommendations

Having administered the pilot project, it is clear that the second skill measured (the ability to distinguish between primary and secondary sources and to properly cite both using Chicago Manual of Style (CMS)) should be decoupled for accurate assessment. In addition, the ability to distinguish between primary and secondary sources probably needs to be assessed in a True/False test, rather than in an essay. Finally, as stated above, we

recommend that assessments should be administered twice per semester (at the beginning and toward the end) to identify areas which need to be focused on and to measure students' progress. We would also recommend that in addition to completing a norming session, more than one instructor assess each student's work, as this might result in a more accurate assessment.

APPENDICES: SOCIAL SCIENCES

Appendix A: History Assessment Rubric

Skill	Exceeds Expectations 3 pts	Meets Expectations 2 pts	Emerging Skills 1pt	Does Not Meet Expectations 0 pt
Demonstrates the ability to craft a thesis statement	Crafts a strong, well-developed thesis statement that can be argued pro and con using sophisticated language	Crafts a thesis statement	Crafts a weak thesis statement – a claim that can be answered yes or no	Does not craft a thesis
Demonstrates the ability to distinguish between primary and secondary sources and to properly cite both using Chicago Manual of Style (CMS)	Consistently distinguishes between primary and secondary sources and cites correctly using CMS	Distinguishes between primary and secondary sources most of the time	Inconsistently distinguishes between primary and secondary sources	Does not distinguish between primary and secondary sources
Demonstrates the ability to use primary and secondary sources to support an argument	Consistently uses primary and secondary sources and analyzes them to support an argument	Consistently uses primary and secondary sources to support an argument	Inconsistently uses primary and secondary sources to support an argument	Does not use primary and secondary sources