

Humanities Department
Unit-Level Assessment Liaison Report
HUMANITIES, Spring 2018

Liaison Project Start Date: Fall 2016 (continued through 2017-2018)

Liaison Report prepared by David Richardson

I. Department Buy-In and Outcome Definition

Philosophy: This phase opened and closed in the fall of 2016 with an email poll of philosophy faculty members regarding their preferred assessment work/area of inquiry. Possibilities included a cross-class rubric for writing assignments, critical reading evaluation, survey of reading and learning beliefs, and others. Eventually, the instructors settled on student critical reading abilities and reading/learning beliefs as our primary areas of interest and inquiry. The Philosophy faculty members have remained enthusiastic about this choice as the project has unfolded over the past two years.

Music: This phase was largely completed prior to my appointment, however in initial discussions with the previous liaison and faculty members, there remains clear consensus (in part as a result of ongoing assessment efforts) regarding the need for continued adjustment and improvement of departmental procedures related to Music Juries, which are the primary focus of our Music Assessment efforts to date, as well as agreement on the need for initial work on other program assessments. The latter led to two new project initiations this past spring, namely the drafting of Program Level Learning Objectives and Student Learning Outcomes for our Music Business and Music Technology Basic Certificates. We expect to finalize the outcomes and determine future assessment activities and needs in the fall semester.

II. Assessment Research and Design

Philosophy: Again, the design of the measure was largely accomplished in the previous year; however, development continued this year with the creation of two additional Critical Reading Assessments for future use. To create these two new measures, I selected two argumentative passages of similar length and lexile density to the original measure and crafted questions of similar intent, structure, and (intended) difficulty. These were completed, reviewed, and finalized this year.

Music: For the AFA jury assessment, our working document has reached a point of effectiveness such that it needed a single minor adjustment and will likely be usable without revision going forward, allowing the faculty members to focus on the rubric use, norming, and data.

III. Pilot Assessment Tools and Processes

Philosophy: In the spring of 2018, the two new critical reading measures were piloted in four sections of philosophy courses, with the intent of determining what degree of similarity the measures have to the original according to various statistical tests (point biserial, KR20, and mean/median student scores). Analysis of the pilot will be completed in the fall for possible use in Fall 2019 or 2020 in either Philosophy classes or, possibly, across all Humanities sections.

Music: Continued iterations of the measure, which is, again, a rubric for rating student music juries, have been successful enough that minor adjustments have been made for each of the last three semesters without the need for additional piloting of the tool. Thus, for the most part, the music faculty have been cycling through the last three stages of the assessment process on a continuing basis.

IV. Administer Specific Assessment

Philosophy: In the fall of 2017, the previously piloted measure was successfully deployed across philosophy classes, yielding a sample that was, roughly, 20% of our (duplicated) philosophy enrollment. Four of five classroom instructors offered the assessment to at least one section, achieving a nice cross section of our classroom students. The assessment was also digitized and offered by at least two online philosophy faculty, though no online students completed the measure, much to our collective disappointment.

Music: The measure was successfully used to rate Music Juries in both Fall 2017 (38 students; 77 responses) and Spring 2018 (49 students; 101 responses). Responses were also collected and entered for Summer 2017, but prior to important revisions to the form.

V. Data Analysis

Philosophy: Fernando Miranda-Mendoza did very helpful work with the philosophy data that I sent him in January, but the fact is that I did not, and still do not, have the facility with data analysis and interpretation that I really need to understand the best questions to ask, the tests that are most useful, and what the answers mean. Consequently, I have embarked on a self-education program to understand more about data models, statistical tests, and data-based inference. One

thing that is clear already is that it will be difficult to make much sense of the direct assessment data without some means of controlling for the significant incoming differences among students sitting in front of the measure. The indirect data, though, related to student beliefs about reading and learning as well as to reading behaviors, yielded some interesting findings about students that will serve as the primary substance for teaching and curriculum discussions in the fall as we enter Stage VI of the assessment process.

Music: The primary data analysis interests for the music faculty will require longitudinal assessment data over multiple semesters in order to track patterns of individual student progress through the sequence of individual lessons, as well as to develop larger pools of data for each level. That data would not be reliable, however, until we have confidence in our measure and in our raters' use of it. Thus, we have focused on rater consistency and determination of the weight and impact of the various categories on the final rating, breaking out the rating of student performance in relation to the intended learning outcomes from an assessment of student progress across the full arc of the course sequence.

Adjustments to the form, which were suggested in response to initial data, proved successful in improving interrater agreement about student learning outcomes, though the data clearly shows that confusion remains with respect to the assessment of student progress through the full course sequence (though less so among the voice students in comparison to the instrumental students).

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

Philosophy: This will be where the department and philosophy faculty will pick up in the fall, starting with the full report of our findings from Fall 2017 and responses to the data. Unfortunately, efforts may prove complicated owing to the fact that 50% of our full time philosophy faculty will be on sabbatical 2018-2019, but we remain optimistic that the project will lead to important and useful changes in our practice.

Music: Even while continuing to tweak the measure, discussions about responses to the data we have collected have led to multiple clarifying discussions about expected outcomes that, in turn, led to important changes in lesson design and content for various student/instructor pairings, according to the Music coordinator who manages student lessons. Furthermore, in response to department meeting discussions of the aims and initial data, music faculty have taken some preliminary steps to review and revise the learning outcomes for the four course sequence of individual lessons and are considering various rater training options for use in the fall 2018 semester. Needless to say, these kinds of outcomes—the foregrounding of student learning outcomes, the curriculum discussions necessary for cross-course consistency—are encouraging.

Success Factors: Working in the role of Liaison Coordinator, Erica McCormack has been an invaluable source of wisdom, knowledge, and encouragement. Her advice and suggestions and general excellence as a colleague, and department/college leader, have made my job feel easy and exciting. The data analysts, Fernando Miranda-Mendoza and Sarah Kakamanu, have also been critical to my work and any successes that have resulted. Being able to build on work that I did while on sabbatical—work that could not have been completed without that sabbatical—has been really great and, again, speaks to the importance of administrative support for faculty research and learning conducted in lieu of teaching duties as well as the lasting value of support for sabbatical projects. Finally, working in the best department of the college has allowed for easy collaboration, efficient and productive development of ideas, and useful, actionable feedback on the tools and procedures, allowing us to power through all the work typical for these kinds of projects with speed and thoughtful attention to quality.

Recommendations: I do not have any recommendations for you, the reader, though, flossing is excellent for your long-term health and Amtrak is a really interesting way to travel. Curricular recommendations have developed among the music faculty (see above) and the philosophical recommendations will be forthcoming as discussions of our initial data set develop and continue. As this Unit liaison role continues to develop (for example, taking on a larger focus on Program Assessment, per the newly revised charge), I expect my focus to shift primarily to music related assessment support over the next year or two, so I recommend that my music colleagues continue to be patient and kind to me, and also that you do everything you can, whomever you are, to work with Carrie Nepstad, Erica McCormack, Jeff Swigart, and the rest of the Assessment Committee as much as possible. They are delightful human beings.