

Humanities Department

Unit-Level Assessment Liaison Report

Spring 2023

Liaison Project Start Date: Spring 2023

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I. Department Buy-In and Outcome Definition

Department Level

Fortunately, engagement with assessment—both as an ongoing practice and as a formal committee within the college—is embedded quite deeply within the Humanities department fabric, so buy-in to the assessment process was largely established well before my current term as liaison began this Spring 2023 semester. There is of course always more to do to include adjunct instructors—especially newly hired ones—in our assessment work, to the extent that they have the capacity for and interest in being involved.

Department, Program & Course Level

Since I just launched my term as department liaison this semester, it seemed like a good opportunity to take stock of our current course-level outcomes and any changes that may be necessary so we can ensure that, as we make explicit program-level outcomes, they get aligned properly and that all assessment work we do within the department is aligned with accurate student learning outcomes (SLOs).

Area Level (Philosophy)

In addition to the direct assessments of student learning that all instructors implement in their own individual courses, our Philosophy faculty decided to implement a direct assessment across all sections of PHIL 105 (Logic) that met in person during the Spring 2023 semester.

II. Assessment Research and Design

Department Level

With the valuable support of our department clerical assistant, Ashleigh Schrum, I was able to access our department's array of course syllabi for the current semester. Doing so revealed a couple spaces in which there was confusion about which set of student learning outcomes is most up-to-date for a given course, so now we are in the process of reviewing other records (such as master syllabi) to help make determinations and support future recommendations communicated by our department leadership to instructors regarding SLOs that belong in each course syllabus. None of these efforts directly constitutes assessment of student learning, but these steps do represent our intention to ensure that our future assessment work is not marred by confusion over such foundational components.

Program Level

One of the upcoming program reviews will affect the Music Business and Technology programs (both of which result in a Basic Certificate). Those programs, along with the AFAs in Music Performance and Music Education, rely as part of their core on at least some of the sequence of Music Theory and Aural & Keyboard Skills courses. Therefore, the main instructor of those courses, Professor Mick Laymon, and I had several conversations about the current configuration of those courses and their outcomes, and we also brainstormed some potential reconfigurations that may be worth pursuing in future semesters to better support student learning and transfer. These possibilities will lead to our decisions about whether it is best to construct one single tool intended for use in all levels of the Music Theory or Aural & Keyboard Skills course sequences, or separate assessment tools for each course level in the sequence.

Area Level (Philosophy)

As these Music Theory and Aural & Keyboard Skills courses are currently set up, Professor Laymon and I discussed the kinds of questions that would be useful to obtain both a direct measure of student skills along with an indirect measure of what they found most helpful to their learning in these subjects.

In Philosophy, Professor David Richardson considered former assessments of student learning that have been administered from the general education level to individual course levels. He used what was learned from those assessments as well as the questions he and his colleagues have about student learning in Logic courses particularly to guide the design of a new assessment tool.

III. Pilot Assessment Tools and Processes

Program Level

This semester's assessment efforts regarding the music programs were spent mainly on preparing for future assessment possibilities by discovering the various sources of documentation around the Music Theory and Aural & Keyboard Skills course syllabi and student learning outcomes, comparing those sources, and evaluating their relative accuracy and authority. The construction of a corresponding assessment tool or tools to pilot in an upcoming semester will begin in Fall 2023.

Area Level (Philosophy)

Professor Richardson administered interim assessments in PHIL 105 (Logic) courses leading up to the final exam, which was administered to all in-person Logic courses at HWC and served as the primary measure and data generator. Those earlier formative assessment tools helped shape the scope and specific questions incorporated into the final summative tool.

IV. Administer Specific Assessment

Program Level

After a pilot version of the Music Theory and Aural & Keyboard Skills assessment(s) run in a future semester, we will make necessary adjustments to how and when—and how broadly across various course levels and sections—it is administered based on how the pilot goes. We will apply those modifications to future full-scale administrations of the tool.

AreaLevel (Philosophy)

Philosophy Professor Richardson collected data in relation to students' demonstrations of their ability to:

1. Distill the essential pieces of an argument (e.g. conclusion, premise(s), key terms, assumptions) from a text.
2. Represent and work with arguments (e.g. derive proofs) in the symbolic forms of one or more basic systems of logic.
3. Distinguish discourses that contain reasoning, inference, or argument from those which perform other linguistic functions.

4. Distinguish between concepts of validity and truth with respect to the evaluation of arguments.
5. Analyze arguments for their structure and quality (e.g., validity);
6. Read and apply basic logic symbols in translation from natural language and sequences.
7. Recognize and identify common fallacies of reasoning.

He was the only faculty member teaching face-to-face sections of logic, making it easy to administer the assessment tool (in the form of an exam to students at the end of the Spring 2023 semester).

V. Data Analysis

Program Level

In future semesters, after running full-scale assessments in Music Theory and Aural & Keyboard Skills courses, we will analyze the data to see the degree to which our students are meeting the learning outcome(s) that the tool is designed to assess. We will look for areas where we can help students improve along with areas in which our students are already achieving the outcome.

Area Level (Philosophy)

Richardson has an analysis and initial report about the degree to which logic students in the aggregate demonstrated achievement of the six course-level student learning outcomes listed above. This semester's data will be from all of our in-person logic classes, but will not include our online asynchronous sections. He will share the report with the philosophy faculty at their fall (local) discipline meeting for discussion.

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

Program Level

Once we have gathered data from the pilot and full-scale assessments of student learning in Music Theory and Aural & Keyboard Skills courses, we will use the results to inform faculty teaching those courses about topics that students in the aggregate are still struggling with and may therefore need more time or additional approaches to learn more fully.

Area Level (Philosophy)

Professor Richardson will discuss the results, future sequencing, and possibilities for an assessment across all of our courses and modalities in either the fall or spring semesters (or both!) with all of the logic instructors in the aforementioned fall meeting.

Success Factors

I am always encouraged by the willingness of my department colleagues to engage in discussions around student learning and assessment practices. Rather than it being an arm-twisting scenario to get them to engage with me in my role as assessment liaison, the possibility of having such discussions is typically met with enthusiasm by my wonderful colleagues. As with anything, the main challenge is finding times that fit within multiple busy schedules to have these conversations and move the work forward, but I think that Professor Laymon and I managed well in setting up multiple in-person meetings as well as reliable email communications within the regular hectic semester.

It was also encouraging to see that, for the most part, our department's various course syllabi maintain the required consistency across sections in terms of course objectives and student learning outcomes. For those few that didn't, it was good that we learned of these inconsistencies at this point so we can improve communication and provide consistently reliable information to all faculty teaching in our department, regardless of full- or part-time status and course modality, so that they in turn are sharing accurate and consistent information with students in all those sections.

Furthermore, having faculty in the department not only participate in shaping, but actually take the initiative in designing and administering their own discipline-specific (or other unit-specific) assessment, represents the next era of growth for assessment practices at HWC. This is not something a lot of faculty have the experience or capacity to undertake immediately (which is one reason why the liaison roles have been so crucial in expanding assessment efforts at HWC), but Professor Richardson sets a helpful precedent.

Recommendations

Department Level

Compile, with department chair oversight, a reliable and complete list of course-level student learning outcomes for every course taught in our department, and make that information readily

available to all faculty every semester with clear instructions about how to integrate it in their syllabi.

Program Level

Determine with music faculty how to best structure the assessments within the Music Theory and Aural & Keyboard Skills course sequences: whether we want to track student growth across the levels by using one capstone assessment tool for all those sections, or whether we want to have a separate assessment geared toward individual course student learning outcomes.

Area Level (Philosophy)

Share with department colleagues the example of the logic assessment and other unit assessments that have been completed so other faculty can consider how they might develop and implement something similar within their disciplines or other areas, whether that involves individual faculty taking the lead in design or whether they want more input from me as department liaison.