SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY.

Program Assessment: *Annual Report*

Program(s): General Studies

Department: N/A

College/School: School for Professional Studies

Date: April 17, 2018

Primary Assessment Contact: Dr. Kyle Crews

1. Which program student learning outcomes were assessed in this annual assessment cycle?

> We assessed whether students could apply an interdisciplinary approach to problem solving, and whether they were able to articulate these solutions in an eloquent and effective manner. To that end, then, we assessed the following learning outcomes:
>
> - SLO 1: Demonstrate the rhetorical skills necessary to write and speak with excellence (*eloquentia perfecta*).
> - SLO 5: Apply an interdisciplinary approach to propose solutions to complex problems.
>
> We focused exclusively on the General Studies Capstone course (HUM 4960) to evaluate these outcomes. It is the ideal course since we can collect both direct measures and indirect measures. The course was offered in both the Fall and Spring terms.

2. What data/artifacts of student learning were collected for each assessed outcome? Were Madrid student artifacts included?

> Students submitted an interdisciplinary essay at the end of the term (direct measure.) The assignment required them to consider how they could integrate their learning across the disciplines (in the humanities and natural sciences) to solve problems in their professional or vocational contexts. In addition, students responded to an exit survey (indirect measure) at the conclusion of the course. The survey includes several questions, but for the purpose of this assessment we looked exclusively at each student's feedback on the learning outcomes. We asked them, for instance, to what extent they learned to apply an interdisciplinary approach to propose solutions to complex problems.

3. How did you analyze the assessment data? What was the process? Who was involved?
   NOTE: If you used rubrics as part of your analysis, please include them in an appendix.

> We used the standard SPS Writing Rubric to evaluate the interdisciplinary essay (Appendix A). The rubric enabled us to measure our students' ability to apply an interdisciplinary approach to problem solving, particularly under the "Support, Analysis, and Critical Thinking" section and the "Completeness and Depth" section (SLO 5). The other sections in the rubric allowed us to evaluate our students' mastery of effective and eloquent writing (SLO 1). At the conclusion of the course, we evaluated the exit survey data, concentrating in particular on our students' feedback on the first (SLO 1) and last (SLO 5) learning outcomes. The professor for the course and the Program Director reviewed the data together in Fall 2017. The same professor taught the course in Spring 2018. By that time, though, he was also serving as the Director of General Studies. Thus, he has been singularly involved in assessing the Spring 2018 section. The data below derives primarily from the Fall 2017 section of HUM 4960.

4. What did you learn from the data? <u>Summarize</u> the major findings of your analysis for each assessed outcome.
    NOTE: If necessary, include any tables, charts, or graphs in an appendix.

    To assess SLO 5, we reviewed the grade distribution under the "Support, Analysis, and Critical Thinking" section and the "Completeness and Depth" section of the SPS Writing Rubric. This part of the rubric enables us to measure whether students mastered the conceptual aspect of the assignment—in this case, the ability to apply an interdisciplinary approach to problem solving. In the "Support, Analysis, and Critical Thinking" section, 75% of the Capstone students were in the "B" range and the remaining 25% were in the "D" range. In the "Completeness and Depth" section, 50% were in the "A" range, 25% in the "B" range, and 25% in the "F" range. For a visual depiction of these distributions, see Appendix B below. (It is important to note that the Capstone course is generally small. Thus, the data represents a smaller pool of students.)

    We also measured the students' perception of their ability to apply an interdisciplinary approach to problem solving through the exit survey. According to this data set, 11% of our students believe they can do this to a small extent, 29% to a moderate extent, and 61% to a great extent. For a visual depiction of this distribution, see Appendix C below.

    To assess SLO 1—the ability to write effectively and eloquently—we looked at our students' performance on the final essay as measured by the SPS Writing Rubric. The average grade for this assignment was 85%. We also measured the students' perception of their ability to write and speak with excellence through the exit survey. According to this data set, 25% of our students believe they can do this to a moderate extent and 75% to a great extent. For a visual depiction of this distribution, see Appendix C below.

5. How did your analysis inform meaningful change? How did you *use the analyzed data to make or implement recommendations for change* in pedagogy, curriculum design, or your assessment plan?

    Overall, we continue to affirm the value of the interdisciplinary essay. It enables the Director of General Studies to assess whether students can integrate their knowledge from multiple disciplines. Yet, some students did not demonstrate this skill effectively in their final essay. Also, there are some students (11%) who believe they can only do this to a small extent. This is especially problematic since students in the General Studies Capstone course should be able to demonstrate mastery of this learning outcome. We see two opportunities for improvement. First, we can clarify the purpose and goal of the interdisciplinary essay in the assignment sheet. We need to make clear to students that this particular assignment reinforces the learning outcome (SLO 5). Second, we need to introduce this concept in earlier courses rather than waiting until the Capstone course. Whereas there are numerous opportunities for students to develop as writers (SLO 1), which explains why so many (75%) believe they can communicate effectively and eloquently, the fifth learning outcome does not really appear until their final course in the program.

6. Did you follow up ("close the loop") on past assessment work? If so, what did you learn? *(For example, has that curriculum change you made two years ago manifested in improved student learning today, as evidenced in your recent assessment data and analysis?)*

    The interdisciplinary essay is the result of "closing the loop" on previous assessment work. In Fall 2016, we launched a new version of the course. We realized from our analysis of the General Studies Capstone course almost two years ago that there was no assignment that encouraged students to apply their learning from the variety of disciplines they encountered in the program. We needed an assignment that encouraged students to integrate their learning. Now that we have the assignment in place, we need to ensure that students understand the purpose of the essay as mentioned above.

Readability: Readability refers to the clarity of the paper itself. Readability is influenced by the use of proper style, but readability also relates to the clear expression of ideas. In a highly readable paper, ideas flow smoothly from sentence to sentence, without the need to re-read passages to understand the author's intent, and errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling do not distract the reader.

Total Points: 30		
Grade	**Points**	**Description**
A		Text is easy to read; the reader can understand sentences clearly when reading at a normal pace and does not have to reread any passages. The reader isn't distracted by any problems with grammar, spelling, and/or punctuation.
B		Text is easy to read in most places; reader understands sentences clearly when reading at normal pace; seldom has to reread any passages. Isolated problems with grammar, spelling, and/or punctuation distract reader in a few places.
C		Text is easy to read in some places; reader can understand some sentences clearly when reading at a normal pace, though may have to reread several passages. Recurring problems with grammar, spelling, and/or punctuation distract the reader in several places.
D		The reader has consistent difficulty understanding sentences when reading at a normal pace; the reader consistently has to reread passages. Recurring problems with grammar, spelling, and/or punctuation distract the reader repeatedly.
F		Recurring problems with grammar, spelling, and/or punctuation interfere with the reader's ability to understand the text's lines of reasoning.

Clarity of Objective, Purpose, or Thesis Statement: All assignments at SPS serve a purpose. Within a given class, a paper is designed to address one or more key objectives. Papers with a clear objective, purpose, or thesis statement sufficiently explain what the paper is going to accomplish and why that is important.

Total Points: 30		
Grade	**Points**	**Description**
A		Presents a clear and engaging objective, purpose, or thesis statement that the reader can easily identify; the thesis statement is clearly appropriate for the assignment; the thesis statement appears at an appropriate place in the paper.
B		Presents a clear and engaging objective, purpose, or thesis statement that the reader identifies; the thesis is appropriate to the assignment; the thesis statement appears at an inappropriate place, making the reader hunt for the purpose.
C		Presents a questionable objective or purpose that is easily identified by the reader; the thesis statement, although not clear or pertaining to the purpose of the paper, is in an appropriate place in the paper.
D		The reader identifies a series of sentences that address the purpose and is in an appropriate place, but no one sentence addresses the purpose of the paper.
F		The reader cannot identify a thesis.

Support, Analysis, and Critical Thinking: Elaborating on the objective, purpose, or thesis statement requires the writer to provide examples or evidence to support that objective, purpose, or thesis statement. Examples and evidence demonstrate that the writer can think critically about the paper topic. When outside resources are required, the paper will provide appropriate documentation, typically using MLA style.

Total Points: 50		
Grade	**Points**	**Description**
A		Uses evidence and examples fairly and accurately. Incorporates the number/type of sources & examples consistent with audience expectations. Reader can move effortlessly into and out of sections that offer evidence or examples; can easily identify the attribution of the source. When appropriate, examines evidence critically.
B		Uses evidence and examples fairly and accurately, though the number and type of sources or examples may be somewhat inconsistent with audience expectations in a few cases. The reader can move effortlessly into and out of most sections that offer evidence or examples and can easily identify the attribution of most sources. When appropriate, examines most evidence critically.
C		Uses evidence and examples, though some ambiguity may exist as to how the evidence or examples fit with the objective or thesis statement. There may be a few sections of the paper in which more evidence or examples were needed. The project may use a few inappropriate sources. When appropriate, examines some of the evidence critically.
D		Evidence or examples are insufficient in number and type to support the objective or thesis. Reader has difficulty throughout paper of understanding how the evidence or examples support the objective or thesis. Even when appropriate, may neglect to question any underlying assumptions or the methodology used to derive conclusions.
F		Evidence or examples are absent.

Audience Awareness: Written papers are designed to appeal to a particular audience, whether that audience is the scholarly community, professionals, students, the instructor, or the general public. Papers that demonstrate audience awareness use language and a tone that are appropriate for the intended audience.

| Total Points: 10		
Grade	**Points**	**Description**
A		Chooses language, a tone, and evidence that engage the audience and demonstrates sensitivity to their interests.
B		The language, tone, and evidence engage the audience and show sensitivity to their interests in most places.
C		The language, tone, and evidence engage the audience and show a sensitivity to their interest in some places.
D		The language, tone, and evidence limit the engagement of the audience. The tone may be more geared toward the writer's interests.
F		The language, tone, and evidence are consistently misaligned with the expectations of the audience. In places, the audience could be off-put or offended by the text.

Organization: An organized paper has a clear flow or progression of ideas. The writer does not move from idea to idea in a haphazard way. The writer also transitions effectively from one topic to another. In addition, for a given topic or class, a paper will be effectively organized if it contains and logically structures all of the key sections required for the assignment.

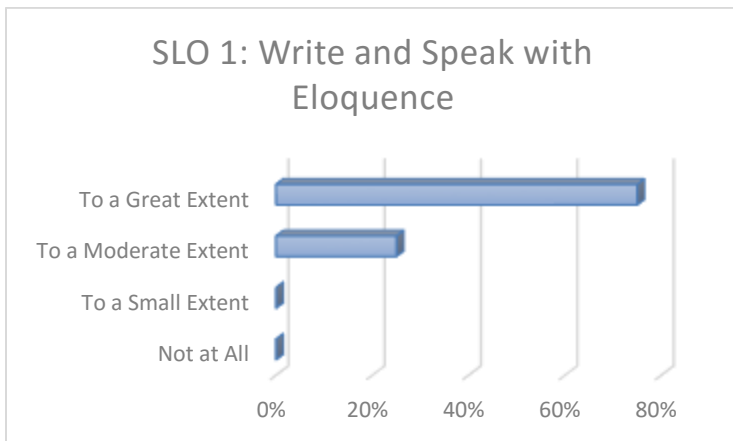| Total Points: 30		
Grade	**Points**	**Description**
A		The paper is structured in a way that sections, and paragraphs within sections, flow easily and naturally; the organization of the paper is clear and logical; paper is clearly structured in a manner consistent with the assignment.
B		The paper is generally structured logically and clearly; paper is generally structured in a manner consistent with assignment requirements; however, some paragraphs within sections may not flow smoothly or naturally, or some ideas may seem out of place in a given section.
C		There may be greater organization issues; there may be several instances of poor transition from one idea or section to another; use of headings to separate sections may not be easily identifiable; still contains all of the sections required.
D		Substantial organizational issues exist; use of headings to separate sections may be non-existent; paper may not be organized according to assignment specifications; major transition problems may be observed.
F		Major organizational issues exist; paper may lack several sections required by the assignment; there appears to be little flow among sections; headings typically not used.

Completeness and Depth: Providing too little information leaves the reader guessing as to the details. A complete paper addresses all of the elements of the assignment (i.e., answers all of the questions posed). In addition, a complete paper provides appropriate depth so that the reader clearly understands that the writer knows how to apply key concepts.

Total Points: 50		
Grade	**Points**	**Description**
A		Fully answers in sufficient depth all the questions the assignment poses.
B		Answers all the questions the assignment poses, most in sufficient depth.
C		Answers all the questions the assignment poses, some in sufficient depth.
D		Does not respond coherently to some of the questions the assignment poses.
F		Does not respond coherently to most of the questions the assignment poses.

APPENDIX B: GRAPHS—ANALYSIS OF SLO 5 FROM SPS WRITING RUBRIC

Completeness and Depth

Support, Analysis, & Critical Thinking
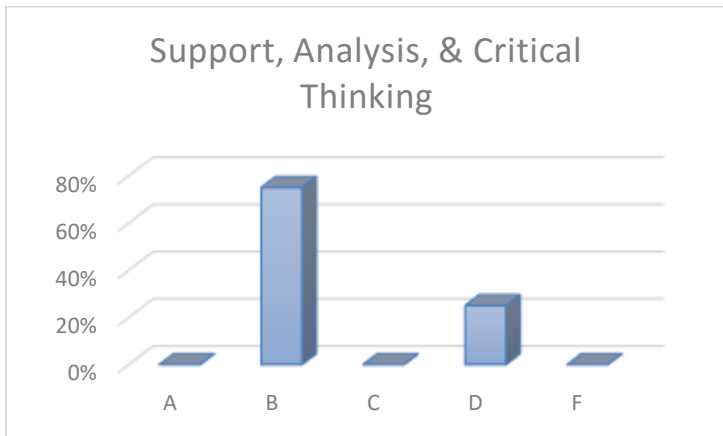
APPENDIX C: GRAPHS—ANALYSIS OF SLO 1 AND SLO 5 FROM EXIT SURVEY

SLO 1: Write and Speak with Eloquence

SLO 5: Apply an Interdisciplary Approach