Annual Assessment Report Summaries
2016-2017

Biology

The AAR 2017-2018 presents data obtained during the 2016-2017 academic year in accordance with YAP 2015-2016. In the 2015-2016 YAP, we proposed that our students' scientific literacy (regarded as the ability to read, analyze, and write scientific communications) can be improved with an intentional effort on instruction in these areas. Our own graduating seniors have acknowledged that a curriculum that further emphasizes scientific literacy would be beneficial. This YAP/AAR represents our continuing efforts to address this aspect of our curriculum by analyzing the proficiency of scientific literacy for our students at all levels of educational experience against a previously established "baseline." The data we collected will provide guidance as we further define curricular changes.

Computer Science

The Computer Science (CS) department administers a standardized test – the Major Field Test, developed by ETS – to all graduating seniors. This test provides an overall score for the department as well as subscores of three content areas that we can compare to other departments who administered the test. With a small number of seniors graduating each year (5 this year), drawing meaningful conclusions from the results is difficult, as variability between individuals can overwhelm any effect of the department, but we look for consistency and trends in the data. This year, our results show a continuation of our relatively high scores in one area (Discrete Math and Algorithms) and a sudden sharp drop in another (Programming and Software Engineering). The latter might be explained by the staffing of the relevant courses when this cohort was taking them, but we will monitor the category in future cohorts.

Economics

The Economics major has a scaffolded structure where students take theory courses, upper division electives in specialized areas in economics (labor, development etc.) and technical courses (*Applied Econometrics*, *Time Series Analysis*) where they learn various statistical methods to pursue empirical research. These courses complement one another and coalesce into an independent research paper written by each and every economics major in their senior seminar capstone course, Econ 401, *Senior Project*. Thus, our *Senior Project* papers provide us with a common platform to facilitate assessment.

Our objective for assessment during the 2016-17 academic year was to evaluate the Economics Department's student learning goals regarding Methodology & Application, Communication, and Initiative & Synthesis by directly assessing the research papers written by our senior Economics majors in their capstone course. During the course of a day on Wednesday August

9th, all faculty members of the Economics Department read and evaluated the 14 research papers written by our senior majors for Econ 401. This report summarizes and analyzes the findings from this assessment activity and presents our response to these findings.

Educational Studies

Based on assessment data collected from internal and external measures, we found that Educational Studies student teachers did learn to interpret, use, and respond to K-12 student assessment data. Student teachers were particularly strong in learning goal 3 or offering feedback to their students based off of their performance on an assessment. Although student teachers performed well, we still think this is an area we can strengthen in our curriculum. How we may strengthen this knowledge base and skill set is a topic of ongoing conversations for our department.

Hispanic Studies

In 2016-2017 academic year the Hispanic Studies Department assessed the cultural knowledge of students in our three culture classes using a department-wide direct measure. Preliminary results show that our students are meeting our goals. Hispanic Studies is considering the creation of assessable learning goals for the obligatory study abroad requirement and also creating a signature work project.

Nursing

Two direct measures of student learning used within the School of Nursing are the NCLEX-RN first time pass rates and critical thinking as measured by changes in the pre and post CCTDI scores from first year to graduation. Additional indirect measurement of critical thinking is obtained through survey data.

Although the School of Nursing has an established history of exceeding state and national pass score averages, in 2016 the IWU pass rates simply met the standards (as they did in 2011 and 2012), which represented a significant drop in performance. Because we previously implemented a NCLEX-RN preparatory program for seniors, attention turned to how reliable and valid multiple choice exam questions used in courses were across the nursing curriculum. In response, the School of Nursing Spring 2017 Retreat featured Dr. Lee Schmidt, a test writing expert from Loyola University, and was held January 12, 2017. Dr. Schmidt is an expert on using ParScore data by Scantron (as we use at IWU), so his insights into how to make data driven decisions for item analysis were valuable. The emphasis on improving test writing skills continued in the Fall 2017 retreat held on August 7, 2017 in which NCLEX-RN expert Cathi Kaesburg devoted the day to improving faculty's ability to focus on analysis and application style questions to write NCLEX-RN style questions in individual nursing courses. Developing faculty competency in test writing should improve student preparation and learning for the direct measure of NCLEX-RN performance.

The retreats were attended by all School of Nursing faculty and professional staff. The outcome of the retreats was aimed at developing and implementing reliable and valid multiple choice exam questions across the curriculum. This commitment to improving NCLEX style exam questions is combined with an ongoing preparatory program with active involvement from academic advisors to maximize NCLEX-RN® outcomes. The preparatory program includes enhanced resources and allocated time, while maintaining the two predictor exams. All faculty were involved in designing the revised preparatory program and consensus was reached to continue the *HESI/Saunders Online Review for the NCLEX-RN®* program.

Political Science

Several years ago the faculty in political science adopted a list of nine specific learning outcomes under the broad headings of knowledge, values, and skills. Each year we have assessed our students' mastery of one of these learning outcomes. We have adopted the pattern of assessing a single outcome for two or three years in a row in order to allow us to track progress. Consequently, this year we were planning on assessing the same learning outcome as we did last year. However, because of a poor alignment between the learning goal we had planned to assess this spring and the papers our students generated during the 2016/17 academic year, we decided to shift our assessment efforts to look at one of the other outcomes that we believe to be of significant importance. (See the end of this document for the complete list of outcomes.)

The learning goal we assessed this year reads as follows:

Be able to analyze political phenomena critically, recognizing the implications of diverse perspectives, normative positions, and evidentiary claims

Because this goal has multiple parts, the specific foci of this spring's assessment varied a bit, as explained below. This May, as in past years, we read two collections of papers from two very different classes. The first class was Greg Shaw's *American Health Policy* (PSCI 270), and the second was Kathleen Montgomery's *Women in Politics* (PSCI 220). As is our custom, we selected a sample of papers stratified in accordance with the overall distribution of grades for that class. (Hence, if 20% of the students in the class earned an A, 20% of the papers would be from A students, and so forth. Of course, the stratification is approximate due to small sample sizes, 6 or 7 papers per class.) Naturally, we are cognizant that assessment of our specific learning goals is different than grading, but we need some meaningful dimension by which to stratify, and overall grade in the course seems like a reasonable one.

Each paper was read independently by two faculty members who were not the instructors giving the assignment. These paired readings have generated many useful conversations over the years, as we reflect on the types of assignments we give, students' abilities, the grading rubrics we use, etc. In response to these insights, many of us in the department have modified assignments to be more clear and, hopefully, impactful. The paired readings for assessment purposes also allows us to check inter-scorer reliability. Greg Shaw and Jim Simone read papers from Kathleen's *Women in Politics* class, and William Munro and Kathleen read papers from Greg's *American Health Policy* class.

In terms of overall points of strength: we liked the diverse literatures that the students drew upon. Even the students who did less impressive work managed to demonstrate an ability to mine the large bodies of academic literature on these questions. They also demonstrated a good ability to cite their sources appropriately in the body of the text. Furthermore, all of the papers were well organized.

A couple of other points highlighted where some general improvement would be desirable: Several of the students showed a limited ability to sum up meaningfully. As you know, synthesis is often difficult for undergraduates. We experience this not only in our lower-level classes but even sometimes in the senior seminars. Clearly, writing a good synthesis is an art, and students need a lot of practice before they get it right. Asking them to practice this skill in a 200-level course is entirely appropriate and is something that, frankly, more of us should ask of our students. Secondly, several of the students did an under-performing job of explaining what's at stake intellectually as they move from one theoretical or empirical approach to another. We believe the students generally have shown a developing ability to identify distinct schools of thought, but they are less skilled at explaining why these distinctions matter.

Psychology

This past year we assessed the following student learning goals: the learning of key concepts in our psychology 100 class, the ability to critically think about and applying psychological principles related to research design and analysis, as well as principles applying psychological outcomes to everyday life and social situation in the context of appropriately using ethics to understand the limitations of psychological knowledge. The data suggests students were successfully exposed to a psychology curriculum that demonstrates these learning goals. Direct measures from the introductory level course in psychology suggest students demonstrated knowledge of most subfields in Psychology. Indirect measures from a senior student exit survey and a survey of faculty teaching our senior thesis courses in the department also suggest students have been exposed to a consistent level of instruction regarding the critical analysis, interpretation, reporting, and execution of scientific inquiry within the science of psychology.

Religion

For the academic year of 2017-2018, we assessed the fourth of our four student learning goals: "Conceptual Understanding and Empathy." This goal involved students' understanding of the concept of "religion" and the difficulty in its definition and study; it also included students' understanding of and empathy with diverse world religious traditions. By adopting a direct measure, we assessed students' portfolios with special attention to their senior seminar papers (REL 490). We had seven questions related to "religion" and "empathy" such as how well the student recognized the difficulties and contradictions in definitions of religion and how well she/he maintained an objective distance from the subject under study while still recognizing the distinctive voices within the religious community and their integrity. These questions were

specific, sufficiently robust and nuanced. After every professor independently scored all the respective papers, their scores (A to N/A) on various questions were tabulated, assessed and discussed in the meetings. We felt that the student papers, especially the Senior Seminar papers, achieved our stated learning goals, but those who fell short did so because of other challenges and not because of our teaching or assessment strategies. Through this assessment process, we learned that we should keep such guidelines (questions and objectives) in mind while designing our courses and make our students fully aware of our goals. We also thought that we should make a re-assessment of our assessments and evaluate whether the types of courses we offer in our Department-- under certain clusters such as "Textual Studies," "History of Religions," "Critical-Constructive Studies," "Methodological Studies," and "Senior Seminar in Religion"-- are in complete harmony with our stated goals (content knowledge, methodology, research and critical thinking skills, and conceptual understanding and empathy). To this end, we plan to reassess our entire process and figure out a different way to evaluate our goals. We think that we should perhaps begin concentrating on the clusters (e.g., Textual Studies) and assess the learning goals we create for each cluster.

Sociology

In the summer of 2016, the sociology program adopted a new set of learning goals, parsed into 5 essential concepts and 6 essential competencies, detailed in Appendix A. For 2016-2017, we chose to focus on Competency 1: *Apply sociological theories to understand social phenomena*. While we modified our sampling pool and the learning goal that we decided to measure after collecting this data, we still were able to glean useful data about the degree to which our Introductory Sociology course met one of our student learning goals. This prompted both a more robust strategy for the coming year, as well as a strategy to collect assessment data that may inform program-level considerations for the future.

Theatre Arts

At SoTA's annual all school jury event, which takes place every January, every student in the School of Theatre Arts presents work samples to a faculty panel. These panelists evaluate individual students, and critical commentary is shared with each student to guide and enhance individual growth. The Jury is also our most important and critical programmatic assessment event, and provides the faculty with a broad snapshot of student performance. Data is gathered by an individual program assessment designee, and analyzed by the SoTA faculty. It can then be implemented as lessons during the next calendar year to address any identified deficiencies in student learning outcomes and close the loop.

This year a total of 82 students (freshmen through seniors) presented work for assessment. Adjunct Instructor Christopher Connelly was designated to assess the BA, BFA Acting, and BFA Design/Technology degrees, while SoTA Music Coodinator, Saundra Deathos-Meers assessed the BFA Music Theatre degree, using each degree track's program level rubric. In doing so, a

rubric composite number score was identified for each student. (Students were identified in the recorded data only by an "audition" number.) The individual composite scores were averaged into a class cohort common number. This allowed us (before averaging) to see if there were individuals or groups performing at rates ahead of or behind the expected cohort target. The goal is to apply the program level rubrics in a systematic and holistic manner, in an effort to capture overall performance in the degree by grade level as a big picture snapshot of our success with specific learning goals in each degree. We expect, or rather hope, that most of our students function in the composite at grade level. Program level rubrics are set up on a 6 point scale, with 6 indicating proficiency in a target skill that equates to professional entry-level. Therefore, seniors would be expected to function at a level of 4 to 6. Conversely Freshmen could be expected to function at a level ranging from 0-2 on the same program rubric.

Women and Gender Studies

In Fall 2016, following the Yearly Action Plan and Strategic Assessment Plan, the Women's and Gender Studies Program assessed its first learning goal, "Through the Major courses in WGS, students will learn to: 1. Demonstrate an understanding of feminist perspectives on the human experience and to communicate that understanding through written and oral work." The process for assessment entailed providing a pre-test and post-test to senior WGS majors in the Senior Seminar with two essential questions: (A.) What can we learn from using "feminist perspectives on human experience"? and (B) Give an example of at least one concept or interpretation of ideas that we could identify as a feminist perspective.

Two members of the Women's and Gender Studies Steering Committee reviewed and graded the responses from 2016. Both graders ranked the answers from the first set of questionnaires as mostly "satisfactory" with one "incomplete." The second set were ranked "incomplete," "satisfactory" or "excellent," with both graders noting that students did not write fuller or more detailed answers in December than they had in August. We agreed that this assessment indicated that students were learning about feminism and feminist perspectives in other courses in WGS, but had not communicated that well in this quiz given at end of the Senior Seminar. It was suggested that further guidance or a schedule change might help the outcomes. The WGS Steering Committee will review the information at a later date in order to give further advice on assessing student learning.