

Humanities General Education Annual Assessment Report 2014-2015

I. Introduction

The Humanities General Education Program serves all Oregon Tech degree students, who are each required to take nine credits in this general education area. The program offers courses in art, literature, humanities, music, philosophy, and foreign languages. The program also offers a number of online courses to serve degree completion students as well as on-campus students.

As of this year, the program also offers a minor called "ALPs." ALPs is an 18-credit minor built around courses in Arts, Literature, and Philosophy (ART, ENG, HUM, and PHIL, though other humanities courses are allowed to count toward the minor), and it allows students to chart their own "route" to the "summit," depending on their specific interests. Currently, there are five suggested "routes," or specializations:

- Art
- Digital Technology and Culture
- Literature
- Ethics
- Philosophy of Science/Logic

Or, students can complete the minor in whatever way they see fit, customizing their own route. The ALPs minor was approved by CPC in spring of 2014 and is now in the general catalog.

II. Program Purpose, Objectives and Student Learning Outcomes

The humanities faculty reviewed and updated the program purpose, objectives, and learning outcomes during a spring humanities faculty meeting in May 2014. The faculty affirms the below statements:

Humanities General Education Program Purpose

The Humanities General Education Program provides for the study of fine arts, literature, humanities, drama, film, music, philosophy and foreign languages, which allows students the opportunity to learn specific methods for critically evaluating human beliefs, values and conduct within various conceptual frameworks.

Global Humanities Learning Objectives

Students will:

1. Critical Thinking

- Become better critical thinkers by learning to identify, clarify and evaluate important ideas and arguments.
- Learn to challenge standard assumptions by asking constructive questions and presenting coherent perspectives as the result of their questioning process.

2. Communication

- Improve their ability to communicate effectively using written, oral, and/or visual media.

3. Lifelong Learning and Independent Learning Skills

- Develop better information literacy by recognizing the different cultural, social, political, etc. contexts in which meaning is made and through which it is disseminated.

4. Teamwork

- Learn to coordinate and cooperate with others to achieve shared goals.

Discipline-Specific Humanities Learning Objectives for ALPs

Students will:

5. Cultural Awareness (Literature)

- Develop a familiarity with other cultural perspectives, which is essential to success in our globalized world.

6. Understanding of Ethical Practice (Philosophy)

- Gain greater ethical awareness, by grasping theory and being able to apply theory to particular situations.

7. Design (Art)

- Knows the elements and principles of design as they relate to the expressive and communicative potential of two-dimensional, three-dimensional, and/or digital media.

III. Three-Year Cycle for Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

We have created a new assessment cycle based on our new learning outcomes:

Learning Outcomes	'14-'15	'15-'16	'17-'18	'18-'19	'19-'20	'20-'21
Critical Thinking		X			X	
Communication	X			X		
Lifelong Learning and Independent Learning Skills		X			X	
Teamwork	X			X		
Cultural Awareness (Literature)			X			X
Understanding of Ethical Practice (Philosophy)			X			X
Design (Art)			X			X

Table 1 General Education Assessment Cycle

IV. Assessment Activities

Drs. Bunting and Rohwer conducted formal assessments of two student-learning outcomes during AY 2014-2015, SLO #2 Communication and SLO #4 Teamwork.

SLO #2. Communication:

- **Improve their ability to communicate effectively using written, oral, and/or visual media.**

Direct Assessment #1

Dr. Bunting assessed this outcome in one section of HUM 105, Introduction to Cultural Studies, in fall term using rubric-scored essays. The course had a sequence of four essays, each of which required the students to apply one of the critical approaches they had studied (reader response, close reading, and historical criticism) to one of a series of texts taken from different media (novel, graphic novel, film, and video game). The primary goal of the assignment in each case was for the student to generate an essay that presented their interpretation of the text in question while showing their ability to analyze that text using a particular critical approach. The final for the class, then, was for the students to revise one of their four papers, adding additional analysis and honing what was already there to make a more thorough essay on one of the previously assigned subjects.

Generally speaking, the students did well in applying particular critical perspectives to each of these works. In fact their learning these three critical frameworks helped them to discuss texts presented through media other than literature (graphic novel, film, and video games) in a much more effective and precise way than if they had not learned these analytic tools as well.

The first Performance Criteria simply measures the students' performance on the final, revised paper. How well did they communicate in the written format on this capstone experience at the end of the course? They were scored on a scale of 1-4.

The second Performance Criteria indicates the students' performance across all the assigned essays for the course. They are scored from 0-2. A score of 0 indicates no evidence of improvement in communication across assignments. A score of 1 shows uneven improvement, but improvement nonetheless. A score of 2 shows consistent improvement.

Dr. Bunting rated the proficiency of students using the performance criteria described in the table below:

Performance Criteria	Assessment Method	Measurement Scale	Minimum Acceptable Performance	Results
Can communicate effectively using written, oral, and/or visual media	Student essay, rubric	1-4 Scale, % at 3 or 4	75% at 3 or 4	74%
Shows improvement in effectiveness by the end of the course	Student essays, rubrics	0, 1, or 2 according to their improvement across 4 assignments	75% at 1 or 2	75%

Table 2 Assessment Results for SLO #2 in HUM 105.01, fall term

Direct Assessment #2

Dr. Rohwer assessed this outcome by examining the students' final papers in PHIL 331 during the fall term. He assessed the students using a 4 point scale, where 4 is the highest and 1 is the lowest. A score of 4 or 3 was deemed acceptable.

Dr. Rohwer rated the proficiency of students using the performance criteria described in the table below:

Performance Criteria	Assessment Method	Measurement Scale	Minimum Acceptable Performance	Results
Can communicate effectively using written, oral, and/or visual media	Final papers were looked over in detail	4-1	3	4 = 7 3 = 16 2 = 0 1 = 1
Shows improvement in effectiveness by the end of the course	I looked over their final papers but also took into consideration their final presentations	Yes no Answer	N/A	Yes = 20 No = 4

Table 3 Assessment Results for SLO #2 in PHIL 331.01, fall term

Direct Assessment #3

Dr. Bunting assessed this outcome in one section of HUM 105, Introduction to Cultural Studies, in spring term using rubric-scored essays. The course had a sequence of four essays, each of which required the students to apply one of the critical approaches they had studied (reader response, close reading, and historical criticism) to one of a series of texts taken from different media (novel, graphic novel, film, and video game). The primary goal of the assignment in each case was for the student to generate an essay that presented their interpretation of the text in question while showing their ability to analyze that text using a particular critical approach. The final for the class, then, was for the students to revise one of their four papers, adding additional analysis and honing what was already there to make a more thorough essay on one of the previously assigned subjects.

As in the fall, the students did well in applying particular critical perspectives to each of these works. In fact their learning these three critical frameworks helped them to discuss texts presented through media other than literature (graphic novel, film, and video games) in a much more effective and precise way than if they had not learned these analytic tools as well.

The first Performance Criteria simply measures the students' performance on the final, revised paper. How well did they communicate in the written format on this capstone experience at the end of the course? They were scored on a scale of 1-4.

The second Performance Criteria indicates the students' performance across all the assigned essays for the course. They are scored from 0-2. A score of 0 indicates no evidence of improvement in communication across assignments. A score of 1 shows uneven improvement, but improvement nonetheless. A score of 2 shows consistent improvement.

Dr. Bunting rated the proficiency of students using the performance criteria described in the table below:

Performance Criteria	Assessment Method	Measurement Scale	Minimum Acceptable Performance	Results
Can communicate effectively using written, oral, and/or visual media	Student essay, rubric	1-4 Scale, % at 3 or 4	75% at 3 or 4	73%
Shows improvement in effectiveness by the end of the course	Student essays, rubrics	0, 1, or 2 according to their improvement across 4 assignments	75% at 1 or 2	77%

Table 4 Assessment Results for SLO #2 in HUM 105.01, spring term

SLO #4. Teamwork

- **Learn to coordinate and cooperate with others to achieve shared goals.**

Indirect Assessment #1

Dr. Bunting assessed this outcome in one section of HUM 148: Western Civilization in the Medieval Age during winter term by utilizing student course evaluations and self-evaluations. One of the primary assignments in the class tasked students with working together in small groups on a daily basis throughout the term. After choosing their groups in the first week, the students worked in those same groups for the rest of the term. After each day's lecture, the students used the last 10-15 minutes of the class period to discuss and compose a response to a question posted on Blackboard concerning that day's readings and lecture. The assessment came at the end of the course, when students were asked to fill out a course- and self-evaluation. Two of the questions on this document were:

1. On a scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much), please rate how well your group work in this class helped you to learn to better coordinate and cooperate with others to achieve shared goals.
2. On a scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent), please rate your own performance as a member of your group.

The students' rating of the group work's contribution to their Teamwork skill was slightly lower than the assessment goal:

1	2	3	4	5
4 Students	1 Students	10 Students	8 Students	11 Students

Though these numbers are low, a significant percentage of students who rated their group's experience as lower than ideal (3 or below) included lengthier, unsolicited comments that noted the group would have functioned better and the group experience would have been more useful to them if other students had attended class more frequently.

Generally speaking, students rated their performance in the group quite highly:

1	2	3	4	5
0 Students	0 Students	6 Students	17 Students	11 Students

This indicates that they consider themselves to be putting in a reasonable amount of work when it comes to helping the group function efficiently, implying that if there is a fault in the effectiveness of the group's work, they perceive it to be, largely, in the other members of the group.

Dr. Bunting rated the proficiency of students using the performance criteria described in the table below:

Performance Criteria	Assessment Method	Measurement Scale	Minimum Acceptable Performance	Results
Learn to coordinate and cooperate with others to achieve shared goals	Indirect; student self- and group-assessment.	1-5 Scale, % at 4 or 5	75% at 4 or 5	56%, 19 out of 34

Table 5 Assessment Results for SLO #4

V. Summary of Student Learning

SLO #2. Communication:

- Improve their ability to communicate effectively using written, oral, and/or visual media.

Direct Assessment #1

Strengths: Generally, students were able to significantly improve their original arguments for the final paper assignment, showing the ability to revise their written communication to make it more effective.

Weaknesses: Many students' performance did not clearly improve across the course. In part, this seems to be an issue inherent with the method of assessment. That is, each assignment was significantly different from the others, and often a student doing worse on their second or third paper as compared to their first doesn't necessarily indicate a lack of improvement in written communication as much as it indicates that the student simply had an easier time with the material to be analyzed for the first paper than for the second or third paper.

That said, the students' ability to communicate their analyses in their papers (in written format) generally lagged a bit behind their ability to communicate those analyses during class discussion (in oral format), which suggests that they would benefit from more direct instruction on how to communicate their ideas about the class texts into writing.

Actions: In light of this assessment, I intend to make changes both in how the course is taught and in how I assess communication. The course's next iteration will have more writing instruction elements tied directly to our analysis to show students how to better convert their analysis generated through class discussion to their written essays. I will integrate brief lectures on writing skills with the discussion of their assignment requirements. I will also include a larger essay-revision element in the course, so students are able to get more feedback on their writing and integrate that feedback before turning in the "final" versions of each of their essays.

On the assessment side, I want to come up with a more effective and accurate way of assessing improvement. As mentioned above in the "Weaknesses" section, I think that this method was lacking a bit in terms of accuracy. For winter term, I intend to assess using both direct and indirect methods to better reflect improvements in writing skills that might not necessarily be communicated through the students' grades, but might be there nonetheless.

Direct Assessment #2

Strengths: The students showed great ability to communicate effectively using written media. And many made strides from their first paper to their last.

Weaknesses: No weakness found, besides the fact that no everyone's performance was deemed acceptable.

Actions: No major actions will be taken the next time I teach this course as I feel that the outcome is being obtained by the vast majority of the students in the class.

Direct Assessment #3

Strengths: Generally, students were able to significantly improve their original arguments for the final paper assignment, showing the ability to revise their written communication to make it more effective.

Weaknesses: Many students' performance did not clearly improve across the course. As I mentioned in my fall report, this seems in part to be an issue inherent with our method of assessment. Each assignment was significantly different from the others, and often a student doing worse on their second or third paper as compared to their first doesn't necessarily indicate a lack of improvement in written communication as much as it indicates that the student simply had an easier time with the material to be analyzed for the first paper than for the second or third paper.

In my fall report, I mentioned that the students' ability to communicate their analyses in their papers (in written format) generally lagged a bit behind their ability to communicate those analyses during class discussion (in oral format). At the time, this suggested to me that they would benefit from more direct instruction on how to communicate their ideas about the class texts into writing. During spring term, I offered an in-class paper workshopping session the day before each paper was due (including the final paper), with the intention of giving the students an opportunity to more directly work on communicating their thoughts in written format before turning in their papers. This resulted in, formally, an increase in the percentage of students achieving the second criterion (77%) and, informally, more time spent by students improving not just the quality of their ideas and arguments, but the quality with which they were communicating those ideas and arguments.

Actions: As I mentioned in the fall, I intend to make changes in how our department assesses communication going forward. I want to come up with a more effective and accurate way of assessing improvement in communication. I intended to do this between fall and spring term this year, but for a time it was uncertain whether myself or Dr. Rohwer was going to take charge of assessing for HSS permanently and the decision ultimately came too late in winter term to change things up this time through the cycle.

As mentioned above in the "Weaknesses" section, I think that this method was lacking a bit in terms of accuracy. In the future, I intend to assess using both direct and indirect methods to better reflect improvements in writing skills that might not necessarily be communicated through the students' grades, but might be there nonetheless.

SLO #4. Teamwork:

- **Learn to coordinate and cooperate with others to achieve shared goals.**

Indirect Assessment #1

Strengths: The students' responses to Question 2 indicate that they believe, by and large, that they themselves are putting an acceptable amount of effort into being team members and working with their group. Though the information isn't included in this assessment report, these students' grades on the assignment support this: nominally, the groups are working hard enough and well enough as a unit to turn in A and B level responses on a class-to-class basis.

Weaknesses:

On the other hand, students' responses to Question 1, including their unsolicited,

extended commentary, indicates that in many cases it's not really the "group" that's turning in this high-level work, but instead a few dedicated workers loosely collaborating in the repeated absence of other group members.

Actions:

The student responses and commentary suggest that there is a serious disconnect between the effort some students are putting in and the quality of the larger group experience they are having. Certainly, they are getting grades that reflect the level of work that they're putting in, but it often seems that this effort is being put in to account for the poor teamwork skills of others, not being supported by ideal teamwork situations. That said, again based on responses and commentary, when all members of the groups *are* in class, the group work seems to help them all both better understand the course material and encourage them to work harder at being effective and responsible team members. As the problem seems to primarily stem from low attendance from some group members, I'm frankly not sure how to fix this particular problem, short of having a mandatory attendance policy. Next time I teach the course, I will consider instituting a few group self-assessments throughout the term rather than at the end. Perhaps more frequent instances of these assessments, especially if they are tied to students' grades, would provide a more powerful incentive for more students to attend class and participate in discussion and composition with their groups more frequently.

VI. Changes Resulting from Assessment

Frankly, the primary change I intend to make in the fall of 2015 in light of this year's assessment activities is to arrange a more efficient and effective method for contacting and keeping in contact with other HSS instructors when it comes to assessment activities. With the exceptions of Dr. Rohwer (who helped with assessing Communication in the fall) and Dr. Neupert (who didn't teach any classes this year that were germane to the chosen SLOs), all of our instructors are adjuncts, and I had a surprisingly difficult time getting assessment data from any of them.

In almost all cases, I found it almost impossible to track down contact information for these adjuncts in the first place and would often, at best, find information that was outdated (an old phone number, contact information for an adjunct that hasn't worked here for three years, and so on). When I *did* get ahold of a few of these instructors, my requests were simply ignored, or the requested assessment reports never showed up. The impression I got overall was that the adjuncts didn't really understand that doing assessment for Oregon Tech in their classes was now a required activity, and by and large I wasn't able to convince them of this on my own. My efforts were especially ineffective since most of our adjuncts either teach online classes or teach at our branch campuses, which made it difficult to follow up with them in person.

I intend to speak with Dr. Neupert at the beginning of next year to discuss options for setting up a reliable database of contact information for our HSS faculty and instructors. I also want to brainstorm a more convincing and immediate method for informing our instructors that doing assessment of these SLOs in their classes, even if they aren't full-time or tenure track, is an important part of teaching courses for Oregon Tech.

I have described the particular changes I intend to make in my courses and in my assessment methods already, in Section V, and I won't repeat those here. Next year, I intend to put much of my effort as Assessment Coordinator for HSS into developing an approach to department-wide assessment that will yield more varied data sources, thus allowing me to respond more appropriately and thoroughly in this section of the report.