

Liberal Studies Assessment Report
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I. Executive Summary

During the spring semester of 2010, the offices of the Provost and Institutional Planning and Effectiveness created the Liberal Studies Assessment Committee. The charge to the Committee was to “yield a report outlining the strengths and weaknesses of the Liberal Studies Program (and) at the same time articulate a way to move forward with improvements to both the Program and the assessment process.” The Liberal Studies Assessment Committee is comprised of a diverse group of faculty. Committee members include: Christopher Blake, Linda Bowers, Philip (Ted) Coyle, George Ford, Janet Ford, Anne Rogers, Debby Singleton (committee chair), and April Tallant. David Onder, Assessment Coordinator, serves as an *ex officio* member.

There were two phases to the assessment of the Liberal Studies Program. First, from 2005-2009, small assessment teams reviewed materials for each area, creating an individual assessment report (IAR). For example, a small team of three faculty members reviewed materials from the C4 (Wellness) area. The second phase consisted of establishing a larger assessment committee (the Liberal Studies Assessment Committee) to review the individual team assessments for each area in order to develop the current Overall Liberal Studies Assessment Report (OSAR) described herein. To prepare the overall assessment report, the Liberal Studies Assessment Committee members reviewed each of the individual assessment reports created by the small teams in each of the core and perspective areas.

The Committee concluded that the strengths of the Liberal Studies Program included the diversity of offerings and assignments and the effort of faculty to meet Liberal Studies goals and objectives. Weaknesses of the Liberal Studies program ranged from issues with inadequate staffing, inconsistent syllabi, inconsistency in course offerings each semester, and the lack of resources for the courses and faculty. Each of the individual assessment reports noted recommendations to improve the Liberal Studies Program. Some of the common themes included providing more support to faculty teaching Liberal Studies; creating consistency among syllabi within the core and perspective areas; offering enough courses to meet students’ needs; conducting periodic evaluations of Liberal Studies course offerings; and investigating pay structure for Liberal Studies faculty. The final section of this report focuses on recommendations for the assessment process. Some of the limitations of the process that were uncovered by the overall assessment committee included inconsistency in assessment procedures; insufficient faculty participation in some categories; limited student work samples that did not portray a range of academic standards; and insufficient guidance with the assessment process.

The Committee formulated six recommendations to improve the process of assessing the Liberal Studies Program. These recommendations include establishing formal guidelines and a timeframe for the review process, the use of small teams to conduct the assessments, consistent and early communication with faculty concerning the assessment process, greater participation by faculty and students, establishing a system to collect materials and student work samples, and revision of the survey instruments to improve accuracy, reliability and validity.

II. Introduction

There were two phases to the assessment of the Liberal Studies Program: First, from 2005-2009, small assessment teams reviewed materials for each area, creating an individual assessment report (IAR). These

IARs were created through a review of the individual components of Liberal Studies and submitted for use by the Southern Associations of Colleges and Universities (SACS) in their most recent review of Western Carolina University's programs prior to re-accreditation.

The IARs were based on faculty and student surveys, course syllabi submitted by faculty, and student work samples submitted by faculty. The Liberal Studies faculty survey attempted to identify teaching methods, as well as if and how faculty were meeting the goals and objectives of the Liberal Studies Program. The later IARs included a student survey that provided student input regarding the attainment of Liberal Studies goals.

As a result of the IARs, the core areas (C1, C2, C3, C4) created program development plans in response to issues raised by the reports. These program development plans are currently being updated. The IARs and program development plans are available at <http://www.wcu.edu/22967.asp>
<<http://www.wcu.edu/22967.asp>>

The second phase consisted of establishing a larger assessment committee (the Liberal Studies Assessment Committee) to review the team assessments for each area in order to develop the current Overall Liberal Studies Assessment Report (OSAR) described herein.

Areas included in Liberal Studies are the following:

<u>Core courses:</u>	C1.	Writing	(6 hours)
	C2.	Mathematics	(3 hours)
	C3.	Oral Communication	(3 hours)
	C4.	Wellness	(3 hours)
	C5.	Physical and Biological Sciences	(6 hours)
		<u>First Year Seminar</u>	(3 hours)

<u>Perspectives:</u>	P1.	Social Sciences	(6 hours)
	P2.	(This category has been changed to C5)	
	P3.	History	(3 hours)
	P4.	Humanities	(3 hours)
	P5.	Fine and Performing Arts	(3 hours)
	P6.	World Cultures	(3 hours)

Courses in Liberal Studies come from the following colleges: Arts and Sciences, Business, Education and Allied Professions, Fine and Performing Arts, and Health and Human Sciences. All students are required to complete 42 academic hours in Liberal Studies. Course offerings are diverse and range from freshman to senior levels. At least one course, the upper level perspective, must be taken at the junior or senior level. Some majors accept Liberal Studies courses as meeting requirements for the major; others do not.

The charge to the Committee was to examine each of the Individual Assessment Reports (IAR) with the following objectives: identify strengths and weaknesses of the overall program; examine the assessment process; make recommendations and suggestions for improvement. Committee members were Christopher Blake (College of Arts and Sciences), Linda Bowers (College of Health and Human Sciences), Philip (Ted) Coyle (College of Arts and Sciences), George Ford (The Kimmel School), Janet Ford (College of Business), Anne Rogers (College of Arts and Sciences), Debby Singleton (committee chair) (College of Education and Allied Professions), and April Tallant (College of Health and Human

Sciences). David Onder, Assessment Coordinator from the Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness, serves as an *ex officio* member. Carol Burton and Melissa Wargo participated in the initial meeting of the committee.

III. Strengths of the Liberal Studies Program

The Committee noted several strengths that generally span the twelve areas of the Liberal Studies Program (LSP) at Western Carolina University. These strengths are the following:

- A. A diversity of course offerings across and within the various LSP areas;
- B. A variety of course assignments within each LSP area;
- C. An indication from faculty and students that the courses and assignments generally meet or exceed the LSP learning goals and objectives;
- D. Many of the faculty who teach in the LSP are dedicated professionals who recognize they are on the frontline of student retention.

A. Diversity of Course Offerings

The types of courses offered within the LSP areas are both interesting and diverse, giving students the opportunity to take courses that are applicable to their specific disciplines and personal interests. The Committee believed this factor to be important for both faculty and students alike as it fosters creative approaches to reaching the LSP goals and facilitates multiple perspectives from within the LSP area. Moreover, it was obvious that the Liberal Studies Program serves a vital function by ensuring that all students at Western Carolina University are prepared with the foundational skills that are essential for personal intellectual growth and lifelong learning.

B. Diversity of Course Assignments

The types of assignments and activities required of students in LSP courses are also diverse, providing students with multiple angles toward reaching the learning goals and objectives. Many Liberal Studies courses are in line with the University's Quality Enhancement Plan by providing opportunities to create connections inside and outside of the classroom. Reviews of the syllabi also demonstrated that both oral and written abilities were addressed through the various components of the courses. Providing students with a diverse range of assignments within and across LSP courses is an important avenue toward reaching the "excitement for and love of learning" goal that has been specified for the LSP.

C. Effectiveness in Meeting LSP Goals and Objectives

Both faculty and student surveys point to a consensus that LSP courses are meeting or exceeding the LSP learning goals and objectives. Submitted samples of student work also support the notion that the LSP coursework is rigorous and requires students to use and develop cognitive skills such as interpreting, analyzing, and synthesizing information.

D. Engaged, Dedicated Faculty

Faculty who teach in the Liberal Studies Program are on the frontline of student retention. The IARs revealed that faculty at various ranks teach LS courses and that overall, LSP goals are being met. While many faculty members are newly hired, temporary adjuncts, many others are in part-time or fixed term positions and have taught courses for many years. Overall, assessment materials indicated that faculty demonstrate a variety of teaching methods, including active learning strategies and synthesis of information. As a whole, faculty members, regardless of rank, seem committed to meeting course and LSP objectives and goals.

IV. Weaknesses of the Liberal Studies Program

The Liberal Studies assessment teams identified numerous perceived weaknesses in both the Liberal Studies Program itself and also in the assessment process.

A. Programmatic Weaknesses

1) Staffing

Assessment teams for C1 (Writing) and C4 (Wellness) expressed concern that a large percentage of courses in these categories have been or are being taught by fixed term, adjunct, or newly hired faculty. The assessment team for C3 (Oral Communication) expressed concern over the high turnover rate for faculty in this area. There was no suggestion that these part-time or junior faculty were performing poorly, however several assessment teams questioned whether these faculty are properly oriented, are given adequate resources, and whether they are sufficiently familiar with Western Carolina University programs, policies, the student body, and its culture to adequately satisfy and promote the goals of the Liberal Studies Program. At the same time, there are a number of part-time and fixed term faculty who have taught these courses for many years. Also, these teams noted that limited faculty resources resulted in large and unwieldy class sizes. Overloaded class sizes and paucity of resources is a challenge for any faculty member, regardless of rank and experience.

2) Syllabi

A recurring observation from the assessment teams was that the content of the Liberal Studies syllabi in all categories is inconsistent. During the recent SACS accreditation process, all instructors of Liberal Studies courses were required to insert into their syllabi the appropriate course objectives and descriptions for each category. However, the overall learning goals of the Liberal Studies Program and of each category were not universally included in course syllabi. Often, where these learning goals are included, they were seemingly included in a perfunctory manner. It is possible that instructors simply copied and pasted the language from the Liberal Studies Program document without reflecting on the connection of their course goals to those of the LSP. The Liberal Studies Program syllabus provided by the Coulter Faculty Center includes the Liberal Studies goals and objectives which faculty can use at their discretion.

Some assessment teams noted that the course content described in some syllabi did not always align with Liberal Studies or individual category goals. In particular, the P6 (World Cultures) assessment team observed that, based upon course descriptions in the syllabi, there were numerous courses in that category that do not seem to fit into or address the focus on World Cultures. Moreover, where assessment teams were able to review assignments in individual courses, they observed that the connection between the assignments and course goals and objectives was not always clear.

3) Learning Goals

One of the most commonly noted weaknesses revealed through the assessment of student work samples was poor writing skills. Another frequently noted weakness was the inability of students to think critically. Higher order thinking skills appeared to be more difficult for faculty to assess. The assessment team for the First Year Seminar noted that a majority of student work samples did not demonstrate that the First Year Seminar goals were being met. Several assessment teams, upon reviewing student work samples, noted that faculty feedback on student work samples was often minimal or non-existent. However, this could be because faculty did not submit their feedback to the assessment teams to avoid prejudicing them.

4) Course Offerings

Several assessment teams noted that there were inconsistencies and deficiencies in course offerings and scheduling in some Liberal Studies categories. The team for the First Year Seminar noted that course scheduling had been inconsistent and that students did not have enough choice about courses during registration. This team also noted that due to enrollment pressures some First Year Seminar courses have grown too large to satisfy the ideal of an introductory college experience. Finally, the First Year Seminar assessment team observed that many First Year Seminar course offerings are not distinct from course offerings in other categories, especially the Perspectives. The assessment team for C3 (Oral Communication) also noted that there is a lack of scheduling consistency. The number of COMM 201 (formerly CMHC 201) sections offered has ranged from 28 to 36 per semester, and faculty schedule overloads are routinely required.

5) Resources

A couple of assessment reports commented on the lack of resources needed to fully support the Liberal Studies Program. As has previously been noted, enrollment pressure and faculty workloads have led to ever-increasing class sizes, particularly in the First Year Seminars and the C3 (Oral Communications) classes. There are only three cameras to support over 30 sections of Oral Communications that are spread all over the campus, and students must supply their own DVD discs. The Oral Communications assessment report further noted that there is no departmental funding allocated to the Oral Communications program.

B. Assessment Process Weaknesses

1) Learning Goals

A common observation from the assessment teams across the categories was that the learning goals for both the overall Liberal Studies Program and the individual categories should be reviewed and revised to improve clarity and assessability. While the Liberal Studies Program document makes it clear that courses are not required to address each learning goal of the program or of the specific category in which that course is listed, several assessment teams concluded that some Liberal Studies goals are not being addressed or evaluated, much less met. The most frequently cited learning goal for which no assessment data was available was the goal to promote “a love of learning.” The assessment teams noted that although promoting “love of learning” is certainly a noble pursuit, it is not capable of being consistently and reliably assessed and should perhaps be incorporated into another portion of the Liberal Studies Program document rather than maintained as a specific learning goal.¹

Other goals that were frequently omitted from course syllabi and assignments and student work samples were the goals of introducing students to “the challenges of living in a global society” and “afford[ing] opportunities to make disciplinary or career choices.” As to these goals, some assessment teams felt that faculty were not certain what is expected in order to satisfy these goals or how to assess them. The goal of educating students to have “the ability to recognize behaviors and define choices that affect lifelong well-being” seems to be addressed only in the C4 (Wellness) courses.

Another concern over the language of the goals was that some of the learning goals are too broad because they incorporate numerous distinct skills into a single goal. For example, one of the overall Liberal Studies goals is that students will “demonstrate the ability to read with comprehension, and to write and speak clearly, coherently, and effectively as well as to adapt modes of communication appropriate to an

¹ During discussions by the Liberal Studies Assessment Committee, one member suggested that there may be confusion over the terminology used by the Liberal Studies Program document and in the assessment process. For example, there could be a distinction made between programmatic *goals* as opposed to learning *outcomes*. The latter should be measurable while the former need not be.

audience.” Such an all-encompassing goal is difficult to assess because students may be strong in some areas but not in others. Similarly, an assignment might focus on reading comprehension but not on “adapt[ing] modes of communication appropriate to an audience.” The “lifelong well-being” goal is merged with the goal of developing students who have “the ability to critically analyze arguments,” which is more naturally viewed as a separate goal.

V. Recommendations for Improving the Liberal Studies Program

After reviewing the IARs for each of the small assessment teams, the Liberal Studies Assessment Committee formulated five recommendations that would improve the Liberal Studies program at Western Carolina University. The recommendations of the Committee are the following:

- A. Ensure that all syllabi for Liberal Studies courses include both Liberal Studies goals as well as the specific course goals;
- B. Ensure that consistent broad offering of FYS courses are offered each semester so students may find courses that match their academic needs;
- C. Create a Faculty Center Fellow position to assist faculty in each of the twelve course areas in developing syllabi and coursework;
- D. Remove classes from the Liberal Studies Program on a regular basis if they do not satisfy the learning objectives of the specific category;
- E. Increase pay along with title promotions for instructors of Liberal Studies courses to match regional average wages.

Following is a more detailed description of the recommendations listed above.

A. Ensure that all syllabi include both Liberal Studies goals as well as specific course goals.

A template could be developed with the help of the Coulter Faculty Center that not only states the Liberal Studies Program goals and objectives but also demonstrates the link to the individual course objectives. The learning goals of the Liberal Studies Program are for students to

- 1) Demonstrate the ability to locate, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information;
- 2) Demonstrate the ability to interpret and use numerical, written, oral and visual data;
- 3) Demonstrate the ability to read with comprehension, and to write and speak clearly, coherently, and effectively as well as to adapt modes of communication appropriate to an audience;
- 4) Demonstrate the ability to critically analyze arguments;
- 5) Demonstrate the ability to recognize behaviors and define choices that affect lifelong well-being;
- 6) Demonstrate an understanding of
- 7) Past human experiences and ability to relate them to the present;
- 8) Different contemporary cultures and their interrelationships;
- 9) Issues involving social institutions, interpersonal and group dynamics, human development and behavior, and cultural diversity;
- 10) Scientific concepts and methods as well as contemporary issues in science and technology;
- 11) Cultural heritage through its expressions of wisdom, literature and art and their roles in the process of self and social understanding.
- 12) Demonstrate an excitement for and love of learning.

This list of goals could be stated in the syllabi minimally as a reference with one or more from the list being expanded upon to show how each is integrated into the course and tied to the specific course objectives.

B. Ensure that consistent broad offering of FYS courses are offered each semester

During the 2009-2010 academic year, the number of Liberal Studies course offerings decreased while the student body grew from 9050 students in Fall 2008 to 9429 students Fall 2009. (Refer to <http://www.wcu.edu/13166.asp>.) This trend is not in the best interest of the Liberal Studies Program. The outcome is faculty overload and undermining of the purpose of small classes sizes that are integral to particular LS classes (e.g. the First Year Seminar).

	2007-2008 # Courses	2008-2009 # Courses	2009-2010 # Courses
C1: Writing	134	154	103
C2: Mathematics	14	19	20
C3: Oral Communication	54	60	70
C4: Wellness	75	85	86
C5: Sciences	133	134	118
First Year Seminar	84	82	93
P1: Social Sciences	218	225	198
P3: History	98	95	77
P4: Humanities	111	96	77
P5: Fine & Performing Arts	72	75	52
P6: World Cultures	185	215	147
Upper Level Perspectives	197	205	148
Totals	1375	1445	1189

Source: Western Carolina University, Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness (OIPE), April 2010

C. Create a Coulter Faculty Center Fellow position(s) to assist in developing syllabi and coursework

While the five recommendations provided by the Committee may be considered macroscopic, this recommendation focuses on needed improvements at the local course or category level. Several of the specific recommendations included in the area reports could be addressed by the creation of a Coulter Faculty Fellow position. For instance, in the C2 (Mathematics), the assessment committee noted that, “not all courses identified to satisfy this (mathematics) requirement include a statistical component, though all include applications and synthesis and analysis.” These details must be addressed at the local level. A Faculty Fellow would be an appropriate program overseer and would be the primary program assessor.

Our committee observed that the assessment teams from C1 (Writing), C3 (Oral Communication) and C4 (Wellness), all had better participation in faculty surveys, a wide range of student work samples, and existing support of the Liberal Studies goals and objectives in their syllabi. Each of these core programs

has an internal director who coordinates the dissemination of information regarding Liberal Studies requirements and training of Liberal Studies faculty within those areas. Whereas, the perspective categories offer courses spread across numerous disciplines, an internal coordinator is not as feasible in this situation. However, a Faculty Fellow position could be the point-person to coordinate the Liberal Studies programs within the perspective areas.

Currently, the Coulter Faculty Center produces a booklet entitled, “Welcome to the First Year Seminar” which is available to all instructors who teach FYS. This booklet has a FAQs section and information on designing, teaching and assessing the FYS with contacts, resources and sample syllabi. The FYS booklet may be a good model for future handbooks that could provide guidance for instructors who teach other Liberal Studies courses.

D. Remove classes from the Liberal Studies Program that do not satisfy the learning objectives of the specific category

A process should be emplaced that will periodically spot-check course materials on a semester-by-semester basis. Should course materials be repeatedly deficient or irrelevant to its Liberal Studies category, the course should be dropped from the approved Liberal Studies list. This process would logically be overseen and administered through the Liberal Studies Oversight Committee.

E. Increase pay along with title promotions for instructors of Liberal Studies courses to match regional average wages to ensure an adequate pool of qualified faculty teach Liberal Studies.

This issue could be addressed through performing an audit of average pay for instructors in each category of Liberal Studies courses for North Carolina and/or the southeastern region of the United States. Course loads and enrollment should also be considered in the analysis. Several of the individual Liberal Studies assessments indicated that inadequate resources were allocated to the Liberal Studies Program. For instance, the C3 (Oral Communication) assessment report stated, “High Instructor Turnover Rate, 1-2 faculty per academic year resign; Turnover rate is approximately 13-25%; Annual salary (\$24K) is insufficient to retain highly qualified instructors; Lack of multi-year contracts contributes to turnover rate”. Another option discussed by the Committee was the promotion of adjunct faculty to fixed term positions. The promotion of 80% fixed term instructors to 100% fixed term positions and the promotion of 100% fixed term to tenure-track positions if they are qualified. Each of these actions would increase faculty pay and give a sense of recognition to deserving front-line faculty. Criteria for these promotions could be created by a committee with consideration for years of service and performance reviews.

VI. Recommendations for the Liberal Studies Assessment Process

After reviewing the assessment reports of each of the individual area committees, the Liberal Studies Assessment Committee formulated six recommendations to improve the process of assessing the Liberal Studies Program. The recommendations of the Committee are:

- A. Review the assessment process for the Liberal Studies Program and establish formal guidelines with a timeframe for periodic review of the Program. It is also recommended that the timeframe be shorter than that used for this review.
- B. Use small teams to review the individual Liberal Studies components with at least one member of the team being from outside the department/program in question.

- C. Provide early notification to all constituent course instructors of the need for assessment data.
- D. Take steps to ensure greater participation by faculty and students in the assessment process, especially regarding surveys.
- E. Review materials being collected and consider collecting additional material as needed. If student materials are necessary for review, a system should be put in place for faculty to submit student work evidence for all students from which an assessment team can take a sample. All evidence should align with the goals and objectives of both the Liberal Studies Program and the individual component of which the course is a part.
- F. Revise the faculty survey instrument to improve accuracy, reliability, and validity. Consider other methods of data collection such as focus groups, interviews, etc.

A more detailed description of the recommendations is provided in the discussion that follows.

A. Review assessment process and establish formal guidelines for periodic review within a shorter timeframe

The Liberal Studies Assessment Committee noted that the assessment reports spanned from 2005 to 2009. During this time period, several different formats of the assessment reports were noted, and several of the assessment teams commented on insufficient guidance on how to evaluate the components and the lack of faculty participation. Our committee discussions noted that the core areas with program directors (C1, C3, and C4), did not express these same concerns.

We recommend the Liberal Studies Oversight Committee (1) establish a two year assessment cycle of the entire Liberal Studies program with clear guidelines and communication channels; (2) create a template for the assessment process that will be shared with all faculty teaching Liberal Studies courses; (3) establish a point-person for each of the perspective areas who will disseminate information about the assessment and encourage faculty involvement from the beginning; (4) contact faculty at the start of the fall semester to explain the assessment process and the types of student work samples that will need to be collected; and (5) collect data through the fall and spring semesters with a final report created by the end of May.

B. Use small teams to review individual Liberal Studies components with at least one member from outside the department/program in question

As the C1 (Writing) report states, “any more ‘cooks’ would have adulterated the process and made collaboration difficult... [T]hree people were sufficient for the review” (p. 12). We concur with their recommendation that “at least one reviewer be from outside the department/program in question” (p. 12).

These review teams should also “be provided with sample reports and access to others who have already completed similar assessments ... [with additional support from] former reviewers and staff from the Office of Assessment [now the Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness] or Academic Affairs” (p. 12). Additional support could come from the Coulter Faculty Center as well.

C. Provide early notification to all constituent course instructors of the need for assessment data

As the C1 (Writing) report states, “[the] review was made much more effective by the fact that the FYC Program was notified well in advance of the review” (p. 12). This early notification allowed for

collection of survey data and additional materials. “Such ongoing tracking over an academic year is highly advisable, as it allows reviewers to compile and analyze more data” (p. 12).

D. Take steps to ensure greater participation by faculty and students in the assessment process, especially regarding surveys

While reviewers of C1 (Writing) and C4 (Wellness) reported high levels of participation, reviewers of all other categories noted either problems or deep flaws with participation in the assessment process. Data was provided for only one course, as in C2 (Mathematics), or instructors “ignored the invitation to submit course materials” (p. 11), as the P3 (History) report found. The P4 (Humanities) report stated that “[t]he committee was immediately concerned about the limited data available for review as well as the low response rate on both the faculty and student surveys” (p. 3). The P6 (World Cultures) report also noted a low response rate, with syllabi and student work provided for only one half of the relevant courses being available for review. The P1 (Social Science) report actually showed lower participation, especially with syllabi submission (28% response rate), faculty survey responses (23% response rate), and student survey responses (4% response rate).

E. Review of all materials being collected and consideration of additional materials to ensure alignment with Liberal Studies goals and objectives.

The use of syllabi to determine if Liberal Studies goals were being met was identified as problematic in a number of reports. Alignment between the actual course contents and the syllabi would be necessary to ensure goals are addressed appropriately. This would entail, as the C4 (Wellness) report states, reviewing “the types of assignments, projects, or learning opportunities that the students were asked to complete in these C4 courses” (p. 5).

The need to assess additional supporting materials would have eliminated an “unnecessary middle man” (p. 12) in the review process, allowing the review team to better understand the data described in the FYC Program Director’s report, even though the report was “very professional and objective” (p. 12).

According to the P1 (Social Science) assessment report, the student work submitted (i.e., multiple choice tests, essay tests, papers, etc.) “varied drastically . . . which made it increasingly difficult to find common ways in which the goals were accomplished” (p. 10). The P6 (World Cultures) report also found “[s]everal of the goals could not be properly evaluated based on the submissions” (p. 19). Also, the work submitted, according to the P3 (History) report, was of “limited use” (p. 3) and in some cases statistically “flawed” (p. 3), “[representing] a small and fairly narrow sample” (p. 3) which often misrepresented the true distribution of product quality rendering the data “meaningless” (p. 3). Also, the “committee members did not know the original questions and were not familiar with the readings addressed in the assignments” (p. 3), and issue identified in other reports as well. Collection of this information might be helpful in future reviews. It was suggested by a member of the Liberal Studies Assessment Committee that the use of an online system, such as the system the Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness are purchasing, might be useful in resolving this issue. This system would be especially useful in allowing work evidence from all students in a course to be submitted and later randomly selected for analysis by the review team. The usefulness of this system should be explored.

Also, student work, as stated in the P1 (Social Sciences) report, was “expected [to be that] of a college graduate[, though most] of the student work submitted was from 100- and 200-level courses . . . [where] we would expect to find work reflecting a level of mastery below that of a college graduate” (p. 11).

Several reports noted that the student work samples did not appear to address any of the Liberal Studies goals.

We recommend (1) have the Coulter Faculty center assist in creating a course syllabus template which clearly demonstrates how the objectives for the course meet the Liberal Studies objectives for that core or perspectives area, (2) a copy of the assignments for which supporting evidence is provided be included in the submission, (3) common assignments or assignment types be established, where possible, (4) using an online system to track and report on assessment data, and (5) ensuring all evidence is clearly aligned with the goals of the Liberal Studies component as well as with Liberal Studies goals and objectives.

6. Revise the faculty survey instrument to improve accuracy, reliability, and validity and consider other methods of data collection such as focus groups, interviews, etc.

According to the C1 (Writing) assessment report, “[w]hile effective, the faculty survey was very difficult to use at times” (p. 12). The order of the questions was not conducive to “compiling of data” (p. 12), nor did the survey “address some fundamental questions, such as the differences between tenure-track and visiting faculty ... [as well as] workload issues” (p. 12). The P6 (World Cultures) assessment report also found “internal validity issues abound” (p. 23) and recommended reviewing the survey instrument for consistency with question types. The P1 (Social Science) report also suggested rewording questions, especially to eliminate “double-barreled” (p. 14) questions.

Also, the P3 (History) report found that the “three P3 questions did not accurately correspond to the P3 goals” (p. 3).

We recommend (1) revising the instrument to improve accuracy, reliability, and validity, including, but not limited to, reordering of questions and rewording questions to eliminate “double-barreled” questions; and (2) aligning questions with component goals.

VII. Conclusion

A two-phases assessment process of the Liberal Studies Program at Western Carolina University over the course of five years revealed a number of strengths and weaknesses. The Overall Liberal Studies Assessment Committee concluded that strengths of the Liberal Studies Program include a diversity of offerings and assignments and a good faith effort of faculty to meet liberal studies goals and objectives. Weaknesses of the liberal studies program ranged from issues with inadequate staffing, inconsistent syllabi, inconsistency in course offerings, and paucity of resources for LS courses and faculty. Most of the weaknesses can be mitigated by incorporating recommendations created by of both the individual and overall LSP assessment reports. These recommendations include provision of more support to faculty teaching Liberal Studies courses; creating consistency among syllabi within the core and perspective areas; offering enough courses to meet students’ needs; conducting periodic evaluations of Liberal Studies course offerings; and investigating pay structure for Liberal Studies faculty. Improvements to the assessment process itself can also provide for a stronger LSP. Recommendations for improving the assessment process include establishing formal guidelines and a timeframe for the review process; the use of small teams to conduct the assessments; consistent and early communication with faculty concerning the assessment process; greater participation by faculty and students; establishment of a system to collect materials and student work samples; and revision of the survey instruments to improve accuracy,

reliability and validity. It is vital that these recommendations be implemented if our LSP truly intends to prepare students to become "contributing and informed citizens in a global community" (Western Carolina University Liberal Studies Program, p.3).

VIII. Glossary

IAR	Individual Assessment Reports – The reports generated in the first phase of assessing the Liberal Studies Program. This took place from 2005-2009. Small assessment teams reviewed materials for each area, creating an individual assessment report
FYS	First Year Seminar
LSP	Liberal Studies Program.
OSAR	Overall Liberal Studies Assessment Report - The report generated in the second phase of assessing the Liberal Studies Program in the Spring of 2010. This assessment phase consisted of a larger assessment committee that reviewed the individual assessment reports (IAR) for each area in order to develop the current Overall Liberal Studies Assessment Report (OSAR). To prepare the overall assessment report, committee members reviewed each of the individual assessment reports (IAR) created by the small teams in each of the core and perspective areas.
SACS	Southern Associations of Colleges and Universities

IX. References

Western Carolina University Liberal Studies Program (1999) (rev. 2007). Available at:
http://www.wcu.edu/WebFiles/PDFs/LS_Program_05_07_08.pdf