

**Qualitative Narrative Assessment: Core Text Programs in Review**

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## INTRODUCTION

This is a book of stories: stories of seven quite distinct institutions united in an effort to deepen the understanding of assessment of student learning in meaningful ways. They share a conviction, voiced by the faculty and administrators that participate in ACTC, that quantitative methods of documenting student learning outcomes should be supplemented with qualitative methods that probe more deeply into the value of liberal arts learning, specifically learning the tradition of wisdom recorded in the core texts of civilizations, in order to produce a more fully realized understanding of the benefit of such an education for students. Because these benefits may not be immediately recognizable or easily monetizable, and because they require forms that account for the individual differences in institutional mission, curricula, and pedagogy, the participating institutions have developed unique methods and rubrics for documenting what they consider most valuable about what they do and the benefits to students.

These are the stories of institutional self-examination, for the process of developing and implementing these qualitative narrative assessment strategies necessitated both deep institutional self-reflection and deep commitment to first acknowledging the value of such an assessment and then taking the necessary steps to implement those strategies. The process differed from institution to institution, as did the level of administrative commitment, faculty participation, and the action steps taken as a consequence.

Undoubtedly, the institutional self-reflection was one of the most, if not the most, significant outcome of this effort, because it required faculty and administration to articulate what had previously been understood, either collectively or individually, as an institution's ethos. The resulting conversations directed attention to areas that might indeed benefit from new approaches. Some institutions were more open to this possibility for change than others, whether because of a lack of consensus or because limited resources, common among most institutions, but especially in small, private, liberal arts institutions, precluded the possibility of substantial change. Tension between faculty and administration, or frustration at the lack of consensus resulted in some cases. Other cases indicate more progress because the hard conversations and decisions had already progressed to the point that meaningful changes could be developed and implemented.

The innovative documentation generated, collected, and analyzed is generating progress toward closing the circle of continuous improvement based on results. The hard work has been done: the institutional commitment to the inherent value of such information, the development of alternative means of demonstrating student learning, and the openness to change based on institutional self-examination and willingness to share results and lessons learned with peer institutions dedicated to the same goals.

ACTC remains committed to this initiative among its institutional members. Participants in the first cohort of institutions, in cooperation with the institutional member schools of the Association for General and Liberal Studies, with which organization ACTC worked in tandem, continue to implement and improve their projects. The preliminary reports of this first cohort were used in the summer of 2014 as the basis of ACTC's Tradition and Innovation Seminar, held on the campuses of Columbia and Yale Universities, in which teams from new institutional members planned curricula and assessment instruments appropriate to their circumstances. From the participating institutions a second Qualitative Narrative Assessment cohort is forming, thereby continuing this significant initiative and generating an ever-growing body of research. This book, and the one to follow it, will make available to all institutions

the important narrative of the commitment to quality liberal arts education as an important addition to the national conversation on the value of higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

### **University of Dallas**

The University of Dallas is known for its extensive core curriculum, which exceeds 60 credits, and includes a semester on its Rome campus for the majority of its undergraduate students. Its combination of a deep core text-based liberal arts undergraduate curriculum in the first two years for all students, including science and business majors, with focused disciplinary study in the second two years, results in a unique degree plan that attracts students who value the pursuit of wisdom in education. The undergraduate faculty desired an assessment instrument that emphasized this shared commitment to the pursuit of wisdom as a “proper and primary end of education,” as stated in the university’s mission statement. For the purpose of developing such an instrument wisdom was understood as intellectual maturity that would be demonstrated by a longitudinal study of undergraduate writing at the beginning, mid-, and end-point of undergraduate studies. From a language and behavioral analysis of a series of lectures presented by core curriculum faculty, graduate students in psychology, under the direction of the program director, derived eight essential descriptors of the process of intellectual maturation. From these eight essential qualities they developed a simple, easy to score rubric with which writing samples could be scored and analyzed, providing both important data sets by which to accomplish the continuous improvement cycle mandated by regional accreditors and easily communicable evidence of the value of the cherished core text-centered curriculum.

### **St. Bonaventure University**

The core curriculum at St. Bonaventure University has as its foundation and organizing principle the *Itinerarium, or, The Soul’s Journey into God*, a core text of spiritual writing by its namesake, that provides a template to liberal learning. Bonaventure’s approach, rooted in the Christian-Franciscan tradition, holds that God exists, that God created all that exists, and that God has in mind a future of peace for all of creation. The journey occurs in three dimensions: the world outside, the world within, and the world above. As Bonaventure attempted to show that the aim of human life (perfection or happiness) is the gradual experience of the presence of the divine in all levels of reality, so students, by extension, seek wisdom in a complex surrounding as they journey through academics framed by the liberal arts. All students are required to participate in a common essay final exam in the Intellectual Journey capstone course in which they are asked to analyze and interpret an excerpt of a core text chosen by the faculty. Common syllabi and similarly constructed essay writing opportunities over the course of the undergraduate curriculum provide writing samples for analysis.

### **Carthage College**

At Carthage College, the institutional decision to adopt qualitative narrative assessment coincided with a review of the core curriculum course sequence. The impetus for re-evaluating the existing assessment procedure was feedback from a student survey indicating that students did not perceive that they had improved in the ability to construct logical arguments in defense of a thesis or benefitted from a mandated a paper re-write and review process that the faculty understood to be an essential pillar of writing instruction. The faculty focus, therefore, was on pedagogical choices. Obstacles and delays resulting from such a major undertaking slowed but did not stop the implementation of a revised,

qualitative narrative assessment instrument as well as a recommitment to writing instruction. The supporting documents for this report include an example of narrative assessment: an edited transcription of a panel discussion among three faculty members involved in the project. Their ability to verbally articulate the values, the concerns, and the outcomes of the process successfully document the institutional commitment to student success, the concrete steps taken to maximize that success, and important insights faculty gained from personal classroom experience that are best expressed in language.

### **Samford University**

The leadership team of what is now named the Core Texts Program at Samford University welcomed the chance to participate in an assessment project that they believed would help them measure the highest levels of student learning in the required two-course first year sequence, known as Cultural Perspectives, in ways that traditional assessments did not. The program is itself a larger narrative containing many smaller narratives; thus, a narrative measure with qualitative indicators rather than quantitative rubrics might indicate not simply if but what students are learning. The project was intended to function much like a comprehensive final exam across all participating classes, but abbreviated for quick comparisons, with the implicit assumption that any successful assessment would also indicate areas for improvement. A small group of representative faculty directly involved with the project ultimately reached similar conclusions. Weak results in the first year convinced them to restructure their approaches in the second year, giving closer attention to frameworks in class. In addition, they determined that the program itself needed a stronger framework to make it coherent and visible beyond the classroom. In the end, the project resulted in improved classroom teaching, and a stronger program: results the administration deemed more significant than those achievable by simply collating and evaluating approximately 350 short essays using the usual assessment rubrics.

### **Lynchburg College**

Seniors at Lynchburg are required to successfully complete a Senior Symposium capstone course that uses as its text an anthology of long selections from core texts while focusing on a specific theme that varies yearly. Institutional data suggest that students struggle with selecting, using, and developing strong and clear lines of evidence from both written sources (core texts) and oral sources such as the public lectures featured in Senior Symposium. In a trial semester half of the faculty teaching the Senior Symposium volunteered to study and develop a narrative assessment instrument. While discontinuing or modifying some early ideas as a result of practical considerations, at the end of the semester the participating faculty reviewed student progress by examining the written assignments, then preparing a brief written summary analysis limited to, at maximum, a single page for a small sample of randomly selected students, narrating development in their learning outcomes. The administration recognized that such a non-quantitative narrative assessment, while providing a more holistic means of determining if, and possibly how, students' skills in higher order thinking are developing during the progress of a single course, could also support the college's ongoing Quality Enhancement Plan.

### **Fresno Pacific University**

Fresno Pacific used the occasion of institution-wide preparation for the re-accreditation process to review and update their sequence of core requirements, embedding specific assignments into common

syllabi in order to generate meaningful sets of writing samples to be analyzed according to rubrics that aligned with student learning outcomes. Planning discussions revealed that, as it had been understood, the Stories of People and Cultures core sequence was assumed to be the primary, if not sole, opportunity for assessing student learning outcomes related to narrative. As a consequence of the curricular review the rigid link between program structure and student learning outcomes was reframed such that outcomes can now be measured throughout the general education program. The resulting updated processes, including a qualitative narrative assessment, were incorporated into a new data management system.

### **Assumption College**

Assumption's core sequence, the Fortin and Gonthier Foundations of Western Civilization Program, has been in place since 1979. Faculty who teach in the foundations program, and who perceive standardized modes of quantitative assessment insufficient to articulate the value of such course work to students, sought new models to determine how and how well students learn liberally in multidisciplinary programs that prioritize student engagement with core texts and how well the distinctive features of the Foundations Program in particular aid that learning. Having articulated a set of principles and directives, they sought to develop a cost effective assessment instrument to meet these objectives. Expressing these objectives as "hopes" and narrowing their focus for the sake of expediency, the faculty devised a survey and invited students, including any current student or recent graduate who had taken at least one course in the program, to complete it online. Despite problems with implementation and a cool response from administrators to the results, the small sample produced information about what is working well and about what calls for improvement in the program. The process of developing a qualitative method of assessment that provides information that faculty perceive to demonstrate how well the program coheres as a program, across courses and disciplines, in student experience in tension with an administration that, mindful of the parameters of financial constraint, prioritizes the efficiencies and cost savings of standardized quantitative means of assessment presents in microcosm the larger issues with which all institutions contend.

All seven of the institutions represented here are private, faith-based, and non-profit; five of the seven enroll less than two thousand undergraduate students. The very thin financial margins on which they operate in the current economic climate preclude a dedicated staff whose function it is to "close the loop" of institutional research, developing and implementing changes based on data-driven decisions. The responsibility falls instead to the administration and to the faculty to, in addition to their other responsibilities, evaluate existing curricula and policies in order to take necessary steps to improve them. In providing the framework for these self-studies that emphasize qualitative, narrative descriptors of student learning, the participating schools maximized scant resources by using the process as a means of both discerning their on-going commitments to their individual missions and goals and identifying areas of intra-mural satisfaction and dissatisfaction with achievements of those objectives, as well as deriving data that can be expressed in the quantitative terms preferred by their respective accreditors. The contribution of in-kind service and work-hours by members of several areas of responsibility served the additional benefit of creating a sense of ownership in the process, strengthening a sense of shared commitment and having a positive impact on morale.

Different as these seven projects are, the unifying theme that emerges from them in the aggregate is a shared commitment to producing a thoughtful, alternative to the "one size fits all" quantitative assessment instruments that, while they produce measurable data, miss the invaluable, if intangible, qualities in which the real value of a liberal arts education grounded in core texts resides. There is not a

direct correlation between input and results; often students do not become aware of the genuine benefit of such an education until long after they have received their diplomas; insight, subtlety of mind, recognition of paradigms, patterns, context, these are not easily demonstrable skills, nor are they driven by discrete goals. They are lifetime intellectual habits that inform and shape the decisions and thinking of students in whatever directions their lives take after graduation.

My co-editor, Dr. David DiMattio, on whom I have come to rely as a trusted colleague and friend, and I appreciate the opportunity to work with and come to know the administrators and faculty so dedicated to the invaluable role of core texts in American higher education, but most of all, dedicated to enhancing the lives of the students they consider themselves privileged to teach. I wish to express my gratitude to everyone who participated in the project for reminding me that the *cor* of core text education is an act of love.

Kathleen Burk, Ph.D.

## Chapter 1: University of Dallas

### THE TELEMACHUS PROJECT QUALITATIVE, NARRATIVE ASSESSMENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF DALLAS CORE CURRICULUM

M. Kathleen Burk, Ph.D.  
Assistant Vice-President and Assistant Provost  
30 May 2014

*Higher education must cultivate imagination in order to show students the way to reason's highest purposes. Louise Cowan, by her words and her example, made clear that the UD curricula present some of the finest works of Western and world imagination in a disciplined way, not just to train students for professional life but to expand their capacities, their minds, their hearts, their souls, so that they might be capable of recognizing, perhaps even embracing, what is essential to a good and civilized human being.*

*Dennis Sepper, Ph.D.  
Professor of Philosophy  
University of Dallas  
2012 King Fellow Address  
17 January 2012*

#### INSTITUTIONAL CHOICES

##### Brief History:

The University of Dallas is nationally known for its Core Curriculum, authored by legendary professor of literature and National Humanities Medal winner Louise S. Cowan, who, along with her late husband, Donald Cowan, took joint positions at UD in its formative first decade.

Within a few years Cowan had revamped the standardized curricular program, expanding what was considered an "honors program" to make it the required curriculum for all undergraduate students. A modification of the St. John's style Great Books approach, its salient characteristic was that students spent roughly the first two years of study reading the foundational texts of western civilization in their entirety, and the second two years focusing on a discipline. The sequence of readings in literature, now known as the Literary Tradition Sequence, was organized, not chronologically, but according to Cowan's articulation of genre theory: The Epic, Tragedy and Comedy, and the Lyric. The truly innovative dimension of the curriculum she devised was that it posited imagination as the foregrounding of all learning, and therefore, of the attainment of wisdom. Imagination serves as the central axis around which first the liberal arts, then the other disciplines, organize themselves. Poetry, therefore, understood in its broadest sense as imaginative language, is understood as the fundamental articulation of the first fruits of imagination in Western culture. She understood that deep grounding in the

foundational core texts of the Western intellectual tradition provides matchless preparation for disciplinary study in advanced undergraduate work, through which students develop their passion and their gifts and discover their vocations.

As Cowan herself has attested, the precise form of this curriculum remained somewhat fluid, adapting to the needs of the growing university and input from all disciplines. In the 1980's UD received funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities to perform a rigorous self-study of its curriculum. One of the results of this study, completed in 1986, was a certain calcification of the core curriculum. Stresses arose in the subsequent decades between those who wished to maintain the core in what had become its standardized form to assure its rigor and depth and those, especially science faculty, who, as demands on science graduates increased, struggled to meet those pre-professional demands while remaining committed to the principles of core text-based liberal arts education.

#### Institutional Choices:

In 2005-6 UD undertook a review of the core curriculum in light of these demands, and certain adjustments were made to the requirements. "Large Majors," mainly the B.S. degree programs, saw a reduction of required credits in History and Literature from 12 to 9. The Math/Fine Arts requirement was reduced for all students from 9 credits to 6, 3 in each discipline. The 12 credit philosophy requirement that included an advanced philosophy course related to the major area (Aesthetics for Art, Philosophy of Science for Science majors, etc.) was reduced to 9 credits, although several majors added the advanced philosophy to the major requirement. The changes to the core requirements were implemented in the 2007-2008 academic year. The plan called for a review of the changes after 3 years. Meanwhile, in 2009, UD submitted its mid-term report to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Committee on Colleges and received its review, which called for additional documentation of program assessment. In 2010, reviewing the early results of rigorous self-study and voluntary modifications to the sequence and content of the core curriculum, the undergraduate faculty, as represented by the Council of Deans and Chairs, approved UD's participation in the joint AGLS-ACTC Qualitative Narrative Assessment Project, agreeing that it presented a unique opportunity to address learning outcomes subsequent to the revision of the core curriculum, in compliance with the criteria outlined in the re-accreditation findings.

The UD faculty found itself in accord with the faculty of other liberal arts institutions who claim that the quantitative methods currently used to measure outcomes inadequately demonstrate the benefit of such an education to students. While not without value, statistics on graduate school or pre-professional school acceptances, graduation rates, GPAs, or first job placements fall short of articulating the value-added dimension of the deep reading in core texts. So, with the other pilot schools of ACTC, UD committed itself to crafting a form of assessment that would at once demonstrate the positive learning outcome for students in compliance with re-accreditation guidelines, as well as argue persuasively for the value of this type of learning, in response to the growing emphasis on a pragmatic informational curriculum aimed at preparation for the job market.

#### **ACTION STEPS**

As a starting point the following hypothesis was formulated: *an undergraduate liberal arts education grounded in and anchored by deep reading in primary core texts augments students' attainment of intellectual maturity.* Researching this hypothesis addressed the fundamental question: what have students accomplished when they have completed their undergraduate study at UD that fills the faculty with pleasure and satisfaction, confident that genuine good has been accomplished? How has

foundational reading in core texts augmented students' wisdom? In the end, UD has attempted to demonstrate that fruitful education is manifest in who students are and who they become, not solely in what they do, aware, certainly, that such evaluations, fraught as they are with value laden, subjective language, are not fully expressible as quantitative data. As an institution UD has participated in this project for the opportunity it presents to join with other institutions in influencing the national conversation about the telos of education, which might be summed up in a phrase from *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*: "the priority...of the person over things."

The process of design and implementation began in spring 2010 when the then Associate Dean of the undergraduate liberal arts college, with the approval of the Dean and Provost, agreed to participate in a humanistic assessment project jointly sponsored by the Association of General and Liberal Studies and the Association of Core Texts and Courses, with the understanding that the project designed would address general education learning outcomes as required by SACSCOC. As the procedure for data collection and analysis were implemented, changes in policy and personnel necessitated modifications of the prototype model, producing a stronger and more easily executed procedure while further solidifying the cooperative relationships among the various units that have contributed to the narrative assessment project in general.

The original source of base-line writing samples was a timed essay component of a competitive scholarship exam, which had been administered for many years to a subset of rising high school juniors applying for admission to the university. When the office of undergraduate admissions discontinued the competitive exam in 2013, the Vice-President for Enrollment and Student Life suggested replacing it with the current practice of collecting base-line writing samples during new student orientation. This demonstrates the cooperation among the several offices and academic units that represents system-wide support for the project, thereby maximizing both use of resources and the likelihood of long-term benefit.

Essays from the students that enrolled in the 2009 entering cohort served as baseline writing samples for evaluation in a sample study. These students were then asked to write another essay on the same prompt with the same time limit at the end of year 2, when the largest part of the core curriculum has been completed, and at the end of year 4, at the conclusion of their disciplinary studies.

In spring 2012 Faculty members that regularly teach core courses team-taught a 1-credit, non-graded elective course entitled: "Across the Core." A group of 75 students, mainly seniors, met with different faculty members for 1 classroom hour each week to discuss the value of the core course they teach and the value of the core as a whole. Students were presented an opportunity to reflect on this fundamental dimension of their undergraduate study at the culmination of their disciplinary study and articulate its immediately perceived benefit. These lectures and discussions were videotaped.

Under the supervision of the Chair of the Psychology Department, graduate students used language analysis and other modes to examine the faculty presentations and student discussions, producing a set of those narrative descriptors of the benefits of a core text-based liberal arts curriculum that recurred most often, resulting in a composite description of the student who demonstrates intellectual maturity at the conclusion of undergraduate study. These narrative descriptors, which collectively articulate the learning goals for the core curriculum, were then arranged into an easy to use rubric with which to evaluate the writing samples.

THE TELEMACHUS PROJECT

The research and assessment project is named for the son of Odysseus, whose story is narrated in Books 1-4 of *The Odyssey*, a core text read by all first year undergraduate students at the University of Dallas. Telemachus must complete his education in order to mature from adolescence to adulthood, to find his place in the world. That he must learn what it means to be his father's son foregrounds the great tale of Odysseus' journey, itself an education for all who hear it. Telemachus' story—the Telemachy—serves as the paradigm for UD's core text centered undergraduate curriculum, which demands that all students reflect deeply on the origins of the culture in which they live in order to discover who they are and who they are meant to become, to prepare for meaningful, responsible, virtuous adult lives. This model continues to shape and distinguish the UD core curriculum and undergraduate programs. The development of the Telemachus project exemplifies the University-wide on-going commitment to the indispensable centrality of the core curriculum as the best means to achieve the fundamental, primary objective expressed in its mission, the pursuit of wisdom, understood for these purposes as intellectual maturity. This intellectual maturity is precipitated by experience of *metanoia*: a coming to awareness based on observation, study, and empathy that prompts deepening of insight, action that implies more than strictly information acquisition: "a reorientation of one's way of life" (OED).] The Administration, Offices of Institutional Research, Information Technology, and Undergraduate Admissions, have all contributed "in-kind" resources to the project; this cooperation enhances the sense of ownership, improving morale across administrative categories. Faculty guidance and participation in the formulation of this assessment instrument has been indispensable to its success for two reasons: first, they *narrated and modeled* the specific intangible, yet invaluable, benefits of the university's unique curriculum; second, because of this participation and this articulation of what they perceive the ultimate value to the students should be, and because the instrument has been developed and implemented by the faculty themselves, rather than imposed upon them from external sources, *they value and support* the effort. The self-directed, internal development that incorporates examples of actual student writing as evidence of intellectual maturity, in addition to students' narrative of perceived value of the core curriculum, combined with minimal demands on resources, has yielded additional value.

#### Project description:

A representative sample of students write under controlled conditions at three points in their undergraduate careers: before enrolling, at the midpoint (completion of core curriculum), and at the culmination of major disciplinary study (graduation). Writing samples are reviewed for development of desiderata that indicate increasing intellectual maturity, as identified and narrated by faculty that regularly teach courses in the core curriculum and organized into an easy-to-use rubric. The baseline essay is written in response to one of several prompts in a one hour session during fall semester new student orientation. Renewal of financial aid for continuing students is predicated upon submission of the second and third writing samples, thereby assuring participation sufficient to produce statistically significant data sets. Mid-point and final essays are administered using an eCollege course shell. Results are tabulated and used to prompt program review and plan appropriate curricular adjustments in addition to the primary purpose of demonstrating the effect of the study of core texts on the intellectual maturity of individual students over time.

#### **INFORMED JUDGEMENTS**

In summer 2013 the Assistant Vice-President/Assistant Provost, formerly the Associate Dean, designed and uploaded a course in Blackboard to collect writing samples for the second and third data points, controlling time and prompt parameters. Evaluators analyzed writing samples using the rubric derived

from faculty and student narratives; however, voluntary participation by subjects proved insufficient to produce a statistically relevant sample. Instead, focus groups of advanced students were conducted to gather anecdotal qualitative information while complete cohort cycles are put in place. The pilot formula for the qualitative narrative assessment instrument has been shown to produce useful information. It is now explained as the Telemachus Test in the letters sent to admitted students. The university discontinued using Blackboard after fall 2014, necessitating the creation of a new course shell in e-College for the evaluation of the writing samples of future student cohorts. The source of future base-line writing samples is reliable, the rubric finalized, yet easily updated when determined appropriate, and easily scored. Meaningful incentives for subject participation in the mid- and end-point writing sample collection will yield useable information. When continuous cycles of assessment are complete the Telemachus Project will prove a valuable source of information about a student learning outcome crucial to supporting the university's distinctive undergraduate program and mission statement. Further, the opportunity to institute new writing prompts presents an opportunity to establish and reinforce the SACSCOC-mandated, university-wide Quality Enhancement Plan to implement an institution-wide, integrated strategy for assisting students in identifying their vocations and preparing for them, the development of which paralleled the qualitative narrative assessment project. The result will be an articulation of value of this education expressed in a vocabulary that is meaningful to its target constituencies and concomitantly apprehensible to accrediting agencies and the higher education community at large.

## **FURTHER IMPROVEMENTS**

Assessing intellectual maturity as a primary learning goal, while requiring some innovation, nevertheless addresses the desire for a successful yet succinct way to convey the shared commitment to transformational education addressed to the pursuit of wisdom, in accord with the university's avowed mission. Ongoing use will produce meaningful information about student achievement of this learning goal that will facilitate continuous improvement efforts while embedding dedication to imaginative, synthetic, and critical thinking into institutional goals.

## **APPENDIX 1:**

### **Qualitative, Narrative Results:**

The following excerpts comparing introductory, body, and concluding passages from base-line and mid-point essays by the same student, on the same prompt, under the same time parameters, demonstrate the positive development in thought and rhetorical proficiency gained by students who have, for the most part, completed the core curriculum. A broader intellectual context that indicates familiarity with other writers and thinkers on the same subject is apparent throughout the samples, as well.

#### **Example 1:**

The writer begins the base-line essay with an unsupported claim on the subject. At mid-point the student demonstrates the ability to compare and contrast the claims of three thinkers from different time periods on the same idea, concisely state the claims of those three writers, use correct terminology for the claim, and deduce a conclusion using dialectic logic.

900838591

Base-line:

Thomas Hobbes is wrong in his belief that there is no standard of justice outside of the laws of civil society. We can see in every culture, through the use of conscience and through our actions, that a law greater than the laws of civil society exists, the Moral Law.

Mid-point:

Thomas Hobbes claims that there is no standard of right and wrong, and therefore man is justified in acting however he deems necessary to secure his self-preservation in a state of nature. Thomas Aquinas and C. S. Lewis, however, disagree. Aquinas claims that since we were all created by God, we are all required to follow the Law of Nature, which aims us toward the Good. Lewis says that, as we can see in daily life, there are standards men follow and therefore there must be a Law of Human Nature for us to follow as well. We are responsible for following this law, no matter who or where we are since it is something that exists within all individuals.

Example 2:

The writer strings together the names of three important texts, but says nothing else about them. This is followed by an oversimplified, unsubstantiated generalization, and a rhetorical question with an unsubstantiated conclusion. At mid-point the writer has constructed a coherent argument, substantiated a claim by directly quoting from the core text, comparing the claim with the ideas of two other thinkers. The writer indicates that the conclusion from the premises indicates a flaw in logic, then introduces a new possibility, effecting a logical transition to the next paragraph.

900838377

Base-line:

Man’s need to be justice is expressed both in the Magna Carta and *Plato’s Republic*. Therefore, the next question becomes how do people know what is just. The best way to answer this question is by looking at little kids. Children always seem to identify with the heroes of stories and movies. They always know who the good guys are. How do they know what is good? The answer to this question is in the Bible.

Mid-point:

Every man longs for a Utopia, heaven on Earth. Thomas Hobbes clearly believed that a Utopia was only possible through human society. However, because he destroyed the very notion of a transcendent order of justice by saying, “Because there is no standard of justice in the state of nature, no one can be criticized for the choices he makes in defending his rights,” he unwittingly destroys the possibility of a good society ever coming to be. By Hobbes’ trying to unite the Lockean understanding of the state of nature and Aristotelian understanding of society, Hobbes is misrepresenting and degrading these two great understandings which still fall short of the authentic Christian understanding of justice and human nature.

**Quantitative results:**

	Reader 1 Baseline									
	ID#									
	900831278	900832258	900828814	900838377	900838591	900838763	900838764	900838777	900839324	900839458
Q 1	6	7	7	8	7	6	4	7	4	7
Q 2	7	2	7	8	7	5	2	7	5	6
Q 3	7	5	6	8	6	7	3	7	5	7
Q 4	6	4	5	5	4	6	3	6	4	5
Q 5	5	6	3	5	4	7	3	5	4	5



Q1	6	6	6	7	7	7		7	6	7
Q2	4	5	5	7	7	6		6	4	6
Q3	5	6	5	7	6	7		5	4	7
Q4	4	6	4	7	6	5		6	5	7
Q5	4	4	5	5	5	5		4	4	6
Q6	4	5	5	7	7	7		6	6	7
Q7	6	5	5	6	7	5		6	4	6
Q8	4	5	5	7	6	6		6	4	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>48</b>		<b>46</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>I</b>										

**Telemachus Project Sample Assessment Summary:**

participant	T1I1R1	I1R2	I1R3	T1I1 AV	T2I1R1	T2I1R2	T2I1R3	T2I1AV
900831278	47	33	10	30	44	43	37	41
900832258	40	50	0	45	46	44	42	44
900828814	48	52	13	38	41	57	40	46
900838377	55	55	13	41	39	34	53	42
900838591	47	64	8	40	51	67	51	56
900838763	50	39	13	34	51	45	48	48
900838764	20	29	11	20				
900838777	56	54	10	40	47	55	46	49
900839324	38	36	10	28	42	44	37	41
900839458	53	49	16	39	57	57	53	56
<b>AVERAGE</b>				<b>35.5</b>				<b>47</b>

**TELEMACHUS TEST SCORE ANALYSIS INSTRUCTIONS**

Underscore each statement with a 100 millimeter line (see template). For each item measure from the origin of the line on the left to the center of the mark or 'X' or the point of intersection of the two lines in a check mark 'v' made by the rater. Round down to the nearest whole number millimeter on the 100 mm line. That number becomes the 'measurement' for that item.

The spread sheet for recording these ratings should have a row for each participant, and a column for each rated item.

Participant I1R1 I1R2 I1R3 I1 AV

Carry out this patten for all 8 items.

**APPENDIX 2:**

**SAMPLE RUBRIC SCORE SHEET WITH EXPLANATION:**

**Across the Core Qualitative Assessment**  
**Gilbert Garza, Ph. D.**  
**Associate Professor, Chair, Graduate Program Director**  
**Department of Psychology**

### **Project Summary:**

My graduate Foundations of Qualitative Research (PSY 6333) course undertook at the behest of Dr. Kathleen Burk a qualitative analysis of the lectures comprising the Across the Core course offered at UD during the Spring of 2012. We viewed and analyzed the videos of lectures presented by Dr. Jodziewicz (history), Dr. Frank (philosophy), Dr. Olenick (physics), Dr. Moran (English), Dr. Caesar (art), Dr. Brownsberger (theology), Mr. Lemieux (drama), Dr. Ivan Eidt (modern language), Dr. Brown Mardsen (biology), Dr. Eaker, (chemistry), and Dr. Sweet (classics). In these videos, professors described their discipline and its relation to the Core and the University mission. We took up these lectures from the vantage point of a 'guiding question' regarding what we could infer from these lectures regarding faculty perceptions of the value and goals of the core. To this end we subjected the data to qualitative analysis and discerned several themes common to the lectures regarding what it would mean to students to 'get' the UD core. The goal of this analysis was to facilitate the development of a rubric by which student writing could be assessed prior to entering the University and at year three or four to assess the impact of exposure to the UD core.

### **General Themes of 'Getting' the Core**

Our analysis revealed several recurring and common themes among the lectures which we took to be indicative of what faculty imagined would be the outcome of the University's liberal education. They included:

- A recognition of and appreciation of complexity
- The ability to draw on multiple disciplines and perspectives to address complex realities
- An abiding curiosity and attitude of awe and wonder before the world
- A recognition of the finitude and perspectivity of human knowledge
- An emphasis on learning as an ongoing process that is never exhausted
- An emphasis on process over content
- An ability to see and understand many perspectives on complex matters
- A sense of vocation and personal appropriation regarding what it means to learn

### **PROPOSED ASSESSMENT RUBRIC**

In view of these findings it is my recommendation that the student essays that comprise the data for this study be assessed utilizing the following rubric. These items should be presented using a semantic differential item rated on a graphic rating scale. The assessor would indicate his or her assessment on the relevant parameter by making a mark on a 100 mm line marked at the ends with the terms 'not at all' and 'very much.'

The writer shows an awareness of and sensibility to complexity.

not at all \_\_\_\_\_ very much

The writer draws from multiple sources/perspectives

not at all \_\_\_\_\_ very much

The writer approaches the question with curiosity and eschews simplistic treatment of the question

not at all \_\_\_\_\_ very much

The writer recognizes the limitations and perspectivity of the sources drawn upon

not at all \_\_\_\_\_ very much

The writer shows an understanding that knowledge is not complete and that understanding continues to develop

not at all \_\_\_\_\_ very much

The writer shows his or her thinking process and illuminates the development of his or her ideas

not at all \_\_\_\_\_ very much

The writer shows an appreciation for a diversity of perspectives

not at all \_\_\_\_\_ very much

The writer goes beyond citing sources and expresses a personal understanding and synthesis of ideas cited

not at all \_\_\_\_\_ very much

## Chapter 2. St. Bonaventure University

### A FRANCISCAN IDENTITY IN A LIBERAL ARTS CURRICULUM

David J. DiMattio, Ph.D.  
St. Bonaventure University

*Acknowledgments to Fr. Michael Blastic, OFM; Dr. John Apcynski; Dr. Michael Chiariello; Dr. Anne Foerst; Dr. Russ Woodruff*

As indicated in our mission, St. Bonaventure is a Catholic university dedicated to educational excellence in the Franciscan tradition. We are committed to our innovative liberal arts core, which we introduce to students as Clare College. Since 1998, Clare College has been the core curriculum totaling 36 credits or 12 core courses. These courses represent general education skills (Composition and Critical Thinking Part 1 and 2), seven core areas of the liberal arts including Western and non-Western traditions (Natural World, Western World, Good Life, Social World, Religious Texts, World Views, Arts and Literature) and three liberal arts courses directly related to our Franciscan identity (Intellectual Journey, Catholic-Franciscan Tradition and University Forum). In addition to these core courses, all students must complete a mathematics/quantitative reasoning requirement of at least one course yet this typically sets in the plan of study for a major. Clare College is the common ground that unites the undergraduate experience for students in all of our programs, including the traditional liberal arts and sciences, as well as professional studies. We have also found that it provides an academic home for those students, particularly in first year, who are not yet ready to commit to a major field of study.

#### INSTITUTIONAL CHOICES

In late 2009, our Faculty Senate and its Curriculum Committee started discussing a formal review of Clare College. This type of work had not been conducted since 2003-2004, when Clare College went through a self-study in connection to its accreditation with the American Academy for Liberal Education (AALÉ). Preliminary steps were taken to reinvestigate the curriculum, our assessment practices, and the realization of a changing educational system as we enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It was at this point that St. Bonaventure became involved with the cooperative AGLS/ACTC project. It had always been a struggle to properly report on a core curriculum and its influences on our students. That is, mechanisms exist to measure learning outcomes when one discusses writing, reading, analysis, and understanding. But can we comment on how our Catholic Franciscan identity and our core liberal arts curriculum influence students and ultimately their lives on a journey outside our 4-year institution?

To begin, a committee representing students and faculty of the campus community referenced the AGLS guide for review and assessment. As an institution, we ask the question "By what means do we ensure that these student learning objectives align with our mission, vision, and philosophy?" And at the same time, we ask "how do the humanities best exercise their strengths within our institution, and can students take those learning objectives beyond graduation and into the future? We continually remind ourselves to ask students some very primary questions as they journey into higher education. Where do you come from? Where are you going? How did you get here?"

Clare College has been modeled after the work of St. Bonaventure, the 13<sup>th</sup> century scholar whose text *Itinerarium* provides a template to liberal learning at St. Bonaventure University. Bonaventure wrote the *Soul's Journey into God* as a response to his personal difficulties, to the problems within the Franciscan Order at the time, and the problems the Order faced as a result of criticisms from without. The *Itinerarium* is thus a *summa*, or, Bonaventure's summary expression of his world view, his understanding of human life in the world, and the relationship of all reality with its source and goal. Bonaventure's approach is based on a Christian-Franciscan conviction of faith, that God exists, that God created all that exists and that God has in mind a future of peace for all of creation.

Being at peace implies that all things seen in right order, i.e., right relationship to/in harmony with everything that exists. This implies that one is in right relationship with all levels of reality. Ultimately, Bonaventure seeks WISDOM on the journey – insights that can help one on their search for meaning in a world that is complex and difficult to unravel. The journey occurs as: THE WORLD OUTSIDE – steps 1-2, THE WORLD WITHIN – steps 3-4, THE WORLD ABOVE – steps 5-6. Bonaventure attempts to show how the aim of human life (perfection or happiness) is the gradual experience of the presence of the divine in all levels of reality. His Seventh Step is more an acknowledgment of a completed journey and implication that a new journey is to begin. In a student's journey through academics, s/he seeks wisdom in a complex surrounding. But within Clare College, they must experience a journey in the liberal arts analogous to Bonaventure's. The World Outside- investigation of the natural world and aesthetic surrounding. The World Within- Seek the Social World and human's interactions with others and their cultures. The World Above-Seek how we live are lives, beyond the physical world (To live a Good life)

So our core areas are set out to provide students a sample of the complex world. It is the hope that on the journey, a student can attempt to unravel some complexities they might encounter as they progress into a major. The Intellectual Journey course is a microcosm of this model. It introduces students to the model acknowledging a world outside, within and above but through a vessel of primary texts. Students sample core texts that deal with the natural world or the social world, or the religious world. Through this primary introduction, students are exposed to more than just the Clare curriculum model, but also original texts that provide a path into the liberal arts. Appropriately, our first objective with this foundational course has been: to introduce the foundation, structure, and methodology of the core curriculum. Thus, it is a priority that our faculty introduces students to this template or mapquest as they begin their own Journey through academics.

## **ACTION STEPS**

As our committee reexamined the existing curriculum including their core objectives, we wished to isolate those courses which best related and articulated our institutional identity. The Intellectual Journey course is a unique component to the core and should be by definition. However, it was determined the core areas unique to our institution and its mission are the Catholic Franciscan Heritage, The Good Life (an ethics course), and The University Forum (the capstone to the curriculum which addresses global issues in a multidisciplinary perspective). So, the committee reexamined the objectives within these four core areas, which we now refer to as the core of the core. In order to best articulate the model of Clare College and its connection to the *Itinerarium*, obvious overlap should occur in these core areas.

As example: an objective to the Intellectual Journey is that students will examine major issues in the context of the spiritual vision of Bonaventure. An objective in the Catholic Franciscan course states students will develop ability to dialogue with other traditions on contemporary moral issues. An

objective to the Good Life course states student will foster systematic reflection on the nature of a moral life as addressed through major traditions, including the Christian and Catholic-Franciscan traditions. And with the University Forum students are to analyze a contemporary issue in depth from a multi-disciplinary perspective. So within these 4 courses, real integration of themes will occur using the lens of the Franciscan identity. The moral questions raised in Catholic Franciscan tradition will be reexamined at a greater level in Good Life. The major issues of Intellectual Journey will be seen in the others but reexamined more fully in the Forum course, not just through a Franciscan lens but through the lens of a student's discipline. This is ultimately a living example of critical thinking. Students are being taught to formulate their own positions from a major's perspective but also thru multiple perspectives related to the real values that come from our Catholic Franciscan tradition.

In the final chapter of the *Itinerarium*, Bonaventure speaks of the joys of discovery and learning. He realizes that Christ's self-giving love is the center point of all reality. In order to find peace, therefore, one must continue on this journey: in a sense, to begin again. For Bonaventure, to know the world outside oneself, to know the world within oneself, and to know God (or the world above oneself) is to know peace, the peace that was always present. Bonaventure suggests in this final chapter that for humans there is no fulfilling knowledge without love, and love is a surrender of the self to another. Knowledge must reflect the totality of reality (below, within, and above).

The core curriculum also includes a capstone course that invites students to use their skills, including the perspectives from multiple disciplines, to engage contemporary issues. This "University Forum" course culminates our students' liberal arts education at St. Bonaventure and is aimed synthesize several outcomes, including the development of intellectual skills, of knowledge about a broad range of cultural issues, and of a strong desire for inquiry as a means to sustain learning throughout their lives. Faculty and students examine how global issues affect us all and that anyone can contribute to a solution because often more than one solution is needed. Like Bonaventure himself, students realize that even though their particular journey through the liberal arts and sciences curriculum will end, they will use what they learned on the path over and over. As work progressed, several action steps were examined: how are course syllabi reviewed to assure that the common learning objectives are included in these courses? How do we make departmental faculty knowledgeable about the purposes and goals of our program so they can reinforce and build on previous learning in their advanced courses? How can our faculty use the core learning objectives as standards for grading and otherwise evaluating student work?

To start the discussion, the committee has suggested common skills requirement within these core areas. Minimum of pages of writing, Use of technology incorporated into assignments, Presentation options (class presentation, active learning discussions), and demonstration of critical thinking exercises which allows students to articulate positions on various interdisciplinary issues. In addition, teaching modules will be available to past, present and future instructors as a resource to all "core of core" participants. Examples of assignments, exams, presentations, evaluation mechanisms, bibliographies will be available at a centralized location. Faculty and staff will be urged to reference these materials as well as contribute towards the data banks. Workshops will be required for all faculty and staff who wish to participate in these core courses. It will be necessary not just for new faculty but for experienced faculty. Our primary objective will be to educate individuals in areas they might not be aware. Since we desire to have obvious overlap for students by way of objectives, it will be important for instructors to understand the methodology within the other core courses.

At this point in our discussion, the inclusion of core texts and primary sources became very necessary. One obvious way to reinvestigate a major issue in these courses will be through core texts that students

had been exposed to in the Intellectual Journey. What better way to explain the concept of critical thinking but to have students look at primary texts in various perspectives: through a lens of faith tradition, through a lens of ethical and moral struggle, through a lens of cultural understanding. As example, students are introduced to Plato's Allegory of the Cave in our Intellectual Journey. But when students reach the Catholic Franciscan Heritage course, the text is reexamined as students are confronted with new images of God and new images of the world. Students read parts of the New Testament, including the Sermon on the Mount. Yet, the text is reintroduced in the Good Life course as a question of ethics. Bonaventure's *Itinerarium*, a core text in itself, is referenced and reexamined in each of the core of the core courses. Aldo Leopold's "On Reading the Forest Landscape" has been reintroduced as well in all four core courses but through various lens: a lens of great literature, a lens of diverse faith, a lens of ethics and a globalization lens. Great works of Augustine and Marcus Aurelius ask the questions of person. Martin Luther King Jr's "Letter from Birmingham jail" examines a person in society and the question of reconciliation.

Core text inclusion also allows for basic uniform assessment to be conducted through sections of a core area as well as through the core curriculum itself. The thread that binds these courses provides a mechanism for our faculty to conduct assessment throughout the curriculum.

## **INFORMED JUDGMENTS**

As pointed out previously, our committee has taken a closer look at integrating core of the core objectives. So starting with the existing mechanisms for these two core courses, we will continue to develop further rubrics for the other two 'core of core' courses in a similar process. Yet one notes, since core texts appear in several core courses, they will provide a path into an assessment mechanism that can be utilized throughout the curriculum.

But as we conclude on weaving a thread amongst these core of the core courses, how might we still approach the question of "can students take learning objectives beyond graduation and into the future? And how did a Catholic Franciscan education develop their understanding of the world?"

Again, we refer to our Institutional core text, since in the *Itinerarium*, Bonaventure lays out a philosophy of education, of life. He argues that "study" involves 7 core activities "in order that you might not assume that reading is sufficient without unction, speculation without devotion, investigation without admiration, examination without exultation, industry without piety, knowledge without love, understanding without humility, study without divine grace, merely mirroring things without divinely inspired wisdom." So we draw attention to 7 core activities: reading, speculation, examination, investigation, industry, knowledge, and understanding. Given Bonaventure's threefold distinction within higher reason: are we as concerned with content mastery as a student's ability to make/see connections, make practical connection? Are there moments and opportunities when students are invited to wonder, see and experience what cannot necessarily to explain? It is along this philosophy of education that we wish to continue the development of our core.

### **Examples:**

#### **A: CLAR 101 Intellectual Journey**

To provide concrete examples to the assessment, we require all students in the Intellectual Journey course to participate in a common essay final exam. The exam question involves a student's

interpretation of an excerpt of a primary text chosen by the faculty. The students are instructed to answer the following:

1. Explain what this passage means.
2. Show how it relates to the Bonaventurian themes of the journey.
3. Explain how it relates to at least four other readings discussed in the course.
4. Explore how it might relate to your own personal intellectual journey.

An excerpt the student writes:

Step two is also a very important step. It focuses on the senses, and on the human relationship to nature. Step two relates to step one in the idea of the outside world. Bonaventure's *The Consideration of God in His Footsteps in This Visible World* is all about the senses and by using our senses we can achieve much more in life and understand the world better. St. Francis of Assisi's *The Canticle of Brother Sun* shows us how we use our senses to examine nature. With our senses we are able to see the lights and feel the wind and smell the roses. Nature is like our family, we can't live with it but we can't live without it either. Our senses really connect us with nature in remarkable ways. People also have to be careful how they use their senses. In the reading it also talks about death and how people cannot escape it. Matthew Arnold's *In Harmony with Nature* basically has his point of view on how nature and humans can never be good friends, mainly because humans can be cruel to nature. I think of it as humans cutting down trees and hurting nature. Humans should observe it and be kind to nature because nature brings so much good to humans.

Hopkins' *God's Grandeur* talks of God's rod. In my opinion, it talks about people wanting ultimate power but God is the only person that can have that power. God is what made this world such a wonderful and beautiful place to live in. These stories relate to the human senses and the relationship between humans and nature. The two poems talk about our senses. Without our senses, we would not be able to see nature. The last two excerpts really talk about how people can be cruel. But nature and humans do have a lot in common as well. Nature grows just like humans and nature can be cruel at times too. Everyone is just doing his or her best to stay alive and be happy and nature does that too. I feel like I can relate to this step too especially through the thought of senses. In these times, I am constantly rushing around and not taking the time to smell the flowers. All the technology today just fogs up our minds.

## **B: CLAR 401 University Forum**

Within the University Forum course (the capstone) we revisit the Bonaventurian theme and ask students to draw upon their own experiences over the last four years. Those core value questions are:

1. Are persons more or less important than "products and profits"?
2. Are our relationship choices respectful and mutual or "controlling and manipulating"?
3. Do my/our choices reveal a pattern of generosity, concern for "others" or concern for what is useful to "me"— winning, getting my payoff or way?
4. Do my/our choices reflect a concern for "a good measure" of the "gifts of God's goodness" for all or a struggle for the appropriation and acquisition of goods for "me/mine"?
5. How do I participate in the creation of a more peaceful, just and loving world?

The final position paper also ask that students connect to the core curriculum as a whole and reflect on the *Itinerarium*.

Student writes:

Liberal Arts can be argued to be the continual process of discovery. The subjects within liberal arts are all unique by themselves, but together they also form a larger whole. Without history, there can be no sociology without sociology, there can be no politics; without politics, no economics; without mathematics, no science etc. Liberal arts is an interconnecting web of relationships, and they all serve similar functions, which is to further understand the world that we live in. The mysteries of one universe may be explained by the knowledge of another. History is the study of the past, and as the past has shown, humans are always evolving, in knowledge and in mindsets. There is no one fixed system that the human race has pursued, and no one system, no matter how fixed in stone it may seem, has survived the centuries. The many factors that has continually evolved has created systems that shape the course of the future. At the same time, if we were to consider the role of religion and science in the same manner, we start to see how they are akin to the two coils of the DNA helix – together they form a world that is the best of both their worlds.

There are certain mysteries of life that are better off left as mysteries. Bonaventure's words ring true to heart, that we are only being given glimpses of the larger world out there. After all, are we not part of nature? But, in a similar way, can nature exist without all of us? Maybe one-day science will be able to tell us the purpose of our existence, but until then, it feels like we should keep the little mysteries of life a mystery, because that way we are continually able to discover new things on the road to unraveling the final mystery. These mysteries continue to be the driving force behind the actions of scientists and theologians, social scientists and mathematicians – what is our role in the larger natural world?

Another student reflects:

Mimicking the ancient Greek and Roman emphasis on education in the liberal arts and sciences, Bonaventure describes levels of “the *powers* of the soul, by which we ascend from the lowest to the highest, from the external to the internal, and by which we move from the temporal to the eternal [emphasis in original]” Sense, imagination, reason, understanding, intelligence, and what Bonaventure calls “the *high point of the mind*, or the spark of conscience [emphasis in original]” are the ways in which we come to know the world, the universe, and the abstract world of the *mind* around, within, and beyond us. Sensory intake tells us about the immediate physical world, imagination lets us begin to determine the underpinnings of the physical world, reasoning in the arts and sciences leads us toward a preliminary understanding of the existence of even higher knowledge, and the final two steps involve spiritual contemplation, among other more difficult exercises of the mental faculties we as humans possess. The basic point he is making is, we must build our knowledge upon more basic knowledge, starting with the simplest and working our way to the complex; that is, we must learn to learn, in order to even perceive that higher levels of knowledge exist (beyond the physical, sensory world).

### **C: CLAR 207 Catholic Franciscan Tradition**

Within the course, the instructors will require journal entries. These entries will be used in the portfolio of the Clare College student.

- i.) In class we have considered Francis of Assisi and his encounter with the leper. We know that today the leper is not only a single individual whom we might encounter. Today the leper is the thousands of homeless who huddle in doorways. The leper is the numberless battered women who seek shelter from impossible domestic situations. The list goes on and on. In First World Countries millions of dollars are spent on diets and calorie reducing products while there are millions of people that are undernourished. Consider the consumption of bottled water when billions of people drink and bathe in contaminated water or are facing droughts. In this week's journal entry consider the situation of those who are marginalized today. How do the situations of today compare with Francis' encounter with the leper? The encounter for Francis was a time of crisis: a moment of self-definition, self-revelation and conversion. How are encounters today with the marginalized be also a time of self-definition, self-revelation and conversion for you for society?

### **D: CLAR 304 Good Life**

The following narrative is taken from the Good Life instructor's workshop.

The second Clare 304 course objective is "To foster systematic reflection on the nature of the moral life as addressed through major traditions, including the Christian and Catholic-Franciscan traditions." It was agreed that as a minimum shared foundation we will all integrate the C-F tradition by means of discussing Francis as a moral exemplar, using three stories from Francis's life that exemplify the Franciscan value of inclusivity (including all others as members of the moral community). Two contexts in which this can be done (others are possible):

[a] Discussion of virtue ethics—Franciscan inclusivity as a virtue; or

[b] Discussion of the metaethical issue of moral considerability: who counts morally?—For Francis, all do.

The following readings will be required for all sections of Clare 304:

Three stories about Francis's life used in integrating C-F tradition

The Sermon on the Mount (*Matthew* 5)

The "Ring of Gyges" story from Plato's *Republic*

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II selections

Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, selections

Mill, *Utilitarianism*, selections from Ch. 2

Re [b], the Sermon on the Mount is revisited from Clare 101, and, contingent on a revision of the 101 textbook, the Aristotle selection will also be shared with 101.

An on-line course library will be created with all these sources available to all instructors. In addition, the library will contain the following materials (with others added as we go):

Francis, "The Canticle of Brother Sun" and "Testament"

The Ten Commandments (*Exodus* 20: 1-17)

The story of Abraham and Isaac (*Genesis* 22: 1-19)

New Testament passages on poverty, to be determined  
Mary Wollstonecraft, "Vindication of the Rights of Women"  
United Nations, "Universal Declaration of Human Rights"  
Martin Luther King, "Letter from Birmingham Jail"  
Isaac Bashevis Singer, "A Piece of Advice"  
Nel Noddings, "What Does It Mean to Care?"  
Virginia Held, "Meshing Care and Justice"  
*Seven Deadly Sins: A Sampler* (link to the stories, available on-line)

## Chapter 3. Samford University

### CORE TEXTS AND NARRATIVES: THE PLACE OF NARRATIVE ASSESSMENT IN THE INTELLECTUAL GROWTH OF FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS

Rosemary Fisk

Associate Dean of Howard College of Arts and Sciences, Samford University

#### INSTITUTIONAL CHOICES

##### Overview:

The leadership team of what is now named the Core Texts Program at Samford University welcomed the chance to participate in an assessment project that we believed would help us measure the highest levels of student learning in our first year program in ways that traditional assessments did not. The two-course sequence of *Cultural Perspectives* which makes up the program is itself a larger narrative containing many smaller narratives; thus, a narrative measure with qualitative indicators rather than quantitative rubrics might let us know not simply **if** but **what** our students are learning. The project would function much like a comprehensive final exam across all participating classes, but abbreviated for quick comparisons. Moreover, we rightfully assumed that any successful assessment also might alert us if the news were not good. We recruited a small group of representative faculty, whose experiences with the project ultimately caused them to reach similar conclusions. The weak results in the first year convinced them to restructure their approaches in the second year to give closer attention to frameworks in class. Likewise, the program itself needed a stronger framework to make it coherent and visible beyond the classroom. In the end, the project resulted in improved classroom teaching, and within a stronger program—results more significant than if we had simply collated and evaluated the c. 350 short essays using the usual assessment rubrics.

##### Institutional Support:

In 1997 Samford University introduced an entirely new, interdisciplinary core curriculum as part of an overhaul of General Education, intentionally making a Great Books/History of Ideas program the foundation of every entering freshman's first year. Called *Cultural Perspectives* 101 and 102, the courses intended to create a common academic experience so that even conversations in the cafeteria might be elevated beyond the tables of the privileged honors track. Prior to 1997, interdisciplinary course design had been limited primarily to the ten percent or so of honors' freshmen, who had benefited from a curricular experiment called *Cornerstone*, which featured a team-taught model and which ultimately proved too expensive to be sustainable. Even with narrow disciplinary expertise, individual faculty surely had the intellectual curiosity, we now reasoned, to learn from their colleagues across campus and to teach texts and ideas from new fields, in other words, to model lifelong learning for students. Yet if the wholesale, democratic model proved effective, how would we know beyond the thirty or so individual classrooms each semester? How could we measure these hypothetical cafeteria conversations about Aristotle and the nature of happiness or Shakespeare and the monumental in art?

Samford has maintained strong support for our Great Books program despite the unsuitability for our program of most existing assessment mechanisms, which need a capstone experience for comparison

with benchmark and milestone skills in order to prove the program's effectiveness.<sup>1</sup> Because we are a master's comprehensive university, our students often move into professional programs after one or two years. Course evaluations and program-based pre- and post-test samplings do reveal intellectual growth as evidenced by cross-cultural understanding, critical thinking, written and oral literacies, etc., but only across the first year. Thus, for the span of their undergraduate education we rely on NSSE data<sup>2</sup> to confirm that overwhelmingly, our students perceive that their first year is more intense than others, that they work closely with faculty members and other students in active projects, and that they make more in-class presentations than do their national peers. Moreover, anecdotal evidence from the professional schools and major programs within Arts and Sciences affirms that students who completed the core curriculum at Samford exhibit stronger skills than do our transfer students. Are we simply claiming that our own children are above average? What are our students actually learning in their two-course sequence of *Cultural Perspectives*, compared to what we believe we are assigning and teaching? The attraction of a narrative assessment model is that it might get at the heart of learning that quantitative measures often miss. The companion to *Cultural Perspectives* is the interdisciplinary writing and speaking sequence of *Communication Arts* 101 and 102, a program with its own assessment guidelines. Together, "CP" and "CA" comprise as much as half of the first year load.

From student recruitment to orientation sessions to the one-credit *Foundations* course in the first semester, we promote the strengths of our split-model General Education requirement that begins with the Core. As associate dean with administrative responsibility for both CP and CA, I address students in the "Core Curriculum" chapter of their *Foundations* textbook:

*A few weeks into your college education, you should be discovering that the life of the intellectual, the educated student of the liberal arts, involves more than just memorization of rules and facts. The Cultural Perspectives sequence begins with classical texts that place high moral positions into a grand dialectic with each other. Is Creon correct or is Antigone? Do we side with absolute authority or with individual freedom? If either simply wins the debate, what values are affirmed and which ones lost? The Greeks recognized that this tension between opposing forces, both right to a degree, creates a balance that is the essence of civility and civilization. As one faculty member put it, "I value a student who learns to read a text or hear another's position and then respond, "Yes, but...." "Yes" means that I have listened closely to the writer or speaker and can repeat his or her ideas. "But," followed by a response, means that I can place these ideas into a constructive tension with their opposition. Effective writing and speaking in a Communication Arts course involves the same intellectual tension. To interest and persuade an audience involves more than the sharing of one idea, however noble. The balanced mind takes effort but is the greatest mark of the wise citizen."<sup>3</sup>*

Do we produce wise citizens? Once again, our rhetoric soars beyond our capability to measure. Of course, the AAC&U rubric for Critical Thinking skills could be somewhat successful at measuring evidence of balanced, ethical thinking, but because the course is much broader than any one skill, we do most assessment at the course level by aligning course evaluation questions with the stated Learning Objectives common to each syllabus:

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<sup>1</sup> For information about all of the Association of American College and Universities' (AAC&U) resources, see: [www.aacu.org](http://www.aacu.org)

<sup>2</sup> The National Survey of Student Engagement assesses the extent to which students engage in educational practices associated with high levels of learning and development. Results from Samford student responses are archived on our Office of Institutional Effectiveness website at [www.samford.edu/oie](http://www.samford.edu/oie)

<sup>3</sup> Lori Bateman, et al, *Samford University: First Year in Focus*, Pearson Custom Publishing, 2005, p. 16.

1. Develop critical reasoning skills through the reading of significant texts and evaluating of different viewpoints and arguments.
2. Develop the ability to investigate an issue and construct a well-reasoned and coherent viewpoint.
3. Learn to communicate ideas and arguments clearly and persuasively through written and spoken means.
4. Understand the world through multiple perspectives and different world values.
5. Explore religious and moral dimensions of critical issues.
6. Appreciate how different disciplines advance understanding of cultures and civilizations and recognize the interconnectedness of the disciplines.
7. Become a part of a larger academic community.

Admittedly, items 4, 6, and 7 are difficult to measure on a Likert scale, for a student who cannot understand different world values is often unaware that she cannot; she may check “strongly agree” when in fact she has learned mere cross-cultural information. What the quantitative measure does tell us—for example with #4— is whether students agree that the course has exposed them to different world perspectives or left their own values unexamined. As an administrator, I have used these results to determine when a faculty member has withdrawn support for the agreed-upon Learning Objectives in favor of his or her own historical period or agenda. Thus, the quantitative measures have value in identifying outliers and trouble spots, but they do little to uncover the program’s success at prompting the highest levels of creative and critical thinking—the synthesis and evaluation of interconnected ideas.

### **ACTION STEPS**

In fall 2011, a faculty committee representing four disciplines (English, history, philosophy, and classics) and all instructor levels who teach in the program (from adjunct to full professor) designed our own simple assessment to try to uncover what our standard rubrics and often burdensome assessments were missing. Beyond the exams and essays, we wanted to know what our *Cultural Perspectives* students are actually learning in the two courses, as opposed to what we faculty think they are learning. How might students connect the textual and classroom narratives from a semester or a year into a meaningful meta-narrative? Would we recognize it in their own words rather than ours? We sought volunteers among the CP faculty, explaining, “Our participation will be a final exam question for CP 101, to be repeated in CP 102 as a form of narrative assessment. You may give this writing assignment as a take-home or in-class portion of the final exam—your choice. Likewise, you may weigh it as you wish. You should be willing to share the students’ work with other participating faculty at the end of the spring semester so that together we discuss what these collective responses reveal about the strengths and weaknesses of the CP program.”

Final exam prompt: If CP 101 tells a story, how would you describe the narrative? If it doesn’t, why not? Where does the story begin, and where does it end? As part of this narrative, what would you say are the most important ideas and themes in CP 101? How do these themes connect through history from the ancient world to the Renaissance?

Again at the end of the spring semester, we repeated the prompt for CP 102 (restricting the questions to connections from the Renaissance to the Global Village) and then collected the bookended responses from instructor volunteers (Doug Clapp (101) and Rosemary Fisk (102), Jason Wallace (101 and 102), Brickey LeQuire (101 and 102), and Allison Hepola (101 and 102). Bridget Rose came aboard in the final semester for a stand-alone assessment (102). The number of sections participating (30 of 128) equaled about one-fourth of the total offered, an adequate statistical sample.

The results from the first year of the project indicated that overwhelmingly, students could not recall connections as much as they could identify key themes such as discovery, knowledge, change,

democracy, social class, multiple perspectives, education, and knowledge of oneself, among others. Perhaps we did not ask the question well, or more likely, we did not provide a coherent structure upfront. At the very least, the results indicated the need for more commonality across sections so that key ideas might be reinforced with co-curricular enrichment events and discussions. Faculty often gave extra credit for attendance at a theatre production, or an evening lecture on Roman gladiators by a classicist, or on sustainable farming by a poet— but these events did not always coincide intentionally with particular units in the course.

However, even the weaker responses indicated that students had learned that ideas matter. One wrote, “CP tells the story of how we have arrived to view the world as we do today. It is not like a history class where one is told various facts to remember about the past, but rather we experience the views of the people of our past to understand their actual perspectives.” An inspirational thread clearly ran throughout the responses, with one student’s expression fairly typical: “CP’s most important idea is that change is possible with passion and action by an individual. All of the writers we studied wished to enlighten the public about their opinions and try to provoke thought and ignite change to better the world.” At this broad interpretive level, the program was challenging students to think about their own meaning and mission in the world, to reconcile their spiritual and humanistic values within complex historical frameworks that the university’s Christian identity might otherwise simplify for them, however unintentionally.

In the second year of our project, we continued to use the same essay prompt but with more in-class discussion and review of the over-arching ideas that give coherence to readings across time and space. At midyear, Allison Hepola again reported disappointment with the results, as she had stressed Aristotelian teleology throughout the 101 course but did not see substantive responses to her connecting narrative: “The world is the child of Athens and Jerusalem.” Dr. Hepola reported, “After reading all the responses, I felt like almost no one in CP ‘got it.’ I am still glad that I asked them this question; having the students answer this question functions sort of like a teaching evaluation - I can see what material, what themes, etc. from the course stuck in their mind, and which ones did not. It is helpful to know that going forward with CP 102 next spring and with CP 101 next year.”

Dr. Hepola then began 102 in the spring with the same question, but adding that this child is now a rebellious teenager as the medieval *telos* is breaking down. As it turned out, this initial nudge and a concluding assignment from Alasdair MacIntyre’s *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* helped students articulate a meta-narrative about the rise of pluralistic societies as humanity tries to make sense of differing ideas to find a “common good.” She was elated with the responses this time and believes that her students needed this secondary reading in MacIntyre to make sense of what they had already encountered from Aristotle to Nietzsche. Her students’ essays overwhelmingly revealed that they had reached intellectual milestones during the year and were thinking philosophically and even originally.

Other participating instructors enjoyed similarly rewarding feedback at the end of this second year of the narrative assessment project. Jason Wallace realized that he must make the embedded course structure more intentionally overt. He now lists four categories on the board the first day of class and explains that the great texts will somehow get at the big questions in these categories: 1. Human Nature 2. Nature (Science) 3. Metaphysics 4. Political Community. Because any culture in the world holds conversations about these topics, why are we starting with the Greeks? (We have sources that survive). As he explained, “throughout the year, I continuously reminded them *what* we are talking about.” Later, he elevated the essay prompt to make it a formal essay assignment, and these essays provide solid evidence for intellectual growth in the course. Typical is one opening line: “What I’ve learned in Cultural

Perspectives is that the search for truth is an everlasting and continuous journey.” The student then correlated struggles from the journey of Aeneas to similar questionings in Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas before concluding, “From all these works, I have learned not to be afraid of ideas that challenge my beliefs but to entertain them to seek truth.”

## **INFORMED JUDGMENTS AND FURTHER IMPROVEMENTS**

The uninspiring results from the first year of our assessment project convinced ourselves first, and then the Samford administration, that the program needed more structured and involved leadership. Jason Wallace has been named the first director of our “Core Texts Program” and has begun using the assessment evidence to argue the need for resources to support shared enrichment activities that underscore the basic units in CP 101 and 102. To that end, Dr. Wallace is planning four large lecture events per year that will be along the narrative arc—from the connection between faith and reason, to Renaissance art or drama, to modern fragmentation, to globalization. Faculty have already voiced appreciation for the support their course content received this past year with the Samford Theatre production of *King Lear* during the Renaissance unit in 101, and a Fulbright Scholar panel discussion of *Arab Spring in Egypt* during the Global Village unit in 102. He has redesigned the CP website and printed promotional materials to echo the overarching categories of Inquiry, Discussion, Faith, and Reason.

The assessment results are also helping the CP faculty body choose common and supplementary texts and make recommendations for revisions to the Sourcebook anthologies for both courses. The new reading lists will reflect shared parameters, or Core Texts, as the new name indicates. The assessment project began just as the original *Cultural Perspectives* program had turned fifteen years old and grown stale in many cases. The project is providing indisputable evidence that students need more help in understanding bigger questions of meaning. We have begun to employ multiple reinforcements to the shared units and expect the results to lead to more commonality and coherence across sections.

Parenthetically, although individual faculty assigned a quantitative value to the students’ responses as part of the final exam (for example, 5 points maximum, with the average grade just above 3), we have resisted the temptation to quantify this assessment and fall into the trap of mere compliance. The report below in the “Appendix” serves as evidence that the project can be ongoing as faculty other than the original participants use the narrative assessment prompt to assess intellectual growth beyond the knowledge often indicated on final exams. We sincerely hope that the project will continue to direct us towards meaningful discussions about what our students are learning.

## **APPENDIX:**

### Summary of Narrative Assessment Project for CP 102 Class Bridget Rose

One of the challenges in my classroom has been my uncertainty over whether or not I was able to communicate effectively when I asked students to think beyond the information covered in class. Were they understanding the key themes and ideas of each assigned text and also making connections among multiple texts? Did they understand what I was asking them to do? While I worked to make the content accessible and understandable to students from a variety of backgrounds, some of whom were non-native English speakers, the key to what I see as this course’s success seemed to lie in the collaborative learning approach, which formed the pedagogical framework of the class. I believe that my stated expectations for student collaboration contributed significantly to the students’ ability to discover the larger narratives at work in intellectual history.

For our final class of the semester, I asked the students to divide themselves into groups of five or six and brainstorm responses to the following question: “What are the ‘big questions’ that CP answers (or tries to answer)?” Put another way, “what are the ideas that seem to appear in multiple texts that we have read this semester?” They worked for about 15 minutes, and then I asked them to report back. While they were talking, I listed the texts that we had read the second half of the semester on the boards on three walls in our classroom. Texts to be covered on the final exam included:

- *Frankenstein*
- Darwin’s *Origin of the Species*
- *Communist Manifesto*
- *Life in the Iron Mills*
- *Things Fall Apart*
- *The Myth of Sisyphus*
- *To Live*
- *The Kite Runner*

The groups then identified these “big ideas” of the course that carry through these readings:

- What does it mean to be human?
- What does it mean to have a meaningful life?
- What is our responsibility to others?
- How do we live “in relationship”?
- Theme of divisions among people. (They initially had in mind Marx’s Bourgeoisie and Proletariat but unpacked it further to discuss male and female, as well as divisions within divisions.)
- Are humans limited? (in regard to knowledge or actions)
- How should we live?
- What is justice?
- Theme of “payback,” related to both revenge and redemption. What does it mean when we are wronged? What about when we wrong others?
- Are human beings evolving and getting better?
- What is true/Truth?

This was basically the same list I had come up with, though not always in the same words. We then turned our attention back to the texts, and keeping the “big ideas” in mind, they began to identify the themes that they thought were important in each of the readings (making connections to other texts to expand on later).

**Frankenstein:**

- Power/danger of knowledge
- Revenge
- Isolation/abandonment
- Nature (natural world)
- Environment’s influence (Locke)
- Relationships
- Controlling fate/playing God

**Origin of the Species:**

- Evolution
- Natural Selection/adaptation

- Social Darwinism – class distinctions

**Communist Manifesto:**

- Class distinctions (Bourgeoisie/Proletariat)
- Class struggles
- Meaningful work
- Equality opportunities
- Common good

**Life in the Iron Mills:**

- Class distinctions
- Class struggles
- Meaningful work
- Equality opportunities
- Common good/responsibility to others?
- Meaning of life?
- Why should we live?

**Things Fall Apart:**

- Relationships (Father/Son—weak father/strong son)
- Masculinity/gender
- Change and tradition
- Adapting (or not)
- Power/what is success?

**Myth of Sisyphus:**

- Meaningless work/life
- Accepting your fate
- Why live?

**To Live:**

- What is the meaning of life? What matters?
- Why do we keep on living when we suffer?
- Family
- Storytelling

**The Kite Runner:**

- Redemption (“way to be good again”)
- Relationships (Father/Son—strong father/weak son)
- Storytelling
- Class divisions
- Past

The students were particularly surprised by all of the overlap they saw between texts and themes. Visually, it was striking to fill the boards that literally surrounded us as we discussed. Most of the students used their phones to take pictures of the boards before we dismissed.

As part of the final exam, students were asked to respond to the original narrative assessment prompt (“If CP 102 tells a story . . .”) to determine whether they were able to take these ideas we discussed during the review and relate them to a particular narrative within CP. The results indicated substantive thinking and intellectual growth, especially when compared to the responses to a similar prompt the previous semester. I believe that the group review session was necessary to begin nudging their thoughts beyond any one “right answer” so that they could perceive all texts as contributing to larger ideas that matter. The assessment project forced me to pay attention to how students make this cognitive leap.

## Chapter 4. Lynchburg College

### **NARRATIVE ASSESSMENT AS A MEANS OF EVALUATING STUDENT DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER ORDER THINKING OR LIBERAL LEARNING IN A ONE-SEMESTER COURSE**

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#### **Narrative Assessment in a Single Semester Course**

#### **INSTITUTIONAL CHOICES**

Lynchburg College and specifically the Senior Symposium program have been engaged in a preliminary process of developing a means of narrative assessment to complement the more traditional quantitative means of assessment of student learning and development. The Senior Symposium course served as a strong fit for this direction, as it is a course that engages students in humanistic learning through the examination of core texts or great books reexamined in the light of public lectures and personal experience. The goal was to determine if a suitable structure could be articulated that would allow a faculty member to provide a concise written analysis of an individual's progress towards a more humanistic approach to thinking and learning.

#### Introduction:

The Senior Symposium is a senior capstone course that has existed since 1976. The focus of this course is for students to encounter broad, modern issues, problems and ideas that are not within the scope of standard disciplinary courses. These themes are then compared and examined in the light of great books and/or core texts; the students write and speak on the confluence of the readings and ideas they are encountering during the course of a semester. Students are expected to engage the texts through weekly lectures, student led discussions, and short papers exhibiting higher order thinking about a point of congruence between these sources. The Senior Symposium is structured on a set of five college-wide goals adopted by the faculty; it asks students to inquire, explore, conclude, persuade, and engage as they encounter ideas through the lectures and readings. For inquiry, students frame questions to address issues and uncertainties. In exploration students investigate issues in depth and detail. For a conclusion students develop informed responses to the issues they encounter. Through persuasive speech and written communication they convince their peers and faculty of the value and validity of their conclusions. Finally, students engage the topics and ideas to use their knowledge and abilities for the good of self and society.

To achieve these five goals the Senior Symposium course has a series of twelve public lectures during the course of the semester. Up to twenty four students are assigned to a specific faculty member whose task is to guide their development in writing, speaking and higher order thinking skills through the engagement with the lecture topics and assigned texts. Lynchburg College has a ten volume series, The Lynchburg College Symposium Readings Series, of selections of complete or excerpted core texts on

which the students can draw. One to three of the specific volumes are selected for use in each semester. Following each lecture the students write a short paper, no more than three pages in length, analyzing an idea, point, or topic of their choosing, using the lecture and the assigned reading selections as the basis for evidence in making their argument. At the end of the semester students then write two exam essays that draw on the whole of the course in supporting their position or argument.

As part of the Senior Symposium and the associated Lynchburg College Symposium Readings (LCSR) program, faculty are trained in the use of the Wolcott-Lynch model for evaluating critical or higher order thinking.<sup>1</sup> This is a developmental model of higher order thinking which posits that thinking skills develop over time and that a general level of higher order thinking skill can be determined and promoted through examination of written work. The scale for the Wolcott – Lynch model runs from zero to four, with zero being the most basic type of thinking in which there is always a correct answer to any problem or question, and four being highly functional strategic thinking that balances diverse views and understanding of issues to construct knowledge and draw well supported conclusions. For undergraduate students such as those examined in this project, a goal of level two thinking upon graduation is a significant achievement. Level two thinkers understand issues and problems in a balanced fashion and control their individual biases in an attempt to reach sound conclusions based upon evidence.

## **ACTION STEPS**

The narrative assessment project was piloted during the spring 2012 semester of Senior Symposium. Four of the eight faculty serving as section instructors during that semester volunteered to participate. In successive semesters all teaching faculty in the course were asked to provide a narrative assessment report. In the initial pilot faculty were to select six students for end of course evaluation, and were asked to track the students' progress during the semester, keeping a simple journal on each one. It was determined that this was too labor intensive, and the pre-course selection of students for evaluation was dropped. At the end of the semester each faculty member reviewed the development of individual student progress by examining the submitted papers. Individual students were to submit between 9 and 12 short papers, approximately 2-3 pages each, and two final exam essays at 3-5 pages each. For each selected student the faculty member would then write a brief summary analysis of the development of student learning in a liberal arts context during that semester. These summaries were to be limited to, at maximum, a single page on each student. As some of the pre-selected students dropped the course prior to its completion, in succeeding semesters the course director randomly selected the students for evaluation for each section of the course.

During the time of the narrative assessment several different anchor texts were used as the basis for discussion. For the spring of 2012 the anchor text was *Essay on the Principle of Population* by Thomas Malthus. For the fall of 2012 the anchor text was *The Souls of Black Folk* by W.E.B. DuBois, and for the spring of 2013 the anchor text was *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley. In the spring of 2012 the overall theme of the course was population, while in fall of 2012 and spring of 2013 the course theme was free will.

In addition to the potential for developing a tool for non-quantitative assessment of student development along the lines of humanistic or liberal learning, the narrative assessment project also has the potential to support Lynchburg College's ongoing Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), currently being developed to target the use of evidence in making an argument. Institutional data have suggested that students struggle with selecting, using, and developing strong and clear lines of evidence from both

written sources (core texts) and oral sources, such as the public lectures featured in Senior Symposium. A secondary outcome of this project will be to provide a more holistic means of determining if and possibly how our students' skills in higher order thinking are developing during the progress of a single course.

## INFORMED JUDGMENTS

Over the course of three consecutive semesters of Senior Symposium a total of 93 individual students were evaluated based on their progress or development of humanistic or liberal learning as evidenced by their abilities to examine modern problems and issues through the use of core texts (See Table I). During this three semester period thirteen separate faculty contributed to narrative assessment of students. In reviewing the written reports of these individual faculty members the author categorized the observed student performance into three categories; strong development, mild to moderate development, or no change in performance. This last category is unfortunately vague, as it was not always clear from the narrative whether the student in question was already performing at a high level and thus was not showing evidence of growth because of this high level of performance, or if the reverse was true, that the student began the class at a poor level of performance and did not show evidence of progress.

In three semesters only five students out of 93 were considered to have shown evidence of strong progress in liberal learning. In these cases the students were commonly described as hard working and dedicated. In several instances they sought out faculty assistance in order to improve their approach to the written papers. An example of the faculty comment on one of these students is as follows: "She worked hard over the semester to improve her writing – not only mechanics such as citations and grammar, but also closer reading of the texts, more effective use of sources, incorporation of personal experiences, and attention to and practice of development of theses and critical-based arguments." This is the ideal goal we would have for all our students across the course and the curriculum in general.

SEMESTER	# of Sections Evaluated	# of Students Evaluated	No Progress	Some Progress	Significant Progress
Spring 2012	4 of 8	23	9	12	2
Fall 2012	5 of 8	35	19	14	2
Spring 2013	5 of 8	35	16	18	1
TOTAL	14 of 24	93	44	44	5

**Table I**

Pattern of Assessment of Humanistic or Liberal Learning in GS 435 Senior Symposium. Data were collected for three consecutive semesters.

Though only a small minority of students showed clear evidence of strong gains in humanistic or liberal learning skills, 44 of the selected students were determined to have shown evidence of mild to moderate progress. In some cases this progress was observed in individual students developing confidence in their own ideas and thoughts as they attempted to synthesize an argument when using a collection of sources that may not have naturally fit together. In other instances it was observed in students progressing and regressing, depending upon the level of challenge posed by the texts and ideas involved, but showing a net positive gain by the end of the semester. As an example, this is, in part, the analysis of a student who made some gains during the course of the semester: "The student probably did not lack the desire to read the texts in a careful way, but did not have the practice or skill in reading texts that were relatively dense, abstract and complex. Yet the student, in my judgment, made a serious

effort to relate ideas from the readings to the paper. I had the impression that she became more adept at understanding the readings and relating them to advance and support the arguments in her paper.” This type of progress was not uncommon among the students who were evaluated. In another example, a different faculty member wrote of a student who began the semester with a low confidence in writing: “I believe the student’s confidence increased by the end of the semester because she received consistently good grades on her papers, and she realized how influential the classic texts were on her own burgeoning teaching philosophy.” In both these cases student engagement and effort in dealing with the conjunction of modern issues and classical or core texts at least initiated the process by which they can begin to develop the means to examine the world from a broader more humanistic perspective.

The final group of 44 students was determined to have no change in their development of humanistic or liberal learning skills over the course of the narrative assessment project. For this category of assessment this judgment could be the result of at least two different types of student. In the first case, an analysis that results in a determination of no change or growth in students could occur because they are already operating on a fairly advanced level at this point in their college career. For example, this assessment of a student from the spring of 2013: “She understood what was going on from the get-go and evidenced a high level of performance the whole way.” Another example is shown in this comment from the spring of 2012: “He was a strong writer and clear thinker right from the beginning.” In both of these examples and many others the students had already developed excellent higher order thinking skills and the ability to apply them to a diversity of perspectives and issues and produce strong, cogent analysis.

The alternate position, in which no change occurs, is observed when students enter the class at a low level and show no progress over the course of the semester. This could be due to a variety of reasons. In the individual analyses it may not be because the student is incapable of progressing, but rather because the individual in question is not committed to such a goal. For example, a common type of comment is reflected in this analysis: “He is a bright and capable student who was never fully committed to the course.” This can be interpreted to suggest that the subject matter and student engagement may have a great deal to do with whether noticeable progress in liberal learning actually occurs.

## **FURTHER IMPROVEMENTS**

The intent of this project was to develop a means of generating a narrative assessment of student development in humanistic or liberal learning in a single semester course in which the students involved were using great books or core texts as the basis for progress in exercising their skills of higher order thinking. During the three semesters in which this project was conducted a total of 93 students were evaluated for their personal growth in their higher order thinking skills. The simple assessment determined that more than half of these students made progress in this area, 49 out of 93 (Table I). This suggests that there is value to this type of approach in order to complement more traditional, quantitative means of assessment.

The faculty participating in this project found that such a project poses its own sets of challenges and rewards. The positive aspects of this approach to assessment are outcomes that yield a greater and more individual knowledge of student learning compared with those produced using exclusively quantitative means, which tend to categorize students, who may have substantial differences in intellectual growth and development, by the same numerical designation. For this type of analysis to be

useful to both the institution and the student regular conversation between the faculty member and the student must occur.

The challenges posed by this approach are what make it a difficult process to implement broadly. First, a narrative assessment such as this is more labor intensive. This added effort, though often rewarding, is made even more difficult with a class section size of 24. Secondly, this evaluation is subject to potential bias in several ways. Since the instructor involved provides grades to students, as well as determining their personal growth in the area of liberal learning or higher order thinking, these disparate end points may create a conflict that results in a positive or negative narrative bias without the instructor's realization of such a bias. Furthermore, since this is not a blinded means of assessment, the current structure cannot absolve the individual faculty member involved of this potential bias. An alternate structure would be to collect a selection of papers from randomly selected students and have other instructors write the narrative in a blinded fashion. This would eliminate this bias, but would also produce the loss of general knowledge about the student that may reflect their progress towards the goal of liberal learning.

Overall this approach, within the structure of a single one-semester course, appears to have some value. The amount of effort expended by an individual faculty member in order to generate the end product limits this value. For small courses that feature writing based upon great books or core texts as the tool for developing liberal learning this model should be sufficient. As the class size increases the return on the investment will decline. In such a course as Senior Symposium only a selection of students within the course were evaluated, since pursuing such an assessment of 24 students during the course of semester would be too labor intensive to be productive. An alternate approach could be to collect written works from students generated in response to classical texts and periodically evaluate individual students' growth or development of liberal learning.

#### Citations:

1. WolcottLynch [Internet]. 2006. Bellevue (WA): Steps to better thinking; [last modified 2006, Feb 10]. Available from <http://wolcottlynch.com/>

#### Acknowledgement:

I would like to acknowledge the following Lynchburg College faculty members who taught in the Senior Symposium course during this time and contributed their evaluations to this project. Professor Nina Salmon, Dr. Jessica Brophy, Professor Lyndall Nairn, Dr. Harvey Huiner, Dr. Candace Todd, Dr. James Price, Professor Beth Packert, Professor Nicole Smith, Dr. Joseph Freeman, Professor Carol Martin, Professor Frank Whitehouse, Dr. Kern Lunsford and Dr. Edith Simms.

## **Chapter 5. Fresno Pacific University**

### **NARRATIVE ASSESSMENT PROJECT**

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#### **INSTITUTIONAL CHOICES**

Fresno Pacific University's participation in the Narrative Assessment Project came in conjunction with the university's preparation for a WASC (Western Association of Schools and Colleges) accreditation review. A comprehensive campus-wide assessment system was being developed that worked on refining or revising Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) at the level of courses, programs and the university, producing curriculum maps, identifying signature assignments, developing rubrics and entering the information into a new data management system. This activity set the context and influenced the narrative assessment plan in GE. The description that follows sketches the system design and how the Narrative Assessment Project fits within this larger system. Data collection began in the 2013-2014 academic year, with analysis to follow during spring and summer 2014.

The General Education program has retained its structure, but is being reinvigorated through the process of re-articulating and designing a more comprehensive assessment framework. Student learning outcomes have been revised. A quantitative course-level assessment system is developing. The narrative assessment plan builds on these elements in order to provide richer and more appropriate qualitative methods of assessing the goals of the program and, in particular, the use of core texts. Program reviews will draw from quantitative and qualitative, course-embedded and non-embedded elements (e.g., NSSE, CSS/CIRP, CAT, portfolios) to provide multiple perspectives on student learning.

Assessment in general, and GE assessment specifically, has received significant support from the Provost and the academic committees. The entire university has been focused on getting a viable campus-wide assessment program in place as part of the accreditation process. Staff, data management systems, and training are important resources that have been provided. GE has received support to send teams to the AAC&U (Association of American Colleges and Universities) summer workshop on GE Assessment, to a WASC Retreat on Student Success, and to a WASC Retreat on Core Competencies. Departmental and program meetings centered on assessment have stimulated positive conversations and changes to planning and curriculum design. The enormity of the institutional project and the relatively short time-span did create tensions. Other work continued as the assessment pieces created additional demands. Occasional miscommunication about expectations, timelines, definitions and processes created expected resistance and cynicism among some. However, the efforts have also generated critical dialogue and improvements within and between segments of the campus.

#### **ACTION STEPS**

One of the initial steps for the campus was to refine the university student learning outcomes (SLOs). Each program was to refine its SLOs and link them to the university SLOs. The same was to be done at

the course level. The GE committee spent nearly a year creating and refining new SLOs from the program description that had previously operated as *de facto* SLOs. The revisions were vetted through the faculty caucuses of the schools with GE courses. A significant advance was made when the SLOs were unhooked from specific program elements. In order to explain the significance for the narrative assessment project, the core, titled Stories of People and Cultures, will be described.

The GE program consists of four parts: 1) Stories of Peoples and Cultures, 2) Tools of Inquiry, 3) Modes of Inquiry, and 4) Stewardship of the Body. The core consists of an initial course titled Jesus and the Christian Community that covers the Gospel of Matthew as a core text for the program and university. There are three courses in a world civilization series: Ancient, Medieval-Early Modern, and Modern Civilizations. Each of these courses incorporates core texts. A biblical literature course requires students to examine an additional one or more core texts from the biblical canon. The Focus Series completes the core with two upper division courses linked by a common topic that draw from one course in Religion, Theology or Ministry and another in a disciplinary offering, e.g., ENV 150-Introduction to Environmental Studies and THEO 425-Theological Ethics of the Environment. There are roughly a dozen pre-approved linked series. Many of these series utilize core texts. The unspoken assumption seemed to be that the Stories of People and Cultures core of GE was the primary, if not sole, place where SLOs related to "story" were housed because that was how the program was articulated. This assumption was unmasked and became a key moment for reframing the relationship between program SLOs and structure. The result was unhooking the rigid link between program structure and SLOs and now includes a set of SLOs that can be measured throughout the GE program. Required communication courses as well as introductory courses in other disciplines are now seen as having vital functions in teaching and assessing "story" elements. The same change occurred in relation to the other SLO categories. This had the effect of inviting other parts of the GE program into conversation about core texts and narrative assessment and de-privileging courses, or removing inordinate pressure on some, as the only place an outcome was housed. A clear example of this is the way that writing has become more owned across the curriculum and not merely the responsibility of the English and Communication faculty. The university SLOs are linked to the GE SLOs as demonstrated in the following chart.

GE Program Student Learning Objectives:

*Story*

1. Students will demonstrate comprehension of the *Christian* story, beginning with the central story of Jesus and continuing with the story of the church, with particular attention to the Anabaptists.
2. Students will demonstrate comprehension of *their own and other people's* stories in relation to personal, cultural and historical contexts.
3. Students will demonstrate comprehension of *disciplinary* narratives and methodologies and their interaction with Christian faith traditions.

*Communication, Critical Thinking, Information Literacy*

4. Students will demonstrate competency in oral communication
5. Students will demonstrate competency in written communication
6. Students will demonstrate competency in mediated communication
7. Students will demonstrate competency in quantitative communication
8. Students will demonstrate competency in multi-lingual communication
9. Students will demonstrate the comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts, events, contexts, ethical perspectives and ramifications, demonstrating inductive and deductive reasoning and disciplinary methodology, and utilizing quantitative and qualitative information, before accepting or formulating an opinion or pursuing a course of action.

10. Students will identify information needed in order to fully understand a topic or task, explain how that information is organized, identify the best sources of information for a given enquiry, locate and critically evaluate sources, and accurately and effectively share that information.

*Stewardship*

11. Students will demonstrate knowledge of the nature of wellness and become skillful in the holistic care of self.
12. Students will demonstrate the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make a difference in the life of communities.

**University and GE Student Learning Objectives**

<b>University</b>	<b>General Education</b>
<p><b>1. Oral Communication:</b> Students will <i>exhibit</i> clear, engaging, and confident oral communication – in both individual and group settings – and will critically <i>evaluate</i> content and delivery components.</p>	<p>4. Students will demonstrate competency in oral communication</p>
<p><b>2. Written Communication:</b> Students will <i>demonstrate</i> proficient written communication by <i>articulating</i> a clear focus, <i>synthesizing</i> arguments, and utilizing standard formats in order to <i>inform</i> and <i>persuade</i> others.</p>	<p>5. Students will demonstrate competency in written communication</p>
<p><b>3. Content Knowledge:</b> Students will <i>demonstrate</i> comprehension of content-specific knowledge and the ability to apply it in theoretical, personal, professional, or societal contexts.</p>	<p>1. Students will demonstrate comprehension of the <i>Christian</i> story, beginning with the central story of Jesus and continuing with the story of the church, with particular attention to the Anabaptists</p> <p>3. Students will demonstrate comprehension of <i>disciplinary</i> narratives and methodologies and their interaction with Christian faith traditions</p>
<p><b>4. Reflection:</b> Students will <i>reflect</i> on their personal and professional growth and <i>provide evidence</i> of how such reflection is utilized to manage personal and vocational improvement.</p>	<p>11. Students will demonstrate knowledge of the nature of wellness and become skillful in the holistic care of self.</p>
<p><b>5. Critical Thinking:</b> Students will <i>apply</i> critical thinking competencies by <i>generating</i> probing questions, <i>recognizing</i> underlying assumptions, <i>interpreting</i> and <i>evaluating</i> relevant information, and <i>applying</i> their understandings to new situations.</p>	<p>9. Students will demonstrate the comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts, events, contexts, ethical perspectives and ramifications, demonstrating inductive and deductive reasoning and disciplinary methodology, and utilizing quantitative and qualitative information, before accepting or formulating an opinion or pursuing a course of action.</p>
<p><b>6. Moral Reasoning:</b> Students will <i>identify</i> and <i>apply</i> moral reasoning and ethical decision-making skills, and <i>articulate</i> the norms and</p>	<p>12. Students will demonstrate the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make a difference in the life of communities</p>

principles underlying a Christian world-view.	
<b>7. Service:</b> Students will <i>demonstrate</i> service and reconciliation as a way of leadership.	11. Students will demonstrate knowledge of the nature of wellness and become skillful in the holistic care of self. 12. Students will demonstrate the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make a difference in the life of communities
<b>8. Cultural and Global Perspective:</b> Students will <i>identify</i> personal, cultural, and global perspectives and will employ these perspectives to <i>evaluate</i> complex systems.	2. Students will demonstrate comprehension of <i>their own and other people's</i> stories in relation to personal, cultural and historical contexts.
<b>9. Quantitative Reasoning:</b> Students will accurately <i>compute</i> calculations and symbolic operations and <i>explain</i> their use in a field of study.	7. Students will demonstrate competency in quantitative communication.
<b>10. Information Literacy:</b> Students will <i>identify</i> information needed in order to fully understand a topic or task, <i>explain</i> how that information is organized, <i>identify</i> the best sources of information for a given enquiry, <i>locate</i> and critically <i>evaluate</i> sources, and accurately and effectively <i>share</i> that information.	10. Students will identify information needed in order to fully understand a topic or task, explain how that information is organized, identify the best sources of information for a given enquiry, locate and critically evaluate sources, and accurately and effectively share that information.

The new articulation of the learning outcomes to the structure of GE presumes that all courses will draw from outcomes in more than one category. This provides a significantly richer set of resources for narrative assessment not only for the story section, but also the core competencies and stewardship.

Another key component that is being developed is a new way of articulating the program. Currently under development is a framework that uses the theme of the "journey" as a way to provide coherence to the learning objectives and to the program structure. Adapted from Joseph Campbell's "hero's journey", as well as other types of journey frameworks, the theme involves encountering and becoming oriented to self, others, disciplines, and the broader world through stories, i.e., narratives. Core competencies are required and honed while on the journey. The purpose of the journey is to become better stewards of one's own life, various communities, and the broader world. One goal in using this way to articulate GE is to make the requirements more understandable, but a more significant goal is to encourage students to understand and own their own journeys. To this end, pieces that are being discussed and implemented for assessment are also viewed as significant moments of learning.

Course embedded assignments will provide a significant amount of assessment material early in the redesign process. Linked courses in the focus series are being encouraged to develop assignments that will help measure the student's journey. GE is also tapping into capstone courses in majors that already incorporate assignments that can be used for GE assessment. Some majors utilize portfolios that are useful resources for this purpose. Liberal Studies, one of the largest majors, began a redesign in summer 2013 that aligns with the GE assessment goals and includes more linked courses and a portfolio designed around the journey theme. A similar process is underway in the Degree Completion program GE. More majors will be brought into the discussion in order to identify or create mutually beneficial assignments. The freshmen seminar is also being revised (due for completion fall 2013) and may

incorporate initial components of a "journey" portfolio. The required freshmen Bible course already includes assignments that allow baseline data to be gathered. These open-ended questions include "Who do I say Jesus is?" and "Who am I", which is a social location essay. Follow-up questions at the end of the first semester ask students to comment on the perception of their own growth, particularly as related to the core text of the Gospel of Matthew. In addition to course embedded assignments, such as the one above, where they utilize core texts, students will be asked to comment in capstone experiences on the impact of core texts used in GE courses on their journey. A survey of core text used in introductory level course in fall 2011 resulted in the following list:

Ann Sexton, *Transformations*  
Arthur Miller, *The Death of a Salesman*  
Augustine, *Confessions*  
Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*  
*Beowulf*  
Buchi Emecheta, *The Slave Girl*  
Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*  
Clifton Taulbert, *Once Upon A Time When We Were Colored*  
Dante, *Inferno*  
Elizabeth Gaskell, *Lois the Witch*  
*Epic of Gilgamesh*  
Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*  
Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Grimm's Fairy Tales*  
Jung Chang, *Wild Swans*  
Le Ly Hayslip, *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places*  
Livy, *The History of Rome, Books 1-5*  
Machiavelli, *The Prince*  
More, *Utopia*  
Oliver Goldsmith, *She Stoops to Conquer*  
Plato, *The Republic*  
Plato, *The Trial and Death of Socrates*  
*Ramayana*  
Sharyn McCrum, *St. Dale*  
Shusaku Endo, *Silence*  
Tacitus, *Agricola and Germania*  
Homer  
*Gospel of Matthew*  
Virgil, *Aeneid*  
William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*  
William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*

The GE Committee will be interested in the increase or decrease in use of core texts as the project develops. There is particular interest in whether courses that have not traditionally used core texts will begin to do so as a way to help students understand the story of their disciplines.

Assessment rubrics are being developed for every course and program. The diversity of courses in GE presents a particular challenge to developing rubrics that are useful across the program. Numerous meetings were needed to reach consensus on an initial writing rubric. The conversation about assumptions and expectations was perhaps as useful as the end result. The same process is underway

for rubrics for other SLOs. The regular use and review of these tools will continue to foster vigorous conversation. In addition to rubrics, the GE committee is planning to utilize some open-ended qualitative observations about samples of artifacts. The purpose is to remain open to learning that is happening that the rubrics do not assess and to discover areas that may need to be incorporated into future revisions of rubrics. Faculty who are versed in qualitative assessment are being drawn into the design of this aspect of the project.

The GE program is on a 7-year assessment cycle. A limited number of SLOs will be identified for review each year. In addition to the GE committee, teams of faculty will assess artifacts and discuss results. The assessment data management system allows artifacts from specific courses to be moved to a repository for assessment by other teams. Assessors can access the artifacts at their convenience, and a time limit for completion of assessments can be added, thereby necessitating fewer scheduled meetings and increasing productivity. The GE program incurs no additional costs, since the database system is funded by the university assessment structure. Compensation for faculty participation in non-course embedded assessment is under development.

The GE committee, which currently reports to the Undergraduate Academic Committee and to the Degree Completion Academic Committee, is the initial recipient of assessment information. Given the distributive nature of the program, with courses being housed in three different schools each with its own dean, one of whom is also dean for Traditional Undergraduate Programs, the potential for conflict during proposed changes is significant. The Provost is working to formalize the role of the committee and the director within the university structure and to continue facilitating faculty involvement and cooperation. In this lengthy process creative relationship-building has mitigated many potential conflicts.

### **INFORMED JUDGEMENTS: PARADIGM BECOMES POLICY?**

Since the program is still in development, it is premature to comment on the value of the information for decision-making. However, previous assessment in writing and mathematics has provided greater clarification of faculty practices and student learning, resulting in changes ranging from entrance requirements to course structures to greater inter-departmental collaboration. Similar results are anticipated as the project expands.

Perhaps more significantly, we anticipate that students will better understand and own their own learning when provided with a better framework. The use of self-reflective questions in the freshmen Bible course reveals that students are more aware of their initial lack of reflection and parochial views. While they still hold many of the same views, those have been expanded and tempered by the encounter with the core texts and with the stories of other students. The faculty in the course continues to revise assignments to enable the learning that they expect and that can already observe.

## Chapter 6. Carthage College

### ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVE ASSESSMENT REPORT

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July 22, 2013

#### INSTITUTIONAL CHOICES: ESTABLISHING OR IMPROVING CORE TEXT COURSES

After a pilot period that took place over the course of the 2007-2008 academic year, the faculty of Carthage College approved a motion in spring 2009 to replace its existing Heritage Studies Program with two separate courses, Western Heritage and Global Heritage. The Western Heritage course is a year-long seminar that treats key texts of the Western intellectual tradition in a roughly chronological order. In general, 45 sections of Western Heritage, carrying a Writing Intensive designation, are taught each semester. Between five and six of those sections are designated Honors with an enrollment capped at 16. Two other sections are designated for students who either need to repeat the course after withdrawing or receiving a failing grade or for students who transfer to Carthage after their freshman year. The 38 regular-track sections originally had an upper enrollment limit of 21, which was lowered for the first time in the 2012-2013 academic year to 19 students.

Over the course of Carthage's previous accreditation process, as well as through subsequent internal reviews, assessment here as elsewhere has become a full, College-wide initiative. It happened, coincidentally, that the move to Western Heritage occurred as assessment at Carthage was gaining steam, leading to the interesting parallel development of the Alternative Narrative Assessment Process along with the more regular, but also in ways quite distinctive, process of quantitative assessment. As a result, Carthage is in an extraordinary position—perhaps uniquely positioned—to triangulate the development of first-year students.

In fall 2011, Julio Rivera, Provost of Carthage College, made the initial decision to participate in the ACTC Narrative Assessment Project, and in subsequent meetings decided that the necessary work would be undertaken by the faculty committee that oversees the Western Heritage course. Unfortunately, Carthage was engaged in a major overhaul of its committee structures, which led to irregular meetings and not much more progress than a drafting of provisional project aims, which were presented at ACTC's annual conference, sponsored by Carthage, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The following was presented at the Advisory Board of ACTC Liberal Arts Institute Meeting:

In consultation with the Office of the Provost, the Director of Western Heritage will chair a subcommittee formed from members of the faculty group that oversees the Western Heritage Program. The larger committee selects texts for the reading list and sets course goals, general and specific, that center around the areas of reading, writing and oral communication, and content. They are charged with an assessment function that has been largely undefined over the past few years. The humanistic assessment project will therefore fall within that committee's normal workload. This larger committee has not met since Carthage joined the project. Hopefully, the Humanistic Assessment Subcommittee will be in place by the time of the ACTC annual conference. As a pool of student work, we will likely use the essay repository we have built over the years through Turnitin.com. All writing assignments in Western Heritage must be submitted to Turnitin.com, which will allow the committee to comb through a wide variety of student work. We hope to use individual course instructors to point the subcommittee to particularly interesting cases of development. Rubrics that have been used in the past at Carthage for scoring essays will likely be modified by the larger committee to ensure that members are looking for the same qualities in student work. This process should be well advanced by the end of the school year. Over the summer, we would likely put together the 'narrative cases' or 'briefs' called for in the project.

Although the time-frame outlined in this report was much delayed, the process has developed along lines laid out above.

The subcommittee's most pressing need was to give greater definition to the assessment process by determining a general aim and then clear first steps. As a first step, the committee decided to look carefully at the process of writing and, in particular, the process of argumentative writing. One motivating factor was the Writing Intensive designation and the Writing Intensive requirements that all Western Heritage sections carry. In response to these, over the years, there has been a certain amount of instructor dissatisfaction with the required burdens of rewriting each major course paper. While the papers themselves run, in general, no longer than four or five pages, the process requires substantial, face-to-face individual engagement with each student. Course instructors accordingly have been compelled to commit to scheduling at least two days for paper conferences each semester, which is, of course, a significant commitment in the direction of mechanical skill building with perhaps unclear payoff at the expense of time that could be spent in seminar discussing course texts. The committee thus posed for itself the general question, "Is the rewrite process worthwhile?"

This aim was further suggested by some results from traditional assessment, particularly The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), which asks freshmen and seniors about how effectively they learn to judge arguments from their course offerings. Results show that Carthage students do not recognize argument as an emphasized aim in the curriculum. Whether this is an issue of student recognition or student ability remains a question. As a result, faculty workshops have been directed to emphasize more forcefully the Writing Intensive guidelines that are in place for the Western Heritage course (See Appendix: DOCUMENT 1) and to stress even more prominently the use of arguments and construction of arguments through class assignments. (An example from the first workshop after this re-emphasis in Appendix: DOCUMENT 2.)

Argumentative writing through process writing was also a target, at least insofar as process writing is the primary vehicle for developing student skills, of one quantitative assessment measure that was implemented for the first time at the end of the semester Spring 2012. Most generally as a response to the recently adopted Carthage College Statement of Institutional Learning Outcomes, a rubric and

methodology was developed to assess initially a pilot group of student writing followed by essays from non-Honors and Honors sections of Western Heritage taught by a full-time and adjunct instructors across disciplines. The final report of that quantitative process, which includes the rubric used, is included below in Appendix: DOCUMENT 3.

Finally, over the past four academic years, an epistemological questionnaire premised on the research of William Perry and developed as an instrument by Marlene Schommer-Aikins, has been administered to all Western Heritage students in an attempt to track development by noting changes in thinking styles.<sup>4</sup> Although the results have not yet been analyzed, there is a vast repository for analysis that can be further linked to an equally vast repository of student writing collected over the years through submission to Turnitin.com as a course requirement.

The committee directing the ACTC Alternative Narrative Assessment process hopes that its initial work will form a significant addition to these quantitative projects and that, eventually, all together can be used to give a full account of the experience in Western Heritage. Ideally, the committee hopes that its analysis will not only complement the quantitative measures but also identify other aspects of the course that are hard or impossible to measure by other means. To make sense as an addition to such a constellation of assessment activities, the committee decided to focus on student writing as submitted through Turnitin.com. A variety of instructors were contacted and asked to provide examples of student writing, supplying both first drafts and final drafts, from the fall and spring semesters of the Western Heritage course. The committee also requested that instructors, if possible, include some examples of students that they had in the same course for the entire year. The committee hopes to examine these yearlong examples at a subsequent date.

After this preliminary planning and the collecting of examples, the committee decided on the following process for reading the papers.

Each member will read three final drafts of essays chosen from fall and spring semesters; grade and rank them individually without talking to others about reactions to the papers; assign a letter grade to each and rank them 1, 2, 3; and write a short paragraph (sixish sentences) for each paper explaining the grades and one paragraph explaining the overall ranking. Next, return to each of the papers looking at them now in comparison with the first draft with a view to answering this question: How much revision has actually taken place. Grade and rank the paper sets in terms of the level of revision. Again, write a brief paragraph regarding the revision of each paper and one paragraph that explains the overall ranking. The group would exchange our results and meet to discuss the impressions. Discuss what this process has told us overall about writing in Western Heritage and the course in general. The committee will then record a discussion and reprint it as a dialogue, perhaps with a third party present as moderator.

The first two-thirds of this process was implemented and completed at the end of March, 2013. The last general discussion reproduced in dialogue form was completed over the following weeks.

For the initial work, all papers, save one, were four-page comparative explorations that largely contrasted one core text with another: Exodus and Vergil's *Aeneid*, Homer's *Odyssey* and Plato's *Euthyphro* and *Apology*, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and the Gospel of Matthew, Darwin's "On

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<sup>4</sup> Perry, William G. 1999. *Forms of intellectual and ethical development in the college years: a scheme*. San Francisco, Calif: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Natural Selection” from the *Origin of Species* and Rousseau’s *Second Discourse*, Dante’s *Inferno* and Shakespeare’s *Tempest*. Initially, before the committee shared its results, members expressed a certain nervousness about the process, particularly in sharing the individual rankings, which was an interesting phenomenon. In the end, however, when the group disclosed those rankings, there was very little divergence. In fact, the letter grades assigned were within one half letter grade of each other. This provided a general but interesting contrast with the more conventional, quantitative assessment of essays, which often requires a substantial amount of time to ‘norm’ the graders. Compare, for instance, the rubric developed for the pilot assessment of writing in the Western Heritage given at the end of DOCUMENT 3 below.

The qualitative discussion aimed at narrative assessment was very interesting when seen as a contrast to the quantitative sort. Quantitative analysis can be thought of as a process of ‘scoring’ and ‘evaluation’ that is, nearly by definition, limited. It takes a product or set of responses and ranks them according to a fixed set of standards. A narrative is then woven around these results, but, especially if readers have been ‘normed’ ahead of time, the rankings themselves must be artificial or unreal, at the very least in that they have been conditioned by the norming process or by some guiding rubric. There are, of course, clear advantages to this approach. There are, however, clear disadvantages, perhaps mostly in the humanities and social sciences, but that limitation is by no means clear.

In contrast, narrative assessment is a much larger and deeper process of ‘conceiving’ that has ‘imaginative’ elements, the latter term used without fictional nuances but as an attempt to capture the evanescent and creative qualities of a piece of argumentative writing. The qualitative process, on the whole, appeared much more holistic. The reports from each grader regarding the papers was weighed heavily along the lines of assessing skills and sound argument. The rubric used in the process of quantitative assessment is also aimed at assessing this same skills, and is able to effectively measure their presence or absence. The quantitative measurement becomes problematic in giving an accurate representation of their relative strengths and weakness and in the area of richly imaginative exploration and conclusion.

#### **APPENDIX A:**

What follows is the final report of the Humanistic Assessment Committee, included as portions of a transcribed conversation between Ben DeSmidt, Alyson Kiesel, and John Isham, held at Carthage College on April 23, 2013. The spirit of this conversation, as of any good conversation, hopefully captures the spirit of the process of humanistic assessment.

“... [I]mperfection is in some sort essential to all that we know of life. It is the sign of life in a mortal body, that is to say, of a state of progress and change. Nothing that is, or can be, rigidly perfect lives; part of it is decaying, nascent part... And in all things that live there are certain also and deficiencies which are not only signs of life, but sources of beauty... All admit card as they imply change; and to banish imperfection is to destroy expression, to check plays’ exertion, to paralyze vitality” (From John Ruskin’s chapter, “The Nature of Gothic,” in *The Stones of Venice*, 1853).

**DeSmidt:** Responding to the work of the assessment committee, a rubric was developed last year (See Document 4, Appendix C) with the aim of taking a look at selected final exam responses in Western Heritage. The general idea was to come up with a quantitative rubric that would be used to measure

those final essays. In applying the rubric, a group of readers got together and spent some time norming them with practice essays so they made sure that everybody was basically grading the essays with the same rubric in mind, and everyone understood the categories and had all their questions answered. What I really liked about our work in humanistic assessment is that this just happened organically. Without norming, we were all within the same range of one another in our assessments of the individual essays, so it just happily occurred. For the purpose of saying things about this in the report, I broke apart the seven different categories used on the rubric on the handout (See Document 3). So, Thesis is #1, Argumentation is #2, and I looked across at the different rankings from 'excellent' all the way down to 'does not meet minimum expectations', and I found that in the excellent category there were terms used that seemed hard to me to quantify.

**DeSmidt:** And so for Thesis: 'interesting,' 'thoughtful,' for Argumentation, 'persuasive...'

**Isham:** 'Compelling....'

**DeSmidt:** Now that could go either way, I guess. Funnily, in organization there was basically nothing; it was just very skills based: 'Essay follows thesis very clearly from start to finish,' 'sign posts,' and so on. But Textual Analysis: 'compelling,' 'reflectively,' Style and Mechanics: 'pleasure to read,' 'serious engagement,' 'genuine thoughtful engagement,' and then Critical Evaluation: 'thoughtfully'. And it seems to me that it's pretty easy to use a rubric to measure skills—do they do this, do they not do this—in terms of the use of good grammar; other things like that you can check off. But, I'm wondering if there isn't something that we could say about the limitations of a rubric when it tries to measure things that are subjective...

**Isham:** Well, one thing about rubrics is they're very good at getting various parts of a whole, but they don't do away with, they don't consider how these various components interact with each other. And I could see where a paper could actually be a hypothetical. That kind of paper could do well on all these different, separate rubrics but maybe overall it just doesn't fit or something's not there; it lacks cohesion or something. I can't quite put a word on it.

**DeSmidt:** Well, I think that's true, and I think that in some of our gradings, we saw the opposite effect, where the paper would actually fall down on...

**Isham:** On separate rubrics...

**DeSmidt:** On separate, yes, but on the whole we'd say 'well there's something here, they're really trying to do something that is, you know....' For instance, for one paper we said: 'well it didn't do a very good job, but...'

**Isham:** I think it was a paper on Moses and Aeneas. And also, something just immediately comes to mind. Can this effort be gauged on sincerity even? There's something about a paper you can feel, at least when I'm grading papers for my class, that means a lot to me. If I really feel the student is honestly thinking about this, and going after it, maybe even if the thing that results is...

**Kiesel:** Right, or taking a risk?

**Isham and DeSmidt:** [In Agreement]

**DeSmidt:** That's interesting: that the idea of sincerity is then bound up with the rhetorical stance that they take in the paper, rather than a kind of cavalier approach or...?

**Isham:** How it would fit in? You're wondering how it would fit in on maybe one through seven here?

**DeSmidt:** Well, I'm just curious because it's one term that has come up...

**Isham:** Because that's really hard to gauge.... Maybe in Argumentation, just because one could argue that it gives the paper a bit of an ethos.

**DeSmidt:** [In Agreement]

**Isham:** Maybe it doesn't, for instance, if I feel that someone is just doing this because it is a rote exercise, they're just playing the game, even if they're doing it persuasively. Like Alyson is saying, it doesn't take the risks?

**DeSmidt:** [In Agreement]

**Kiesel:** The thing about that, the argument about the *Aeneid* and empire met the rubric's standards, and yet, while we found it to be a strong paper, it seemed rehearsed, and then there's nothing. It wasn't taking risks necessarily, it was ...

**DeSmidt:** That's interesting. That seems to be getting at papers that are recycling what has been discussed in class versus papers that are really stabbing at something that is beyond. You know that; you can tell that, right?

**Isham:** And this, to me, can create the irony: it almost becomes more of a plus for me in a paper if I see that it's logically flawed, but I see that they're really kind of doing this on their own, that they're really trying to figure this thing out.

**Kiesel:** Right.

**Isham:** Whereas, say they get something logically correct and—we're not talking plagiarism here—but this idea that they probably are really just recycling something that is a little more straight-forward, or it's verging on them giving more of an explanation or replication of something rather than an argument...

**Kiesel/DeSmidt:** [In Agreement]

**Isham:** There's this irony where this—whatever we're talking about here—this, what is it again? I want to say the sublime, or the ineffable, or something like that, can sometimes mean that you've got this perverse situation where the different rubric categorizations are skewed but the end result shows that something is really there, or something's really happened.

**Kiesel:** When we were first talking about it, I wondered if we are becoming much too subjective, which, of course, is at odds with this sort of assessment in some ways. Are we considering the student's personality when we're grading? Because we would want to avoid that in some way, in assessing

sincerity, for example. Of course, maybe I would have a particular student in mind when reading, but then, we were reading these anonymous papers and still...

**DeSmidt:** It stills comes off.

**Kiesel:** I still felt this in the explanation, like orderly neatness was not at the apex of our assessment, like the perfection of that one argument that met all the rubrics is not perhaps the nicest argument....

**Isham:** One thing I want to ask Alyson is: have you ever tried reading your papers anonymously in your class, without knowing who's written which one, or grading exams that way?

**Kiesel:** Yes, I do that sometimes. I haven't done it very recently. I just have them do a title page with all of their identifying information and then....

**Isham:** I've done it, I've done it sometimes with exams. I've never done it with papers and there's something in me that really resists doing that, because I really feel that I need to know who it is; I can't just...I cannot divorce argument from the person. I realize that this may bias me in ways that are beyond my control, but I would not enjoy teaching if I'm just reading, it's repulsive, not repulsive, but it's repugnant to me.

**Kiesel:** It can be hard. I mean, I've done it. When I have done it, I've done it at the very beginning of the semester, so it's when I don't know them yet, and so then my introduction to them is through their writing, and then I find out who it is. So in that way, I think it's good to shut off bias in some ways, because I don't have, you know, someone who is slouching at their table in mind when I read.

.....

**DeSmidt:** I'm getting back to what you said about the possibility of this process taking us away from what assessment really means, which seems to be something that's not subjective, that really is scientific in a way. I think that one thing it would be nice to try to identify is whether, rather than reworking the formal rubric categories here, or adding things to the language that's laid out, whether we can actually identify things that there simply is no way to adequately reflect in using the rubric at all. So I think one aim of this humanistic assessment process is to see whether a case can be made, not so much against quantitative assessment, but just suggesting that there is more to what students' writing communicates.

**Isham:** That there are qualitative concerns that we ignore at our peril...

**DeSmidt:** Right. So this risk taking, the kind of sincerity...

**Isham:** I would also say that we can sense the time spent on it, that they have put effort into it, and time.

**DeSmidt:** Because one of the big fears that I have is that in this norming exercise that they held and the group that actually used it, there's such a variety of different Western Heritage instructors, and a lot of faculty on that committee hadn't taught Western Heritage. They're not only new to the particular student writing that they're getting, but they're actually very new to the course in general. I'm wondering if using a rubric like *this*, which claims to be key to Western Heritage, in a way, doesn't have the potential of missing a huge amount of what we're really trying to do in the course. Maybe that

would be a further step beyond: identifying things like risk taking and sincerity. Not sure, but to that end, I put a few questions on the handout underneath the listing of the standard rubric, and I think we've already touched upon the first at least: can a rubric claim to assess such qualities in a given paper? Does the thoughtfulness of one paper compare meaningfully with the thoughtfulness of another paper? That is a strange thing: quantitatively one paper that receives a five should be the same or equivalent to another paper that receives a five, but there's no way that a rubric can communicate differences that have to be there, right?

.....

**DeSmidt:** Personally, I give a lot of attention to where students start at the beginning of the semester and where they end up. I think that's what's implied: excellent for one student at the end of the semester might be something very different for another, and there is no way, unless they start looking at student writing with the rubric for the entire year, to gauge that sort of difference or improvement.

**Isham:** Improvement is a really hard thing to compare, just like thoughtfulness; it's going to be different with different students and...

**DeSmidt:** ...and then learning style differences and everything else.

.....

**DeSmidt:** Just picking up on what you said about students getting ground up by the rubric, there's just so much that you know gets missed, where they've come from and where they're going. One value of the humanistic project is that if you had the instructors of the actual students writing a few narrative reports on where the students have gone, that would, at least, supplement this kind of quantitative approach. In other words, if maybe every Western Heritage instructor took three students, one they considered their very best, one who was kind of an average, and then a kind of lower-achieving student, and actually talked about those students' progress over the course of the semester, I don't think that would be hugely time consuming, I think what this humanistic process is aiming at is to show that this is necessary because there are these other qualities that we just can't see.

.....

**Kiesel:** But, I wonder what people's thoughts would be. We are bending much more towards a subjective place. There is part of me that feels that we need to have standards, and if the essay doesn't tick certain boxes, then it doesn't matter that this person has grown as a human. I don't know.

**DeSmidt:** If they still can't read, or they still can't write, or can't form an argument...

**Kiesel:** Right, or an utter inability to communicate. I clearly am personally torn about this, because in my own grading I am probably quite subjective and do acknowledge growth, individual growth, and I don't necessarily norm for the class. So, maybe my B+s are not equivalent with one another. That is, it's a B+ for this person, and a B+ for another. I am thinking of Western Heritage, because I think I handle things much differently when I'm dealing with majors in English.

.....

**DeSmidt:** I'm very interested in that, because I think it's one place where the people working on assessment maybe match up with people like us, who really aren't into the process. In a way, we want to have standards, but we realize the need to be open to much more than that, whereas the people working with the quantitative sort of assessment are also very interested in measuring standards. But, I

think that the danger of that would be if the people working on assessment said, 'Well, yes, we should keep a course like Western Heritage that's focused on reading these books and just move it to the sophomore year rather', and then come up with a more rudimentary, skills-based class for the first year. Would they still see value in what Western Heritage is trying to do in asking those bigger questions? Because a lot of those characteristics that we're talking about, that really define Western Heritage, are things that aren't central to what they're measuring with these rubrics.

**Isham:** For example, this rubric that we're seeing on the table.

**DeSmidt:** While I do want there to be these standards, and I want them to know what an argument is and organizing, mechanics and everything, what I really want to see in the Heritage papers is that kind of risk taking, sincerity, adventurousness, and if quantitative measurement *can't* really measure that, they're still going to want to try. Or they're going to want to come up with a rubric, even if it's actually not possible. And I wonder if that whole questioning of the course at all and moving skills out of it would cause a class like Western Heritage to just be undone.

**Isham:** It's really hard. Imagine if Homer had been getting A's according to the rubric of his time. Imagine if Montaigne were writing, and he wrote just according to the rubric of his time. We would not be reading him still today.

.....

**DeSmidt:** Every once in a while in Western Heritage I'll assign a creative project that will involve argumentation, organization, and a kind of thesis. For instance, I will ask them to take a canto of Dante and rewrite it in the style of Montaigne, changing the argument as they might imagine Montaigne doing. That requires them to have an argument and a thesis, but one aspect is missing from this rubric: a kind of latent artistry or creativity. Persuasion, for instance, takes a kind of creativity in approach or in thinking. Students spend time reading works that make arguments, but they are creative, beautiful. Shouldn't that be reflected in some way in the papers? I'm wondering if those are the kinds of things that the rubric doesn't really get at.

.....

**DeSmidt:** And the rubric comes down to 'paper thoughtfully raises critical questions', but the emphasis is clearly on the skills of argumentation. And this new push arises because students have said that they're asked to identify whether argumentation is taught with significant enough emphasis, and students have reported no. But I'm wondering if that isn't a very limited understanding of the whole process of argumentation and of what's involved in it and what might need to happen first. There might need to be this questioning and wondering and all of these things.

**Isham:** I think they kind of missed the fact that there can be a beauty in argumentation, or at least in a certain type of thinking, in addition to there being rock solid logic. These people asking questions think too much in terms of sheer logic and not enough in terms of persuasion. But persuasion really does rely on a little bit more of a playfulness that actually gives students skills that are going to be more useful in their life than this kind of sheer dialectic. I find problems with a total emphasis on argumentation and, as much as I love such logical approaches, papers with such a heavy focus on just sheer argumentation after a while are very, very boring to read, because the students get a feel for what the game is. I feel they play this game, and I don't find that it's really ultimately asking interesting questions. I feel that they pick their thesis early on and then go ahead and figure out what they need to do. The whole

curiosity factor, this whole thing, is gone, the whole beauty factor, the whole wonder, the whole kind of this other type of thing that we were talking about.

**Kiesel:** Right, and it's a flat, cumulative equation. I think that that's a real risk of some of the papers that are like, 'I am making an argument. This is the argument. Here is part one, two, three. The argument is this.' Right? It's funny because there's such discomfort with the Platonic dialogue, partly because of its endless questioning, endless wondering about complexity, the badgering insistence of revealing other layers of complexity, perpetual wonder, almost aggressive wonder, and then no resolution. It's so uncomfortable because it doesn't seem like an argument, when of course it is. Constant arguing...

**Isham:** People try to say it goes nowhere or it ends up where it was before, but if you think it's easy, you try it.

**Kiesel:** Right, and I'll sound very humanist and corny, but asking questions that don't have answers: this is very valuable. Or acknowledging that some things in the world are just ambiguous. They have two simultaneous possible answers to them. That is higher level thinking that will be of use, I think.

**Isham:** I agree.

**Kiesel:** But it's very hard to maintain two balls in the air for an essay that then ends with a tidy bow.

**DeSmidt and Isham:** [In Agreement]

**Kiesel:** I guess that's why we like some of the messier papers, too, with genuine questioning, and the end is: 'I've been thinking a lot! But I'm still a little bit confused'. There's such value in that, but it's not neat.

**DeSmidt:** And the rubric seems to be skewed at wanting papers that have an argument that's neat and tidy, because if there isn't that kind of conclusion....

**Kiesel:** Right, and it can be a short-reach paper, or a paper that does not reach an answer. And, 'oh yeah, the answer' is such an anathema to what we are striving for, as if you should send your father to be executed if he murders someone, and you say, 'That's the end. Problem solved'.

**DeSmidt:** Exactly.

**Isham:** And all papers start to look very much alike. Hence they become more rubric-like if they're doing this. Because, just as Alyson was saying, they become more flat.

.....

**DeSmidt:** Well that's the one question: is it still these basic skills? We want them to have the ability to recognize an argument and make an argument; that is a basic, necessary skill. On the other hand, the tendency is to close off the importance of the other side, and it does seem that the rubrics are aiming much more at this, not that questions are important, too, and does the paper ask questions. I can say that one pretty intense discussion came up at number seven, where the rubric says 'critical evaluation of key themes, ideas of the Western intellectual tradition' 'paper thoughtfully raises critical questions about fundamental assumptions'. Now, does critical mean proving that they are wrong, proving that Montaigne is wrong, or that the West is wrong, or does it just mean close analysis?

**Isham:** Close analysis, careful, thoughtful...

**DeSmidt:** And the writer of the rubric insisted, no, it means critical...

**Kiesel:** Identifying weaknesses...

**DeSmidt:** Yeah, identifying weaknesses, and I said, 'no, no, no, it can't mean that', but the claim was that when the term 'critical' is used in assessment literature, it means the one and not the other. So, it is not just about asking questions or taking an argument and looking at it from different directions, but the idea is critical, meaning: to challenge.... They want it tied up in this sort of neat bow, that there really should be an answer, but John, I think you said early on, there is kind of a productive ignorance, or a sort of ignorance that's necessary.

**Isham:** And that to me seems very closely linked to what liberal arts colleges are about. I think that it's all getting lost because we're all thinking too much in terms of skills. When I think about this, just like teaching in the room, it's as if we're training all these students to become lawyers or something like that. This real focus on that they're really just going to be needing this skill for whatever they do, whereas liberal arts colleges have this idea of more humility involved here. As Alyson was saying: 'hey, some stuff's just really hard, and I'm not going to be able to write an argumentation essay tonight to figure how I should handle the most difficult personal situation of my life tomorrow'. It goes beyond this type of thing, but yet we may be getting other things as a result of liberal arts education, this type of wonder, humility and all this, that really do end up helping us in our practical situations.

**DeSmidt:** I think it gets lost in that false dichotomy. A lot of liberal arts schools have people preaching for the liberal arts who would say, 'well it's about the questions and not the answers', which is true, but it's not totally true. It's about this process of trying to reach an answer or reach a conclusion, but questioning along the way. I feel as if saying things like that is a little bit misleading.

.....

**Isham:** I think, looking at our rubric list again, the closest thing to something like that is either Style of Mechanics or Organization, but those don't really take into account what we're saying here, the aesthetics. You notice: 'no significant errors in the use of language, sentence structure, spelling, grammar, citation'...

**DeSmidt:** Other than the 'pleasure to read', whatever that means. Well it's short, so...

**Isham:** I can see that a paper that I would enjoy reading could be written in incomplete sentences, especially when I start to think about the way questions can be, and, certainly, I can see it being written almost not at all with full sentences. There could be something about it that I enjoy reading; I can tell that they are really thinking. I can tell if their mind is expanding, and I can really feel like something's happening, and it's not typical.

**Kiesel:** It's funny, I have a student right now who is very bright, but he writes precisely as he speaks, which is in this stuttering rapid fire at certain moments and then long pauses, and it's eerily accurate—

his written style to that—but it is pleasing to read, and he’s very thoughtful, and yet it’s very hard to grade.

**Isham:** I don’t want somebody to lose something like that.

**DeSmidt:** Be forced to change or...

**Isham:** Like: ‘Stop please. Go to the Writing Center and have somebody teach you about run-on sentences; work with a student on run-on sentences’....

.....

**DeSmidt:** This leads to process writing. As it’s emphasized here at Carthage, I’m wondering if this whole idea of process writing and this rewrite process that we’re required to use in Western Heritage isn’t very reflective at all of the way writing happens, if instead it’s too narrowly focused or emphasizes a very narrow set of things in a way that some of these elements of the rubrics do, where it’s strictly on argument and producing a clear, logical kind of prose. Since there is no real way of writing, or since the process of writing is a very individual thing, I think the starting point needs to be a lot messier than it is—which is the idea of messy questions—rather than of constructing a thesis before the paper is really worked out or thought out. Maybe the thesis needs to be thrown out completely, or changed, or worked around. I’ve been having more concerns about this whole writing across curriculum idea, the way they say students should be taught in all the same way, because of assessment. There is an idea that these courses are teaching very discrete skills that we need to be able to measure as discretely.

**Isham:** I find that what is done in process writing, and maybe I just haven’t figured out how to do it yet, just creates busy work for us. I’ve not been satisfied. I’ve done this several years in a row, and I’m not finding the rewrites that they’re doing to be productive. I think this rigid structure that we have—turn in your rough draft, now turn in your final—doesn’t replicate the real writing process. I’m thinking out loud right now, but I like your idea of starting off with something really messy, something question-oriented and then working from there.

**DeSmidt:** It’s also this problem of lacking curiosity. I haven’t done it a lot, but when I’ve written something that is very important to get right, like a real piece of rhetoric or even an article, the number of times that I reread and rework it is on the order of forty or fifty times. It’s this huge, laborious sort of process. I’m not sure if that’s individual, but even if it is, so is the writing process or the rewrite process. But a standard movement such as writing across the curriculum is designed to be just one process to fit everybody, and I wonder if it shouldn’t be opened more to allow for presenting writing as a much more complicated kind of thing.

.....

**Kiesel:** This emphasizes the idea that the questions are really hard, and that a genuine question is hard to construct and certainly hard to answer. I’m sensitive to the fact that it’s not a great fit for everybody.

.....

**Isham:** I want students to somehow feel that there’s an imperative need for precision, and I don’t know how to teach that. I know that our two week, rough draft, final draft, isn’t doing it. I’m trying to think of some way to get the process to where the stakes are high, to make them realize the musicality of words, the rhythm of words, getting it in there, getting the order, this type of thing. Maybe that’s out of the bounds of Western Heritage.

.....

**DeSmidt:** The third area that it's asking about here is that the purpose of assessment is to use it to make actual changes to the course. My issue with a lot of what quantitative assessment has been doing is: one day they see that students have said argumentation is not emphasized enough in the Western Heritage, the next thing you know, they're requiring all Western Heritage instructors to do another day of workshops with the writing across the curriculum people because we have process writing here that's in place, and people have to be using it more rigidly. I don't ever want to be that prescriptive, other than having a reading list and a basic chronology for instructors to follow. I don't ever want assessment to be that that prescriptive. Now obviously, it might sometimes identify some real deficiencies in a course, but it does seem like a lot of what's happening with assessment right now is a rush to this accreditation date. There hasn't been a tremendous amount of thinking that's gone into it, yet it's still being used to push us in a particular direction....

**Isham:** It would be a shame if Western Heritage gets transformed in some sort of way through...

**DeSmidt:** And that's the kind of talk: it should be skills based. That's what the course was originally. I think what's really constructive about this discussion is that it has become pretty clear that there are other skills. Questioning is a skill. The danger is that they can't be quantified in exactly the same way. So I see this sort of humanistic assessment as a way to counter the quantitative assessment. But I'm wondering whether the value in this wouldn't be to actually make it a broader discussion at something like the workshop, or to create another set of documents of what we're identifying as skills that are also important in the course. These are things that we should be emphasizing to a much greater degree, if not equally. I'm just thinking in my own mind how to make a case to the traditional assessment people that this is as important, and it seems like humanistic assessment might do that to some degree. If there were this body of assessment data asking instructors again to reflect, maybe write reports, on what students have done.

**Isham:** What would the reports consist of or what would be included?

**DeSmidt:** Well, towards the end of that report on assessing writing in Western Heritage, which basically talks about using this rubric and norming process for students, I included whether there shouldn't be some step to make humanistic assessment accepted at the level of the quantitative work that's being done. The question is: is this just subjective, would it be looked at as insignificant?

**Isham:** Evasive?

**DeSmidt:** Yes, in the worst case scenario.

**Kiesel:** So that we don't come off as out of touch intellectuals. It's all well and good to have a questioning disposition in a small classroom, but it is really marketable to have answers. Clarity is so important, but so is innovation. Maybe that is a way: that being able to think in an innovative way, in a way that is able to look past what is apparent and available surely could be seen as useful, as a practical skill.

.....

**Editor's Note:** This document in the form of a Platonic dialog has been redacted from a transcription of the original panel discussion and edited for length and for clarity. Dotted lines indicate elisions in the transcript. I have an increased respect for Plato. **KB**

## **APPENDIX B:**

### DOCUMENT 1. Carthage College WI-Guidelines and Requirements for Western Heritage

A minimum of two four- or five-page analytical papers each semester; a minimum of eight pages of informal writing each semester; each semester the analytical papers must go through a rewriting process and that informal assignments relate to each other and/or to the longer essays.

#### SHORT WRITES:

Almost daily writing assignments are a key to enabling students to reach these goals. The most frequent assignments require students to write in paragraph form their thoughts regarding the reading scheduled for that day. Students are given a specific question or menu of questions to which they respond in their paragraph(s). By the end of the semester they will have written 6-10 such assignments consisting of at least one (but often more) paragraph each. The chief skill emphasized is the use of quotations (or paraphrases): are they chosen well, set up well, accurately quoted and cited, and (most importantly) convincingly interpreted or analyzed? Students must include at least one but no more than three quotations or careful paraphrases per paragraph.

Examples of questions for daily writing assignments:

- For what is Ulysses punished in Dante's *Inferno*? State whether you think the punishment is justified and why you think so. (2 paragraphs) In what way is science like a new religion in Bensalem (in Bacon's *New Atlantis*)? (1 paragraph)
- According to the Declaration of Independence, is democracy the only legitimate form of government? Is it necessarily better than other forms of government?

Key skills are built by means of such writing assignments, along with the teaching of formal grammar, syntax, etc. To answer the questions, students must make an assertion. To support it they must marshal and analyze passages. To convince that it is true, they must form (at least implicitly) an argument. Also, at least once early in the semester, student paragraphs (w/o names) can be copied and critiqued in class. The class then develops alternative ways to rewrite the paragraph so as to make better use of quotations. Later peer review could be used for the same purpose, generally pairing stronger writers with stronger writers and weaker with weaker, giving more of my class-time attention to the latter. Students could be required to offer critiques and improvements such as those we've done in class together. Written comments on individual assignments are given by the instructor on all assignments.

Other Examples of Shorter Paper Assignments:

- Writing Assignment #1  
We discover in book 23 of *The Odyssey* that Odysseus, after finally returning to Ithaca and reuniting with his family, must fulfill Tiresias' prophecy and set out once again for unknown lands. In the character of either Telemachus or Penelope, write a letter to Odysseus that will persuade him to stay. Use arguments that the character you chose would use, and use examples from the text to support your argument. You could use other characters as examples (or

counter-examples), or you could even use Odysseus' own words against him. Try to anticipate the objections Odysseus would make and counter them in your letter. Your letter should be a minimum of 500 words.

- Writing Assignment #2

Aeschylus' tragic trilogy *Oresteia* begins with a play entitled *Agamemnon*. In that play, the great hero of the Trojan War Agamemnon returns home only to be promptly killed by his wife. This introduces a big question that needs to be investigated by us. When Clytemnestra kills Agamemnon, does she act with justice? The idea of justice implies two different things: 1) that a person not only acts for a good reason, in other words, that punishment is deserved, but 2.) that the punishment is also just or fair. For example, if someone commits the crime of theft, we believe that the person deserves to be punished, but at the same time we do not believe that the person should be sentenced to death. As a first step in your paper, find all the 'crimes' that Agamemnon is judged to be guilty of in the play and the people who judge him to be guilty of those crimes? After you have compiled a list of those crimes and the names of Agamemnon's accusers, consider whether Agamemnon deserves to be killed or whether there are circumstances that should mitigate against his execution.

- Writing Assignment #3

Taking Rousseau's "Letter to Geneva" as your model, give at least 5 characteristics or features of the country you would choose to live in. This need not be based on an actual place, but rather represents your ideal. Make sure you give specific and concrete reasons why you chose the things you did. Write no more than one page.

#### LONGER PAPERS—THESIS CONSTRUCTION:

Instructors should be very deliberate about the construction of theses. The key is the development or recognition of a genuine question (or problem or puzzle) to which the thesis is a response. This search for genuine questions is facilitated by modeling (as in question posed in the above short write assignments and seminar questions in class) and in the construction of theses out of initial impressions. This process of construction happens in class discussion, in students' preparation of class discussion questions, in peer review feedback, and in instructor comments on drafts. These are typical steps students can follow in thesis construction. One moves from: An impression regarding a passage, character, image, etc.: e.g., "I don't like Odysseus." To a justification behind the initial impression: "Odysseus is bad/evil/unheroic/etc. because he lies a lot." To a broader question behind the justification: "Given his many acts of deception, can Odysseus be considered a heroic character?" Now the student is in a position to make an assertion that is interesting and evaluative because it is focused and arguable. To continue the Odysseus example, there are reasons for thinking Odysseus is heroic despite or even because of his deceptions or cunning, and there are reasons for thinking he's not. A thesis asserting one side and taking into account the opposing side(s) can then be formed. "Odysseus's habitual deceptiveness and extreme preoccupation with his own safety and comfort is a characteristic antithetical to heroic dedication and sacrifice." Or, "Because Odysseus's deceptions ultimately serve the highest Greek value protecting hearth and home, Odysseus must be considered a heroic character." Most work on argumentation is in an ad hoc and implicit manner. Students identify the main thesis of each didactic text we read and lay out why the author thinks we should accept its truth. An author's coherently organized reasons is labeled "the argument". I also talk about the arguments students make in class to support points.

### Examples of Longer Paper Assignments:

- Paper #1

Again and again in Homer's *Odyssey*, Aeschylus' *Oresteia* and Plato's *Republic* providing the reader with a definition of justice has been a central concern. So, for instance, in the case of the *Odyssey* we ask, "Was the slaughter of the suitors just?", for the *Oresteia* we ask, "Was the murder of Clytemnestra just?", and the *Republic* asks us "What is a just life or a just city?". What is different about the *Republic* is its attempt to consciously give a definition of justice, as Socrates and his companions work to construct from scratch a city that is completely just.

- OPTION #1: In the first part of your paper provide a clear picture of what Socrates' hypothetical city looks and feels like, making sure to explain how each part of the city is created in a way that promotes justice. Then, in the second part of your paper, imagine the family of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra living their lives in the city of Socrates that you have just described. Could the events that we hear about and see in the *Oresteia* have occurred? Even if those events could not have happened precisely in the same way, what would take their place? Be sure to be specific, citing the actual words and situations described in Plato's *Republic* and Aeschylus' *Oresteia*.
- OPTION #2: Be creative. Write a new version of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* in which the audience watches the family of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra live out their lives in Socrates' city. Before you begin the action of the play, set the scene by describing what the city looks and feels like based on the descriptions that we read in Plato's *Republic*. Then begin the action of the play. How would you translate the specific events that we see and hear about in the *Oresteia* into the world of Plato's *Republic*? Be sure to be specific, citing the actual words and situations described in Plato's *Republic* and Aeschylus' *Oresteia*.

- Paper #2

From the opening scene, *The Tempest* confronts us with the conflict between natural and civil power, between those that rule and those that are ruled. Choose a character from *The Tempest* who rules or is ruled (or both), and analyze the character in terms of power and authority, focusing on the character's relations with other characters. Consider these points in shaping your argument: What are the sources of your character's power, or the sources of your character's subjection? Does your character have a valid and legitimate claim to power, or does your character rightly deserve to be under someone else's power? Give specific reasons why. Use the character's relationships to the other characters to describe his or her attitude towards his/her status. Does the character use power in the right way? Does the character have the right attitude towards his/her subjection? Does a character with power have obligations to use it in a certain way? Under what specific conditions? Is a character in someone else's power obligated to serve his or her master? For what reasons? What happens to your character at the end of the play? Is Shakespeare using your character to comment on the nature of power and subjection? Is he trying to tell the reader what power over other people should be based upon? Is he saying there are specific conditions or circumstances, or particular relationships, where it is right for one person to be ruled by another? Make sure you take a position and defend it using evidence from the text; state your thesis at the end of the first paragraph, and keep your thesis in mind

throughout your paper. Anything you say about the character must be supported by quotations or incidents from the text.

WAC Criterion B: “Describe how you will help students successfully complete the assignment, and when during the semester this assignment will be addressed” In both semesters informal writing assignments should be used to build to the longer analytical essays assigned for the course. Each longer essay must receive substantial feedback from the instructor. This may be supplemented by peer-review. You can see in the examples above, for instance, how “Writing Assignment #2” works to expand into the ideas of any of the longer paper topic examples also given above. Direct, face-to-face delivery of this instructor feedback in paper conferences is highly recommended. The first long essay should be assigned by the end of the third week with a shorter written assignment due at some point in other weeks when longer papers are not due. The second long essay should be assigned no later than the seventh week to allow for revision.

WAC Criterion C: “Percentage of student's grade based on this assignment or type of assignment” 30% Minimum each semester; 50% minimum suggested.

WAC Criterion D: “Number of pages required”: 16 Minimum each semester; Counting rewrites, 24 pages minimum suggested.

#### DOCUMENT 2. Report of Western Heritage Response to Assessment Committee Request:

At the December 4 meeting of the Assessment Committee, “argumentation” was identified as an area goal for overall student improvement. The committee discussed with the program director and chair of the oversight committee options for changes to the Western Heritage course in an attempt to begin to address this aim. Rather than add a writing or argumentation manual to the list of required texts, we decided upon an initial fine-tuning of the general writing aims of the course, which would be presented to instructors as part of the two days of workshops at the end of January Term.

On February 5, the Writing Intensive guidelines for the Western Heritage course were redistributed in paper form to instructors and they were led through the specifics of that document highlighting the stress put on argumentation. Afterwards, Dave Gartner gave instructors a 40-page packet containing the full set of writing documents that he uses to structure the teaching of writing over the course of the spring semester. This packet is keyed to the spring semester texts of Western Heritage and can be used without modification as is or different elements of the approach can be modified to suit individual instructor aims. (Several years ago Professor Gartner presented an earlier iteration of his plan.)

Professor Gartner was chosen for this presentation because of his past work with the Writing Across the Curriculum committee and at the Western Heritage workshops, the raw numbers of Western Heritage sections he has taught—at least two every semester from Fall 2005—and his huge rate of success: Professor Gartner has had more than 15 of his students reach the final stage of the Western Heritage Scholarship Competition with five of those winners of the award.

As a brief follow up, Professor Gartner’s plan has been a topic of discussion at several of the weekly Western Heritage cluster sessions, and a number of instructors have indicated their choice to apply at least some of Professor Gartner’s plan. At the very least, it has increased awareness of the need to be more intentional in the kind of writing taught as part of Western Heritage.

DOCUMENT 3. Humanistic assessment agenda, April 23, 2013:

I: Looking at the standard rubric:

	<u>EXCELLENT</u>	<u>GOOD</u>
1. THESIS	interesting, thoughtful	
2. ARGUMENTATION	persuasively	
3. ORGANIZATION	-----	
4. TEXTUAL ANALYSIS AND EVIDENCE	compelling, reflective	
5. STYLE AND MECHANICS	pleasure to read	
6. SERIOUS ENGAGEMENT WITH THE TEXT AND WITH KEY THEMES AND IDEAS	genuine thoughtful engagement	takes the question treated in the text seriously
7. CRITICAL EVALUATION OF KEY THEMES/IDEAS OF THE WESTERN INTELLECTUAL TRADITION	thoughtfully	

QUESTIONS:

1. Can a rubric claim to assess such qualities in a given paper?
2. Does the “thoughtfulness” of one paper compare meaningfully with the “thoughtfulness” of another paper?
3. If not, are the differences that lie hidden behind the rubric’s numbers worth exploring as part of the assessment process?

II. Imagine that papers in Western Heritage are being assessed by a group of individuals who have never taught the course. They are using only the standard rubric to assess learning outcomes. What aspects, good and bad, of what the Western Heritage course tries to accomplish in terms of skills and method would not be adequately reflected by the rubric, relating to our particular pool of papers?

III. What is the value of such traditional and narrative assessment for making real changes to the course? Are the resources expended on the process(es) worthwhile?

DOCUMENT 4. Final Report of Pilot Assessment of Western Heritage Final Exams:

**To:** Provost Julio Rivera  
Dana Garrigan, Director of Assessment  
Seemee Ali, IDS Division Chair  
Ben DeSmidt, Director of Western Heritage  
Carthage College Western Heritage Oversight Committee  
Carthage College Assessment Committee

**From:** Thomas Powers (Carthage College Assessment Committee)

**Re:** Pilot Assessment of Western Heritage (WH), Spring/Summer 2012

September 20, 2012

**Contents:**

1. Introduction
  2. Assessment Objectives
  3. Method
  4. Findings
  5. Analysis of Data
    - A) General note on inter-rater reliability and the rubric
    - B) Writing
    - C) Engagement/critical questioning
    - D) Honors and Non-Honors sections
  6. Feedback from faculty assessors
  7. General recommendations based on this assessment
  8. Recommendations for further assessment
  9. Acknowledgements
- Appendix A: Carthage institutional student learning outcomes document (12/2/11 draft)
- Appendix B: Assigned questions for student essays used in the assessment
- Appendix C: WH assessment rubric (separate document)

#### 1. Introduction.

Over the course of the past two years, the Carthage Assessment Committee has been developing a comprehensive approach to assessing the general education components of the Carthage curriculum. Western Heritage (WH) is a central element of Carthage general education and it was thus only natural that clarifying its place in that broader matrix would be an important part of the Committee's work. The Committee finalized a preliminary statement of "institutional student learning outcomes" for general education at Carthage in December 2011 and this was presented to the Academic Senate during the spring semester (Appendix A). That document included statements concerning student writing as well as specific learning goals associated with Western Heritage. In addition, the Committee has been advocating and sometimes overseeing various efforts to assess the different components of Carthage general education. It is in this broad context of the Committee's work that the assessment of WH here summarized took place. More specifically, the goals of this assessment were taken from the December 2011 draft document of institutional student learning outcomes. In September 2012 those learning outcomes were revised somewhat (see below) and were approved by the Academic Senate.

While this assessment exercise was thus undertaken, obviously, from the point of view of general education at Carthage, subsequent assessment of WH undertaken by the Western Heritage Oversight Committee (WHOC) itself will of course introduce different considerations and goals (though the objectives of Carthage general education ought to inform those deliberations of the WHOC).

The last time that a regular assessment of the Western Heritage program at Carthage was undertaken was in 2004, though an assessment of the pilot of the current WH program was undertaken in Spring 2008. Assessment of Heritage in the years between 1998 and 2004 took several forms. First, and most common, several assessments of student writing were undertaken (sometimes by the Director of WH but more commonly by the Carthage Writing Task Force). Surveys were used to gauge faculty feedback and issues concerning WH at Carthage and both surveys and focus groups were used to examine student reactions to WH as well. These opinion surveys also sought to identify the "goals" of WH from the point of view of faculty and students. In the intervening years WH at Carthage was reconceived; after a pilot year (2007-2008) the new WH program was formally launched in the 2008-2009 academic year. An assessment of the WH pilot undertaken in Spring 2008 examined students' ratings of the text they read and other student reactions to the course.

The exploration here summarized is the first in what will be a series of assessment activities for WH, to be overseen for the most part in the future by the WHOC itself.

## 2. Assessment Objectives.

Two statements from the December 2011 draft of the Carthage College statement of Institutional Student Learning Outcomes (drafted by the Assessment Committee and included in its entirety at the end of this document as Appendix A) provide the basis of the assessment activity summarized here: The first objective listed includes this statement: “Students will be able to communicate clearly in writing.”

The third objective listed includes a statement pertaining to Western Heritage (the relevant text has been highlighted).

## 3. Exploring and Evaluating Traditions (Intellectual, Religious, and Cultural).

Students will engage and explore fundamental questions of human life as they come to sight in the diverse perspectives of the Western and non-Western intellectual, religious, and cultural traditions

- *Students will demonstrate by means of formal academic writing and close textual analysis an ability to critically evaluate key themes and ideas of the Western intellectual tradition*

In September 2012 the latter statement was revised to read: “Students will be able to evaluate critically key themes and ideas of the Western intellectual tradition.”

Because the original draft had some overlap between the concern with writing in objective 1 and the statement about “formal academic writing and close textual analysis” in the original draft of objective 3, the September 2012 revision of the learning outcomes does not significantly affect the assessment of WH summarized here. As will be clear, that assessment looked to writing on the one hand and to critical evaluation of key themes/ideas of the Western Heritage on the other.

For the purposes of conducting an assessment exercise, this learning objective was restated as seven specific measures of student performance, under two general headings (formal academic writing and critical thinking; engaging fundamental questions of the Western intellectual tradition) listed below. These form the basis of the assessment rubric that was used (attached as Appendix C). (The footnotes reproduced here appear in the rubric.)

### Rubric Dimensions:

#### Formal Academic Writing and Critical Thinking<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The word “critical” appears in this document in two different senses. Here (first) it is part of the concept of “critical thinking” which is associated with a broad range of analytical tools (logical reasoning, organized argumentation, the use of evidence, etc.). A second, somewhat different, use of the word is used in our assessment dimension 7, “critical evaluation of key themes/ideas of the Western intellectual tradition.” There the meaning is somewhat more precise and has to do with our common-sense understanding of the word “criticism” – raising challenges and questions. This meaning, in turn, is also commonly considered to be one *dimension* of “critical thinking” (and so there is built in to the idea of critical thinking a certain amount of ambiguity). We wish to single out the second meaning of “critical” (in dimension 7) however, to emphasize that one central aim of Western Heritage at Carthage is to encourage students to raise *questions* about the Western intellectual tradition and, indeed, to highlight the *competing* and sometimes contradictory currents of thought within it.

1. Thesis. Author advances a complex, interesting claim about an issue of general importance. Thesis is clearly stated near the beginning of the paper and addresses the assigned topic in a thoughtful way.
2. Argumentation. Thesis is developed through effective supporting arguments that are structured logically and persuasively.
3. Organization. Essay follows thesis very clearly from start to finish. Author effectively guides the reader through the use of introduction, conclusion, and transitions (“sign-posting”).
4. Textual Analysis & Evidence. Textual evidence is used in sufficient quantity to make the thesis compelling. Quotations are actually analyzed and explored reflectively.
5. Style and mechanics. The paper is a pleasure to read. No significant errors in the use of language, sentence structure, grammar, spelling, citation, formatting, or in the use of quotations.

#### Engaging Fundamental Questions of the Western Intellectual Tradition

6. Serious engagement with text and with key themes and ideas. Author interprets the text in a way that reflects genuine thoughtful engagement with the important themes/questions raised in it.
7. Critical evaluation of key themes/ideas of the Western intellectual tradition.<sup>6</sup> Paper thoughtfully raises critical questions about fundamental assumptions (cultural, religious, philosophical, political) advanced in the text. Author brings diverse perspectives to bear in a useful dialectical engagement with the question.

#### 3. Method.

The institutional student learning outcomes goals were finalized in late fall semester 2011. A decision was made in the Spring 2012 to conduct a pilot assessment using student work done during that semester. This assessment activity focused, first, on developing and testing the rubric. In May 2012 several faculty members (Ben DeSmidt, Dennis Munk, Nicholas Ravnika, and Janice Pellino) helped with a brief pre-pilot trial of the newly devised rubric, which was then modified into its final form.

After the rubric was pre-piloted, an assessment of essays from my two Spring 2012 WH sections (one Honors, one non-Honors) was undertaken over the course of two days during the summer (August 2-3, 2012). Five different WH instructors (Paul Kirkland, Jean Preston, Nicholas Ravnika, Brian Schwartz, and Karin Sconzert) served as faculty assessors.

Using a separate set of student essays (not from among those assessed), these WH faculty members began by first conducting a “norming” exercise (with input from Dana Garrigan and myself) to ensure that all assessors were using the rubric in the same way and to check for inter-rater reliability.

30 student essays from the two WH sections (18 non-Honors students and 12 Honors students) were then assessed. These essays were all the product of a deliberate revision process (to include a writing conference with the instructor to discuss their first pre-revision draft).

Each student essay was assessed by three of the five faculty member assessors using the common rubric. Each assessor examined a proportionate mix of both non-Honors and Honors student essays (assessors were told that the sample included both sorts of student papers, but individual papers were not identified to indicate Honors or non-Honors). At the end of the second day, the faculty assessors and I had a general discussion of the assessment activity to identify ways it might be improved. Using the

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<sup>6</sup> See note 2 on the double use of the word “critical” in the student learning outcomes statement.

raw assessment scores recorded by the assessors, Cindy Welch compiled the overall results in an Excel document.

The assessment rubric used the following 5-point scale (see Appendix C):

1. Does not meet minimum expectations
2. Meets minimum expectations
3. Good
4. Excellent
5. Excellent [*sic*] (a “5” was to be given only for “truly exceptional work”)

#### 4. Findings.

Table 1 summarizes the overall average scores for each of the seven assessment criteria and provides a breakdown of averages for non-Honors and Honors students as well.

**Table 1. Assessment Results Summary**

<b>Formal Academic Writing and Critical Thinking</b>			
	Non-Honors	Honors	Overall Average
1. Thesis	2.45	2.72	2.56
2. Argumentation	2.40	2.75	2.54
3. Organization	2.45	2.74	2.57
4. Textual analysis & evidence	2.64	2.93	2.76
5. Style & mechanics	2.58	2.89	2.71
<b>Engaging Fundamental Questions of the Western Intellectual Tradition</b>			
	Non-Honors	Honors	Overall Average
6. Engaging text and key themes/ideas	2.69	3.09	2.85
7. Critical evaluation of key themes/ideas	2.28	2.53	2.38

#### 5. Analysis of Data.

A) General note on inter-rater reliability and use of the rubric: Our assessors used the assessment instrument in a consistent fashion. While three different assessors rated each paper, the variance among scores given using the five-point scale was almost always one or zero (with a few “twos” and only very rarely a discrepancy of three). This suggests that the rubric is designed in such a way as to be readily understood and employed by those using it.

B) Formal Academic Writing: The first five assessment dimensions in the rubric deal with student writing (corresponding to those items in the draft institutional student learning outcome statement emphasizing the same). Generally speaking the overall average (ranging from 2.54-2.76) suggests that

the student assignments assessed here did better than meeting minimum expectations and were, on the whole, close to being “good” papers. The fact that these papers were already the product of a deliberate revision process, with instructor feedback, should be factored into any global judgment.

Students scored best on style and mechanics (2.71) and textual analysis and evidence (2.76). This result is perhaps unsurprising, since the revision process would have identified problems in these areas in most cases, suggesting corrective measures that would have been relatively easy to take.

Scores for the first three dimensions (thesis, argumentation, and organization) are remarkably close to one another. This likewise makes sense, given the interrelation of those dimensions of writing, but it may suggest a simplification of the rubric in the future. Students scored lowest in these areas, presumably reflecting the greater difficulty of these writing tasks.

Contrasting these results with earlier writing assessment efforts using Heritage sections is difficult but not impossible. A 1998 assessment of 39 writing portfolios (on a 5 point scale where 3 was “average” and 5 was “superior” had an overall average score of 3.21 (the summary does not provide a breakdown of results for the five specific categories - “mechanics, structure, narrative, analysis, and judgment” - used in the assessment). Similarly, writing assessments undertaken in 2001-02 and 2002-03 (using a 5 point scale where 3 = “average competence,” 4 = “high average competence,” and 5 = “highly competent) had averages ranging from 2.55 (for a Skills-Intensive class) to 3.04 and 3.06 (for Regular and Hybrid Regular Heritage sections) to 3.625 and 3.875 for Honors sections (Hybrid and non-Hybrid).

While a close comparison between these earlier assessments and the one discussed here cannot be made (the courses differed as did the rubrics employed), still, some rough comparison may be attempted. Generally speaking, the scores in the 2012 assessment seem to be roughly consistent with earlier assessments of WH writing. The 2012 range (2.54-2.76) is a full point lower but this reflects a difference in the scale used. While the 2012 rubric uses a 5 point scale, both 4 and 5 denoted “excellent” (with 5 to be used very sparingly for truly exceptional work). In other words, the 2012 rubric uses what is in effect a 4-point scale and so a difference of roughly a full point between these scores and scores from earlier years using a 5-point scale suggests continuity more than difference.

C) Engagement/Critical Questioning: The most significant difference in the scoring is to be found in dimension 6 (where students scored the highest) and dimension 7 (where they scored the lowest). The high scores given for dimension 6 (engaging the text and key themes/ideas) suggests that the students took the assignment and the questions they addressed seriously. But the low score given for dimension 7 (critical evaluation of key themes/ideas of the Western intellectual tradition) suggests that students were not raising challenging questions in their approach to the topic. As the assessors pointed out in the discussion we had at the end of the assessment exercise, this may have been the result of the nature of the assigned questions given to the students in this case, which directed the students to very specific topics and may not have invited critical questioning (more about which below).

D) Honors and Non-Honors: There is a clear and consistent difference between Honors and non-Honors essays among those assessed here. For the formal academic writing dimensions, the Honors essays scored about .3 higher across all categories. Under the heading of “engaging fundamental questions of the Western intellectual tradition,” the difference between Honors and non-Honors essays was somewhat greater (.4) for dimension 6 and slightly less (.25) for dimension 7.

6. Feedback from Faculty Assessors.

There are some important limitations of this pilot assessment that should be highlighted. First is the lack of a clear point of comparison in past assessments (the natural result of the fact that this is the first assessment undertaken for the current WH course). A second basic difficulty is the limited sample used in this assessment (using only one instructor and two WH sections).

Several other useful suggestions for future improvement were made by the faculty assessors at the end of the exercise:

1. The writing assignment in this case may help to explain the low scores under dimension 7 (critical questioning). Two of the three topics (on Dante) from which students were free to choose directed students in a way that was thought to be somewhat confining by some of the assessors and, hence, not designed to elicit the sort of critical questioning assessed in dimension 7. The third topic (on Bacon and Montaigne) was chosen by very few of the students. (The topics are reproduced in Appendix B.)
2. To assess WH in the future it will likely be necessary to employ a variety of assessment instruments (portfolios, artistic projects, in-class writing, focus groups, oral communications) in addition to assessment of formal essay assignments.
3. To conduct a rigorous assessment it may be useful to try to gauge the progress of students within one semester or from the beginning of fall semester to the end of spring semester.
4. Assessment of formal academic writing was thought to be fairly straightforward (though adding an assessment of the use of “sources” along with the use of textual evidence was suggested).
5. More could be done to assess the substance of WH (the subject of two items in the rubric, dimensions 6 and 7). For example, it might be useful to add some consideration of “aesthetic appreciation” as well. To expand upon these dimensions in future assessments, it might be useful to survey WH faculty to determine what they think are the courses “key themes and ideas” (or at least some range of them).

#### 7. General recommendations based on this pilot assessment

It is necessary to emphasize again some of the limitations of this pilot assessment, which is really of one instructor’s students more than it is an assessment of Western Heritage as a whole. This limited exercise will prove useful mainly in suggesting improvements to future assessments (about which more below). Nevertheless, there are at least three recommendations worth passing along to the WHOC and to WH instructors:

1. Heritage students seem to have a fair grasp of the basic mechanics of writing. In-class instruction on writing should thus focus on those areas where students did less well: thesis/argumentation/organization.
2. If the student essays assessed here are an accurate reflection of WH students’ critical questioning in the course as a whole, then steps should be taken to emphasize this dimension of the course (or, alternatively, the institutional learning outcome would need to be re-examined).
3. If students are to be encouraged to raise challenging questions in their written work, then space needs to be given to them in the assigned topics to do so. Instructors will use different writing assignments for different purposes, of course, but if students are to be free to raise big

questions in their papers, then constraining them as this assignment may seem to do might limit the range of the questions they entertain.

## 8. Recommendations for future assessment

1. As the WHOC undertakes assessment efforts in the future, it will necessarily determine the specific goals/objectives of those efforts, goals likely to be different in some respects from those stated in the Carthage institutional student learning outcomes document. In that case, different appropriate assessment measures and methods will need to be devised for those purposes. In that process the WHOC should also examine the language of the Carthage institutional learning outcome goal for WH to see if it has any suggestions for adding to or clarifying it.

2. Future assessments of WH will of course survey students from more than one instructors' sections.

3. Steps should be taken, over time, to develop assessment tools that will permit the accumulation of comparable data and that might facilitate comparative judgments over time.

4. Future assessments should use different kinds of assessment instruments to gauge student outcomes in WH. In particular, formal written essays (especially essays that have been revised) may not be the best test of some aspects of student writing. For example, in-class writing (whether final exam answers or prompts designed specifically for WH assessment administered during class time) could usefully serve to gauge most of the dimensions of formal academic writing considered in this assessment pilot (though the rubric would need to be altered appropriately).

## 9. Acknowledgements

Many people helped with designing both the institutional learning outcome for Western Heritage, above all Dana Garrigan and the rest of the Assessment Committee. Thanks are due also to Ben DeSmidt, Dennis Munk, Nicholas Ravnika, and Janice Pellino for help with pre-piloting the assessment rubric. Above all, many thanks to our five assessors: Paul Kirkland, Jean Preston, Nicholas Ravnika, Brian Schwartz, and Karin Sconzert. Cindy Welch's work (under trying circumstances) to finalize the Excel spreadsheet was much appreciated, as was Dana Garrigan's help tabulating the final results. Finally, thanks as well go to Provost Julio Rivera for supporting the exercise with stipends for our faculty assessors

## APPENDIX A:

Carthage College Institutional Student Learning Outcomes  
DRAFT (Revised 12/02/2011)

1. Communication – *Students will be able to effectively communicate ideas to diverse audiences orally and in writing*

- Students will be able to clearly communicate ideas in writing
- Students will be able to write in style that is appropriate for their discipline
- Students will be able to clearly communicate ideas orally
- Students will be able to utilize effective interpersonal communication

2. Complex and Critical Thinking – *Students will be able to evaluate, interpret, integrate, and analyze information to make reasoned decisions*

- Students will be able to access and analyze primary and secondary sources
- Students will be able to reach independent conclusions based on data and independent reasoning
- Students will be able to effectively utilize quantitative information and reasoning
- Students will be able to view issues and problems from more than one point of view or disciplinary perspective

3. Exploring and Evaluating Traditions (Intellectual, Religious, and Cultural) – *Students will engage and explore fundamental questions of human life as they come to sight in the diverse perspectives of the Western and non-Western intellectual, religious, and cultural traditions*

- Students will demonstrate by means of formal academic writing and close textual analysis an ability to critically evaluate key themes and ideas of the Western intellectual tradition
- Students will engage with a non-Western tradition, and be able to critically evaluate key themes and ideas of that tradition
- Students will be able to articulate the origins, components, functions, and concepts of religious worldviews
- Students will be able to identify distinguishing characteristics, similarities, and differences among major world religions

4. Self-knowledge and Personal Ethics

- Students will be able to identify and to critically evaluate the fundamental values that guide their lives as human beings and as citizens
- Students will be able to form moral and ethical judgments of complex human (social, political, artistic, intellectual) phenomena

5. Disciplinary Expertise – Students will be able to complete a significant project during the senior year that demonstrates skill and knowledge in their major discipline

APPENDIX B. Assigned questions for student essays used in the assessment

1. How does Dante’s depiction of the punishment of love and lust in Canto 5 of the *Inferno* clarify the nature of human love on the one hand and the relationship between God’s love and divine punishment on the other?

To explore this topic, consider *some or all* of these questions (these are things to *think about* as you develop your argument/thesis; it is not necessary that you try to answer *all* of them):

Develop your answer with a view to any passages in Cantos 1-4 that address love (and especially God’s love) (you are free to consider passages later in the work as well, but you need not do so). Explore the phenomenon of human love through a careful analysis of the text in Canto 5, to include reflection on the reactions of Dante-as-character in the drama to what he witnesses (note: an answer reducing the phenomenon here to nothing more than “lust” (or adultery) will *not* permit any fruitful exploration of *love*; if that is how you read Canto 5 (which is, of course, one possible reading of the text), then it would make sense to write on a different topic). From what you see in Canto 5, provide an explanation of why love is punished in this way. Is human love in any way a model for God’s love for human beings – or for the love of God by human beings? If it is, why is human love here punished? If not, what are the differences between them? Generally speaking, how could “hell” be a product of God’s love?

2. How does Dante’s depiction of the punishment of the angry and sullen in Cantos 7 and 8 of the *Inferno* clarify the nature of anger on the one hand and the nature of divine punishment on the other?

To explore this topic, consider *some or all* of these questions (these are things to *think about* as you develop your argument/thesis; it is not necessary that you try to answer *all* of them):  
 Develop your answer with a view to any passages in Cantos 1-8 and 11 that address anger. What do we learn about anger from its depiction in Cantos 7 and 8 in particular? Why or how is anger wrong – or sinful? Is there a difference between good anger and bad (or sinful) anger? How does the punishment of anger here help to illuminate its nature? Consider the behavior of Dante-as-character (and Virgil too) in the drama of Canto 8: what does that add to our understanding of anger? Consider as well the other examples of anger that we come across in Cantos 7 and 8 (Filippo Argenti, Plutus, Phlegyas). How does what we learn about anger here help us to understand divine punishment? Is hell the product of God’s anger (according to Dante? according to you?); If so, is there a difference between God’s anger and human anger? If not, then how would one account for the existence of hell? (In consulting Canto 11, consider generally the “logic” of hell as it is presented there. More specifically, see lines 70-75 and 85-90: what do they say about anger/God/hell? The issue of usury raised in Canto 11 can safely be ignored.)

3. Compare Montaigne’s appeal to nature in “On Cannibals” and in “To the Reader” with Bacon’s view that humanity should try to “command nature” (p. 21). Which is the superior view and why?

To explore this topic, consider *some or all* of these questions (these are things to *think about* as you develop your argument/thesis; it is not necessary that you try to answer *all* of them):

Work out the similarities and differences between the two perspectives on nature expressed by the two authors. How does each understand nature? To what extent does nature provide a standard or guidance for human life according to each? Montaigne seems to embrace nature – why does he? In the name of what? *Why* do you think Bacon wants us to try to “command” nature? (Note: Bacon does not give a detailed *justification* for the idea of the conquest of nature. But for passages where he does articulate this vision see especially *The Great Instauration*, pp. 16, 21, 25-26, 31-32. Reflecting on the list of inventions/sciences surveyed in the passages from *New Atlantis* that we cover in class would also likely be helpful.) Which view, according to you, is more sensible? Are there any *alternative* perspectives on nature that you think are worth considering (or perhaps even superior to these two)?

Appendix C: Rubric for Western Heritage Assessment of Formal Academic Writing (Essay Assignment) – Draft 4/August 2, 2012<sup>i</sup>

**Formal Academic Writing<sup>ii</sup> and Critical Thinking<sup>iii</sup>**

Excellent: 4 - 5 <sup>iv</sup>	Good: 3	Meets minimum expectations: 2	Does not meet minimum expectations: 1
<b>1. Thesis.</b> Author advances a complex, interesting claim about an issue of general importance. Thesis is clearly stated near the beginning of the paper and addresses the assigned topic in a thoughtful way.	Author advances a complex claim that is not simply obvious or banal. Thesis is clearly stated and addresses the assigned topic.	Author advances a claim, but the claim is somewhat obvious or confused; and/or it is stated unclearly; and/or it does not address the assigned topic in an effective way.	Author has no clear thesis; and/or advances a claim that is trivial or obvious; and/or fails to address the assigned topic.
<b>2. Argumentation.</b>	Thesis is developed	Thesis is developed	The substance of the

Thesis is developed through effective supporting arguments that are structured logically and persuasively.	through effective supporting arguments.	through supporting arguments but this could be done more effectively or persuasively.	paper does not effectively support or elaborate the thesis.
<b>3. Organization.</b> Essay follows thesis very clearly from start to finish. Author effectively guides the reader through the use of introduction, conclusion, and transitions (“sign-posting”).	Essay generally follows the thesis. Author guides the reader in the introduction and conclusion and through the use of transitions.	Essay follows thesis, but not consistently. Introduction and conclusion could be used more effectively. Transitions are vague/weak or nonexistent.	Essay does not follow thesis. Organization of the essay is very hard to follow. Introduction, conclusion, and transitions are ineffective or nonexistent.
<b>4. Textual Analysis &amp; Evidence.</b> Textual evidence is used in sufficient quantity to make the thesis compelling. Quotations are actually analyzed and explored reflectively.	Textual evidence is used in sufficient quantity to support the thesis. Use of quotations does more than simply help to summarize the text’s basic point or storyline.	Textual evidence is used throughout and author demonstrates a basic familiarity with the text, but a more careful reading would make the paper more effective. Quotations appear but do little to go beyond basic exposition of the text’s obvious argument or storyline.	Author does not examine the text in a serious way. Very few quotations are used and/or quotations are not used to support the argument being made. Discussion of text is inaccurate or implausible or demonstrates lack of familiarity with it.
<b>5. Style and mechanics.</b> The paper is a pleasure to read. No significant errors in the use of language, sentence structure, grammar, spelling, citation, formatting, or in the use of quotations.	Paper is competent and clear. No major or repeated errors in the use of language, sentence structure, grammar, spelling, citation, formatting, or in the use of quotations.	Paper is at times a chore to read. Problems with language, sentence structure, grammar, spelling, citation, formatting, and in the use of quotations distract the reader from the substance of what is being said.	Paper is badly written. There are numerous problems with language, sentence structure, grammar, spelling, citation, formatting, and in the use of quotations.

**Engaging Fundamental Questions of the Western Intellectual Tradition**

<b>Excellent: 4 - 5</b>	<b>Good: 3</b>	<b>Meets minimum expectations: 2</b>	<b>Does not meet minimum expectations: 1</b>
<b>6. Serious engagement with text and with key</b>	Author takes the question treated in the	Author does not convey a strong sense	Author shows no real engagement with the

<p><b>themes and ideas.</b> Author interprets the text in a way that reflects genuine thoughtful engagement with the important themes/questions raised in it.</p>	<p>text seriously and uses the essay as an opportunity to explore it.</p>	<p>of the importance of the question under discussion in the text.</p>	<p>text or the issues raised in it.</p>
<p><b>7. Critical evaluation of key themes/ideas of the Western intellectual tradition.</b><sup>v</sup> Paper thoughtfully raises critical questions about fundamental assumptions (cultural, religious, philosophical, political) advanced in the text. Author brings diverse perspectives to bear in a useful dialectical engagement with the question.</p>	<p>Paper raises critical questions about fundamental assumptions (cultural, religious, philosophical, political) advanced in the text. Author looks at the question raised from more than one point of view.</p>	<p>Paper touches on fundamental assumptions (cultural, religious, philosophical, political) advanced in the text, but these assumptions are not scrutinized critically. Author does not go very far to consider alternative points of view.</p>	<p>No fundamental assumptions (cultural, religious, philosophical, political) are explored. No attempt is made to consider alternative points of view.</p>

<sup>i</sup>This rubric was developed by starting from the statement on Western Heritage in Carthage’s “Institutional Student Learning Outcomes” document (12/02/2011): “Students will demonstrate by means of formal academic writing and close textual analysis an ability to critically evaluate key themes and ideas of the Western intellectual tradition.” Parts of this rubric also reflect borrowings from a “Grading Rubric” developed by James Morris of Brandeis University (with permission).

<sup>ii</sup>A separate rubric for assessing student final exam answers is somewhat different from this document. This rubric is for use in assessing formal academic essays.

<sup>iii</sup>The word “critical” appears in this document in two different senses. Here (first) it is part of the concept of “critical thinking” which is associated with a broad range of analytical tools (logical reasoning, organized argumentation, the use of evidence, etc.). A second, somewhat different, use of the word is used in our assessment dimension 7, “critical evaluation of key themes/ideas of the Western intellectual tradition.” There the meaning is somewhat more precise and has to do with our common-sense understanding of the word “criticism” – raising challenges and questions. This meaning, in turn, is also commonly considered to be one *dimension* of “critical thinking” (and so there is built in to the idea of critical thinking a certain amount of ambiguity). We wish to single out the second meaning of “critical” (in dimension 7) however, to emphasize that one central aim of Western Heritage at Carthage is to encourage students to raise *questions* about the Western intellectual tradition and, indeed, to highlight the *competing* and sometimes contradictory currents of thought within it.

<sup>iiii</sup>A “5” should be given only for truly exceptional work.

<sup>v</sup>See note 2 on the double use of the word “critical” in the student learning outcomes statement.

## Chapter 7. Assumption College

### INSTITUTIONAL GOALS CLARIFIED THROUGH QUALITATIVE NARRATIVE ASSESSMENT

Molly Brigid Flynn, Ph.D.  
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#### INSTITUTIONAL CHOICES:

##### Introduction:

Convinced that current models of assessment obscure much student learning, threaten to undervalue liberal education, and are often out of line with the professional expertise of those most experienced and concerned with student learning, we seek new models to determine how and how well students learn liberally in multidisciplinary programs that prioritize student engagement with excellent texts. We note five observations, based on our experience as students and teachers, about learning and teaching in the liberal arts tradition. These have guided the development of our assessment model and explain why assessment for a text-based, liberal arts core program should differ from the standard model:

- (1) Principle: Some important learning that students achieve in liberal arts courses is not easily or directly quantifiable; this learning is susceptible to being obscured by assessment models that aim for results that are easy to quantify.

Directive: For this reason, assessment prompts should allow students to display benefits of liberal learning—such as depth, insight, thoughtfulness, curiosity, and self-knowledge—that are obscured by quant-heavy or more “objective” assessment tools.

- (2) Principle: Because learning is an activity catalyzed by teaching rather than controlled by it, some important learning students achieve in liberal arts courses is unplanned rather than the fulfillment of specific objectives and strategies of teachers; such learning is susceptible to being overlooked by goals-focused assessment models.

Directive: For this reason, assessment tools should allow students to display learning that was not preconceived by teachers.

- (3) Principle: Much important learning college students achieve is aided by broad curricular programs that are not identified as a major and not the special purview of any department or departments; this learning is susceptible to being ignored by major- and department-centered assessment models.

Directive: For this reason, as long as assessment expresses an institution’s educational focus and commitment, it is possible that we should seek ways to assess student learning outside of majors and departments.

- (4) Principle: Many of the learning goals of core programs are achieved through students applying what they learn in one course to the material in other courses, often in other disciplines, or through students studying related material in multiples courses, often in several disciplines; in such programs, the disciplines and courses are not isolated from one another but are meant to interact and to multiply each other’s contributions to the whole of the person’s education.

Directive: For this reason, assessment tools should allow students to display how the program *qua* program, by weaving many courses and disciplines together, aids student learning.

- (5) Principle: A major learning goal of a text-based liberal education program—beyond that students become familiar with a text’s content or with the text as content (e.g., as historical

artifact) and beyond that they acquire skills such as critical reading—is that students, both sympathetically and critically, use these texts to illuminate the world, themselves, and other people’s beliefs; this learning is easily overlooked by assessment models that focus on measuring mastery of content and skills.

Directive: For this reason, assessment tools should seek out how well students can deploy excellent texts as lights on the world, themselves, and other people.

In short, if assessment informs or even dictates curricular adjustments, then we must not be misled by assessment models that might systematically overlook or undervalue the benefits of text-based, interdisciplinary, liberal education.

#### Brief History:

The Fortin and Gonthier Foundations of Western Civilization Program has grown gradually since its beginnings in 1979. The Foundation Program’s overall goal is to help students understand the heritage of Western Civilization, especially through reflection on primary texts. The initial intention of the first course (Religion and Philosophy) and subsequent courses (most especially Art and Politics) was to recover for students the connections that had been lost by both the aggressive departmentalization of the academy and the compartmentalization of knowledge. Guided by the convictions that higher education is propaedeutic to wisdom and that preparing the ground for wisdom requires many academic domains, each course in itself as well as the interaction among the courses is intended to prepare the students for learning disassociated from formal coursework. Co-curricular cultural events and travel to Europe reinforce this understanding.

The program includes four year-long sequences, including the two interdisciplinary courses already mentioned: “Art and Politics,” which is team-taught by art history and political science professors, and “Religion and Philosophy,” taught by a philosophy or theology professor. Two are not interdisciplinary: “History of Western Civilization” and “Literary Foundations of the West.” The program also sponsors a special topics course (for example, team taught in history and art history), often including a trip abroad. In each of the four sequences, students are led through developments of Western Civilization from ancient Greece to the twentieth century. The sequences are intended to overlap enough so as to show students several key developments in multiple, deepening iterations.

The problem that formal assessment presents to the goals of the Foundations Program is that course- or discipline-specific assessment will miss and, indeed, obscure its interactive and long-term educational goals. Wassily Kandinsky presents an instructive example. How might one adequately assess in a single art history course, with its specialized Student Learning Outcomes and Goals, how a given student or group of students has achieved broader and integrative insights into the artist’s work? Consider his debt to the ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche, the place of Nietzsche in the history of philosophy, the role of nihilist thinking in Russian literature such as Dostoyevsky’s *Brothers Karamazov*, the response to nihilism by either the neo-Thomist philosophical movement or the efforts of C. S. Lewis, or even the relation between Kandinsky’s artwork and the *Regensburg Address* of Benedict XVI. Ideally, the student would make such connections, and more, even though no survey of the history of art could do justice to any of them. Even better, the student should be able to make connections with works, events, and ideas that are not and could not appear on the syllabus. A Student Learning Assessment Plan tied to a specific course (whether in philosophy, art, history, literature, or theology) would miss the interactions and the creative insight of students. The challenge for the Foundations Program is, therefore, to develop a means of assessing that can be applied beyond the confines of single courses and disciplines and beyond the confines of the preordained insights of the professors.

## **ACTION STEPS**

A proper and full assessment of the Foundations Program would be conducted at four moments within and after a student's education: (1) before taking any courses within the Foundations Program; (2) upon completion of each course or sequence of courses; (3) during and after completion of all courses in the Program; (4) and several years after graduation, where we might be able to see if students have retained habits of mind and interest in the intellectual life sufficient to carry them through a lifetime. Current assessment models within departments measure individual courses, so this is not our highest priority. Moreover, we do not have the resources to conduct studies of incoming freshmen and alumni. Currently, the only feasible moment for assessment is during and after completion of the various courses in the Program. While this can capture only part of what the Program does, it might help us develop strategies for even small samples of students before matriculating and after graduating.

Not yet required to participate in assessment procedures, the Foundations Program, based as it is on disciplinary complementarity and reflection on primary texts, seemed a perfect candidate for this experiment in non-standard assessment. The provost was supportive and other faculty and administrators involved in assessment thought such unofficial experimentation was fine. We sought an assessment instrument that would fulfill the principles and directives articulated above while also being low-cost for the program to implement and for the students to complete. We also hoped to discern how well the distinctive features of the Foundations Program aid student learning. These features include, most importantly, interdisciplinarity and a reiterative, developmental sequence of courses. We focused on the following hopes we have for students of the program:

- a) **BREADTH:** Students should become knowledgeable about a wide range of important figures, texts, and events from the development of Western civilization and the Western and Catholic intellectual traditions.
- b) **DEPTH:** As the program unfolds, students should develop a deeper understanding and thoughtfulness about these important figures, texts, and events from the development of Western civilization and the Western and Catholic intellectual traditions.
- c) **SYNTHESIS:** Students should make connections—recognizing points of divergence and convergence, disagreement and reiteration—across the program's courses and disciplines.
- d) **THOUGHTFUL APPLICATION:** Students should be able to articulate the relevance of important primary sources to understanding the world they encounter in, for example, its political, artistic, economic, religious, philosophical, and literary aspects.

The language of 'goals' and 'objectives' suggests that success is in the power of those writing the goals and objectives. Teachers, courses, and programs are crucial aids for students in their work of learning, but no teacher, course, or program can force or efficiently cause students to succeed. Consequently, we understand these as our primary hopes for student self-development.

In order to gauge how well the program helps students fulfill these hopes, we invited students to complete a survey online. We included any current student or recent graduate who had taken at least one course in the program.

First, the survey collected some demographic information about the students, for example, how much of the program they had completed. The survey proper had three phases. (1) It asked students to estimate their level of familiarity with thirty-six major figures in the history of Western Civilization and whether they had learned about these figures through primary texts. (2) It prompted them to report on how they experienced the multidisciplinary, reiterative, and developmental structure of the program.

(For example, did topics and figures reappear in multiple courses? Were later courses redundant? Did the courses seem unrelated? Did they learn new things about topics they had studied before? Did they notice differences or even disagreements course to course, discipline to discipline?) (3) Finally, the survey asked them, in a series of five questions, to name a primary text or work they had studied that helped them understand permanent human issues, themselves, or the recent world in its political, economic, artistic, religious, or ethical dimensions; the survey then asked them to elaborate how this text or work did so.

These sections correspond to our four hopes for student self-development above. Of the three sections of the survey, we expected the first to indicate very roughly how well the program achieved both *breadth* and *depth* in teaching students about Western civilization. We expected the second section to give us some hint of *synthesis*, namely whether the several layers of the program as experienced by students were successfully reiterative and deepening rather than either redundant or irrelevant to each other. We expected the third section to deliver the meat of our assessment data, giving students the opportunity to display their *depth* of understanding, their *thoughtfulness in applying primary texts* to the world, their ability to *synthesize* and understand issues and texts across disciplinary lines, and to develop their own insights. The initial survey yielded some useful information about the program, but also encountered obstacles and suffered some unforeseen limitations.<sup>7</sup>

The first set of obstacles was encountered during the development of the assessment model and attempts to improve and deploy it, even for an initial try. On the one hand, people dedicated to teaching and administrating programs like Foundations typically view assessment as an enemy, and for many good reasons, some of which have been outlined above. There was little enthusiasm or energy on their part to develop and implement this project, even though it was self-consciously counter-cultural, assessment-wise. On the other hand, people dedicated to assessment typically view non-quantitative assessment tools, or any reliance on student self-reporting, as beside-the-point because purportedly subjective and unscientific. A major objection was made by those tasked with coordinating assessment at the college that the tool being developed would not be acceptable as assessment and therefore would ultimately be a waste of time. This both lowered morale and delayed the project. Consequently, the survey has been administered only once so far.

Inevitably, a second set of obstacles was discovered upon administration of the survey. First, the survey suffered from a few technical faults; for example, several questions were not presented to students at all, or not presented to the proper subset of students. Second, a small majority of students skipped some questions entirely; they were especially prone to skip those questions we were most interested in (the third type of question listed above). This has tended to reinforce criticisms of the methods used and the overall impression by those opposed to these methods that only quantitative measures are useful; of course, traditional assessment methods can also suffer from students not putting in a full effort, since poor performance on an assessment tool, as opposed to a graded assignment, is usually of no consequence to students. Hopefully, with some technical adjustments and an increased incentive to develop answers to the short essay questions, these problems can be fixed or mitigated in the future.

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<sup>7</sup> The first deployment of this survey has suffered from several problems in application. First, some of the so called "skip logic" directed all students past some questions rather than only those students to whom the questions did not apply. Second, the database used failed to include a whole the most recent freshman class of students. This seems to have been the result of migrating it between versions of administrative software. As the survey is reissued it will be refined and corrected, and the database of students will be improved.

In spite of these limitations, the survey, even in its test-run, yielded some useful information about the program—both about what is working well and about what calls for improvement.

First, the reiterative nature of the program seems to work. It has been experienced well by students. By very large numbers students reported that the program's courses were clearly connected and relevant to each other. They also reported, in large numbers, that referring to events or issues in repeated courses was not redundant or inconsistent, but rather that it extended their knowledge and deepened their understanding. This is how the program is supposed to work. The persons about whom students reported having a stronger depth of knowledge were also the figures they were most likely to have seen in multiple Foundations courses. This correlation may be intuitively obvious to experienced teachers, but it is reassuring to see it surface in the assessment data.

Second, the interdisciplinary nature of the program seems to work. A strong majority of students noticed professors linking their course material to other courses or disciplines; a strong majority reported making connections on their own to other courses and disciplines; and a strong majority reported noticing differences of opinion (but not inconsistencies) about how to evaluate or understand events or issues. This is how the program is supposed to work. Also, the Art and Politics sequence and the Philosophy and Religion sequence were the sources of a strong majority of the primary works named and commented upon by students when asked to articulate the relevance of a great work to contemporary or perennial issues. Because these are the two interdisciplinary sequences within the program, this fact might suggest that the more interdisciplinary aspects of the program seem to have the most impact on a student's ability to deploy great texts in understanding the world. Of course, instead this fact might just reflect the habit of the disciplines involved or the way these particular courses are taught.

Third, both in reporting their depth of knowledge about important persons and in their naming primary texts and applying them, students seemed especially strong and thoughtful about artistic, political theoretic, religious, and philosophical persons and texts, and they seemed especially strong, both in breadth and depth, on ancient, medieval, and early modern figures and texts. Apart from showing strength and depth on Kant, Marx, and Nietzsche, students' knowledge of and thoughtfulness about late modern and more contemporary persons and texts seemed weaker.

Fourth, with a few exceptions, students showed marked weakness on literary figures and texts from all eras. This evidence is important but not surprising, given that in recent years the program has not been able to regularly offer the year-long Literary Foundations of the West sequence. This does not show a weakness in the program on paper, but in its execution. It does underscore that even students going through the program lack knowledge about a significant aspect of Western Civilization.

Fifth, the survey revealed little about how well the year-long History of Western Civilization course works within the program. On the one hand, judging from the data, it clearly provided students, often through primary sources, with increased breadth of knowledge about many of the important persons not covered in the other courses. On the other hand, these persons and texts did not show up often when students were asked to name and apply great texts. This suggests, perhaps, that while these courses serve to provide students with essential breadth about Western Civilization, they are insufficiently integrated programmatically with the other courses or disciplines involved in the program. It also suggests that perhaps the survey should be adjusted so that it might better intimate the influence of the history sequence on students.

Regarding the four learning goals listed above, breadth, depth, synthesis, and thoughtful application, the survey seems to indicate that the Foundations Program serves its students well, although it also indicates that the program has a few lacunae that might be filled with increased programmatic attention and coordination among its several sequences of courses.

### **INFORMED JUDGEMENTS**

As this report shows, despite the imperfections in the initial administration of the survey, we gained some perspective on the program. What we have learned about the program may seem modest. It is. But the method's costs in resources and time were also modest. Moreover, it is as useful as any results we have ever seen of traditional assessment tools applied to liberal arts programs. Compared to such traditional assessment models, this process has given us more helpful insight into how well the program coheres as a program, across courses and disciplines, *in student experience*. It has not given us exact data as to whether students are caused to meet the objectives teachers and administrators preordain for them, and it has not pretended to. This model clearly does not meet expectations for scientific validity, since it has not tried, in pursuit of a one-sided notion of objectivity, to abstract from the judgment of students and teachers. Most importantly, this model, in line with our five principles and directives above, does not invite us to diminish our hopes for students into objectives that may seem more exactly measurable.

Finally, it should be noted that assessment tools must not be accepted naively. This is true for standard assessment models as well as for the experiments in liberal arts-friendly assessment. Assessment tools should be designed to help detect weaknesses and strengths of academic programs; sometimes, they indicate their own weaknesses instead.

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