

# Department of Liberal Studies Assessment Plan

[revised, September 2021]

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## 1. OVERVIEW

In light of its Mission Statement, the Department of Liberal Studies expects its graduates to achieve five Student Learning Outcomes subsumed under three Learning Goals. The Liberal Studies core curriculum provides a cohesive course pattern through which students are introduced to learning outcomes in their initial courses and then develop and master these outcomes in subsequent courses. Assessment takes place over a three-year cycle in which specific outcomes are assessed each year. Direct assessment is achieved through embedded assignments in relevant core courses. Indirect assessment triangulates with direct assessment through a senior exit questionnaire.

## 2. LIBERAL STUDIES MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Department of Liberal Studies is to provide its students with an educational experience that promotes interdisciplinary knowledge of major ideas in the humanities, arts, natural sciences, and social sciences, and advances critical reasoning and effective writing skills.

### 3. Liberal Studies Learning Goals and Student Learning Outcomes

The following goals and learning outcomes have been established for students pursuing a Bachelors of Arts Degree in Liberal Studies.

#### GOAL 1: *Written Communication*

##### **Learning Outcome:**

- 1 Present ideas and subject matter coherently in written communication.

#### GOAL 2: *Analysis*

##### **Learning Outcomes:**

- 2a Compare and contrast significant concepts, themes and arguments from the arts and humanities.
- 2b Compare and contrast significant concepts, themes and arguments from the social sciences.
- 2c Compare and contrast significant concepts, themes and arguments from the natural sciences.

#### GOAL 3: *Interdisciplinarity*

##### **Learning Outcome:**

- 3 Explain interdisciplinary connections among and within the three subject areas: arts and humanities, social sciences, natural sciences.

## 4. LIBERAL STUDIES CURRICULUM MAP

All learning outcomes are introduced in LBST 300, Introduction to Liberal Studies.

Outcome 1 is developed in LBST 301, Inquiry and Composition in Liberal Studies; it is developed in LBST 302A/B, Historical Dimension of Liberal Studies, as well as in LBST 303, 304, 305, and 401: Liberal Studies in the Humanities and Arts, Liberal Studies in the Sciences, Liberal Studies in the Social Sciences, and Knowledge in the Arts and Sciences. Mastery of Outcome 1 to a degree appropriate for graduation is achieved in one of the required Liberal Studies Senior Seminars, LBST 485-492.

Learning Outcomes 2a, 2b, 2c, and 3 are developed in LBST 302A/B and further developed in LBST 303, 304 and 305; mastery to a degree appropriate for graduation is achieved in 303, 304 and 305 and particularly in 401 and the senior seminars, LBST 485-492.

**LBST Learning Outcomes**

	1	2a	2b	2c	3
	300	I	I	I	I
	301	I, D			I, D
	302A	I, D	I, D	I, D	I, D
	302B	D	D	D	D
	303	D	D, M		D, M
<b>LBST Courses</b>	304	D		D, M	D, M
	305	D		D, M	D, M
	Electives	D			D
	401	D	M	M	M
*	485-492	M	M*	M*	M*

**485-492** Course content varies by seminar -- appropriate outcomes 2a-c mastered.

**KEY**

- I** introduced
- D** developed and practiced with feedback
- M** mastered at level appropriate for graduation

## 5. Three-Year Cycle for Assessment of LBST Learning Outcomes

Assessment of LBST learning outcomes takes place through a three-year cycle. Embedded assignments are administered in the fall of each academic year followed by analysis in the subsequent spring semester. Discussion of assessment data takes place at the May department meeting and includes plans for curriculum adjustments if necessary.

	<b>when</b>	<b>evidence</b>	<b>collected</b>	<b>how assessed</b>	<b>close loop</b>
<b>1</b>	year 1	essay assignment in senior seminars exit questionnaire	seminar faculty seminar faculty	grading rubric scored	April Dpt meeting
<b>2a</b>	year 2	embedded assignment: 303 exit questionnaire	303 faculty seminar faculty	grading rubric scored	April Dpt meeting
<b>2b</b>	year 2	embedded assignment: 304 exit questionnaire	304 faculty seminar faculty	grading rubric scored	April Dpt meeting
<b>2c</b>	year 2	embedded assignment: 305 exit questionnaire	305 faculty seminar faculty	grading rubric scored	April Dpt meeting
<b>3</b>	year 3	embedded assignment: 401 exit questionnaire	401 faculty seminar faculty	grading rubric scored	April Dpt meeting

## 6. Assessment Procedure for Learning Outcome 1

### 1 Present ideas and subject matter coherently in written communication.

#### **Direct Assessment:**

LBST faculty who teach senior seminar courses assess the ability of students to “write clearly and correctly” and to “present ideas and subject material coherently” by means of a short thesis-driven essay that is evaluated according to a shared rubric with three assessment categories: Focus, Analysis and Organization, and Readability and Style. Prior to assigning essays, faculty will consult and agree on degree of difficulty. Topics do not need to be the same in different sections. A shared assessment rubric is applied. Faculty will conduct a norming session to calibrate grading rubric and to insure inter-rater reliability. Indication that learning outcome 1 has been satisfactorily achieved is when 80% of students achieve grades of “proficient” (B) or “advanced” (A) in the “Readability and Style,” “Focus” and “Analysis and Organization” categories of the senior seminar assessment essays.

#### **Indirect Assessment:**

The exit questionnaire administered to senior seminar students includes a question addressing learning goal 1. According to this measure, learning outcome 1 is satisfactorily achieved if 80% of the students respond to the relevant exit exam questions with options “excellent” (A) or “good” (B).

## 6a. Student Writing Development Rubric

The following **rubric** articulates the way in which we expect student writing skills to develop throughout the course of their baccalaureate degree. As students progress, the quality of their writing should move from the “basic” and “developing” levels toward “proficient” (B) and “advanced (A).”

Writing outcome	Below Basic (D)	Developing (C)	Proficient (B)	Advanced (A)
Focus	Thesis is unidentifiable or does not respond to the assignment. Essay has no coherent focal point.	Thesis fits the writing assignment, is identifiable but vague, too broad, or unrelated to the essay. Essay is not consistently or adequately linked to the thesis.	Thesis fits the writing assignment, is clear and, expresses a specific point of view. Essay maintains consistent and adequate connection to the thesis.	Thesis fits the writing assignment, is clear, and expresses a specific point of view that is legitimately debatable and insightful. Essay maintains a connection to the thesis with style.
Analysis and Organization	Ideas not explained; inadequate or inappropriate evidence; unorganized: no clear relationship between paragraphs or sentences.	Typically explains concepts; over uses or under-analyzes evidence; demonstrates some signs of organization; occasionally includes abrupt or illogical shifts and ineffective sequence of ideas.	Develops concepts coherently within paragraphs effectively-ordered paragraphs and generally links concepts with useful transitions; supports the thesis with credible, analyzed evidence.	Develops concepts with sophistication and creativity, sequences ideas effectively and seamlessly; supports the thesis with well-selected and thoroughly analyzed evidence.
Readability and Style	Spelling, syntax, diction, or punctuation errors impede readability; incorrect or omitted citations; tone suggests an absence of audience awareness.	Spelling, syntax, diction, or punctuation errors impede readability or otherwise distract from meaning; generally uses citations correctly; tone is inconsistent or suggests misreading of the audience.	Spelling, syntax, diction, or punctuation errors are few and do not distract from meaning; correctly uses appropriate citations; uses tone appropriate to audience.	Outstanding control of language, including effective diction and sentence variety; superior facility with the conventions of standard written English. Correctly uses appropriate citations; uses tone with sophistication.

Last Revised: 4/20/12

## 6b. Assessment Rubric for Senior Seminar Essays

### CLASS TOTALS

Instructor \_\_\_\_\_ Seminar \_\_\_\_\_

SPRING \_\_\_\_\_ FALL \_\_\_\_\_ enrollment \_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate total numbers of grades given in your class for each category

### TOTALS

	A (advanced)	B (proficient)	C (developing)	D (below basic)	F
1. Focus					
2. Analysis and Organization					
3. Readability and Style					

INDIVIDUAL EVALUATIONS  
(ONLY FOR INSTRUCTOR USE)

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Seminar \_\_\_\_\_

	A (advanced)	B (proficient)	C (developing)	D (below basic)	F
1. Focus					
2. Analysis and Organization					
3. Readability and Style					

This page is only to record the results for each student. It does not need to be returned to the Assessment Committee.

## 7. Procedures for Embedded Assessment of Learning Goals 2 and 3

1. All embedded assessments are assessment tools that also are part of the grading procedure for specific courses. Following a three-year cycle, embedded assessments take place during fall semesters with analysis during the subsequent spring semester culminating in discussion at the May department meeting.

### 2. Learning Goals 2a, 2b, 2c

- 2a Compare and contrast significant concepts, themes and arguments from the arts and humanities.
- 2b Compare and contrast significant concepts, themes and arguments from the social sciences.
- 2c Compare and contrast significant concepts, themes and arguments from the natural sciences.

#### Direct Assessment:

For learning goals 2a, 2b, 2c, each instructor in 303, 304, and 305 administers a comparable essay comparing and contrasting significant concepts, themes and arguments in arts and humanities (303), social sciences (305) or natural sciences (304). Prior to assigning essays, faculty will consult and agree on degree of difficulty. Topics do not need to be the same in different sections. A shared assessment rubric is applied. Faculty will conduct a norming session to calibrate grading rubric and to insure inter-rater reliability. According to this measure, learning outcomes 2a, 2b, or 2c are satisfactorily achieved if at least 80% of the students rate as “competent” (B) or “accomplished” (A).

#### Indirect Assessment:

The exit questionnaire administered to senior seminar students includes questions addressing learning goals 2a, 2b, and 2c. According to this measure, learning outcomes 2a, 2b, 2c are satisfactorily achieved if at least 80% of the students respond to relevant questions with options “excellent” (A) or “good” (B).

### 3. Learning Goal 3

- 3 Explain interdisciplinary connections among and within the three subject areas: arts and humanities, social sciences, natural sciences.

#### Direct Assessment:

For learning goal 3 each instructor in LBST 401 administers a comparable essay addressing interdisciplinary connections among or within the three subject areas: arts and humanities, social sciences, natural sciences. Prior to assigning essays, faculty will consult and agree on degree of difficulty. Topics do not need to be the same in different sections. A shared assessment rubric is applied. Faculty will conduct a norming session to calibrate grading rubric and to insure inter-rater reliability. According to this rubric, learning outcome 3 is satisfactorily achieved if at least 80% of the students rate as “competent” (B) or “accomplished” (A).

#### Indirect Assessment:

The exit questionnaire administered to senior seminar students includes a question addressing learning goal 3. According to this measure, learning outcome 3 is satisfactorily achieved if at

least 80% of the students respond with options “excellent” (A) or “good” (B).

**7a RUBRIC FOR EMBEDDED ASSIGNMENT in 303, 304, and 305**  
(ESSAY TO ASSESS LEARNING OUTCOMES 2a, 2b, 2c)

Assignment Template: “Compare and contrast [significant concepts, themes, arguments, . . .]”

DIMENSION	RATING CATEGORIES			
	Beginning (D)	Developing (C)	Competent (B)	Accomplished (A)
<b>Comparison</b>	Fails to identify relevant commonalities among significant concepts, themes, and arguments.	Inaccurately identifies and weakly develops relevant commonalities among significant concepts, themes, and arguments.	Identifies relevant commonalities among significant concepts, themes, and arguments with reasonable accuracy and adequate development.	Identifies relevant commonalities among significant concepts, themes, and arguments with great accuracy and with insightful and sophisticated development.
<b>Contrast</b>	Fails to identify relevant contrasts among significant concepts, themes, and arguments.	Inaccurately identifies and weakly develops relevant contrasts among significant concepts, themes, and arguments.	Identifies relevant contrasts among significant concepts, themes, and arguments with reasonable accuracy and adequate development.	Identifies relevant contrasts among significant concepts, themes, and arguments with great accuracy and with insightful and sophisticated development.

**Assessment Standard:** According to this rubric, learning outcome 2a, 2b, or 2c is satisfactorily achieved if at least 80% of the students rate as “competent” (B) or “accomplished” (A) in ability to both compare and contrast.

**7b RUBRIC TO ASSESS LEARNING OUTCOME 3**

Assignment Template: “Explain interdisciplinary connections between [major historical events, theories, paradigms, movements, *Weltanschauungen*, . . .]”

DIMENSION	RATING CATEGORIES			
	Beginning (D)	Developing (C)	Competent (B)	Accomplished (A)
<b>Interdisciplinarity</b>	Fails to identify interdisciplinary connections.	Inaccurately identifies and weakly develops interdisciplinary connections.	Explains relevant interdisciplinary connections with reasonable accuracy and adequate development.	Explains relevant interdisciplinary connections with great accuracy and with insightful and sophisticated development.

**Assessment Standard:** According to this rubric, learning outcome 3 is satisfactorily achieved if

at least 80% of the students rate as “competent” (B) or “accomplished” (A).

## 8. LIBERAL STUDIES EXIT QUESTIONNAIRE

The following questions are designed to assess the effectiveness of the Liberal Studies program. We value your feedback and will use it to evaluate and improve our program. Many thanks for your help.

**Please indicate which emphasis you are following:**

ITE \_\_\_\_\_

EEE \_\_\_\_\_

**Please answer all nine (9) questions on both sides of the questionnaire and indicate your answers on a scale from “excellent” (A) to “poor” (E):**

1. To what extent did the Liberal Studies core courses teach you to write clearly and correctly?  
a  b  c  d  e
  
2. To what extent did the Liberal Studies core courses teach you to analyze and present ideas and subject matter coherently?  
a  b  c  d  e
  
3. To what extent did the Liberal Studies core courses teach you to identify significant figures, concepts, themes and developments in the arts and humanities?  
a  b  c  d  e
  
4. To what extent did the Liberal Studies core courses teach you to identify significant figures, concepts, themes and developments in the social sciences?  
a  b  c  d  e
  
5. To what extent did the Liberal Studies core courses teach you to identify significant figures, concepts, themes and developments in the natural sciences?  
a  b  c  d  e

6. To what extent did the Liberal Studies core courses teach you to compare and contrast significant concepts, themes and arguments from the arts and humanities?

a  b  c  d  e

7. To what extent did the Liberal Studies core courses teach you to compare and contrast significant concepts, themes and arguments from the social sciences?

a  b  c  d  e

8. To what extent did the Liberal Studies core courses teach you to compare and contrast significant concepts, themes and arguments from the natural sciences?

a  b  c  d  e

9. To what extent did the Liberal Studies core courses teach you to explain interdisciplinary connections among and within the three subject areas: arts and humanities, social sciences, natural sciences?

a  b  c  d  e