



Core Curriculum Assessment Report 2011_12

Department Honors College

Representative William F. Trimble

Course Name / number HONR1017, HONR1017

1. AGSC Content Area of Alignment: Area IV: History, Social and Behavior Sciences

2. SLO(s) being assessed: Student will..

SLO 2: Students will be able to read analytically and critically.

SLO 3: Students will be able to critique and construct an argument effectively.

SLO 8: Students will be informed and engaged citizens of the U.S. and the world.

3. Assessment Method(s):

[Explain how assessment for the measures associated with this SLO - not grading for the course as a whole - was conducted. You may cut/paste rubrics for inclusion here, identify faculty reviewing committees, or identify specific kinds of test questions important to your method. Is this the method you initially planned to use? Provide a separate paragraph for each method].

Methodology: One of the challenges in this and other interdisciplinary courses is that faculty teaching discussion sections may assign their own supplemental readings and/or emphasize different aspects of works read by the entire class. Not surprisingly this consideration, plus the fact that different mixes of students, mean that each discussion section assumes its own identity. Although students and faculty indicate these varieties are one of the most interesting and valuable aspects of the course, it also means that most academic evaluations of students take place within these small groups; within the broad parameters of the course and the common syllabus, each faculty team enjoys wide latitude in designing the quizzes, essays, projects, and exams that evaluate their students' performance. Assessing how well the program as a whole met the SLOs presented a difficult, but not impossible, balancing act. After discussion and collaboration the faculty decided that the best way to evaluate how well the course met the SLOs was to employ direction assessment. That is, we asked students in all sections to read a brief excerpt from an important figure in technology and culture and ask them to answer, in a short essay, a number of questions tailored to fit the SLOs. We anticipated that this would allow students to demonstrate their ability to analyze a piece of writing (SLO 2), to compose and construct a persuasive argument (SLO 3), and to show that they could place this information within a global context (SLO 8). HONR 1007 Evaluation Fall 2011: In order to evaluate how well the course had prepared students of the fall section (HONR 1007) to address the SLOs, faculty members designed a final exam essay that was given to all class members. Students were given a brief excerpt from an interview that the Smithsonian Institution did in 1995 with Apple founder Steve Jobs. During the semester they had watched and we discussed a video on Jobs and the history of the iPod. In the Smithsonian interview, Jobs discussed the limitations of technology in solving the world's problems, his personal and professional goals, where he thought technology played a role in education, the role of the federal government in promoting technological change, and the Internet and World Wide Web. Students were asked to read the work and compose a short essay that addressed a number of questions, including "Why do you think the Smithsonian decided to interview Jobs in 1995?" "What does Jobs mean by Apple's stress on the 'humanistic' aspect of technology?" "Why does Jobs think the Internet and the World Wide Web were so exciting in 1995?" and "What do you think changed to make Jobs believe that technology could no longer solve the world's problems?" (A copy of the excerpt and questions is attached). Faculty members graded their own students' final exams, and the student performance on the essay comprised a portion of their final exam scores. Faculty members photocopied their students' essays and submitted them to the course coordinator, Bill Trimble, who rated the essays using the approved rubrics for each of the three SLOs. These gauged the student's ability to meet each SLO on a scale of 1-5. For example, the rubric for SLO 2 (which evaluated the ability to critically analyze a piece of evidence) assigned a score of 1 if "Student fails to comprehend the argument or thesis," 3 if "Student demonstrates an acceptable comprehension of the argument or thesis" arguments," and 5 if "Student fully comprehends the



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central argument or thesis. . . .” Similar rubrics were used for each of the measures in all three of the SLOs. (Copies of the assessment rubrics are attached). Fifty-eight (58) essays were evaluated for each of the three SLO categories, for a total of 174 evaluations. The average score for SLO 2 was 3.62; for SLO 3 it was 3.10; and for SLO 8 it was 3.12. Of the 174 evaluations, no student scored a “1,” and 24 (7.2%) scored a “2.” Thirty-one (31) of 58 students (53%) received a 4 or 5 on SLO 2; 18 of 58 (31%) received a 4 or 5 on SLO 3, and 12 of 58 (21%) received a 4 or 5 on SLO 8. Twenty-three (23) of 58 students received a 3 (39%) on SLO 2; 23 of 58 got a 3 (39%) on SLO 3, and 41 of 58 (71%) received a 3 on SLO 8. (Statistical results are below). From the essays it appears that a clear majority of the students were able to comprehend the basics of the Jobs interview, and a strong minority of them were able to make their cases in well-constructed and articulated essays. They understood the evidence Jobs used (mostly his own personal experience with the personal computer and Apple) in making his points. Nearly all of the students picked up on the aesthetic component of the technology, which Jobs stressed a good deal in the interview. That is encouraging in that it points to the success of the course in linking technology with culture and the humanistic dimensions of technology. Other students did well in understanding the limits of technology and agreed with Jobs that technology alone was not going to change the world. And most understood the truly global nature of the technology. Many of the students used their own experience with computers and the Internet as evidence for their analyses and conclusions. A few, perhaps based on their own experience, could not help but point out the irony of Jobs advocating for the openness and democratic nature of the computer with his company’s policy for proprietary hardware and software. Others did well in understanding the complexity and non-linear nature of technological change. Generally, most of the students were engaged and informed, although the statistical results were weakest in this respect. HONR 1017 Evaluation Spring 2012: Faculty followed a similar approach in designing the SLO evaluation during the Spring semester of the course (HONR 1017). In this case, students were asked to analyze an excerpt from a 1998 lecture by cultural historian Neil Postman, titled “Five Things We Need to Know about Technological Change.” Postman stresses how all technologies involve tradeoffs, with advantages and disadvantages. This meshed with what students had read in Edward Tenner’s *Why Things Bite Back*, which we used as a text to give students a perspective on unintended consequences and the negative effects of modern technologies. In his lecture Postman argues that it would better for us to ask the question: “What will a new technology undo” rather than “What will a new technology do?” Added to this is his idea that new technologies do not affect everyone equally, in effect a zero-sum game where a technology that benefits some will be offset by the harm it does to others. Technology allows us to give mental structure to the world, as well as to shape our environment physically. Technological change changes everything, in essence being fundamentally ecological rather than linearly additive. Finally, technology, especially the electronic media, takes on dangerously mythic proportions that transcend reality and it is perceived as part of the “natural” order of things. We need to learn to use technology rather than have it use us. Again, students were asked to answer a number of questions about the document in the form of a short, well-written essay. For example, students were asked to “provide examples of technologies that best explain each of Postman’s ‘five things.’” They were asked: “In what ways do Postman’s ideas parallel those of Edward Tenner?” [one of whose books was used as a text for the course] And they were asked “In what ways might Postman see technology as a cause of global environmental, social, economic, and political problems?” (A copy of the excerpt and questions is attached). As they did in the fall with HONR 1007, faculty members photocopied the students’ essays and submitted them to the course coordinator, Bill Trimble, who rated the essays using the same rubrics for each of the three SLOs as were used in HONR 1007. Fourteen essays were evaluated for each of the three SLO categories, for a total of 42 evaluations. The average score for SLO 2 was 4.43; for SLO 3 it was 3.64, and for SLO 8 it was 3.36. Of the 42 evaluations, no student scored a “1,” and only 1 (2%) scored a “2.” On the other hand, 13 of 14 students (93%) received a 4 or 5 on SLO 2; 10 of 14 (71%) received a 4 or 5 on



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SLO 3, and 6 of 14 (43%) received a 4 or 5 on SLO 8. (Statistical results are below). The essays show that all of the students grasped the basic concepts put forward by Postman, probably because they were clearly laid out in the five categories that he said they needed to know. Most of the students crafted strong, well organized essays using examples and evidence from the course. Most of them also firmly established the connections between what Postman put forward and what they had picked up from the Tenner book—that is, that there are tradeoffs and unintended consequences of technologies. All of the essays showed that the students had an understanding of the essential and dynamic connection between technology and culture. Eleven of the 14 clearly understood Postman’s critique of capitalism. Less easy to gauge from the essays was how engaged and informed students were. It was clear that they were informed, as some of the essays demonstrated that the students understood what technology meant to them and to the global problems associated with it. Some of the essays specifically mentioned global climate change as a problem caused by technology that was likely not fixable by technology. It was less clear from the essays if the students were engaged as global citizens, although one might infer that from their “informed” level.

4. Findings: What assessment data did each assessment method produce?

Differences between Fall and Spring Scores: The raw data show that Tech and Culture students performed at or above average during both semesters. The numbers did, however, increase in HONR 1017 in the spring, averaging nearly a full percentage point above the fall (HONR 1007) for SLO 2. The faculty members who analyzed this data found this somewhat surprising. Why this was so is not easy to determine, but it is possible:1. That among the much smaller number of students in the spring course were self-selected, high-achieving students who had also taken the fall course. They were familiar with how the course was structured, the issues, and the course requirements in general.2. That the small number of students in the spring semester and the number of faculty and postdocs meant more personal attention to each student and a higher level of involvement and engagement in the material.3. That the Postman excerpt on which students based their essays in the spring semester was so structured as to make it easier for students to structure their essays. On the other hand, both essays required students to answer similar questions.4. That the much smaller number of students (71% smaller) in the spring course renders any meaningful statistical comparisons problematic at best. Conclusion: Students enrolled in the Fall 2011 Technology and Culture course performed in about the mid-range category on all of the SLOs, with SLO 8 being relatively the weakest. In the Spring 2012 HONR 1017 course, students did better, especially on SLO 2; once more, they did relatively worse on SLO 8, although somewhat better than students in HONR 1007. That the students read a different excerpt and answered different questions makes the comparison between the two problematic, despite the faculty’s efforts to achieve continuity and consistency in the assessment instruments and process. Comparing how students did in AY 2011-2012 to AY 2010-2011 is revealing. HONR 1007 students in the fall of 2011 did worse than those in HONR 1007 in the fall of 2010 in all of the SLOs. They were, for example, a full percentage point behind HONR 1007 students from the fall of 2010 in SLOs 3 and 8. On the other hand, HONR 1017 students in AY 2011-2012 did significantly better on SLO 2 than their counterparts in AY 2010-2011 (4.43 average vs. 3.8), and were either marginally ahead or only a tenth of a percentage point behind HONR 1017 students from AY 2010-2011 in SLOs 3 and 8. As suggested above in comparing the fall semester AY 2011-2012 to the spring semester AY 2011-2012 may be due to the structure of the Postman excerpt. Part of the reason for the variation in performance may also be due to anomalies caused by the random sampling that was done in AY 2010-2011 versus the use of full samples in AY 2011-2012. The course syllabuses were significantly different in the two academic years, as were the teaching teams, which render meaningful statistical comparisons between the two hard, if not impossible. Finally, another variable is that the AY 2010-2011 survey summary and report



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was done by one of the course postdocs, and the AY 2011-2012 survey report by the course coordinator. The two most likely applied the essay rubrics differently. Yet the results for SLOs 3 and 8 for AY 2011-2012 and AY 2010-2011 are remarkably similar, due in part to the similar small sample sizes. Again, the data from both academic years suggest that the course and the faculty have succeeded in meeting the SLOs, although there is ample room for improvement based on the results we have from the two years surveyed.

5. How did you (or will you) use the findings for improvement?

[What questions / issues / concerns did your data raise for the faculty teaching the course? What discussion did the faculty have about the findings? What future actions to improve student attainment of this outcome will the department / program take as a result of this analysis?]

Recommendations: In order to determine more precisely the effectiveness of the program in preparing students to meet the objectives the faculty have followed through with a recommendation from the AY 2010-2011 report to implement an indirect evaluation instrument. At the beginning of the fall semester HONR 1007 AY 2012-2013 course, the faculty will have students complete a 20-question true and false survey, which will be administered again at the end of the fall semester to provide additional comparative data. Modifying the selection of readings and "fine-tuning" the plenary lectures to bring them more in line with the SLOs and the program objectives may help with the overall effectiveness of the program. We understand, however, that in doing so we do not want to lose the stimulating interdisciplinarity of the course. Closely instructing guest plenary lecturers, for example, might be especially counterproductive and jeopardize the diversity that is one of the strengths of the course. More standardization of evaluation methods (exams and quizzes) from section to section and from semester to semester might yield more consistent and useful assessment results. Yet doing so in a multi-section interdisciplinary course would obviate some of its advantages over conventional courses. Both students and faculty found one of the most positive and rewarding aspects of the course: that the interdisciplinary faculty provided a unique perspective of viewpoints. Continuous assessment will help us maintain a balance between overstructuring the course and the equivalent of pedagogical anarchy.

6. Additional Comments:

[What else would you like the Committee to know about your assessment of this course or plans for the future?]

7. Committee Comments

Mean rubric score= 3.86 (out of 4) While I think very apropos for SLOs 2 and 3, this method of assessment is difficult to connect to SLO 8 (as the report itself notes) -- it's pigeonholed in a way that doesn't quite work here. Might they consider separating out SLO 8 and testing it separately? I think that this is an excellent example of how to test for SLOs 2 and 3, but again not so much for 8. As much as 2 and 3 complement each other, three SLOs is a lot, and I just don't think that bunching them together is the best approach.

HONR 1007 (Technology and Culture Fall 2011) Scoring Breakdown:

SLO 2 (“Students will be able to read analytically and critically.”)

<u>Score</u>	<u>Number of Responses</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1	0	0
2	3	5
3	23	39
4	25	43
5	6	10

Average score: 3.62

SLO 3 (“Students will be able to construct an effective argument.”)

<u>Score</u>	<u>Number of Responses</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1	0	0
2	17	29
3	23	39
4	14	24
5	4	7

Average score: 3.1

SLO 8 (“Students will be informed and engaged citizens of the United States and the world.”)

<u>Score</u>	<u>Number of Responses</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1	0	0
2	5	9
3	41	71
4	12	21
5	0	0

Average score 3.12

HONR 1017 (Technology and Culture Spring 2012) Scoring Breakdown:

SLO 2 (“Students will be able to read analytically and critically.”)

<u>Score</u>	<u>Number of Responses</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1	0	0
2	0	0
3	1	7
4	6	43
5	7	50

Average score: 4.43

SLO 3 (“Students will be able to construct an effective argument.”)

<u>Score</u>	<u>Number of Responses</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1	0	0
2	0	0
3	4	28
4	7	50
5	3	21

Average score 3.64

SLO 8 (“Students will be informed and engaged citizens of the United States and the world.”)

<u>Score</u>	<u>Number of Responses</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1	0	0
2	1	7
3	7	50
4	6	43
5	0	0

Average score: 3.36