



# **HUMANITIES AND JUSTICE STUDIES (BA)**

## **Program Learning Assessment**

### **2011-2014 Assessment Planning Cycle Key Findings and Proposed Actions**

**October 1, 2015**

## **Acknowledgments**

The implementation of the 2011 to 2014 assessment plan, leading to key findings and actions to enhancing the learning experience of Humanities and Justice Studies majors, was made possible by the active participation of talented faculty in the program. The contributions of the following faculty members are acknowledged.

Bettina Carbonell

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Program Learning Assessment

2011-2014 Assessment Planning Cycle  
Key Findings and Proposed Actions

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## Humanities and Justice Studies (BA)

### Mission

The Humanities and Justice Studies (HJS) major offers students the opportunity to explore fundamental questions about justice from a humanistic, interdisciplinary perspective. Rooted in history, literature and philosophy, Humanities and Justice prepares students for basic inquiry and advanced research into issues of justice that lie behind social policy and criminal justice as well as broader problems of social morality and equity. Its courses are designed to help students develop the skills of careful reading, critical thinking and clear writing that are necessary for the pursuit of any professional career. This major provides an excellent preparation for law school and other professional programs, for graduate school in the humanities, and for careers in law, education, public policy and criminal justice.

### Learning Objectives

Learning Objective 1 (Knowledge Acquisition): Students will gain a comprehensive foundation in major concepts, underlying principles, values, issues, and theories of justice in the Western tradition.

Learning Objective 2 (Knowledge Acquisition): Students will gain a comprehensive foundation in non-Western traditions of justice in several historical periods through direct engagement with historical, literary, and philosophical primary texts.

Learning Objective 3 (Comparative Analytical Skills): Students will learn to identify and analyze the issues and theories embedded in primary texts concerning justice.

Learning Objective 4 (Multidisciplinary Methods of Inquiry): Students will learn to employ, compare, and evaluate the methods of inquiry used in the disciplines of history, literary study, and philosophy.

Learning Objective 5 (Writing and Rhetorical Skills): Students will be able to produce well-reasoned, coherently written, evidence-based, argumentative analyses of primary sources.

Learning Objective 6 (Research Skills + Information Literacy): Students will be able to investigate an original research question or research problem, and / or argue an original thesis, by engaging in a critical, rigorous, and ethical process of academic research.

### Assessment Cycle Review

Humanities and Justice Studies has a well-established culture of assessment, and a well-developed system of assessment rubrics and criteria by which the goals of the course can be directly evaluated. These were all put in place by a former HJS Coordinator, Bettina Carbonell, back in 2011-12, and were used for consistency throughout this process.

The HJS gateway course is 250 Justice in the Western Traditions / 310 Comparative Perspectives on Justice. Both HJS 250 and HJS 310 are foundational courses intended to prepare students for their ongoing investigations and analyses of justice-related issues and questions. HJS 310 was added to the curriculum after the initial creation of the HJS major in order to provide students with a more comprehensive working knowledge of non-Western perspectives. This curriculum revision was undertaken as a result of an ongoing self-study by the HJS faculty. The importance of these perspectives will likely continue to increase, considering the current international and often global scope of justice-related events and policies. It is also important to recognize that many students choose to focus their senior thesis research on topics for which a foundation in comparative / non-Western perspectives is essential. Subsequently, in Oct 2014, the HJS faculty prepared and approved new learning outcomes.

The HJS Research Methods course is 315. HJS 315 focuses on research methods — modeled at first by the investigation of a topic chosen by the Instructor. Students must then select a topic of their own and begin to develop and implement a research plan. In HJS 315 (the research methods course) none of the students exceeded, and less than half approached expectations of identify, compare, contrast, apply and evaluate the concepts, underlying principles, values, and theories embedded in justice-related issues, events, and texts; they will be able to formulate, find a theoretical framework for, and seek answers to their own original research questions. Since the focus here is on modeling the research process, identifying databases, and locating credible sources, it is not surprising that analytical skills *per se* do not reach a high level of performance. In HJS 315, the problems with argumentative skills, style, and mechanics resurface, perhaps because the focus shifts (for the students) to refining a research topic and locating credible sources.

The HJS courses 410 Problems and Theory: Thesis Prospectus /415 Thesis in Humanities and Justice Studies represent the capstone of the HJS major. The faculty's ambitions for student theses are high, as are their demands about quality work. Over the last several years, the HJS faculty has been engaged in a substantive discussion about the place and structure of the thesis in the HJS major. This year permitted the assessment team to evaluate how students are doing. In terms of the three criteria assessed, namely, the application of justice-related theories or concepts; the engagement with primary sources; and the integration of secondary sources, the team found a distinct disparity between the two classes. Substantial higher scores were found in one class rather than another, presumably reflecting the disciplinary focus of one instructor versus another. However, more seriously, the team found that the class with the lower overall scores did not possess the learning outcomes of the class on their syllabus. This suggests that the instructor did not pivot their class towards the agreed learning outcomes, and it would appear that both the grades for that class, and the assessment of its student's work suffered appreciably. The HJS coordinator has vowed to ensure that all faculty know of, incorporate, and adjust their syllabi to meet the agreed upon learning outcomes.

## Humanities and Justice Studies (BA)

Program Learning Assessment. Key findings and proposed actions  
(2011-2014)

### Program Learning Goals

1. Gain a comprehensive foundation in major concepts, underlying principles, values, issues, and theories of justice in the Western tradition.
2. Gain a comprehensive foundation in major concepts, underlying principles, values, issues, and theories of justice in the non-Western tradition.
3. Identify, compare, contrast, apply, and evaluate the concepts, underlying principles, values, and theories embedded in justice-related issues, events, and texts.
4. Employ, compare, and evaluate the methods of inquiry used in the disciplines of history, literary study, and philosophy. Apply these methods to study of justice.
5. Produce well-reasoned, well-researched, well documented and articulate texts, including essays, a Thesis Prospectus and/or draft a final Senior Thesis.
6. Investigate an original research question or research problem, and / or argue an original thesis, by engaging in a critical, rigorous, and ethical process.

### Outcomes Assessment

Program Learning Goal #	% Meet / Exceed <sup>1</sup>	Key Findings	Proposed Actions (Semester Implemented)	Was action effective? <sup>4</sup> Follow-up assessment Sem. Year % Meet / Exceed
<b>Fall 2010</b>				
<b>Assessment Context<sup>2</sup> : HJS 415 (n=10), Tool<sup>3</sup> : Thesis - Trial Run</b>		Students in trial run not as strong as we would like in development of an original thesis, ability to engage with primary texts, attention to counter-arguments and alternate perspectives. Sample was small.		
<b>Spring 2011</b>				
<b>Assessment Context : HJS 415, Tool : Thesis</b>				
3	90	Compared to trial run, faculty assessed their own students.	Faculty meetings on assessment planning in core courses.	
3	80	Theses had the benefit of instructor-specific goals and comments.	Identification of assessment tools for core courses.	
3	70	This may account for the more positive results. LG#4, application of concepts and theories, were exceeded only by 13%, but met by	Revision of existing rubric for 415.	Sp 14    64    ↓
3	76	56%; LG#3, engagement with counter-arguments were exceeded	Need to make more emphasis on writing and rhetorical skills in	
4	69	by only 15%, but met by 61%; LG#5, academic writing	every core course and offer more opportunities for students to	Sp 14    50    ↓
5	79	competence, were exceeded by only 13%, and met only by 46%.	attain this objective.	
5	59			Sp 14    57    ↓
6	73			

(1) Percent represents ratio of students who met or exceeded expectations. Where scores represent mean performance, the mean score and highest scale value are indicated (e.g., 3.3 of 4). (2) Assessment context may relate to comprehensive program review, specific academic setting (e.g., course #, capstone, internship), class standing (e.g., seniors, transfers, alumni), post-graduation outcomes (e.g., placement, further education, employers ratings of employee skills), or indicators of learning progress. (3) Examples of tools include exams, portfolios, research projects, lab reports, papers, essays, surveys, licensure tests, performances, presentations. (4) Re-assessment of learning follows the implementation of actions to determine their effectiveness in improving learning outcomes.

## Outcomes Assessment

Program Goal #	% Meet / Exceed	Key Findings	Proposed Actions (Semester Implemented)	Was action effective? Follow-up assessment Sem. Year % Meet / Exceed
<b>2012</b>				
<b>Assessment Context : HJS 250 (n=38), Tool : Essay</b>				
1	66	Good result (8% of students failed to meet expectations).	Explicit emphasis in HJS 250 and HJS 310 on justice-related principles, issues, and theories <i>per se</i> on the similarities and differences in the ways they are examined in History, Literature and Philosophy (Sp 13).	
<b>Assessment Context : HJS 310 (n=28), Tool : Paper</b>				
2	50	Results somewhat less positive. Foundational course added in response to self-study to support investigations of justice.		
<b>Assessment Context : HJS 410 (n=20), Tool : Thesis</b>				
1 & 2	75	Majority of students able to identify broader principles and theories underlying their specific, original research topics.		
<b>Assessment Context : HJS 250 (n=38), 310 (n=28), 315 (n=11), 410 (n=20), 415 (n=18), Tool : Essay, Paper, Thesis</b>				
<i>Learning Goal 3</i>		<u>LG3</u> involves skills acquired slowly and honed in more complicated contexts. Not surprisingly, students in 250 did not perform as well as those in 310. (Essay assignments differ from course to course.) In 315 no student exceeded expectations, but focus here is on modeling the research process. Results in 410 and 415 suggest we need to do more to prepare students for the highly analytical work.	Reexamination of Program Learning Objectives and Curriculum Map (Sp 13). Proposed revisions to major: may include development of a two-track curriculum.  <u>LG#3</u> : Collaborative development of prompts and formal essay assignments, adaptable for use in 250 and 310 (Sp13)  <u>LG#4</u> : Explicit emphasis on disciplinary methods in core courses. Teaching Development Workshop on genres and methods of inquiry in History, Literary Study and Philosophy, and their application to issues of justice. Development of an ongoing process of review of course syllabi, re: study of historical periods and equal attention to the 3 disciplinary methods (Sp 13).  <u>LG#5</u> : Development of a closer working relationship with the Writing Center (Sp 13).  <u>LG#6</u> : Inclusion of Library / Information Literacy assignments and workshops in core courses (Sp 13).	
250	37			
310	57			
315	55			
410	60			
415	67			
<i>Learning Goal 4</i>		<u>LG4</u> : Good results in 315 may be influenced by productive discussions among instructors. Results in 410 suggest that focus is on finding and refining a research topic and credible sources, not on disciplinary methods. We realize that 250 / 310 must introduce the concept of disciplinary distinctions.		
250	51			
310	25			
410	65			
<i>Learning Goal 5</i>		<u>LG#5</u> : Overall results indicate that writing and rhetorical skills fall below expectations. Qualitatively, we find that students need more opportunities to hone their argumentative skills. As writing assignments become longer and more complicated, we find more problems with grammar, sentence structure and paragraph coherence than we do in 250.		
250	53			
310	72			
315	45			
415	67			
<i>Learning Goal 6</i>		<u>LG#6</u> : In 410, where research is guided by the instructor and conducted by each student, 30% met expectations. Results in 415 show improvement. The fact that 22% approach expectations and 11% fail to meet them speaks to our concern about retaining the thesis requirement for all majors.		
315	91			
410	30			
415	67			

**Outcomes Assessment**

Program Goal #	% Meet / Exceed	Key Findings	Proposed Actions (Semester Implemented)	Was action effective? Follow-up assessment Sem. Year % Meet / Exceed
<b>2012 (cont.)</b>				
<b>Assessment Context : HJS 250 (n=40), 310 (n=37), 315 (n=19), 410 (n=34), 415 (n=33), Tool : Student Exit Survey</b>				
<i>Learning Goal 1</i> 250	90	Students agree they have gained a foundation in principles and theories - a very good result.		
<i>Learning Goal 2</i> 310	100	Most students (70%) strongly agree they have gained a foundation in principles and theories - an excellent result.		
<i>Learning Goal 3</i> 250 310 315 410 415	96 97 96 88 92	<u>250 &amp; 310</u> : Most agree they are able to contrast theories of justice and take a position and formulate a thesis statement. <u>315</u> : More skilled in formulating a thesis statement and how to read critically and evaluate and incorporate sources. <u>410</u> : Mixed results on preparation in earlier courses for the formulation of a thesis, a challenging aspect of the course. <u>415</u> : In core courses, students gained knowledge / skills to develop ideas, use evidence and acknowledge sources. In 415, they further developed critical reading and analytical skills.		
<i>Learning Goal 4</i> 250 310 315 410 415	79 86 86 85 97	<u>250</u> : Some students are not sure they have a grasp of the individual methodologies. <u>310</u> : Similar findings to 250. This is an area we need to focus on in the introductory courses. <u>315</u> : Improvement in understanding disciplinary methods, with only Literary Study showing 16% at the "not sure" level. <u>410</u> : Most students employ more than one disciplinary perspective in conducting research. <u>415</u> : Positive perception of ability to use more than one disciplinary perspective.		
<i>Learning Goal 5</i> 250 310 410 415	82 93 90 88	<u>250</u> : Able to write persuasive essays on justice and use evidence and incorporate sources in writing thesis-driven essays. <u>310</u> : After taking this course, more confident about writing persuasive essays. <u>410</u> : Increased readiness at the end of the semester about developing and refining a thesis. <u>415</u> : Students agree the course was helpful in further developing and refining their topics.		

## Outcomes Assessment

Program Goal #	% Meet / Exceed	Key Findings	Proposed Actions (Semester Implemented)	Was action effective?	
				Follow-up assessment Sem. Year	% Meet / Exceed
<b>2012 (cont.)</b>					
<b>Assessment Context : HJS 250 (n=40), 310 (n=37), 315 (n=19), 410 (n=34), 415 (n=33), Tool : Student Exit Survey</b>					
<i>Learning Goal 6</i>		<u>250 &amp; 310</u> : Students agree they have learned to fully acknowledge sources in their writing. <u>315</u> : Skilled in using library resources, identifying relevant databases, developing Working and Annotated Bibliography, and writing a Review of Literature.			
250	86				
310	92				
315	95	<u>410</u> : Substantial improvement in students' perceptions, at the start versus at the end of the course, of their ability to use databases			
410	92	(Strongly agree 31% vs. 56%) and locate sources (Strongly agree 27% vs. 59%). <u>415</u> : Students agree the course was helpful in further developing their skills in using library databases and locating sources.			
415	94				
<b>2014</b>					
<b>Assessment Context : Capstone HJS 410 - 415 (n=14), Tool : Thesis</b>					
3	64	Substantial higher scores in one class rather than another. Class with lower scores did not possess the learning outcomes of the class on their syllabus. Overall, assessment revealed that many students only just met the expectations for integrating secondary sources and even less effectively, the explicit use of primary source materials. Process probably needs to be instilled at the research methods level (315), Assessment results from 315 suggest we need to improve student performance markedly.	Learning outcomes must appear on syllabi. Faculty failing to integrate learning outcomes in the revisions of syllabi will not be further invited to teach in HJS (2015).		
4	50		All faculty teaching in HJS will be given copies of the Descriptive Assessment Rubrics (2015).		
5	57		HJS 250 and 315 have be re-worked in order to ground students in coherent relevant bodies of literature, and to expose them to thinking about primary and secondary sources (2015-16).		