

Student Learning in U.S. Studies (IN250 and IN251) Academic Year 2009-2010 Assessment

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Executive Summary

New learning goals for IN250 and IN251 were instituted in the 2009-2010 academic year. Overall, assessment shows that students in IN250 were learning at least at an adequate level for the three learning goals this year, while those in IN251 were learning at an excellent level. A new assessment methodology was instituted this year, along with the new learning goals, and this report discusses these changes and implications.

Catalog Description and Learning Goals for US Studies

IN250. United States Studies 1 (3) Sophomore year. Course sections study the diversity of cultures, institutions, and groups in the United States. Inter-disciplinary and historical perspectives inform contemporary understanding of diversity issues. "Culture" refers to learned systems of meanings, and their representations, that people use to interact with the world around them, including language, values, beliefs, norms, traditions, customs, history, art, and artifacts. Pre-requisites: sophomore standing.

The learning outcome goals for students taking a course that fulfills the United States Studies 1 requirement are that students will be able to:

1. analyze diverse cultures in the United States through the use of discipline-appropriate sources;
2. reflect on ethical and social justice issues characteristic of a diverse democratic society; and
3. engage in activities essential to responsible democratic citizenship in the United States.

IN251. United States Studies 2 (3) Sophomore year. Course sections study the diversity of cultures, institutions, and groups in the United States. Inter-disciplinary and historical perspectives inform contemporary understanding of diversity issues. "Social structures" refers to generally stable patterns of interactions, from the smallest units found in individual social relationships, through larger economic, political and social institutions in societies, to worldwide systems of relationships among nations. Pre-requisites: sophomore standing.

The learning outcome goals for students taking a course that fulfills the United States Studies 2 requirement are that students will:

1. analyze social structures within the United States through the use of discipline-appropriate sources;
2. reflect on ethical and social justice issues characteristic of a diverse democratic society; and
3. engage in activities essential to responsible democratic citizenship in the United States.

In addition to these learning goals, the faculty decided that US Studies courses should be writing intensive. The Nyberg Report on Weaving the Threads of MPSL discussed writing intensive courses as those which include the following:

- Written work which represents a substantial portion of the grade.
- Instruction and coaching as students write.
- Guided revision for at least one formal writing assignment.
- Evaluation of the quality of the writing by the characteristics of effective prose, including grammar, organization, and support.
- Support for students needing help with grammar and other elements of composition such as referrals to the Writing Center, etc.

Snapshot

During the 2009-10 academic year, 18 sections of IN 250 were offered by 10 faculty members (see Appendix A):

- 10 sections by four History faculty—one full-time tenured faculty; one adjunct faculty with a terminal degree and two adjunct faculty without terminal degree
- 6 sections by four English faculty—three full-time, tenured or tenure-track, one adjunct faculty without terminal degree
- 1 section by one Theatre faculty—full-time, tenure track
- 1 section by one Communication faculty—full-time, tenure track

In addition, 15 sections of IN251 were offered by 8 faculty members (see Appendix A):

- 4 sections by two Sociology faculty— one fulltime, tenured; one adjunct with terminal degree
- 4 section by one Political Science faculty— adjunct with terminal degree
- 2 sections by one Biology faculty—fulltime, tenured
- 3 sections by two Philosophy faculty—fulltime, tenured or tenure-track
- 1 section by one English faculty—fulltime, tenure-track
- 1 section by one Exercise Science faculty—fulltime, tenure-track

The Learning Story

Starting in the 2009-2010 academic year, the changes to the University Studies curriculum approved by the faculty in 2007-2008 became effective for the sophomore year core curriculum. These changes involved the expansion of the former IN250 class into two different classes, IN250 and IN251, emphasizing the culture and social structure of the US, respectively. In US Studies classes, students now learn about different aspects of American society through this two-course sequence. IN250, US Cultural Studies, emphasizes the literature and history of America, while IN251, US Structural Studies, emphasizes the structure of American society. Students read primary texts in a discipline, reflect on ethical and social justice issues in America, engage in activities essential to democratic citizenship, and write a polished essay or paper, or a series of them that demonstrate these engagements through writing. In all sections, students learn about the experiences and perspectives of some of the diverse cultures and people living in the United States. Courses may focus on particular groups (African Americans, women) or particular issues (poverty and welfare, Vietnam, Civil Rights, Watergate), but all faculty are committed to inculcating in their students sensitivity and empathy, as well as sharper critical thinking and writing skills. Competencies that promote professional success and understanding of others are emphasized (as per MPSTL Prepares 1 and 2).

Assessment Methods and Data

One of the major problems in assessing US Studies classes is the wide diversity of classes offered from many disciplines, with the large majority of them being cross-listed with disciplinary offerings. In general, faculty see themselves as teaching their disciplinary course, be it English Literature, History, Sociology or Political Science, to name a few, with the added requirements to make it a US Studies class. Consequently, attempts to create a community of scholars for US Studies have been largely unsuccessful, and only badgering from the US Studies Coordinator has resulted in assessment procedures being followed. The outside reviewers from North Central Higher Learning Commission acknowledged that cross-disciplinary requirements often create problems in assessment. Such problems challenge the

ability of the University to sustain a culture of assessment. Streamlining of the assessment process is a reasonable goal in situations like this.

Consequently, during this academic year the faculty decided to introduce a new method for assessment that would accept faculty members' primary teaching foci, while reducing the degree to which assessment created an onerous burden. See Appendix B for rationale. During the Fall semester, artifacts were collected in the usual way, and a committee of Monroe and Troy assessed three artifacts from each class for which faculty submitted them. In the Spring semester, faculty were to develop an assignment that directly addressed the learning goals, and use a common rubric to assess student performance. This assessment was in addition to any grade that the student may have received for the assignment. See Appendix C for the common Assessment Rubric. Each learning goal was assessed on a scale of 1 – 4, with 4 being Excellent, 3 being Good, 2 being Fair, and 1 being Poor. The following table shows the range of possible scores and their interpretation.

Green	Excellent	3.00-4.00
Yellow	Adequate	2.00-2.99
Red	Nominal	1.00-1.99

In the fall semester, artifacts were received from three of the ten IN250 classes and five of the six IN251 classes. These artifacts were read by Professors Monroe and Troy and scored using the new rubric based on the new learning goals. The results are seen in the following table.

	IN250	IN251
Analyze cultures or structures	2.94	2.61
Reflect on ethical and social justice	2.11	3.36
Engage in democratic citizenship	2.06	2.83

In the spring semester, fifteen US Studies were assessed by the faculty teaching those classes: seven of the nine IN250 classes and eight of the nine IN251 classes. The results are seen in the following table:

	IN250	IN251
Analyze cultures or structures	3.14	3.46
Reflect on ethical and social justice	3.16	3.27
Engage in democratic citizenship	2.84	3.43

Combining both classes and both semesters, we get the final, overall results in the following table:

	IN250	IN251
Analyze cultures or structures	3.04	3.04
Reflect on ethical and social justice	2.64	3.32
Engage in democratic citizenship	2.45	3.13

Means for each faculty member and course for the year are listed below:

Mean Scores for Assessment of Student Learning for each class			
IN250			
Fall 2009 (Based on Review of Artifacts)			
Instructor	Analysis of Cultures or Structures	Reflects on Ethical and Social Justice Issues	Demonstrates democratic Citizenship
Duncanson – US Pop Culture			
Magagna – Place in American Literature			
Matthews, A – Multicultural Literature	3.17	2.50	2.50
Matthews, D – Holocaust in American Life	3.33	1.83	1.67
Sampson – US History to 1865	2.33	2.00	2.00
Monroe – US History to 1865			
Keagle – US History to 1865			
Landro – Drama Literature			
Jessup – World Religions in America			
Monroe – Violence in America			
SUB-TOTALS	2.94	2.11	2.06

Spring 2010 (Based on Instructor Ratings)			
Instructor	Analysis of Cultures or Structures	Reflects on Ethical and Social Justice Issues	Demonstrates democratic Citizenship
Jessup- World Rel. in America			
Monroe – History of US Since 1865	3.21	3.46	3.5
Sampson – History of US Since 1865	2.50	2.67	2.58
Sampson – Ireland in America	1.55	1.45	1.45
Sampson – History of US Worker	3.45	4.00	2.58
Magagna – At Home and On the Road	3.41	3.00	3.0
Matthews – Lit of Civil Rights			
Landro – Drama Literature	3.62	3.22	2.82
O’Conner – Intro to Film	3.50	3.79	2.00
SUB-TOTALS	3.14	3.16	2.84

Mean Scores for Assessment of Student Learning for each class			
IN251			
Fall 2009 (Based on Review of Artifacts)			
Instructor	Analysis of Cultures or Structures	Reflects on Ethical and Social Justice Issues	Demonstrates Democratic Citizenship
Roark – Bioethics	2.50	3.50	2.67
Dunn – American Political system	2.33	3.33	2.83
Cloney – Health and Pollution	2.67	2.83	2.33
Horn – Creating a Green Society	3.50	3.83	3.50
Jacobs – Social Class in America	2.33	3.33	3.00
Dunn – Civil Liberties and the Constitution	2.33	3.33	2.67
SUBTOTAL	2.61	3.36	2.83

Spring 2010 (Based on Instructor Ratings)			
Instructor	Analysis of Structures	Reflects on Ethical and Social Justice Issues	Demonstrates Democratic Citizenship
Phillips – Contemporary US Social Problems (2 sections combined)	3.70	2.94	3.40
Troy – Intro to Sociology (2 sections combined)	3.38	3.62	3.70
Horn – Creating a Green Society	4.00	3.00	3.00
Meddaugh – History of Intolerance			
Roark – Environmental Ethics	3.25	3.00	3.25
Dunn – Civil Rights, Vietnam, Watergate	3.39	3.35	3.19
Dunn – American Political System	3.30	3.30	3.26
SUB-TOTAL	3.46	3.27	3.43

Data Analysis and Discussion

Overall, the data show that students in IN250 and IN251 met all three learning goals in 2009-2010. The IN250 scores indicate that students were “analyzing” American culture at the excellent level, while they were “reflecting on ethical and social justice” and “engaging in democratic citizenship activities” at an adequate level. The IN251 scores indicate that students were performing at an excellent level for all three learning goals. These results are very positive, because they suggest that students are learning based on the new learning goals, which went into effect this year. On the other hand, students were learning at the excellent level for all three of the old IN250 learning goals, so we certainly have room to improve.

However, these results require further consideration. The scores are confusing and require discussion by the faculty teaching IN250 and IN251. The inconsistency between the Fall and Spring scores is the most troubling. Recall that the Fall scores

derive from a committee reviewing artifacts, while the Spring scores derive from faculty members using the rubrics to evaluate their own students' work. For IN250, the Spring scores are .20, 1.05, and .78 greater than the Fall scores for the three learning goals, respectively. For IN251, the Spring "Analyze" and "Engage" scores are .85 and .60 greater than the Fall scores, respectively, although the Fall "Reflect" score is higher than the Spring score, but quite close. Faculty will need to come together to discuss whether self-scoring is an appropriate methodology for this assessment. If so, "norming" workshops will need to be held to help faculty develop greater consistency among themselves in the use of the rubrics.

Feedback Loop

The 2008-2009 report was distributed to all faculty teaching IN250 and the IN251 pilots during the 2009-2010 year. Individual consultations were held with a few faculty members, especially those new to Millikin or developing a new US Studies class. Workshops were also held to prepare faculty for the new learning goals, which began in Fall 2009. The current report will be distributed to all faculty teaching IN250 and IN251 during the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 academic years. The report will form a basis for further consideration of the US Studies learning goals and how they should be assessed. As indicated above, the plan is also to develop "norming" workshops to help faculty achieve a greater degree of consensus in the use of the new rubric.

Appendix A
IN250 Courses, AY 2009-2010

Date	Course Title	Cross-listed Department & Course number	FT Tenured Or t-track, W/terminal Degree	FT Contract Faculty w/ Terminal Degree	Adjunct Faculty
Fall 2009	US Pop Culture	CO306	•		
	Place in Literature: The West	EN220	•		
	Multicultural Literature	EN234	•		
	Holocaust in American Life				•
	US History to 1865	HI203			•
	US History to 1865	HI203	•		
	US History to 1865	HI203		•	
	Drama & Representation of US	TH331	•		
	World Religions in America	HI210			•
	Violence in America	HI310	•		
Spring 2010	World Religions in America	HI210			•
	US History since 1865	HI204	•		
	US History since 1865	HI204			•
	Ireland in America	HI210			•
	History of US Worker	HI330			•
	At Home and On the Road: Mod Amer. Lit.		•		
	Literature of Civil Rights Movement	EN233	•		
	Dramatic Literature	TH332	•		
	Introduction to Film	EN250	•		

IN251 Courses, AY 2009-2010

Date	Course Title	Cross-listed Department & Course number	FT Tenured Or t-track, W/terminal Degree	FT Contract Faculty w/ Terminal Degree	Adjunct Faculty
Fall 2009	Bioethics	PH217	•		
	American Political System	PO105			•
	Health and Pollution	ES321	•		
	Creating a Green Society		•		
	Social Class in America	PH260	•		
	Civil Liberties and the Constitution	PO334			•
Spring 2010	Contemporary US Social Problems				•
	Contemporary US Social Problems				•
	Introduction to Sociology	SO100	•		
	Introduction to Sociology	SO100	•		
	Creating a Green Society		•		
	History of Intolerance	EN220	•		
	Environmental Ethics	PH219	•		
	Civil Rights, Vietnam, Watergate	PO260			•
	American Political System	PO105			•

APPENDIX B

October 1, 2009

To: IN250/IN251 Instructors

A MODEST PROPOSAL

One of the issues that Anne Matthews is dealing with as she prepares for the North Central Accreditation re-visit is the sustainability of the assessment process. NCA would like us to have an assessment process that is smooth and does not create an undue burden on the faculty. I think the process we've developed can be improved, but I need your cooperation and feedback. If we can agree to the proposed changes I'm suggesting, we can begin applying them starting next semester.

To review the current system for context, it is my responsibility as Coordinator for US Studies to make sure that your syllabi all reflect the IN250 or IN251 learning goals, and that you and I know what artifacts you are going to provide at the end of the semester. I then have to follow up with you to make sure that you provide me with the artifacts, because assessment is not on the top of your mental to-do list, or priorities! Once I collect the artifacts, I usually let them sit until the end of the academic year, so I can combine them with classes taught in the Spring (and PACE and immersion if I've maintained my own attention to the task). Then I need to get together a committee to read a sample of the artifacts, so we can assess student learning for the three learning goals. I then write a report and send it out by e-mail to everyone. We should then have some meeting to discuss the report and assessment results, but given that faculty from all over the University teach IN50/IN251 classes, I have found that these meetings are not well attended, and don't accomplish the goal. Fortunately, the assessment reports are showing that our students are performing wonderfully on these goals, so I have not had serious problems to address.

One of the issues that came up as we began to do assessment concerns the question of why can't we just use the grades in our classes to assess learning. The answer is that grades are multidimensional measures that do not focus specifically on the learning goals. But, and here's my new insight, what would happen if all IN250 and IN251 classes had assignments that were specifically addressed to the learning goals? And further, what if we all used the same rubric to grade those assignments? Couldn't we then use the grades you give on those assignments as our assessment, and all you would have to do is give me the grade distribution (even anonymously if you want) for those assignments? You wouldn't have to worry about collecting and sending me artifacts, and I wouldn't have to worry about getting a committee together to re-read a sample of the artifacts that you've already read!

Let me give an example to illustrate my idea. The learning goals for IN251 are:

Students will be able to:

1. analyze social structures within the United States through the use of discipline-appropriate sources;
2. reflect on ethical and social justice issues characteristic of a diverse democratic society; and
3. demonstrate an engagement in activities essential to responsible democratic citizenship in the United States.

In addition, the course needs to be writing intensive, which means that there needs to be at least one substantial written assignment that students have had to ability to edit over time.

My class, Poverty and Welfare, is listed as SO224, but is typically cross-listed as IN251. Students already have to write a term paper that reviews the literature on a topic of their choosing in the field of poverty. They work on this paper in stages, with my feedback, and can hand in a second formal draft if they are unhappy with their grade on the first formal draft (which is usually the case!). Now, suppose I made sure that the assignment for the paper included the phrase that their paper needed to “analyze some aspect of the social structure of poverty in the United States.” Couldn’t I use the grades on that paper for the assessment of that learning goal?

To carry through with my example, what if I gave them another assignment (or even an appendix to the first one) to “reflect on the ethical and social justice issues” brought up by some element in the course (or even by the issues in their paper)? Again, couldn’t I use the grades on that assignment for the assessment of that learning goal?

Finally, what if I had them write what implications some element of the course had for changing laws with respect to welfare reform? Again, couldn’t I use the grades on that assignment for the assessment of that learning goal?

At the end of the semester, I would only need to send me (as the Coordinator) a list of grades for the three assignments. No collecting of artifacts. No creating a committee. No reading of a sample of previous graded papers. Simple. Sustainable. Minimal burden on faculty.

What would we need to do to implement this modest proposal?

1. All instructors would have to agree to have the same three assignments, adapted for their course.
2. All instructors would have to agree to use the same rubric for grading the assignments.
3. All instructors would have to agree to send me their grade distributions for these assignments at the end of the semester.

APPENDIX C

IN250/251
Assessment Rubric

Class _____

Semester _____

Professor _____

Student _____

GOAL	EXCELLENT 4	GOOD 3	FAIR 2	POOR 1
Analyze cultures or structures				
Reflects on ethical or social justice issues				
Demonstrate democratic citizenship				