

Student Learning in IN250 U.S. Studies Academic Year 2006-07 Assessment

Millikin University

by the IN250 Assessment Committee
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Executive Summary

The 2006-07 academic year was a time of reflection and revision. Over the course of two meetings with IN250 faculty, both the student learning goals and the rubrics used to assess whether the students met them were streamlined. There was much lively discussion about the role of IN250 in the sequential part of the MPSL, especially about the efficacy of student reflection isolated from regular assignments and about the ability of the courses as they are currently designed to prepare students for "democratic citizenship in a global environment," as mandated by the second of Millikin's three "prepares." A further concern was how the goals—and the rubrics—could be streamlined so as to accommodate a wider variety of writing assignments than the old goals and rubrics envisioned.

Goals

After careful discussion, the student learning outcome goals for IN250 were streamlined and revised. The old set read as follows:

By the end of IN250 U.S. Studies, students will have

1. Read primary texts by and/or historical texts about some of the diverse cultures living in the United States;
2. Conducted research into cultural issues distinct to the discipline of the course;
3. Written polished essays that reflect critical analysis; and
4. Reflected on the uses of their deeper knowledge of cultures in the U.S. in their public and personal lives to better understand themselves, their communities, and the world.

The new set of goals reads thus:

By the end of IN250 U.S. Studies, students will be able to

1. Critically respond to texts by or about some of the diverse cultures and people living in the United States;
2. Use discipline-appropriate sources to inform their critical analyses of diverse individuals' or cultures' experiences and perspectives; and
3. Write at least one well-developed critical analysis about cultural, structural, or institutional issues specific to the discipline of the course.

The new goals both reflect the assumption on the part of the faculty that reflection was an inherent aspect of reading and writing about diverse cultures and peoples, as well as the desire to include a wider range of writing assignments than had hitherto been assessed. All three goals, then, can be used to assess essays, essay exams, response papers, issue/position papers, and Blackboard discussion threads. Moreover, with this new flexibility in the learning goals, only one rubric is needed, since the faculty assumes that a good artifact will include all three components. The assessment process conducted in June 2007 confirmed this assumption.

Snapshot

During the 2006-07 academic year, 21 sections of IN 250 were offered by 14 faculty members (see Appendix A):

- 9 sections by six English faculty—all full-time: three tenured or tenure-track faculty; three by faculty without terminal degree
- 7 sections by four History faculty—two full-time tenured or tenure-track; two adjunct faculty
- 2 sections by one Political Science faculty—adjunct faculty
- 1 section by one Sociology faculty—full-time, tenured
- 1 by one Theatre faculty—adjunct faculty
- 1 by one Alumni and Development staff member

The Learning Story

In all sections of IN250, 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. In all sections, students use discipline-specific sources in their writing, which ranges from the formal essay to informal discussion threads in Blackboard. Competencies that promote professional success and understanding of others are emphasized (as per MPSL prepares 1 and 2).

Assessment Methods and Data

Artifacts were collected at the end of the Fall 2006 semester and at the end of the Spring 2007 semester. The IN250 self-study committee randomly selected 20% of the total artifacts submitted and then assessed almost 40% of that selection. It should be noted that only eight of the fifteen eligible faculty submitted artifacts by their students, just over a 50% compliance rate. Those eight participating faculty members submitted 205 artifacts, which included essays, exams, response papers, and issue/position papers (Blackboard discussion threads are not included in this count, but a random sampling was taken from the two sections that submitted Blackboard artifacts). Of the 205 artifacts submitted, 43 were selected (or about 21%); of those 43 artifacts, 16 were assessed, including two Blackboard discussion thread samples (or 37%). The committee used a single rubric (see Appendix B) to assess all the artifacts.

Analysis of Assessment Results

The 2006-07 IN250 courses met the following goals at these rates and with these performance indicators:

- Critical response: 85%--excellent/green light—on the right track
- Use of sources: 82.5%--still strong, but faculty might be advised to submit artifacts that show research more clearly
- Well-developed analysis: 61.25%--nominal/red light—faculty might be advised to pay more attention to writing; students could and should be encouraged to use the Writing Center more often

Scale

- Excellent = 11-15 points
- Adequate = 6-10 points
- Nominal = 0-5 points

Performance Indicators—Academic Year 2006-07 Artifacts

	Excellent—Green Light/	Adequate—Yellow Light	Nominal—Red Light
Goal 1—Critical Response	• 85%		
Goal 2—Use of Sources to Inform Critical Analysis	• 82.5%		
Goal 3—Well-developed Critical Analysis			• 61.25%

Initiatives and Improvement Plans

Pending the adoption of the Nyberg Summer Seminar’s recommendations, IN250 will undergo significant changes. Until those changes are in effect, though, the committee offers the following suggestions:

- Increase faculty participation, not only in course design and mission, but also in data collection
- Increase profile of research projects in data collection
- Increase intentionality with respect to writing, perhaps following a Writing-Across-the-Curriculum model
- Continue to assess and revise goals and rubrics

Comparison of Spring 2006 and AY2006-07 Data

- Reading remains the strongest and most consistent component of IN250, with students engaged in a variety of texts in both Spring 2006 and AY2006-07
- Demonstration of the use of sources is up in AY2006-07, from 73.78% to 82.5%, an encouraging trend. These numbers can go even higher, however, if faculty are encouraged to submit more student artifacts that include research for assessment
- “Reflection” was revised to read “critical response,” and this area showed the greatest gain from Spring 2006 to AY2006-07, with the percentage rising from 47.36% to 85%--the highest rating in the 2006-07 assessment report
- Conversely, when “writing” was rearticulated as “well-developed critical analysis,” the numbers plunged, from 86.4% in Spring 2006 to 61.25% in AY2006-07. Part of this disappointing rating stems from the range of student artifacts faculty chose to submit; there may be no way of getting around the fact that formal essays showcase student learning much better than Blackboard discussion threads—although even within those threads that were assessed, there was a huge discrepancy in the quality of thought and writing from section to section.

Further Recommendations

This committee strongly recommends that faculty consider two things:

1. that they participate more fully in assessment, by both attending meetings and submitting artifacts for assessment, and
2. that they consider more carefully which artifacts they send in to the assessment committee. Perhaps the committee itself can be more proactive in asking for specific kinds of data, although that would bring the process back to square one, when the faculty decided that they *wanted* more latitude in the kinds of student writing they submitted for assessment.

Appendix A
IN250 Courses, AY 2006-07

Date	Course Title	Cross-listed Department & Course number	FT Tenured Or t-track, W/terminal Degree	FT Contract Faculty w/ Terminal Degree	FT Contract Faculty w/o Terminal Degree	Adjunct Faculty
Fall 2006	Drama & Represent In the U.S.	TH331				•
	Civil Rights, Vietnam, & Watergate	PO260				•
	Women and Media	EN220			•	
	American Lit Through Twain	EN231	•			
	U.S. Multicultural Literature	EN234	•			
	U.S. History To 1865	HI203	•			
	U.S. History Since 1865	HI204	•			
	World Religions in America	HI210				•
Spring 2007	Civil Rights, Vietnam, & Watergate	PO260				•
	Lit. of Childhood	EN220			•	
	American Lit. of the 20 th C.	EN232	•			
	African-Amer. Literature	EN233	•			
	U.S. Multicultural Literature	EN234	•			
	The Outsider in Film & Fiction	EN220			•	
	The Sixties	PACE			•	
	Women in America	HI210				•
	U.S. History To 1865	HI203	•			
	U.S. History Since 1865	HI204	•			
	Poverty and Welfare	SO224	•			
	World Religions in America	HI210				•
	History of American Workers	HI210				•

Appendix B
IN250 Assessment Rubric

Millikin University
IN250 U.S. Studies
Student Learning Evaluation—REVISED June 26, 2007

By the end of IN250/U.S. Studies, students will be able to

4. Critically respond to texts by or about some of the diverse cultures and people living in the United States;
5. Use discipline-appropriate sources to inform their critical analyses of diverse individuals' or cultures' experiences and perspectives; and
6. Write at least one well-developed critical analysis about cultural, structural, or institutional issues specific to the discipline of the course.

Item Evaluated: Variable—may be an essay, exam, or response paper

Evaluation by: Self-Study Assessment Team Member

	Excellent (5 points)	Adequate (3 points)	Nominal (1 point)
Critical Response	An excellent response demonstrates consistent reflective thinking in using previous reading, research, and/or experience as a prompt not only to describe and explain, but also to develop awareness of the self in relation to other cultures.	An adequate response demonstrates inconsistent reflective thinking in using previous reading, research, and/or experience as a prompt not only to describe and explain, but also to develop awareness of the self in relation to other cultures.	A nominal response lacks a connection between uses of reading and writing and the development of self-awareness in relation to others.
Use of Sources to Inform Critical Analysis	An excellent analysis demonstrates the student's consistent ability to use discipline-appropriate sources. The student interprets, rather than summarizes, relevant evidence. Student can formulate a well-positioned and well-supported argument or opinion by critically synthesizing multiple perspectives.	An adequate analysis demonstrates the student's inconsistent attempt to use discipline-appropriate sources. The student inconsistently attempts to interpret, rather than summarize, relevant evidence. Student attempts to formulate a well-positioned and well-supported argument or opinion by critically synthesizing multiple perspectives.	A nominal analysis demonstrates no attempt to interpret evidence.
Well-developed Critical Analysis	An excellent analysis demonstrates the student's consistent ability to compose a well-organized, properly-documented, and carefully-edited piece in a confident voice.	An adequate analysis demonstrates the student's inconsistent attempt to compose a well-organized, properly-documented, and carefully-edited piece in a confident voice. The student may make errors in documentation and/or grammar and mechanics.	A nominal analysis demonstrates no attempt to edit or document. There are many errors in documentation and/or grammar and mechanics.
Final Signal Rating	Excellent (Green—Go) 11-15 points	Adequate (Yellow—Caution) 6-10 points	Nominal (Red—Stop) 0-5 points
Total for this Student			