

Quality Enhancement Program Pilot Program

Assessment Period Spring 2017

Pilot Program. [Liberal Arts BA Research Assessment Louisiana Scholars' College](#)

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Student Learning Outcomes (SLO).

SLO 1. During the capstone experiential learning course(s), students will demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions expected of entry-level professionals in their disciplines. (Aligned with Principle 1-Intention and Principle 2-Preparedness and Planning)

SLO 2. During the capstone experiential learning course(s), students will reflect critically to link theory with practice and develop applications of knowledge based on the reflection. (Aligned with Principle 4-Reflection and Principle 6-Monitoring and Continuous Improvement)

Measure.

A six-hour senior thesis is a graduation requirement for the college's Bachelor of Arts with a major in Liberal Arts and a concentration in Scientific Inquiry (820A), Humanities and Social Thought (820B), Fine and Performing Arts (820 C), Foreign Languages (820D), and Philosophy, Politics, and Law (820F). Students in any of the Scholars' College joint majors, offered in collaboration with other programs in the University, must also complete a thesis.

The thesis experience is divided into three courses: SBUS/SLSC 4000--Thesis Research Methods (1 credit hour in spring of the junior year), SBUS/SFPA/SHUM/SSCI 480T--Thesis Research (2 credit hours in the fall of the senior year), and SBUS/SFPA/SHUM/SSCI 482T--Thesis (3 credit hours in the spring of the senior year). Students produce a proposal in the first course and receive a letter grade at that time. The second course typically results in deferred grading (IP), which is corrected when the archival copy of the thesis is turned in.

Methodology.

In Spring 2017, 20 students completed their thesis projects. Students were assessed twice: at the oral defense and after the archival copy was submitted. At the oral defense, the first and second reader and the Director of the Scholars' College (or designee) independently rated the student according to the rubrics for SLO1 and SLO2 (*Learning for Life (Lfl)*, pp. 41-44), based solely on the performance and information given during the defense. First readers were instructed to ask leading questions addressing rubric benchmarks if they were not apparent from the student's presentation and the information did not arise independently in the question and answer period. Once the archival copy was completed, the first and second readers were asked to independently rate the student on each rubric benchmark, based upon the defense, the archival document, and their own interactions with the student through the thesis process.

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The responses for each benchmark were averaged for each student. Individual ratings that were omitted were not included in the averages.

Target.

The goal of the program is for at least 50% of students to perform at level three (3) *Mastery* or level four (4) *Advanced* on each rubric item for each SLO. The overall benchmark is for 50% of students to have an average score of 3 or greater (*LfL*, p. 41).

Finding. **Target Met.**

Scholars' College students exceeded this goal (Table 1). The worst performance was on SLO 2 (*During the capstone experiential learning course(s), students will reflect critically to link theory with practice and develop applications of knowledge based on the reflections*), where 4 students (20%) averaged lower than 3.0 on Benchmark 1 (*Students will communicate effectively using appropriate conventions of language and correct format(s)*). The number of students who averaged below a 3.0 on each of the other rubric items ranged from 1 to 3.

Table 1.

Number of Pilot Program Undergraduate Research Participants Scoring below 3.0

SLO1			SLO2		
benchmark	#	freq	benchmark	#	freq
1	2	10%	1	4	20%
2	2	10%	2	3	15%
3	3	15%	3	2	10%
4	3	15%	4	2	10%
5	3	15%	5	2	10%
6	1	5%			

Note: N = 20

Students were also evaluated on their average scores overall rubric items. The average of this score was 3.58 ($SD = 0.478$, $N = 20$). Again, the benchmark was exceeded; 85% of the population had a mean score above 3.0. In fact, the 95% confidence intervals for the mean score for each of these 17 students was also above 3.0.

Analysis.

The pilot study revealed a number of issues with the application of the rubric. First, while the rubric was appropriate for courses in which a reflection component was administered, this was not the case for the final Scholars' College thesis course. If we want to continue to administer this form, the Scholars' College needs to incorporate a reflection piece in the capstone sequence. In particular, the rubric seemed more

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appropriate for NSU's typical internship or a project involving clients or participants. (And not all internships involve clients.) Thus, this may become an issue in the future, even for departments choosing internships.

Scholars' College faculty (and second readers from other departments) received no training on interpreting the rubric. As a result, 90 responses (of 1089) were omitted. Second readers from outside the College did not rate any responses for one or both Student Learning Outcomes as well as for an occasional single benchmark for seven (7) students (a total of 59 items (5.4%)). Most indicated that they did not feel qualified to rate the students, even though they were asked to rate only their own interactions with the students, the thesis defense, and the final written document. A single Scholars' faculty member was responsible for 39 omitted responses (3.6%) because she felt the benchmarks were "irrelevant." This included SLO2 benchmarks 4 (*Students will assess what they learned about themselves as members of a broader community*) and 5 (*Students will assess what they have learned about themselves as individuals*). Since both of these points are usually covered in the thesis defense question period (with every student able to identify with the community of researchers in their fields), this clearly should not be an issue.

It would be beneficial to "translate" the rubric to point out skills and dispositions that occur in the research setting. This would make it much easier to rate students. The missing responses were distributed across individuals. Due to the redundancy in the procedure, all benchmarks had at least one rating and that only occurred once. Most ratings were relatively consistent within students. The average width of the 95% confidence interval for overall rating was 0.27.

Although this cohort far exceeded the target, it is too early in the process to change the goal, based on this group alone. Before making such a change we must ensure that the faculty evaluators are using the rubric consistently and as intended. In addition, the student population is not a random sample of graduating seniors and, as honors students, may be expected to perform at a higher level. This population has significantly higher ACT scores and high school GPAs than the student body as a whole, and must have a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher to graduate. Weaker students often self-select and leave the College prior to commencing on the thesis project.

Decision / Recommendations.

Scholars' College needs to incorporate a reflection piece in the capstone sequence. To demonstrate growth through the process, it is recommended that reflection pieces be collected, at a minimum, at the beginning and end of the Research Methods course, during the Thesis Research course, and at the end of the Thesis course in the final semester.

We also need to ensure we train faculty evaluators on interpreting the rubric for consistent application. It is recommended the rubric be translated to point out skills and dispositions that occur in the research setting.