

Student Learning Assurance Report Requirements

Report Date: AY 2011-2012
September 30, 2012

School/College: Arts and Sciences

Department/Program: Comparative Literature and Culture

Person completing the Report: Shawn C. Doubiago (Anne Mairesse is on Sabbatical)

1. Overview Statement: Briefly summarize the student learning assurance activities that were undertaken this academic year, indicating: The Comparative Literature and Culture Program underwent its external review in the spring of 2012. We thus had minimal time to consider a formal examination of the student learning assurance activities this past year. This said, we did review the petitions for chosen electives, the Capstone curriculum and the senior theses. All three of these activities have concrete components that document and reflect specific student outcomes for the major and minor.
 - a. which program learning outcomes were assessed this year. We have assessed the following learning outcomes:
 - Apply analytical skills to the interpretation of a wide spectrum of cultural phenomena, including literature, art, music, film and popular media.
 - Identify and compare major artistic and cultural figures of different regions of the world, showing sensitivity to the plurality of meanings they offer.
 - Situate the Arts in the context of their historical, cultural, and aesthetic traditions, while recognizing the limitations of such categorizations
 - b. who in your department/program was involved in the evaluation of the above learning outcomes Anne Mairesse and Shawn Doubiago were involved in the evaluation of the above learning outcomes. As chair and advisor of the program, Anne Mairesse has carefully monitored each student who has gone through the program. Her assistance with students in choosing courses that will satisfy the six 300 level electives that will support their chosen designated emphases (literature, culture, or language), along with her guidance with the petitions for these electives, has been crucial to student learning outcomes. In addition, Shawn Doubiago has worked with graduating seniors in writing their senior theses, a process that culminates in a document that clearly demonstrates specific learning outcomes mentioned above.
2. Please Answer the Following Questions for Each of the Student Outcomes Assessed:
 - a. What did you do?
Describe clearly and concisely how you assessed the learning outcomes that were evaluated this year (e.g., measures, research methods, etc.).

- Each petition for a 300 level elective consists of three key elements: 1) a description of the student’s emphasis and the area of research in the CMPL program. This has allowed us to assess students’ conceptual and historical understandings of the topics they have chosen in relation to, and/or as influenced by a specific course they have taken; 2) In having to justify the ways in which each elective course is relevant to students’ emphases, they must identify, articulate, and contextualize historical, cultural, and aesthetic traditions that will be relevant to their senior theses. These petitions were created in order to assess students’ abilities to map out and to contextualize their learning at USF. The petition form allows us to carefully examine each of petitions in relation to students’ chosen emphases and topics. These petitions are good indicators of students’ overall organization and understanding of their topics before they take the Capstone seminar. 3) Each petition for an elective must be accompanied with the course syllabus and a completed research assignment (typically, a writing assignment) that offers a sample of the students’ engagement and proficiency with the course topic. We use these documents to further evaluate students’ writing skills, analytical skills, etc.
 - The Capstone Seminar: “Political Fictions,” is intended as a course that introduces students to graduate-level research methods and theoretical approaches revolving around the political. The culminating project of this seminar is an 18-25 page senior thesis on each student’s chosen topic. This document demonstrates a student’s capacity to develop and sustain an in-depth history and analysis of literary, cultural, and/or linguistic phenomena, as well as the ability to write in a scholarly manner on a comparative topic. Careful evaluation of the theses using the rubrics found in the Comparative Literature and Culture Self-study allow us to evaluate students’ ability to engage with a comparative topic in a scholarly manner.
- b. What did the faculty in the department or program learn?
Summarize your findings and conclusions as a result of the student learning assurance indicating strengths and weaknesses in student learning demonstrated by this evaluation.

Petitions for Electives: Regarding the petitions for electives, we found that they are strong documents for assessing many of the above student learning outcomes. The quality and the coherence of students’ ideas immediately stand out, as well as their ability to situate their specific interests within a larger framework. On the other hand, there are some weaknesses that we have found with the organization of the petitions. These weaknesses are mostly due to minimal guidelines for

filling out the petitions. Since there is very little instruction on what to do, students can feel initially baffled by what is expected of them. It takes several meetings, and often an initially rejected petition for some students to fully grasp what is expected.

Capstone Seminar and Senior Thesis: By analyzing both the form and content of several senior theses, we found that there were consistent discrepancies in certain areas of student writing (specifically, in organization). As well, several of the assignments (besides the thesis) for the Capstone Seminar were not necessarily supporting students' specific research projects. Both of these evaluations demonstrated the need for more rigorous writing practices within the seminar.

- c. What will be done differently as a result of what was learned?
Discuss how courses and/or curricula will be changed to improve student learning as a result of the evaluation. Include a discussion of how the faculty will help students overcome their weaknesses and improve their strengths.

Petitions for Electives: We are planning to complement the petition forms by adding a detailed instruction form to the CMPL Website. We will offer sample petitions to seniors who are in the process of writing their petitions, which will help clarify expectations.

Capstone and Senior Thesis: We have revised the Capstone seminar in order to implement basic research and writing practices each week. These assignments build on each other and ultimately contribute to the senior thesis and to the assessment of students' writing practices. For example, we now assign students the following tasks as a step-by-step process for writing their theses: prospectus; list of definition of terms; an outline; a synopsis of an important essay on the chosen topic; working bibliography; introduction; section of body of thesis; conclusion; first draft; second draft; final draft; oral presentation. Although we read quite a bit of theory and fiction, which we discuss at length in each weekly seminar, we have eliminated any assignments that do not support students' specific topics. These steps have greatly reduced stress in students (they are building on their theses while completing assignments) as well as improved the quality of writing as is demonstrated by their final completed drafts. In addition, we will create a rubric specifically for the senior thesis that will allow students to check their theses for essential elements before turning them in.

- d. What student learning improvement initiatives did you implement as a result of what was learned from this Year's student learning assurance report?
Discuss how courses and/or curricula were changed to improve student learning as a result of the Year's student learning assurance. Include a discussion of how

the faculty has helped students overcome their learning weaknesses and improve their strengths.

Petitions for Electives: We are implementing more detailed instructions for filling out the petitions for electives, along with an earlier introduction to the importance of the petitions in terms of chosen emphases and topics of study. In addition, we have already begun to offer some sample petitions for students to look at as models.

Capstone Seminar and Senior Theses: We have already revised the Capstone seminar curriculum and assignments as mentioned above.

3. Attach a copy of the components of the department/program student learning assurance plan that have been modified since its initial submission:

- a. Will be submitted by due date, October 31st.

Please return to: Office of Student Learning Assurance by September 30.

Please send your replies as Word attachment (to: wmurry@usfca.edu).

If you have any questions, please contact: William Murry, Director of Student Learning Assurance (wmurry@usfca.edu or x5486).