



## Department of Rhetoric and Language

### ASSESSMENT REPORT ACADEMIC YEAR 2018 – 2019

#### I. LOGISTICS

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1. Please indicate the name and email of the program contact person to whom feedback should be sent (usually Chair, Program Director, or Faculty Assessment Coordinator).

Cathy Gabor, [cgabor@usfca.edu](mailto:cgabor@usfca.edu)  
Department Chair

2. Please indicate if you are submitting report for (a) a Major, (b) a Minor, (c) an aggregate report for a Major & Minor (in which case, each should be explained in a separate paragraph as in this template), (d) a Graduate or (e) a Certificate Program

None of the above.

3. Please note that a Curricular Map should accompany every assessment report. Has there been any revisions to the Curricular Map?

None

#### II. MISSION STATEMENT & PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOMES

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1. Were any changes made to the program mission statement since the last assessment cycle in October 2018? Kindly state "Yes" or "No." Please provide the current mission statement below. If you are submitting an aggregate report, please provide the current mission statements of both the major and the minor program

No changes

##### Program Mission

The mission of the Rhetoric Program in the Department of Rhetoric and Language is to teach all University of San Francisco students to communicate effectively and ethically in academic, civic, and professional contexts. Through our classes, service, and co-curricular activities, we advance the Jesuit ideal of eloquentia perfecta--reason and eloquence in writing, speaking, and languaging--and guide our students as they learn to engage critically with the texts that influence their beliefs, values and actions.

**2. Were any changes made to the program learning outcomes (PLOs) since the last assessment cycle in October 2017? Kindly state “Yes” or “No.” Please provide the current PLOs below. If you are submitting an aggregate report, please provide the current PLOs for both the major and the minor programs.**

**Note: Major revisions in the program learning outcomes need to go through the College Curriculum Committee (contact: Professor Joshua Gamson, [gamson@usfca.edu](mailto:gamson@usfca.edu)). Minor editorial changes are not required to go through the College Curriculum Committee.**

No changes

Rhetoric Program Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of the rhetoric program, students will be able to:

1. Explain and apply rhetorical concepts, theories, and principles in the process of analyzing various texts and rhetorical situations.
2. Evaluate the ethics and effectiveness of their own and others’ communication in academic, civic, and professional situations.
3. Produce research-driven written, oral, and digital communication that demonstrates awareness, knowledge, and application of rhetorical concepts.
4. Articulate and interpret their own rhetorical choices and composing processes.

**3. State the particular Program Learning Outcome(s) you assessed for the academic year 2018-2019.**

In short, we assessed the following program outcome:

- Articulate and interpret their own rhetorical choices and composing processes.

However, the 2019 assessment process needs more explanation.

Due to the fact that USF decided to go “Test Optional,” the Department of Rhetoric and Language had to prepare to place students in writing classes using a method other than test scores. Given that situation, we designed and assessed a placement tool. This effort assessed the “co-curricular activities” mentioned in our mission statement, although the object of our assessment—placement—might be better labeled “pre-curricular.”

### III. METHODOLOGY

We investigated Directed Self-Placement using a three-pronged method:

- pilot
- usability test and focus group
- quantitative comparison

Pilot: A Subcommittee of the Department of Rhetoric and Language created a Directed Self-Placement (DSP) tool, designed to place students appropriately in their first writing course at USF. The entire tool was launched through Canvas. The first aspect of the tool was a

16-question survey which students filled out. Immediately upon filling it out, an algorithm suggested an appropriate writing course. Following completion of the survey, Canvas directed students to an essay prompt and a screen to write an essay. Once the students submitted their essays, they were shown three essays written in response to the same prompt: each one written by a student from one of USF’s writing class options. Students were then led to a third module within Canvas where they read the class descriptions of Rhetoric 130, Rhetoric 110, and Rhetoric 110N. Students were prompted to select the course that best fits their abilities and needs, using the survey results, sample essays, and course descriptions as guides. The final screen mandated that students write a 100-200 word reflection on why they selected the course they did.

Usability Test and Focus Group: Specifically, 64 incoming students (all Muscat Scholars) participated in this assessment. They completed all phases of the pilot tool within Canvas: survey, essay, course selection, reflection. Simultaneously, the students completed a usability test on paper. Following the pilot/usability test, the students went immediately into 20-minute focus group sessions to further discuss the efficacy of the DSP tool.

Quantitative Comparison: After the results from the students’ Directed Self-Placement were compiled, we compared them to the existing placements in their student records (based on SAT/ACT scores).

#### IV. RESULTS & MAJOR FINDINGS

The results of this assessment activity indicate that incoming students can use a DSP tool to accurately place themselves into writing classes while upholding USF’s social justice standards. The survey and essay activity ask students to “interpret their own composing processes” (PLO # 4). And, the reflective writing at the end of the DSP tool shows that students are well on their way to “articulating their own rhetorical choices” (PLO #4). As stated above, this is a “pre-curricular activity” and is meant to, in part, inculcate students into the academic culture at USF, setting them up to begin meeting the Program Learning Outcomes once they start taking Rhetoric classes. Additionally, the writing prompt was about *eloquentia perfecta*, the Jesuit rhetorical theory at the core of our Program Mission.

In the pilot group, 59 of 64 (or 92%) students placed themselves in the same classes as their SAT/ACT scores did. This statistic is the result of our quantitative comparison.

However, the most useful results of this assessment come from the usability test, because they show us how we can make the survey questions (and answer choices) more clear and accurate. We asked students to give feedback on which questions were confusing and/or where they felt none of the answer choices applied to them. The following chart shows how much feedback we got on each question (i.e., which questions were confusing):

No confusion-very little confusion (0-1 comments)	5 questions
Some confusion (2-4 comments)	6 questions
Higher level of confusion (5-6 comments)	4 questions
Highest level of confusion (7+ comments)	1 question

Even our “highest level of confusion” question was only flagged by 14% of the students participating in the pilot/usability test. So, we are heartened that the survey is predominantly sound.

Finally, the technological platform we used for the survey was completely insufficient. In real time while students were taking the survey, the platform was flagging student answers as “correct” or “incorrect.” The survey did not have any correct or incorrect answers. For example, one question asked students the length of the longest paper they had written to date and gave student page number ranges to choose among. Clearly the “correct” answer is distinct for each student.

## **V. CLOSING THE LOOP**

### **1. How will you close the loop between the implication of these results and your curriculum?**

The Department of Rhetoric and Language will take three major steps to “close the loop.” First, we will find a new technological platform for the survey – one that does not automatically give “correct” and “incorrect” labels in real time. Second, we will revise the questions that students found confusing. In addition, we will add a few more questions to the survey that we deem necessary based on the feedback from the focus groups. Finally, we will conduct another pilot (with the new questions and new technology) for approximately 300 incoming students in January 2020.

### **2. What were the most important suggestions/feedback from the FDCD on your last assessment report (for academic year 2017-2018, submitted in October 2018)? How did you incorporate or address the suggestion(s) in this report?**

We were encouraged to assess a Program Learning Outcome rather than a Course Learning Outcome, which we have done this year.

## ADDITIONAL MATERIALS