

Master Degree in Humanities

M.A.

Expanded Statement of Institutional Purpose

Institutional Mission Reference

The Humanities Program relates to the mission of the College by training graduate students to think critically across traditional disciplinary boundaries, to communicate effectively in written and verbal contexts, to appreciate and understand the richness and diversity of cultures, the forms and structures of human signification, to manage information effectively and to make good use of the information resources available to them, to appreciate more fully their own unique strengths, and, finally, to mobilize those strengths toward the achievement of their life goals, intellectual and professional.

Institutional Goal(s) Supported

Advancement of critical and analytical thinking; the development of writing and speaking skills; information and information resources management; appreciation of cultural diversity; understanding of the contribution of intellectual and artistic endeavor.

Intended Educational (Student) Outcomes, Methods for Assessment, Criteria for Success, Assessment Results, and Use of Results

Intended Outcome 1

To think critically and analytically about the key questions and issues in the humanities.

Method for Assessing Outcome 1 and Criterion for Success: The Masters thesis (HUM. 698, 699) and final integrative written project for non-thesis students (HUM. 694) are the primary means for evaluating students' abilities to apply critical and analytical tools effectively. The integrative project for 694 is a paper on an approved topic which will reflect the student's own interdisciplinary program. For thesis students, the thesis committee of three faculty (plus the graduate program director) evaluates the success of the student's critical thinking and analytical skills. For non-thesis students, the faculty mentor and the graduate program director (who currently teaches 694) determine the success of these projects based on the structure and coherence of the argument, the quality and depth of development and support provided, the relevance of scholarly sources consulted and the effectiveness with which these sources are incorporated into the student's scholarly apparatus. Each student selects one or more faculty advisors from among the Arts & Letters faculty. These are faculty who have expertise in the discipline(s) with which the student's project deals. The faculty mentor's main responsibilities are to advise students on sources, scholarship, and intellectual developments concerning their topics, and to evaluate (with the Graduate Program Director) the final product.

Summary of Assessment Data Collected for Outcome 1: Eight completed research papers were collected in HUM. 694. All of the projects focused on interdisciplinary theses in the humanities: four of them emphasized social issues; two focused on the arts; one focused on the historical development of consumer culture; and two focused on media and communication. The papers were collected and, upon evaluation by the 694 instructor in consultation with each student's faculty mentor (from his or her primary discipline) it was determined that all of the papers successfully provide well-formulated and coherent arguments and well-organized, detailed development and support. One incomplete was granted to a student who required more time to complete the project. That project was submitted two weeks following the end of the semester, and was successful, although the student's ongoing difficulty indicated some weaknesses in his ability to formulate a viable and focused research project. In addition to the 694 projects, two students completed their theses (698 and 699) and all requirements for graduation. One thesis was in theater and the other was in philosophy. The latter was one of the finest pieces of graduate research that I have seen in my four years as serving as director.

Intended Outcome 2

To become effective scholarly writers and articulate, informed speakers on humanities issues and questions relevant to the student's particular interests.

Method for Assessing Outcome 2 and Criterion for Success: For both thesis students and non-thesis students, this outcome is assessed by the student's ability to demonstrate, in the thesis or in the final integrative project, that he/she is able to locate relevant scholarly resources, comprehend them, synthesize and incorporate them into his/her own written argument. The verbal component is assessed in the Masters thesis defense, which is the final stage in the thesis writing process. In HUM. 694, students are required to talk about their work in progress, articulate their writing process, including problems they may be facing, and to defend their scholarly arguments and conclusions in discussion with the other students and the instructor. Moreover, students in HUM. 694 are required to read other students' work in progress and provide on-going feedback and constructive criticism in order to help class participants cultivate a coherent argument and a writing style that is accessible to an interdisciplinary audience, or readers with different backgrounds who are not necessarily specialists in the student's own field.

Summary of Assessment Data Collected for Outcome 2: The nine projects which were completed for HUM 694, and the two finished Masters theses, included proper scholarly documentation and bibliographies which demonstrated that students had successfully located relevant scholarly resources, and had synthesized and incorporated them into their own written argument. Also evident was that students had effectively incorporated the comments and feedback which they received from their peers in group critique sessions. All papers were readable and accessible to readers who are not necessarily specialists in the student's discipline.

In HUM. 694, eight out of nine students successfully completed their projects with a grade of B+ or higher. One student received a grade of B.

In addition, two theses were submitted and deemed by faculty committees to be outstanding.

Intended Outcome 3

To understand the contribution of the humanities and the arts to the world of ideas and to human enterprise.

Method for Assessing Outcome 3 and Criterion for Success: This outcome is assessed through the Humanities core courses HUM. 601 and HUM. 602. As its title indicates, Humanities 601 is designed as a grass roots introduction to the basic elements of humanities research, methodology, and critical theory. Humanities 601 is the premier course of the core Humanities Program courses. It is also the precursory course to Humanities 602. Both courses provide students with general historical background in humanities scholarship and the arts. In both courses, students are required to develop a term paper and take a final exam which tests their reader comprehension and assimilation of information from lecture and students reports. The paper and the exam are the primary methods for assessing students' in the courses, as well as their overall understanding of the history of the arts and humanities. It is assumed that this understanding is further enriched and developed in the courses which students take in various humanities departments. The success with which students select courses that help them build upon the knowledge gained in the core courses is finally assessed through the evaluation of the thesis or the final integrative written project.

Summary of Assessment Data Collected for Outcome 3: In Humanities 601, 11 out of 13 students successfully completed the course, as well as their final papers, and the final exam. One student withdrew from the course because of health concerns. One student completed the course with a grade of B- as a result of poor writing skills. That student registered for advanced composition as a result of receiving this grade in order to improve his writing skills. In Humanities 602, which was taught by Professor Tim Havens, ten out of fifteen students received a grade of B+ or better. One student received a B. Two students dropped the course for personal reasons. One student audited the course and received no grade. One student received an incomplete pending the resolution of charges of academic dishonesty. This last case is, indeed, the one that requires attention insofar as it may suggest, depending on the outcome of the case, that students entering the Humanities program are not as familiar as they should be with the essential codes and conventions of scholarly documentation. This particular case may also suggest that students with little background in the humanities do not, as a rule, do as well in the program as students with a more substantial background in the arts and humanities. Academic background should perhaps be weighed more seriously as an indication of a student's suitability for the program. Again, this assessment will depend in part on the outcome of the case, but evidence strongly suggests that a combination of strategies--more emphasis on documentation styles in 601, more attention to academic background in the admissions process, better communication with incoming students about the expectations of scholarship and academic honesty--need to be implemented in the future.

Intended Outcome 4

To understand the interdisciplinary nature of humanities scholarship and knowledge. To appreciate how disciplinary approaches differ from one another, and how they can benefit and compliment one another.

Method for Assessing Outcome 4 and Criterion for Success: This outcome is assessed by the term papers and final exam which are requirements for the core courses , Humanities 601 and HUM. 602. In both courses, students are required to read and discuss essays that address the meanings, challenges, and problems of interdisciplinarity. They must demonstrate through both the final exam and the term paper that they have a strong grasp on the concept of the interdisciplinary. Ultimately, for thesis students, the prospectus must make clear the interdisciplinary nature of the project, describing the methods to be used and the specific ways in which the project combines at least two different humanistic disciplines. For non-thesis students, this outcome is assessed in Hum. 694 (for non-thesis students.) The seminar brings students together in their final semester of study in order to explore contemporary theories of interdisciplinary study in the humanities and to consider these general theories in relation to the individual interdisciplinary programs of humanities students. To this extent, the seminar provides students with a formal opportunity to take stock of their work and experiences in the program. Above all, this seminar is a working seminar in which students prepare and complete a paper on an approved topic which will reflect the student's own interdisciplinary program. In this sense, the seminar will function as a workshop wherein students will have the opportunity to share their works-in-progress with one another and receive feedback. It is expected that this final integrating paper, like the Masters thesis for thesis students, will demonstrate effective interdisciplinary research, methodology, and scholarship.

Summary of Assessment Data Collected for Outcome 4: As cited above, in Humanities 601, 11 out of 13 students registered for the class successfully completed the course, as well as their final papers and the final exam, with a grade of B or above. The one student who received B- took immediate steps to improve his writing skills so as to remain in the program.

In Humanities 602, which was taught by Professor Tim Havens, 11 out of 15 students completed the required research paper successfully. My deepest concern, once again, is the one student against whom charges of academic honesty have been leveled. Pending the outcome of this case, I will need to consider strategies for ensuring that students fully understand the expectations of the scholarly community before they are admitted into the program.

In Hum. 694, eight of the nine final project papers evaluated demonstrated that students had a firm grasp of interdisciplinary scholarship, methodology, and research. The two theses were equally successful, if not more so given the depth and breadth of the scholarship involved. This suggests that students who choose the thesis option may attain a broader and more sophisticated understanding of interdisciplinarity as it relates to humanities inquiry. This possible outcome will be addressed by the Humanities Advisory Committee at future meetings in order to assess whether it would make sense for all students to complete a thesis.

Intended Outcome 5

To use the library effectively, including all information resources, eg. electronic data bases, and information on the Internet.

Method for Assessing Outcome 5 and Criterion for Success: Humanities 601 provides students with the foundation upon which your work in the Humanities Program will stand. The course will refresh, update, or otherwise show students from scratch how to conduct graduate level research in the Humanities, how to access data bases and resources, print and electronic journals, bibliographies and archives necessary for research in your discipline(s). To this end, students will be a given ample opportunity to acquaint themselves with the Perry Library and receive hands-on instruction at the computer terminals. Assignments will be task-oriented and will encourage students to exercise and expand their research skills. In this sense, Humanities 601 serves an eminently practical function. HUM. 602 allows students to exercise, expand, and reinforce their graduate level research skills in the Humanities. At the same time, 602 continues to examine current interdisciplinary approaches to humanities research. Once again students are given a library orientation with reference librarian. Finally, in Hum. 694 these lessons are once again reinforced as students are given an in-depth library orientation and training session in preparation for writing their final integrative paper projects. They are expected to prepare a prospectus and an annotated bibliography. Obviously, the same is true for thesis students, who must similarly be able to demonstrate--through the prospectus, bibliography, and final product--that they can effectively access and use reference and research data bases.

Summary of Assessment Data Collected for Outcome 5: The successful completion of paper in HUM. 694 required that students conduct research in the library, as well as other information resources. The nine completed papers which were evaluated for assessment report provide ample evidence that students have mastered the skills necessary for graduate level research, including accessing data bases and resources, print and electronic journals, bibliographies and archives necessary for research in their disciplines, as well as across disciplines.

In Hum. 601, students demonstrated their ability to access information and scholarly materials by writing their final papers, all of which received passing grades.

In Humanities 602, all of the students who completed the course, with the exception of the one student against whom charges of academic dishonesty are pending, completed their final papers with grades of B or above.