**Annual Departmental Assessment Report**

**Department or Program: Humanities Program**

**Academic Year of Report: 2020-2021**

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**Section 1: Learning Objectives Assessed for this Report**

The Humanities major provides the opportunity for motivated and independently minded students to craft an individualized major with a humanistic orientation. Students working toward a Humanities major, which is designed in consultation with the program advisor, pursue their interests in a systematic and coherent way across several disciplines. The Learning Objectives are that graduates with a BA in Humanities should be able to:

1. read critically and analyze texts from a variety of periods and cultures  
2. analyze critically a variety of cultural artifacts such as paintings, sculpture, architecture, and music  
3. show familiarity with the cultures that produced these texts and artifacts  
4. do research, write clearly, develop a coherent argument, and substantiate that argument with relevant evidence (citations of texts, references to cultural artifacts, etc.)  
5. identify ideas that unite different disciplines  
6. understand issues of historical contingency and enculturation and, accordingly, be able to reflect critically on the thought systems (e.g. economic, political, religious) inculcated in our own culture.

**Section 2: Assessment Activities**

It’s important to note that the Humanities major has no core courses, only core subjects and methods of inquiry. The major is divided into 1) an introduction to interdisciplinary learning in the humanities (fulfilled by two out of the HUM 101-102-103 sequence *or*, for students starting the major at an advanced level, the HUM 300 interdisciplinary themes class, 2) a foundation in the humanities, currently consisting of one course each in the Arts, History, Philosophy, and Classics, 3) seven upper-division "Concentration" courses of their choice, chosen in consultation with their advisor, that form an interconnected sequence of inquiry and learning. The culmination of the major is a "Concentration Defense" that gives a brief overview of the Concentration sequence chosen by the student, and that allows reflection on their learning. The majors do not take any other courses in common, and no courses past the HUM 101-102-103 sequence and the HUM 300 courses are taught by recurring faculty. Humanities itself has no faculty; all faculty are borrowed from other departments. Thus it is difficult to obtain a broad comparative view of majors — the program simply doesn't work that way.

Five Humanities majors were set to graduate in spring 2021. By the time of this assessment, four had turned in their Concentration Defenses, which allow us to see where they have ended up.

One student, for instance, wrote as part of her Concentration Defense: "My Humanities focus is Interdisciplinary Intersectional Activism Through Art, and I'm writing my undergraduate thesis for the Robert D. Clark Honors College on Social Emotional Learning in Public Education. The Humanities major has given me the opportunity to explore the interconnections between art, environmentalism, indigenous history, race, feminism, pedagogy, religious, spirituality, communication, psychology, neuroscience, literature, human behavior, ability, emotion, philosophy and much more. Due to my broad range of interests, narrowing my lens to one subject has always felt counterintuitive. Therefore, my Humanities *focus* is really about the power of interdisciplinary breadth, and how non-dichotomous and broad intersectional thinking can help make the world a better place. One of my many modes of expression, art, is key to this practice of identifying the ideas, thoughts, and feelings that weave seemingly separate fields and lives together...." She described one of her Concentration classes as follows: "ARH 410 Land & Environmental Art History (and the Decolonial Lens): This course showed me how art is inextricable from the political and social worlds, and how art can both communicate and violate. This class was inherently interdisciplinary, weaving through the fields of art history, environmental history, colonial history, and indigenous studies. I learned about the non-tangible art practices that have continually inspired my present work and desire to help change the world through non-visual artistic media, such as relationship, touch, and verbal language.” This demonstrates Learning Objectives 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6, and presumably 1 as well, as much of the material must have been textual.

In another example, a second student wrote: "I am deeply interested in Story. Language and storytelling have always captivated my interests, and the above courses gave me a deeper understanding of why we tell each other stories, and what we like to tell stories about. For example, Folklore and Foodways may not at first glance feel related to The Modern American Superhero, but Batman, as Bruce Wayne, is known for lavish parties and socialite gatherings, with the villain so often going undercover to ruin Bruce’s night and bring the Batman out of hiding. This trope, perhaps best exemplified by Poe’s *Mask of the Red Death*, goes back to literature as ancient as Beowulf, which I studied in Medieval Hero and Monster, with Grendel’s stalking of Heorot Hall." Learning Objectives 1 and 3 are clearly on display here. She continues, "The heroic protagonists of YA, the sometimes-barbaric, super-strong defenders and monster slayers of medieval heroic epic, the mysticism of miracle workers and magicians in the bible, and superhumans flying across the panels of a comic: in many ways, all of these things are related, reflective and descendant of the others." (Learning Objectives 2 and 5.)

A third student wrote about studying “the development of ethical thought and action in our culture over time,” studying “varied modes of narrative art including film, literature, and autobiography,” especially using “the ethical thinker Levinas’ work to define a historical pattern of ethical action over time.” These concern Learning Objectives 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6, and the essay itself is an example of number 5.

The fourth student described himself as particularly interested in the “interpretation of culture,” and observed, “I found a modern transition of culture in CINE 365. Studying the arrival of digital cinema and the effects it has had on cultural norms was enlightening. Seeing a modern example of how established views on an aspect of society changed over time was very helpful in understanding values themselves.” This seems to speak especially to Learning Objectives 3 and 6.

**Section 3: Actions Taken Based on Assessment Analysis**

We are satisfied that the program's learning goals are being met. In informal discussion, the students express great appreciation for the program and for the opportunities it affords to follow their own fields of interest across disciplinary boundaries.

**Section 4: Other Efforts to Improve the Student Educational Experience**

Feeling that the original designation of “Classics” as one of the field requirements showed a Euro-centric point of view, we have put in a proposal to expand the “Classics” requirement to an “Ancient Civilizations” requirement, allowing for a course in any civilization before 200 BCE, e.g. ancient Japan, China, Egypt, etc. We feel that the depth of understanding helps counteract a contemporary tendency to regard only modern sources and cultural production as worthwhile, and gives students a deep view of human culture.

**Section 5: Plans for Next Year**

We intend to perform a similar assessment in 2021-22, and to continue to advise and guide students in interdisciplinary study.