

Liberal Studies Program Assessment Plan
Liberal Studies Program
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Introduction

At Park University, Liberal Studies constitutes a program and a major, but is not an autonomous department. Nevertheless, the faculty of the Liberal Studies program welcomes ongoing assessment of the program in an effort to provide the best possible education to our students and to encourage best practices for faculty.

Mission Statement

The Liberal Studies program at Park University seeks to instill in its students both a broad sense of the nature of humanities and liberal studies and a deeper knowledge of an area of expertise within those fields, which will be reflected in critical thinking and an appreciation for cultural differences.

Academic Goals

Graduates of Park University's Liberal Studies program will be prepared to:

- + Enter professional or graduate schools (law, business, liberal arts)
- + Work effectively in a variety of business environments
- + Actively participate in the cultural life of their community
- + Lead fully realized lives connected to the continuum of human creativity

Program Competencies

Liberal Studies program graduates will display competence in a variety of fields through their

1. Ability to discuss an array of human creative endeavors in a thoughtful and critical way.
2. Demonstration of an area of expertise through projects or presentations that reflect a deeper awareness of the issues within that field, including theories, challenges, and signal achievements.
3. Application of critical thinking skills to written, oral, and creative assignments.
4. Conception and application of a major project designed around the student's own field of concentration within the liberal arts and humanities.

Evaluation of Competencies

Liberal Studies faculty utilize two tools to assess the competencies of the program.

LS400: Senior Project in Liberal Studies

Each Liberal Studies major must take six hours (across two semesters) of LS400, Senior Project. This course may be scholarly or creative, and should be addressed to the student's area of concentration within the field of Liberal Studies (History, Philosophy, Religion, English, Communication Arts, Art, Music, or Theatre). The student, working with a mentor within his or her area of concentration, designs the project, including the elements of assessment of the final product, an approximation of time anticipated to be spent on the project, and a procedure plan (including, if relevant, an abstract, a review of literature, and progressive drafts if the project is scholarly.)

The first three hours of the Senior Project are anticipated to be preparatory and exploratory. The last three hours should result in a discrete product. The senior project is submitted to the Liberal Studies mentor overseeing the course, who submits a final grade.

Past examples of Senior Projects have ranged from creative writing to production of music CDs to history theses.

All Senior Projects should be focused on the student's area of concentration and display a high degree of knowledge, a sophisticated use of rhetoric pertinent to the field of study, and a scholarly or creative display of mastery of the field.

This element of the program measures competencies 2, 3, and 4.

Assessment of LS400:

Because of the variegated nature of this program and the broad nature of the Senior Project in Liberal Studies, no single rubric can be devised. Instead, each mentor in a particular area of concentration, working closely with the student, constructs a suitable rubric for assessing the completed project taking into account competencies 2, 3, and 4. One additional faculty member, selected by the Project mentor, assesses the Project along with the mentor.

A few general statements can be made, however. The superior project, one which clearly exceeds expectations, will:

1. Provide evidence of exhaustive research, with a list of works cited or consulted, and this will include creative projects in illustrating an understanding by the student of the context of his or her own project.
2. Demonstrate a mastery of the area of concentration by the appropriate use of language specific to the discipline. This demonstration might be either written or oral.

3. Analyze clearly the role of the artist or practitioner within the field of concentration, and the historical shifts in that role over time and culture.

The Senior Project that meets expectations will:

1. Provide evidence of some research, which although adequate to the project, is clearly not exhaustive.
2. Demonstrate a useful, working vocabulary of disciplinary rhetoric, either oral or written, that displays a firm grasp of the discipline's rhetoric but falls short of mastery.
3. Analyze the role of artist or discipline practitioner within a contemporary setting, but lacks a historical context regarding the changing roles of that individual across time and culture.

The Senior Project that does not meet expectations will

1. Provide little or no evidence of research.
2. Demonstrate a lack of fundamental understanding of the vocabulary specific to the discipline of their concentration.
3. Fail to display any analysis of the role of the artist or practitioner in a social or cultural context.

Senior Oral Exam in Liberal Studies

Each student who majors in Liberal Studies takes a senior oral examination in which he or she is questioned by faculty regarding his or her area of concentration and one area of study selected by the student. The faculty committee administering the exam will consist of the program coordinator or his or her designate, and three additional faculty selected by the student.

This exam in the past has been unstructured, to the extent that most examination sessions have become discussions. Perhaps this should be tightened and modeled roughly after the paradigm of the English Department. That is, possibly each student should be given a short list of titles relative to the general study of liberal arts and humanities, and one or two titles relative to the area of concentration.

The Senior Project thus would be the capstone for the area of Liberal Studies concentration, and the senior oral exam would be the arena for assessing the competencies of the entire major.

This would measure competencies 1 and 3.

Assessment of Student Performance on the Oral Exam in Liberal Studies

Once more, a rubric for measuring student performance in the Senior Oral Exam is problematic given the broad nature of the Liberal Studies program. However, some general guidelines can be formulated to guide both the evaluators and the student sitting for the exam.

The evaluation for this senior oral exam is straightforward, i.e., pass or fail.

To score Pass on this exam, the student will:

1. Demonstrate clear mastery of the area of concentration, by a full and complete discussion of current major practitioners and key figures from the past, as well as theory, philosophy, and rhetoric specific to the discipline.
2. Provide evidence of an understanding of the interdisciplinary nature of Liberal Studies and of its role in a pluralistic society.
3. Analyze issues relating to the field of concentration in a changing and contentious global environment. An example might be: Given the current state of violence, should musicians be expected to self-censor their work before releasing it to the public? (For a concentration in music, obviously.)

Failure of the exam would mean the student:

1. Displays little understanding of his or her field of concentration through an incomplete discussion of major practitioners, both current and historical, as well as an inability to talk about theory, philosophy, or rhetoric specific to that discipline.
2. Provides little or no evidence of a grasp of the interdisciplinary nature of Liberal Studies, or of its role in a pluralistic society.
3. Is unable to analyze social issues relevant to his or her field of concentration.