The Neumann University Core Experience Newsletter

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INTRODUCTION

Dear Colleagues,

In academic year 2014-2015, we completed the first cycle of assessment of the Core learning outcomes with a focus on *Comprehension* and *Compassion*. This newsletter includes a description of the assessment protocol; the full assessment reports are available on SharePoint and an overview will be provided during the Faculty Development Day on August 27, 2015. Results will be shared in greater depth at Lunch and Learn sessions (*Comprehension* on September 15 and 16 and *Compassion* on October 27 to 30). Heartfelt thanks to every faculty and staff member who participated in the assessment process in some way by designing rubrics, providing samples of student work, participating in the assessment of these artifacts, and reviewing results. The entire assessment process demonstrated a commitment of faculty and staff to the promotion of the essential learning outcomes. This past Spring we updated the Core Map. This process also engaged faculty and staff members across the campus.

During the current academic year, we will complete the implementation of the revised Core with the inclusion of a Capstone course/experience in every major. Although the Capstones will be unique for each major, these courses will require students to provide evidence of their ability to apply what they have learned in the major through research, a professional portfolio, an artistic product, or some other method (e.g. student teaching or clinical experience). This year we will assess *Communication* learning outcomes; this newsletter includes strategies to promote growth in these areas identified by faculty and staff members after the first cycle of assessment in 2012-2013.

Sr. Pat Hutchison, OSF

From Task Force to Committee

With the Core revision complete, the "task force" has now become a standing University Committee with the following purpose:

To assist and advise the Director of the Neumann University Core Experience program in relation to:

- Communication to ensure understanding of the Core philosophy and learning outcomes
- Assessment to promote the achievement of the Core Learning outcomes
- Program review to ensure that modifications, additions, and deletions to the Neumann University Core Experience align with the University's Mission, Institutional Goals, Core Goals and Learning Outcomes, and the needs of major programs
- Professional development of faculty and staff to promote the Core philosophy and learning outcomes
- Development of all aspects of the Neumann University Core Experience program in light of best practices in Catholic education in the Franciscan tradition in the 21st century.

2015-2016 Core Committee Members:

Sr. Patricia Hutchison, OSF, Chair
Megan Camp
Sarah Cazella
Jilian Donnelly
Janelle Ketrick-Gillespie
Julie Lanzillo
Daniel McKee
Robert McMonagle
Kathleen Swanik
Sandra Weiss
Lawrence DiPaolo, ex officio

CORE COMPREHENSION ASSESSMENT

During the 2014-2015 academic year, **Comprehension** (Think critically, creatively, and analytically) competencies were the focus of the Core Curriculum assessment.

Comprehension learning outcomes include: Analyze and solve complex problems; demonstrate quantitative reasoning and scientific literacy; and explore the relationship of contemporary and historical events and issues.

Direct assessment measures included: written artifacts for problem solving and scientific literacy (92 papers from Core courses in Chemistry and Environmental Studies); written artifacts demonstrating student understanding of the relation of contemporary and historical events (96 papers from History 102, 103, and History 226); and quantitative reasoning assessment implemented and completed by the Math Work Group. Other direct measures included a comparison of recent ETS Proficiency Profiles in Reading and Critical Thinking and Math.

Indirect measures included relevant questions from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) – First and senior years.

Data collected were analyzed by faculty and staff members during June and July 2015. Results will be shared with faculty and staff during Lunch and Learn sessions (*Comprehension* on September 15 and 16). To view *Comprehension* assessment report, please see SharePoint. Based on results, faculty and staff will provide feedback and create action plans to foster improvement. The complete assessment report will be shared in January 2016.

LUNCH AND LEARN FEEDBACK SESSIONS

COMPREHENSION
September 15 and 16, 2015

COMPASSION
October 27, 28, 29 and 30, 2015

CORE COMPASSION ASSESSMENT

During the 2014-2015 academic year, **Compassion** (Respect all of creation) competencies were also the focus of the Core Curriculum assessment.

Compassion learning outcomes include: Honor the worth and dignity of each person; interact respectfully in the local and global community; engage in service to promote the common good; and demonstrate environmental awareness and stewardship.

Direct assessment measures included: written artifacts based on the worth and dignity of every person (77 papers from French 102, Spanish 102, Italian 102, and American Sign Language 102); written artifacts related to service in promotion of the common good (77 papers from all major programs; a threaded discussion from the capstone course in the Liberal Studies degree completion program; and eight group oral presentations from Sport and Entertainment Management). Direct measures also included Neumann University Co-op/Internship Employer Evaluations of students from Fall 2014 and Spring 2015.

Indirect assessment included: National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) – First and senior years; NSSE Catholic Supplement; Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory (all years); and a University-developed survey on environmental awareness and stewardship administered to a cross-section of students in Spring 2015. In October 2014, Neumann University participated in the National Assessment of Service and Community Engagement (NASCE), conducted by the Siena College Research Institute. The NASCE provided rich data which is included in the assessment of service in promotion of the common good.

Data collected were analyzed by faculty and staff members during June and July 2015. Results will be shared with faculty and staff during Lunch and Learn sessions (*Compassion* during the week of October 26). To view *Compassion* assessment report, please see SharePoint. Based on results, faculty and staff will provide feedback and create action plans to foster improvement. The complete assessment report will be shared with all constituencies in January 2016.

CORE COMMUNICATION ASSESSMENT

During the 2012-2013 academic year, *Communication* competencies were the focus of the Core Curriculum assessment. Specifically, learning outcomes associated with oral and written communication and information literacy were assessed. The Core Task Force continues to research specific competencies associated with technology (Learning Outcome 5.3 Use technology competently). *Communication* competencies will be the focus of Core assessment during the 2015-2016 academic year. In order to improve the *Communication* learning outcomes, please take the time to review the Core Communication Assessment report on SharePoint. A summary of results and action plans is provided here.

Learning Outcome 5.1 Express ideas clearly and effectively in written form

Results of Assessment

Findings from the Neumann University Co-op/Internship Employer Evaluation of Students were quite positive. The mean of employer ratings of students was 4 or higher on all features of the 5-point scale. Analysis of growth from first to senior year on the ETS Proficiency Profile for Writing revealed that students achieved benchmarks for growth on Writing Level 1, but not Levels 2 and 3. Comparing the percentage of students in English 102 with the percentage of senior students reaching the Accomplished or Mastered levels on the written artifacts demonstrated growth; however, the overall averages of students revealed a need for improvement. With regard to writing-related questions on NSSE, NU first year students compared favorably with peer institutions with two exceptions. First year students did not write as many short papers and did not spend as many hours preparing for class as peers. NU senior students compared favorably with peer institutions with three exceptions. Senior students did not write as many papers of any length, did not work as frequently on research with faculty, and did not spend as many hours preparing for class as peers.

Analysis and Action Steps

From September 9-12, 2013, faculty participated in Lunch and Learn sessions to review assessment results. Assessment results were also posted on SharePoint. Faculty offered the following ideas for improvement:

- Adopt and explain common rubrics for written communication
- Encourage/require students to use Smart Thinking and Academic Resource Center early in the semester
- Provide frequent descriptive feedback
- Increase emphasis on writing across the curriculum (carefully scaffold writing requirements within every major)

Learning Outcome 5.2 Express ideas clearly and effectively in spoken form

Results of Assessment

Findings from the Neumann University Co-op/Internship Employer Evaluation of Students were positive. The mean of employer ratings of students was 4 or higher on all features of the 5-point scale. Comparing the percentage of students in English 102 with the percentage of senior students reaching the Accomplished or Mastered levels on the oral presentations demonstrated growth; however, the overall averages of senior students revealed a need for improvement. With regard to questions related to effective public speaking on NSSE, the comparison of scores from first year to senior year indicated that students perceive that Neumann University promotes their growth in oral communication skills.

Analysis and Action Steps

From November 4-7, 2013, faculty participated in Lunch and Learn sessions to review assessment results. Assessment results were also posted on SharePoint. Faculty in every division submitted written analyses and action plans. Faculty offered the following ideas for improvement:

- Adopt and explain common rubrics for effective public speaking
- Emphasize PVLEGS (Erik Palmer)
- Increase opportunities for student presentations
- Videotape and critique presentations
- Consider restoring Public Speaking course to Core requirements
- Identify specific places within major where instruction in public speaking will occur
- Provide frequent descriptive feedback
- Use debates to strengthen communication skills
- Model and show examples of exemplary presentations

Learning Outcome 5.4 Access, evaluate, cite, and credit information using accepted conventions

Results of Assessment

Analysis of growth from first to senior year on the ETS Proficiency Profile for Reading and Critical Thinking revealed several areas for growth. Comparing the percentage of students in English 102 with the percentage of senior students reaching the Accomplished or Mastered levels on information literacy artifacts revealed mixed results, with growth in some but not all features of the rubric. With regard to questions related to information literacy on NSSE, students perceive that they have grown in skills from first to senior year.

Analysis and Action Steps

From October 7-10, 2013, faculty participated in Lunch and Learn sessions to review assessment results. Assessment results were also posted on SharePoint. Faculty offered the following ideas for improvement:

- Adopt and explain common rubrics
- Identify opportunities in every program for students to gain information literacy skills
- Provide opportunities within class for students to read critically and interpret informational text
- Work closely with research librarians to ensure scaffolding of skills
- Consider requiring a Critical Thinking/Logic course
- Reinforce note-taking skills to promote critical reading
- Increase number of research assignments within major programs
- Emphasize how to paraphrase text and how to properly select and use direct quotes
- Require that students submit work to Turn-It-In.

For specific suggestions to improve Information Literacy, see the [Information Literacy webpage](#) on Library website.

Communication Assessment 2015 - 2016

Learning outcomes 5.1, 5.2, and 5.4 will be assessed through artifacts in English 102 and upper level courses in every major.

In the next three weeks, Core Committee members will contact colleagues to identify upper level courses within each major to be assessed. The committee welcomes volunteers to visit classes to assess oral presentations.

MSCHE Standard 12: General Education

Neumann's Self-Study related to *Standard 12: General Education* provides documentation to demonstrate compliance with several Fundamental Elements: required semester hours (15 for associate degree programs and 30 semester hours for baccalaureate programs); evidence that general education skills and abilities are applied in the major; study of values, ethics, and diverse perspectives consistent with the institutional mission; indication that upon degree completion, students are proficient in oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, and technological competency appropriate to the discipline; clear and accurate description of Core requirements in official publications; and assessment plan and evidence that assessment results are utilized for curricular improvement.

In addition to reviewing and confirming Neumann's compliance with the Fundamental Elements, the *Standard 12 Self-Study* committee explored questions related to: how successfully the revised Core is meeting student learning needs; the extent to which the entire campus community has embraced its responsibility to "create opportunities for students to integrate faith and reason, grow in social responsibility, and prepare for personal and professional leadership roles in the local and global community"; and how the scaffolding of required common learning experiences and the introduction of Service-Learning and Capstone courses into the Core Program have deepened student understanding of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) and Catholic Franciscan Tradition (CFT), fostered ethical reasoning, promoted student engagement in meaningful reflection, and strengthened a commitment to use knowledge "in the service of others."

Please take the time to review the latest draft of MSCHE *Standard 12* in SharePoint so that you will be prepared to answer questions the MSCHE Visiting team may have.

Capstone Courses

The final phase of the implementation of the Neumann University Core Experience, to be completed during the 2015-2016 academic year, is the development of a Capstone course in every major. Many majors piloted Capstone courses during the past few years with excellent results. As we complete the implementation, the Core Committee will begin to discuss how to showcase the excellent work of our students which demonstrates both their proficiency in the Core and major program learning outcomes, and their understanding and application of Neumann's mission and values.

Definition: A Capstone course is a culminating experience required for students nearing the end of their undergraduate academic studies. Within this course, students will produce a project that integrates and applies what they have learned. The project can be a research paper, professional portfolio, portfolio of "best work," or an artistic expression of some sort. In addition, all Capstones will address the mission and philosophy of the University and the Core values of the University. Majors choose how to implement the Capstone. (Adapted from *A United Endeavor*, AACU, p. 34; & AAC&U documents).

Note: Major Programs choose the model (see [Capstone Booklet](#) on Core Experience website) or combination of models that best meet the needs of their students. The five sample models are meant as a guide for the process; however, modification and additions can be made. A program may already have something in place that can be tied into a Capstone project. Faculty are strongly encouraged to be creative in the design and development of Capstone projects. Capstones may also be accomplished on an interdisciplinary level. When appropriate the two components of the Capstone may be embedded within two courses.

Core Map: What it tells us about the Core learning outcomes

In Spring 2015, the Core Map was revised with the assistance of faculty and staff members across the University. **The Core Map is an important document which indicates the courses and the student life activities which intentionally and explicitly promote the Core learning outcomes**. In revisiting the Core map, some majors identified the specific assignment and assessment which demonstrates such a concrete focus. Such discussions are essential to ensure that students have sufficient opportunities to develop in every Core area. To obtain samples of how various majors are explicitly addressing the Core learning outcomes, contact Sr. Pat Hutchison at hutchisp@neumann.edu .

Next Steps in reflection on the Neumann University Core Experience

With the first cycle of assessment of the Core and implementation of all aspects of the revised program complete, it is important to continue reflection on questions such as:

- How well do the revised Core learning outcomes express the essential competencies desired for every student regardless of major?

- How has the NU community embraced its responsibility to promote the Core learning outcomes, and to what extent are these outcomes promoted both within the classroom and beyond?

- How can we evaluate proficiency in Core competencies through alternative methods (beyond the academic curriculum)?

- How have faculty and staff used assessment results to improve instruction and programming? How can we share promising practices?

- How can the Core assessment process be simplified?

The Core Committee welcomes recommendations of additional questions for consideration.