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University Studies Annual Assessment 2005-2006

Portland State University. University Studies Program

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University Studies
Annual Assessment Report

2005-2006

Table of Contents

Freshman Inquiry Assessment Report4

Sophomore Inquiry Assessment Report14

Capstone Assessment Report19

Executive Summary

During the 2005-2006 academic year, University Studies continued to use end-of-term evaluations in Sophomore Inquiry (SINQ) and Capstone courses as well as freshmen portfolios in its assessment efforts. Freshmen Inquiry (FRINQ) faculty developed new protocols for the use of FRINQ data in assessment and other levels are now engaged in the development of similar protocols.

At the FRINQ level, the portfolio review focused on the Critical Thinking and Ethics and Social Responsibility goals of the program. Overall, the average portfolio score on the Ethics and Social Responsibility goal improved when compared with the average portfolio score from 2003, the last year in which these goals were assessed. Ratings on the Critical Thinking goal remained stable.

At the Junior Cluster level, the program conducted a survey of students enrolled in cluster courses and asked questions regarding student history with the University Studies program, contribution of cluster course to University Studies goals, and uses of teaching approaches. Echoing findings from a pilot survey conducted last year, students indicated that cluster courses added to the breadth of knowledge of the cluster theme, contributed to the interdisciplinary nature of the cluster and made connections with other cluster courses. Students agreed that their cluster courses emphasized communication and critical thinking but there was less agreement about diversity and ethical and social responsibility. When asked about teaching strategies, differences appeared between the strategies that students reported helped them learn and the strategies students reported that instructors used most frequently. For example, students reported that instructors used lectures frequently but did not rate lectures very highly as a strategy that contributed to their learning.

End-of-term Capstone evaluations revealed that compared with 04-05 in 05-06 more instructors required class attendance, collaborative projects and group decision making. Instructors also decreased the time they spent on lecturing. These changes are consistent with the active learning pedagogies encouraged in University Studies. Students also reported an increase in the number of readings on civic responsibility, discussions on political issues and discussions on social issues, which reveal improvement on two of the four university studies goals. Qualitative analyses of mid-term small group assessments as well as student comments on the end-of-term survey were also conducted. These analyses align with the findings from the quantitative portion of the end-of-term evaluation. Students reported that effective instructors, engaging discussions, and effective readings were helping them learn and reported that they learned about the importance of community involvement, gained new understanding of another population, increased communication skills and were able to apply theory to practice. When asked about areas for improvement, students suggested that community partnerships could be made more clear and that the courses could be structured so that the work is more easily completed. The Capstone program uses these suggestions to focus faculty development and training.

Freshman Inquiry Assessment Report

Student Profile:

In the fall of 2005, 1105 students were enrolled in freshman inquiry. Of these students, 944 were enrolled full-time and the remaining students were enrolled part-time. There were slightly more women than men, 53% compared to 48%. 938 students completed the first quarter with a median GPA of 2.82. Freshman inquiry students were asked to complete a "prior learning survey" online in the first two weeks of classes. 1075 students completed the survey. 67.3% of these students indicated that their immediate plans were to complete their bachelors degree at Portland State University. 54% said that they were planning to attend graduate or professional school. Only 8.7% indicated that they were planning to attend a different institution.

In their preparation for PSU, a majority of students reported having written at least one paper between 5-10 pages long. More significantly for the purpose of looking at writing experience, they had engaged in a drafting process five or more times (74%) Additionally, students indicated that they had engaged in group work in the past more than five times (76.8%). 80% of the respondents reported having attended one of the summer orientation sessions for freshmen.

There were eight freshman inquiry themes offered in 05-06, we offered 37 sections (including two trailer courses, courses that begin in the winter term and finish in the fall term of the following year):

- Columbia Basin
- Constructed Self
- Design and Society
- On Democracy
- Forbidden Knowledge
- Meaning and Madness at the Margins
- System Earth
- The Work of Art

1227 registered for the fall term 05 (number recorded for the first day of classes) 1106 were registered in the fourth week of the first quarter, 1057 registered in the winter quarter and 931 students registered for the spring quarter. Using the 1106 number, the retention rate into the spring quarter was 85.4%

Fall 05 to Fall 06 Student Retention for ALL freshman: 67.75%

Assessment Initiative:

The major assessment change in the 05-06 academic year was a change to the assessment procedures and protocols. An assessment committee composed of faculty teaching in freshman inquiry met all year to redesign the protocols in response to concerns raised about the uses of assessment for faculty evaluation; these concerns were recorded in the 04-05 assessment report recommendations. The committee created a document explicating assessment purposes and protocols which was then accepted by a vote of the frinq faculty.

Assessment Purposes and Protocols

Preamble: The UNST assessment program is a means to improving student learning and enhancing faculty reflective practice. It seeks to encourage faculty to take productive and creative risks in the classroom to maximize the learning potential of the class. Our goals include:

- 1) Understanding our students' unique background and learning needs to inform our teaching practices;
- 2) Support faculty and mentors to develop and improve their teaching;
- 3) Empower students to become self-directed learners;
- 4) Give the program feedback on how courses are meeting the goals of the program.

Feedback mechanisms for improving student learning and enhancing faculty reflective practice:

Assessment instruments
From mentor
From students
From team members

Assessment Sources:

Formative Early Term

Because freshman inquiry is a difficult course to teach, the program acknowledges that faculty require more support during their early experience in teaching frinq. Thus, the protocol for entering faculty in frinq is slightly different for those who are more experienced in teaching frinq. The early assessment is used with new faculty in frinq. Other faculty have the option to participate. The purpose of the early term is to get a quick and early sense of how students perceive the course and what if any teaching changes need to occur. It provides a teaching moment for faculty to share the rationale for the teaching strategies being used. Our data suggests that if faculty listen and respond to early term feedback, students report greater satisfaction and learning in the course at the end of the year assessment.

Viewed by:

- Individual faculty
- Curriculum development and assessment associate and frinq faculty coordinator

Processing data:

- Will be done week 3 or 4
- Faculty receive data in a timely manner
- Process and "share" data with mentors
- Faculty should consider discussing data with students
- Curriculum development and Assessment associate analyzes, thematizes and distributes data, and invites faculty to a discussion of that data.
- Faculty are encouraged to identify issues and share insights from the data with their team.

If there are areas of concern:

- 1) Faculty will take responsibility to address issues.
- 2) Faculty will identify issues and share insights from the data with their team.
- 3) Curriculum development and Assessment Associate will invite a discussion of data and teaching improvement with all faculty.

Formative Early Year:

All students in frinq complete this survey. The purpose of the early year assessment is to understand:

- 1) Students' experience in the course
- 2) Students' response to pedagogy and curriculum
- 3) Students' evaluation of their progress towards the University studies goals.

Faculty can use this feedback to make timely adjustments to the course. It also provides an opportunity for students to reflect on their own role in learning.

Viewed by:

- All sections of the survey reviewed by individual faculty
- Mentor section and student learning section reviewed by mentors
- Faculty encouraged to share complete survey with mentors
- All sections reviewed by Curriculum development and Assessment Associate and Frinq faculty coordinator
- Mentor section reviewed by Director of Mentor Programs.

Processing data: timely process for improvement

- 1) Process and discuss data with mentors
- 2) Faculty should consider discussing data with students
- 3) Curriculum development and Assessment Associate and Frinq faculty coordinator review all data, Director of Mentor Programs reviews mentor data.

If areas of concern:

- 1) Faculty can approach Curriculum development and Assessment Associate and/or Frinq faculty coordinator to seek assistance.
- 2) Curriculum development and Assessment Associate and/or Frinq faculty coordinator can approach faculty to discuss issues.
- 3) If meeting held, strategic plan to address issues.
- 4) Before next assessment, Curriculum development and Assessment Associate and Frinq faculty coordinator will revisit strategic plan.

Mid Year

All students in frinq complete this survey. The purpose of the mid-year assessment is to have students identify their role in learning as it connects to theme specific concepts and University Studies goals. It also provides feedback to that faculty can make timely adjustments to the course.

Viewed by:

- All sections of the survey reviewed by individual faculty
- Mentor section and student learning section reviewed by mentors
- Faculty encouraged to share complete survey with mentors

- All sections reviewed by Curriculum development and Assessment Associate and Frinq faculty coordinator
- Mentor section reviewed by Director of Mentor Programs.

If areas of concern:

- 1) Faculty can approach Curriculum development and Assessment Associate and/or Frinq faculty coordinator to seek assistance.
- 2) Curriculum development and Assessment Associate and/or Frinq faculty coordinator can approach faculty to discuss issues.
- 3) If meeting held, strategic plan to address issues.
- 4) Before next assessment, Curriculum development and Assessment Associate and Frinq faculty coordinator will revisit strategic plan.

End of Year

The end of year provides students' perception of the overall success of the course. It also provides feedback for faculty to continue to develop innovative pedagogy. It is used in both summative and formative ways.

- Summative: Members of the administration will review data from this assessment. Data from this assessment may be used as a part of the yearly review of faculty performance. For further details on the yearly review process, check governance guidelines for University Studies (to be determined).
- Formative: If the course is continuing, the feedback can be used to make adjustments in curriculum and pedagogy.

Review Process:

- All sections of the survey reviewed by individual faculty
- Mentor section and student learning section reviewed by mentors
- Faculty encouraged to share complete survey with mentors
- All sections reviewed by Curriculum development and Assessment Associate and Frinq faculty coordinator
- Mentor section reviewed by Director of Mentor Programs.
- Faculty are encouraged to reflect on the end of year assessment with their team in their yearly portfolio.
- All data is reviewed by Program Director, the Curriculum Development and Assessment Associate and the Frinq faculty coordinator.

If areas of concern:

- 1) Faculty can approach the Curriculum Development and Assessment Associate and/or the Frinq faculty coordinator to seek assistance.
- 2) Curriculum Development and Assessment Associate and/or the Frinq faculty coordinator can approach faculty to discuss issues.
- 3) If meeting held, strategic plan to address issues.
- 4) Before fall term, Curriculum Development and Assessment Associate will follow up with a discussion.

Concerns from Mentors:

- 1) Mentors are responsible for talking to their faculty about any course concern or their relationship.
- 2) If a mentor approaches the Director of Mentor Programs before talking with the faculty partner, the mentor will receive coaching on approaching their faculty partner.

- 3) If a mentor feels that their concerns have not been addressed and approaches another administrator about the course, they will be referred back to the Director of Mentor Programs.
- 4) The Director of Mentor Programs will develop a plan for the mentor for how to approach the faculty again about the concerns. If the issue is not resolved by another discussion between mentor and faculty, the Director of Mentor Programs will develop a plan of the mentor for how to approach the faculty again about the concerns.
- 5) If the issue is not resolved by another discussion between the mentor and faculty, the Director of Mentor Programs will seek to resolve the issue by talking with the individual faculty members. Depending on the severity and type of the issues, the Fring faculty coordinator and/or Curriculum Development and Assessment Associate and/or team members will be consulted.
- 6) If the issue is still not resolved the Director of Mentor Programs will request a meeting between the faculty, mentor Fring faculty coordinator and/or Assessment associate.
- 7) If no resolution is found, the Director of University Studies will consult with the Fring faculty coordinator, Assessment associate, and Director of mentor programs about appropriate actions.

Fring Assessment Schedule 2005/2006

<u>Terms</u>	Entering Faculty	Type/Purpose	Regular Faculty	Type/Purpose
Fall				
Week 1	Prior Learning	<i>Student Learning</i>	Prior Learning	<i>Student Learning</i>
Week 3-4	Early Term (In – class with curriculum associate)	<i>Anonymous data Formative, (provide assistance if needed)</i>	Early Term (optional) <i>(Faculty will send email to Candyce and mentors if early term assessment not done)</i>	<i>Anonymous data Formative, (provide assistance if needed)</i>
Week 8-10 <i>Entering Faculty</i> Week 7-10 <i>Regular Faculty</i>	Early Year	<i>Formative, (provide assistance if needed)</i>	Early Year	<i>Formative, (provide assistance if needed)</i>
Winter				
Week 3-4	Early Term (In Class with curriculum associate or electronic)	<i>Anonymous data Formative, (provide assistance if needed)</i>	<i>(Faculty will send email to Candyce, re: mentors)</i>	

Week 8-10 <i>Entering Faculty</i> Week 7-10 <i>Regular Faculty</i>	Mid Year Progress	<i>Formative, (provide assistance if needed)</i>	Mid Year Progress	<i>Formative, (provide assistance if needed)</i>
Spring				
Week 6-8	Teacher facilitated discussion, re: content, theme, process, ideas for next year	<i>Formative, (provide assistance if needed)</i>	Teacher facilitated discussion, re: content, theme, process, ideas for next year	<i>Formative, (provide assistance if needed)</i>
Week 8-10	End of the Year	Non-anonymous <i>Formative & Summative: Part of Faculty Review Process</i> <i>Presentation of Data: Public as aggregate</i>	End of the Year	Non-anonymous <i>Formative & Summative: Part of Faculty Review Process</i>
Spring Retreat	Team Analysis of End-of-Year Data		Team Analysis of End-of-Year Data	
Summer				
	Portfolio Review	Formative	Portfolio Review	Formative
Fall				
	Portfolio/End-of-Year Data Review	Formative	Portfolio/End-of-Year Data Review	Formative

The schedule and protocols were in place throughout the year. Unfortunately, the end-of-year evaluations were lost in the electronic retrieval process. Consequently, there are no evaluations available for assessment for the 05/06 year.

Portfolio Review:

The 2006 Summer Portfolio Review was a performance-based program assessment of two of the four major University Studies goals: critical thinking and ethics and social responsibility. This assessment was initiated and completed in the summer of 2006. All Freshman Inquiry classes share a common end-of-year portfolio assignment that was developed over a period of five years. Although there is some variability, it is used in every class, and certainly in a uniform enough manner to allow for a programmatic assessment.

Two readers reviewed and scored every portfolio after having gone through a raters' agreement process in the morning. In past years, a third reader was used when two readers' scores differed by more than two points. Because data for third readers was not available for this analysis, scores for readers who differed by more than two points were discarded.

These two goals were last assessed by the program in the summer of 2003. In 2003, the mean score for Critical Thinking was 3.1 and the mean score for Ethics and Social Responsibility was 2.53. In the summer of 2006, the mean score for Critical Thinking was 3.0 and the mean score for Ethics and Social Responsibility was 2.8.

Critical Thinking Scores

	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>(SD)</u>
1. Columbia Basin	16	3.2	(0.9)
2. Constructed Self	11	2.9	(1.0)
3. Design and Society	9	3.5	(0.8)
4. Einstein's Universe	12	2.9	(0.8)
5. Forbidden Knowledge	8	2.9	(0.7)
6. Meaning & Madness	12	3.0	(0.9)
7. Metamorphosis	4	2.0	(0.7)
8. On Democracy	11	3.2	(0.9)
9. Pathways Sust. & Justice	11	3.2	(0.9)
10. System Earth	13	3.1	(0.8)
11. The Work of Art	11	2.7	(0.9)
Global	118	3.0	(0.9)

Ethics Scores

	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>(SD)</u>
1. Columbia Basin	12	2.6	(0.8)
2. Constructed Self	10	2.7	(0.9)
3. Design and Society	9	3.7	(1.0)
4. Einstein's Universe	9	2.2	(0.3)
5. Forbidden Knowledge	9	2.8	(1.2)
6. Meaning & Madness	11	3.0	(1.1)
7. Metamorphosis	5	2.0	(0.9)
8. On Democracy	10	3.0	(1.2)
9. Pathways Sust. & Justice	6	3.8	(1.2)
10. System Earth	12	2.5	(1.1)
11. The Work of Art	11	2.9	(1.0)
Global	104	2.8	(1.0)

Scoring Rubrics

Critical Thinking

Level Six – Consistently does all or almost all of the following:

- Accurately interprets evidence, statements, graphics, questions, etc.
- Identifies the salient arguments (reasons and claims) pro and con.
- Thoughtfully analyzes and evaluates major alternative points of view.
- Generates alternative explanations of phenomena or event.
- Justifies key results and procedures, explains assumptions and reasons.
- Fair-mindedly follows where evidence and reasons lead.
- Makes ethical judgments

Level Five – Does most of the following:

- Accurately interprets evidence, statements, graphics, questions, etc.
- {Thinks through issues by} Identifying relevant arguments (reasons and claims) pro and con.
- Offers analysis and evaluation of obvious alternative points of view
- Generates alternative explanations of phenomena or event.
- Justifies (by using) some results or procedures, explains reasons.
- Fair-mindedly follows where evidence and reasons leads.

Level Four – Does most of the following:

- Describes events, people, and places with some supporting details from the source.
- Make connections to sources, either personal or analytic.
- Demonstrates a basic ability to analyze, interpret, and formulate inferences.
- States or briefly includes more than one perspective in discussing literature, experiences, and points of view of others.
- Takes some risks by occasionally questioning sources, or stating interpretations and predictions.
- Demonstrates little evidence of rethinking or refinement of ones own perspective.

Level Three – Does most or many of the following:

- Responds by retelling or graphically showing events or facts.
- Makes personal connections or identifies connections within or between sources in a limited way. Is beginning to use appropriate evidence to back ideas.
- Discusses literature, experiences, and points of view of others in terms of own experience
- Responds to sources at factual or literal level.
- Includes little or no evidence of refinement of initial response or shift in dualistic thinking.
- Demonstrates difficulty with organization and thinking is uneven

Level Two – Does most or many of the following:

- Misinterprets evidence, statements, graphics, questions, etc.
- Fails to identify strong, relevant counter-arguments.
- Draws unwarranted or fallacious conclusions.
- Justifies few results or procedures, seldom explains reasons.
- Regardless of the evidence or reasons, maintains or defends views based on self-interest and/or preconceptions

Level One – Consistently does all or almost all of the following:

- Offers biased interpretations of evidence, statements, graphics, questions, information or the points of view of others.
- Fails to identify or hastily dismisses strong, relevant counter-arguments.
- Ignores or superficially evaluates obvious alternative points of view. Argues using fallacious or irrelevant reasons, and unwarranted claims.
- Does not justify results or procedures, nor explains reasons.
- Exhibits close-mindedness or hostility to reason

Ethics and Social Responsibility

Note: In this scoring guide, the phrase “ethical issues and social responsibility” refers to the impact and value of individuals and their choices on society – intellectually, socially, and personally.

6 (highest)	<p>Portfolio creatively and comprehensively articulates approaches to ethical issues and social responsibility, in a scholarly manner, citing specific evidence. Demonstrates an ability to view multiple sides of these issues, to question what is being taught, and to construct independent meaning and interpretations.</p> <p>Portfolio presents well-developed ideas on the role of ethical issues and social responsibility in both private and public life. Demonstrates a deep awareness of how a conceptual understanding of ethical issues and social responsibility manifests concretely in one’s own personal choices, including decisions on when and how to act.</p>
5	<p>Portfolio analyzes ethical issues and social responsibility in a scholarly manner, and makes thoughtful connections between this area of study and its effects on lives, ideas, and events.</p> <p>Portfolio discusses explicitly how a deepening understanding of ethical issues and social responsibility has influenced personal opinions, decisions, and views on the role of self in society.</p>
4	<p>Portfolio thoughtfully analyzes, in a scholarly manner, a situation or situations in which ethical issues and social responsibility have played an important role. Begins to investigate connections between areas of controversy, and to extrapolate meaning from specific examples.</p> <p>Portfolio applies learning in ethical issues and social responsibility to issues that arise in everyday life, and contemplates the impact of personal ethical choices and social</p>

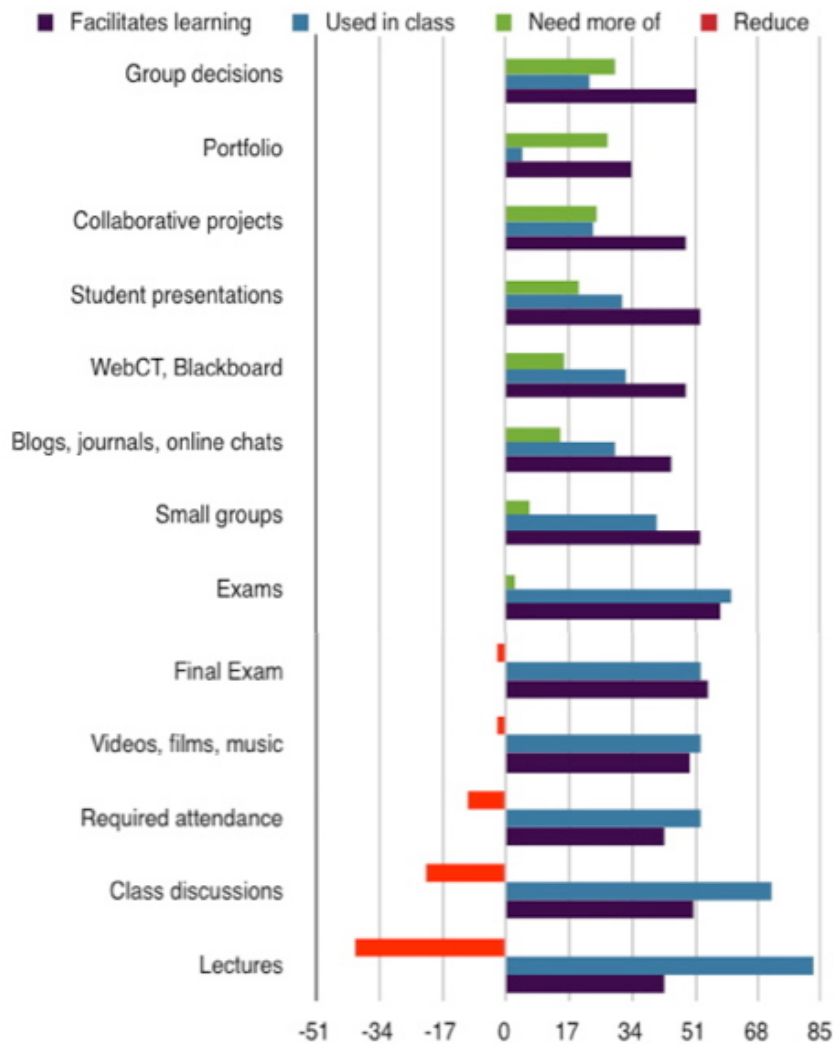
	action in the context of interpersonal and broader societal spheres.
3	<p>Portfolio exhibits a working knowledge of major themes and scholarly debates surrounding ethical issues and social responsibility, and applies this understanding to some topic(s), but offers no independent analysis.</p> <p>References ethical issues and social responsibility as a subject of personal inquiry, begins to question established views, and contemplates in some way the value and impact of individual choices and personal action on one's broader community.</p>
2	<p>Portfolio mentions some issue(s) involving ethics and/or talks about social responsibility in a general fashion, but does not discuss these areas in a meaningful way.</p> <p>Portfolio contains some evidence of self-reflection in the area of ethical issues and/or social responsibility, but this reflection is superficial and reveals little or no questioning of established views.</p>
1 (lowest)	<p>Portfolio displays little or no engagement with the subjects of ethical issues and social responsibility.</p> <p>Demonstrates little or no recognition of ethical issues and social responsibility as subjects worthy of personal inquiry.</p>

X = No Basis for Scoring (use only for missing or malfunctioning portfolios)

Sophomore Inquiry Assessment Report

In spring 2006, as part of the continuing reevaluation of the middle part of the program and drawing from the 04-05 study, a survey of more than 5000 students was conducted. A detailed summary of those results (below see "Portland State University Cluster Course Survey Spring 2006: Summary of Results"). Among the findings we teased out an interesting disjunction between the primary cluster classroom pedagogies utilized and those pedagogies respondents said best supported their learning (see below). These findings strongly suggest that we rethink our approach to cluster courses, either requiring a significant shift in pedagogy on the part of departmental "U" courses (a strategy likely to fail), selecting as "U" courses only those that more routinely feature the pedagogies that promote better student learning, or design a new set of courses from the ground up.

During spring 2006 OIRP invited more than 5000 students who had taken cluster courses to respond to a survey. Nearly a thousand students responded. Among other things they were asked what course activities most helped their learning and which were used in their cluster courses. One can see that lectures are most common and portfolios least common. However, one also notices that there is often a mismatch between what students report facilitates learning and what activities predominate (or are rarely used). We have calculated a "differential" between the light and dark blue values and shown them as green bars (arguably those activities that should be more prevalent) or red bars (those approaches that should have reduced prominence)—and then arrayed those activities (top to bottom) from those most in need of greater presence to those most in need of reduced presence.



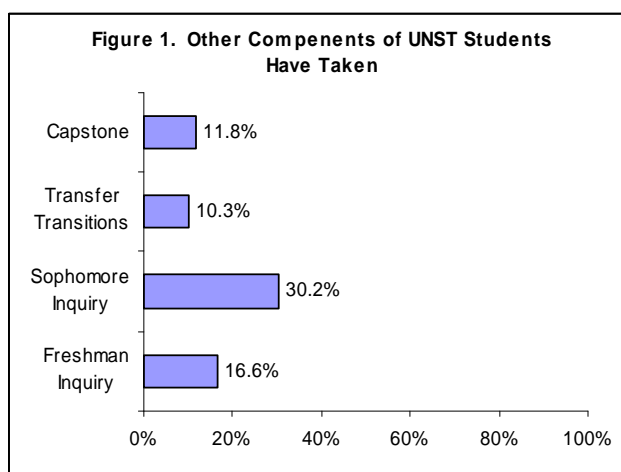
Assessment and Faculty Development Activities to Carry Forward: We will continue with SINQ end-of-term assessment. This will be especially important if significant changes are made as a consequence of recommendations from the University Studies Council. In support of future workshops on active learning pedagogies and developing assignments that facilitate learning relative to UNST goals (to be done with the help of the Center for Academic Excellence), we will move to create a repository of ideas/models/exemplary syllabi and assignments (preferably on the web). We possess an archive of SINQ student work samples that have not yet been scored against rubrics developed for use in Freshman Inquiry; that work should go forward.

Portland State University Cluster Course Survey Spring 2006 Summary of Results

University Studies (UNST) partnered with the Office of Institutional Research and Planning (OIRP) to conduct an on-line survey of students currently taking cluster courses. The purpose of the survey was to collect information that would assist in program-level assessment efforts. All 5,731 students currently enrolled in cluster courses were eligible to participate in the survey. Some students were enrolled in more than one cluster course; in these cases, OIRP randomly selected one cluster course for the student to evaluate. Only 5,648 students enrolled in cluster courses had valid PSU e-mail (i.e., 83 invalid e-mail addresses) and of these, 986 completed the survey resulting in a 17.5% response rate.

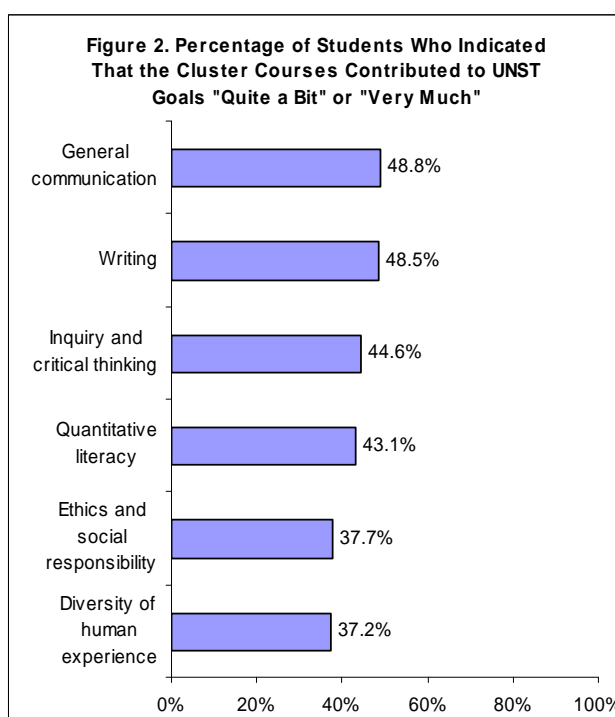
Almost two-thirds (61.8%) of the students indicated that they were taking the cluster course for University Studies credit. Not quite half of the students (44%) reported that this was their third course in the cluster; the rest said it was their first (29.7%) or second (26.1%).

Figure 1 shows the other components of University Studies that students indicated they had already taken. Less than 20% of students had taken Freshman Inquiry, Transfer Transitions, or Capstone. Less than one-third had taken Sophomore Inquiry. (Please note that this is self-reported information, not verified with data from the Student Information System.) The results are consistent with student attendance patterns at PSU. About two-thirds of undergraduates, new to PSU, are transfer students (i.e., 65% in Fall 2005). Of those transfer students, over half (i.e., 54% in Fall 2005) transfer at the junior or senior level and are therefore not required to take Freshman Inquiry, Sophomore Inquiry or Transfer Transition.



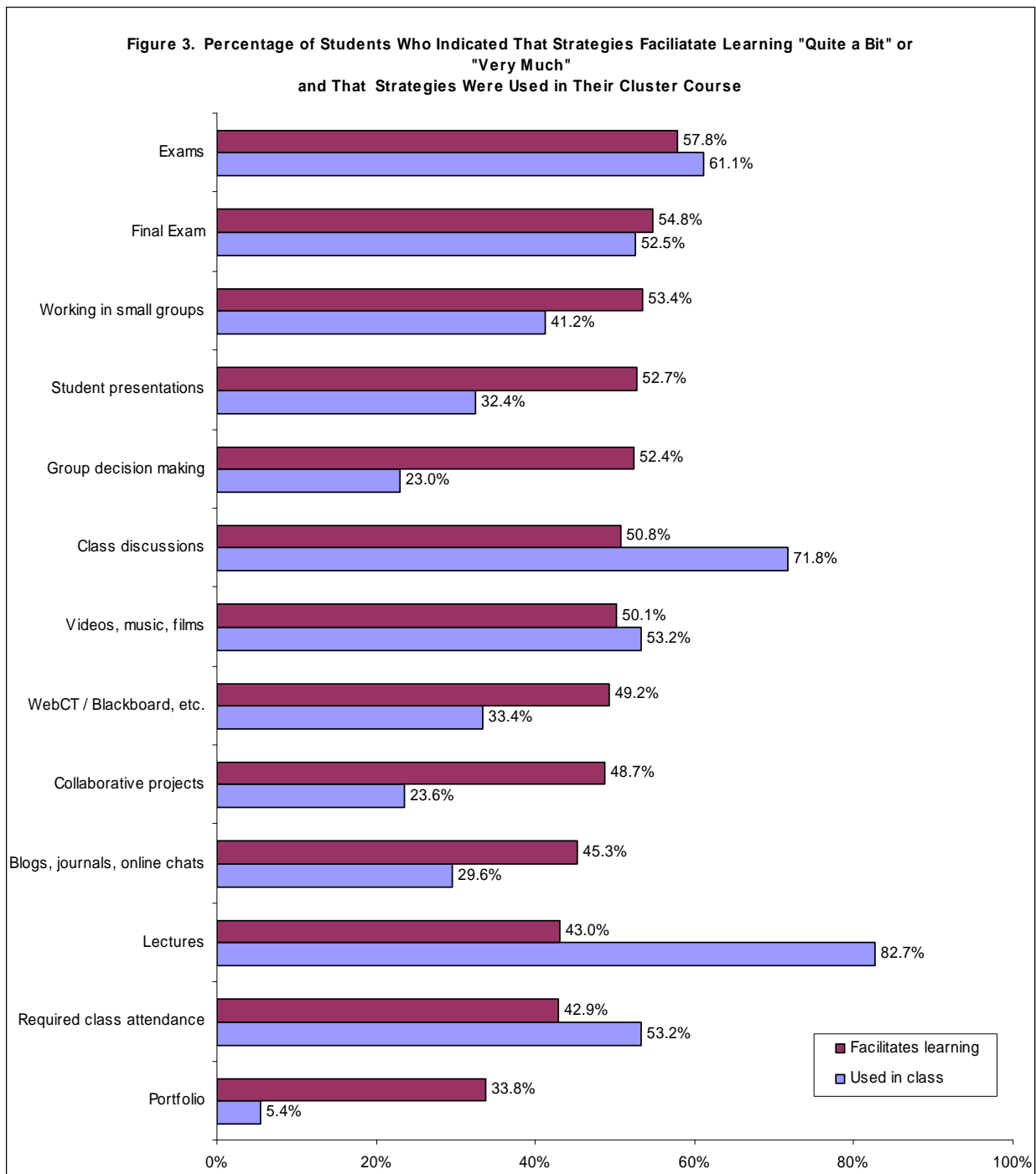
Students used a scale from 1 (*Not at all or very little*) to 4 (*Very much*) to rate various aspects of the cluster course. On average, students indicated that the cluster course added to the breadth of knowledge of the cluster theme, contributed to the interdisciplinary nature of the cluster, and made connections to other courses in the cluster "Quite a bit" ($M = 3.02, 2.95$ and 2.73 respectively). However, roughly one third of respondents indicated that they did not know how much the cluster course accomplished these things (i.e., 41.9%, 38.9%, and 31.1% respectively).

Students also rated the degree to which University Studies learning goals were emphasized in their cluster course (using the same 4-point scale as described above). As shown in Figure 2, more than a third of students reported



that each of the goals was emphasized “Quite a bit” or “Very much”. The largest proportions of students indicated that that the General Communication and the Inquiry and Critical Thinking goals were emphasized in their cluster course. There was less agreement among students about their Cluster Course’s contribution to the Diversity of Human Experience and Ethics and Social Responsibility goals. “Don’t know” was once again a popular response to these items, ranging from 25.2% to 47.0% of the responses for each goal.

Near the end of the survey, students indicated how well a variety of teaching strategies help them learn and also which of these strategies were employed in their cluster course. Figure 3 shows that most of the strategies helped students learn “Quite a bit” or “Very much” (i.e., 42.9% – 57.8%), with the exception of portfolios (33.8%). However, few students (5.4%) reported that portfolios were used in their cluster course, so they may be unable to accurately rate the impact



of portfolios on their learning.

For a few of the items, there was a notably large discrepancy between the reported helpfulness of the strategy and the prevalence of the strategy's use. For example, most students reported class discussion and lecture were strategies used in their cluster course (72% and 82%, respectively) but no more than half of the students reported that class discussion and lecture helps them learn "Quite a bit" or "Very much" (50.8% and 43.0% respectively). Students did not report how often an instructor used a particular strategy in a course, rather they reported whether a strategy was used at all in their cluster course. These results then should be taken as a preliminary investigation into the match between student learning preferences and instructor teaching strategies. They point out areas in need of further investigation.

The Cluster Survey included two open-ended questions. The first asked students to describe in their own words why they chose to take their specific cluster course. The second gave students an opportunity to offer any general comments about their cluster course. The qualitative analysis of these items is beyond the scope of this summary and therefore not reported here. The Director of University Studies will review responses to these questions and determine whether further analysis is warranted.

In summary, the results of the on-line Cluster Course Survey were moderately positive, but they also pointed to areas that warrant further investigation. In general, students made favorable ratings of the cluster courses, indicating that the courses added to the breadth of knowledge of the cluster theme, contributed to the interdisciplinary nature of the cluster, and made connections to other courses in the cluster. Although more than one-third of students (and in some instances close to half of students) indicated that their cluster course contributed to University Studies learning goals, more than one-fourth reported not knowing whether their course contributed to these goals. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents were taking these courses for University Studies credit, so cluster course instructors may want to consider how to make these goals more prominent in their classes. The items covering learning strategies provided some information on students' preferred learning strategies and the prevalence of these in the cluster courses, however, further revision of these items would provide more useful information regarding the frequency with which these strategies are employed.

Capstone Assessment for 05-06

The Capstone Program uses three formal assessment strategies to provide feedback on the quality of Capstone courses. First, mid-term qualitative assessments are completed each term in 20% of Capstones to gather formative data for Capstone faculty and the Capstone office. This qualitative process identifies what is helping students learn in their Capstones, what challenges they are facing, and what specific suggestions they have to improve the quality of their course. Secondly, students complete an end-of-term quantitative course evaluation which addresses how well their course engaged the University Studies goals, the congruence between community service and course content, and the quality of the instruction. Finally, a qualitative section of the end-of-term evaluation asks students to state their most important learning and their ideas for improving the course.

The intent of this report is to summarize the data gathered during the 2005-06 academic year and discuss pertinent implications arising from the data. This data report is divided into two categories: a quantitative section identifying student responses to the quantitative portion of the end-of-term course evaluations and a qualitative section outlining student comments from both the formative mid-term qualitative assessments and the summative end-of-term evaluations.

Quantitative data

Course design question: Within your Capstone, what forms of learning did the instructor use?	04-05	05-06
Reflective journals	73.7%	76.0%
Required class attendance*	77.1%	80.8%
Collaborative projects*	72.3%	82.7%
Readings on racial and ethnic issues	51.8%	51.7%
Extensive lecturing*	30.7%	20.7%
Readings on women and gender issues**	37.5%	34.3%
Group decision-making*	68.1%	82.0%
Readings on civic responsibility*	40.0%	61.5%
Student presentations	73.6%	72.6%
Discussions on local political issues*	38.8%	52.7%
Written essays/papers (not asked in 05 – 06)	85%	
Discussions on local social issues*	59.5%	77.7%
Multiple choice exams (not asked in 05-06)	18%	
Class discussions	n/a	89.5%
Exams	n/a	3.8%
Final exam	n/a	3.9%
WebCt or blackboard	n/a	31.4%
Portfolio	n/a	20.0%
Discussions on ethical issues	n/a	40.4%

In AY 2005-06, an overwhelming majority of students continued to report that their Capstone courses engaged them in active pedagogies requiring attendance in class, class discussions, group decision-making, and collaborative projects. The majority of Capstone courses involve reflective and essay writing and student presentations. The data indicated an increase in readings on civic responsibility. This is a key goal in Capstones that is clearly being represented in more Capstone courses. The reason for this increase is unclear, but clearly this is a topic that has been discussed in various faculty development opportunities as well as the Capstone

proposal process. Students continue to report that Capstones tend to avoid traditional instructional techniques such as extensive lecturing and quizzes. For example less than 4% of Capstones employ a traditional final exam as a means of assessment. Of these data, the only surprisingly low reports are those documenting that only 36% of Capstones include readings on women and gender, and only 55% require readings on racial and ethnic issues. This would raise questions for a program that strives to address diversity issues in its courses, but the data below suggest that most students “agree” that their Capstone course addressed issues of diversity. Evidently, this can and does occur outside of required reading, perhaps in class discussions and/or written reflections, particularly as these relate to community service.

Capstone "Post" Student Surveys	04-05 Mean	
The community work I did helped me to better understand the course content in this Capstone.*	3.95	4.28
I feel that the community work I did through this course benefited the community.*	4.18	4.27
I felt a personal responsibility to meet the needs of the community partner of this course.	4.19	4.15
I was already volunteering in the community before taking this course.	3.06	3.12
I improved my ability to solve problems in this course	New q	3.83
My participation in this Capstone helped me to connect what I learned to real life situations.*	4.01	4.14
This course enhanced my communication skills (writing, public speaking, etc.).	New q	3.96
This course helped me understand others who are different from me.	New q	4.23
This course enhanced my ability to work with others in a team.	New q	4.07
This course explored issues of diversity (such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation).	New q	4.13
In this course I improved my ability to analyze views from multiple viewpoints.	New q	4.14
I will continue to volunteer or participate in the community after this course.*	3.82	4.00
The syllabus clearly described how the course content connected to the community work.*	3.76	4.05
I believe this course deepened my understanding of local political issues.*	3.46	3.92
I believe this course deepened my understanding of local social issues.*	3.86	4.24
I now have a better understanding of how to make a difference in my community.*	3.90	4.15

Six questions were changed for the 05-06 course evaluation based on faculty feedback over the years. For example, in order to assess our diversity goal, the previous course evaluations used to ask students if they became more aware of their biases and prejudices. Faculty reported that it was difficult to use this data because it was unclear if a high score in that area was truly desirable (do we want to increased bias and prejudice). Faculty asked if the questions could be modified to reflect desirable outcomes such as “this course explored issues of diversity (such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation)”. As a result, they felt that the data would be more useful to them because it is clear that we do indeed want courses to address these diversity issues so an increased score would be a positive outcome.

The course evaluation scores for this year were very strong with mean scores near 4.0 and above. Students indicated that they agree that Capstone courses are achieving University Studies' desired student learning outcomes (enhanced communication skills, enhanced ability to work in a team, deepened understanding of issues related to diversity, improved ability to analyze topics from multiple viewpoints, and a better understanding of how to make a difference in their communities). Since one of the primary goals of community-based learning is to enhance student learning while addressing community issues, it is affirming to see students report that the community work they completed enhanced their understanding of course content and benefited the community. In addition, students indicated that this connection between course content and

community work had been outlined in the syllabus. It was reassuring to see an increase in the clarity of Capstone syllabi as we have instituted a policy where Janelle Voegele, from the Center for Academic Excellence is trying to review each new syllabus designed by our new Capstone instructors.

Qualitative data

Analysis of Qualitative Mid-term Assessments

Forty-seven Small Group Instructional Diagnostic (SGID) qualitative mid-term assessments were conducted in AY 05-06 (see protocol in appendix). In each of these 47 courses, students were asked the following questions: (1) What about this course is helping you to learn the course material and engage in your community work? (2) What could be changed to improve the course? and (3) What specific suggestions do you have to bring about those changes? During the initial assessment process, these responses were solicited from students in small groups, transcribed by the session facilitator, and shared with both the course instructor and the Capstone program director to catalyze real-time course improvement.

At the beginning of AY 06-07, three readers (Seanna Kerrigan, Julie Porter, and Sam Gioia) analyzed these data using Creswell's qualitative approach to data analysis (1994). This process required the researchers first to read through all of the session transcriptions carefully to get a sense of the whole and to note initial ideas about the data. Secondly, the researchers looked through the data one SGID at a time and answered the question, "What is the underlying meaning of this transcription?" Next, the researchers made a list of the core underlying topics and clustered similar ones into topical themes (identifying, coding, and categorizing the primary patterns in the data). The researchers then tested these themes by looking at the data to see if they could be organized according to these themes (a process of content analysis in which topics are defined and labeled). After organizing the data, the researchers categorized the data accordingly and looked for relationships between the themes in order to make final decisions about the themes and their coding. The data were analyzed until a coherent and comprehensive thematic analysis had taken place.

Each reader conducted an individual thematic analysis according to the exact same set of data analysis instructions. The researchers compared and contrasted their thematic findings and confirmed the results. The results of their collaborative conclusions are described as follows:

Themes Confirmed by All Three Readers
Question 1: What about this course is helping you to learn the course material and engage in your community work?
Overwhelmingly, it was <i>effective instructors</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approachable /responsive • Enthusiastic • Engaging • Knowledgeable • Experienced; great resource • Strong facilitators
Secondly, <i>engaging class discussions</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Created safe learning community • Happen frequently/ongoing • Interesting • Connect reading and service • Questions got answered

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well facilitated • Enhanced by small class sizes • WebCT reported as effective tool
<p>Thirdly, <i>informative readings</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helpful • Thought-provoking • Informed students' work • Linked and enhanced learning from the community and the lectures
<p><i>External resources</i> broadened perspectives and deepened understanding of course content</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guest speakers; community partner presence in class helpful • Field visits • Videos • Tours • Connected course content to "real world"
<p><i>Depth of connection</i> with the community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meaningful volunteering • Connection with population was a powerful tool for learning • Tours in the community enhanced learning • Community added depth to course content • Connection with the community made powerful and emotional impression on students
<p>Questions 2 and 3: What could be changed to improve the course, and what specific suggestions do you have to bring about those changes?</p>
<p>Primary concerns were <i>clarity and organization</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definition of the project needs to happen at the beginning of the class • More examples and samples of previously completed projects • Regarding community partnership (clarity of project and service commitment) • Clearer grading criteria • More frequent feedback on how students are doing in the community partnership and in class • More detailed syllabi
<p><i>Better structured community partnership</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better communication and more groundwork done before the term starts • Better organized (logistics at service site)
<p><i>More training on specific duties</i> at service site</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tutoring • Working with population • More general organizational orientation
<p>Suggestions regarding <i>course structure</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pacing of project so that students can work towards final project earlier in the term • More time in groups • More time to complete the project • More time to talk about service in class • Consider transportation time as part of volunteering • Sensitivity towards balance of class time between lecture, reflection, service project, and external speakers

<p><i>Integration of community work and classroom experience</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A few responses addressed a disconnect between the community work and the course work.
<p>A few comments were made concerning <i>logistics</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation issues • Sites closer to PSU

Analysis

It was informative to identify the common themes from a wide range of Capstone courses. The researchers were impressed by the students' identification of the high quality of instruction within the program. As a whole, students reported that instructors created an engaging learning experience with courses rich in active learning and meaningful alignment of course content with community service. The data indicate two primary challenges: clarity and organization within the course and the structuring of community partnerships. The challenge the researchers found most compelling was that of developing and integrating community partnerships—a feature unique and integral to Capstone courses. This is clearly an opportunity for future faculty development.

Implications for Faculty Development

The Capstone office plans to share this data broadly with Capstone faculty through the Capstone listserve. In addition, the data will be shared at a Capstone Council meeting (where Capstone faculty over .5 FTE meet) to discuss the implications these data may have on future faculty development. These data document the common strengths and challenges in Capstone courses and could encourage dialogue and the exchange of ideas among faculty. It will be beneficial to focus additional staff training on developing, organizing, and integrating the community partnership experience and course structure. Creating a clear and well-organized course is a common challenge throughout the University, of course, but for Capstone faculty this needs to be addressed within the context of community service learning, as the nature of the community partnership necessarily influences the structure and organization of the course. Faculty development efforts should target both instructors with extensive teaching experience but less experience structuring community collaborations and those with extensive community knowledge but less experience in designing a University course.

Analysis of Qualitative Comments from End-of-term Course Evaluations

The end-of-term course evaluation asks students to answer two questions: *What stands out as your most important learning in this Capstone?* and *What would you change about this course?*

Two hundred and fifty responses to each of these two questions were randomly selected for analysis. These comments were analyzed by two independent readers (Seanna Kerrigan and Vicki Reitenauer) who considered the data separately, created themes suggested by the data, and categorized the comments by the identified themes. (See a description of this data analysis process under "Analysis of Qualitative Mid-term Assessments, above.") The themes generated by the two readers are as follows:

Themes Confirmed by Both Readers
Question 1: What stands out as your most important learning in this Capstone?

<p>1. Importance of community involvement (70 comments)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of creating change in the community • Self-efficacy; students seeing that they could make a difference • Importance of “service” to the community
<p>2. Transformations resulting from “crossing boundaries” (63 comments)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New insights regarding various populations • Relationships formed with new populations • New insights regarding social issues students had never encountered before • New insights regarding diversity • New insights regarding oppression
<p>3. Enhanced communication skills (50 comments)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced ability to work in a group • Enhanced communication with outside audiences (presentation skills)
<p>4. Pedagogy of applying theory to practice (40)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of “real world” work • Importance of “hands on” work • Career skills developed from practice • Classroom exercises that helped students • Classroom discussions
<p>5. Praise for faculty member (25)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support • Guidance • Facilitation of teams • Problem solving • Class discussions
<p>6. Self awareness (15)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insights about self • Strengths/weaknesses
<p>Note: Seven students expressed disappointment with their Capstone (or with University Studies or the Capstone requirement) in this section rather than identified an important learning</p>

Both readers agreed on the six themes presented above. Although they originally named these themes in slightly differently terms, they clearly achieved consensus on the themes themselves. They both determined that the most common responses related to the *importance of community involvement* (frequently referred to as the University Studies goal of **social responsibility**). Here students wrote about the importance of the issue they addressed in the Capstone and the sense that they could make a real difference in their community.

The second most frequent response related to *transformations resulting from “crossing boundaries,”* (which University Studies) typically refers to as **appreciation of diversity**. Students consistently remarked on the power of interacting with persons outside of their typical social spheres. Transformations resulted from the forming of relationships across differences at community partner sites such as camps for children with special needs, boys’ and girls’ clubs, safe havens for gay and lesbian youth, and centers that serve immigrants and refugees. Students reported gaining new understandings of these populations and new insights about social and political issues connected to these populations, as well as learning about themselves as they charted new social territory through this border-crossing.

The third most important learning students reported involved **enhanced communication skills**, another priority of University Studies. Frequently, students placed this learning in the context of focused attention on working effectively with their peer group in order to complete their Capstone project. Students commented on the importance of teamwork and how they had managed to complete a project in a highly collaborative environment in merely 10 weeks.

Next, students commented on the importance of learning through the application of **theory to practice**. They reported that the most meaningful element in their Capstone was the “real world” aspect that allowed them to apply what they had learned in the classroom to a project which benefited the community. Students also saw application of theory to practice as an important career skill as they developed products for a “real client.” Students referred to class discussions being an important component of this learning, in that discussions facilitated their ability to transfer academic theory to practice in the community.

Related to the importance of classroom discussion was the **role of the faculty**. Twenty-five students made specific reference to their faculty member being an essential element of their most important learning. Students referred to faculty as sources of expert knowledge, personal support, problem solving, and facilitation when they struggled in groups.

Finally, students reported **self-awareness** as their most important learning. They referred to reflective practices which helped them “know themselves better” and become clearer on social and political issues.

Question 2: What would you change about this course?
No/Nothing (80)
Changes to timing of course content, delivery, and logistics of final product (52) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not enough time at the end to complete the project without a rush • Details of the final product presented earlier in the term • More examples of the final product so it is clear what students are developing • Form groups earlier in the term
Suggestions to improve the community partnership (39) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More student contact with the community partner (and clients) • Better communication between the community partner and the faculty • Better communication between the students and the community partner
Changes to the structure of the course (27) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better organized • Clearer deadlines
Clearer grading criteria (12) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group projects • Reflections • Need more feedback earlier in term
Compliments to faculty in this “suggestion” section (12) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Praise to faculty with no suggestion attached
Miscellaneous comments (40; no one category had more than 6 comments) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideas for readings to use • Ideas for discussions • Request for more money for materials • Ideas related to technology • Ideas for reflection

- Ideas about groups
- Request not to have Capstone required
- More speakers
- Comment on the specific project

Both readers noted that, out of the 250 evaluations, 80 of them had ***no suggestions for changes***. This was by far the most common response. The main concern of students dealt with the ***timing*** of course content, delivery, and logistics related to the final product. Capstones often front-load students with course content before students form groups to create the final product, but students are concerned that they form groups too late and that the project does not get clarified until mid-term, leaving only a month for project completion. Students also suggested that a few faculty could improve the ***community partnership*** by creating mechanisms for better communication between the community partner and the faculty. Students also wanted more time to communicate with the community partner and desired more feedback and interaction with the partner.

Further, students requested having ***clearer structure*** to the Capstone, especially the final product. Students requested greater organization, more guidelines, and specific details related to their projects. Sometimes students were uncomfortable with the lack of specificity that the faculty and community partner had in regards to the final product. In addition, students expressed a concern with the ***amount of time*** they needed to spend on their Capstone projects. Although some students expressed an interest in increased time at the community partner site (and, especially, more time interacting with clients), more students were concerned with the overall time they needed to complete the final project.

Data Used for Improving the Quality of the Program

The purpose of the course evaluation is to improve the quality of the program. Each faculty receives the results from her/his course evaluations, and the aggregate scores are reported out at Capstone retreats. These retreats serve as a vehicle for the forming of a learning community among Capstone faculty, a regular meeting time and place where faculty celebrate their successes, discuss their challenges, and share best practices. Faculty who receive high praise in their course evaluations are asked to share lessons learned and exemplary assignments in formal retreat sessions, and informal, low-stakes interactions are employed to catalyze faculty connections. The program actively builds upon the strengths of our best instructors and assists those faculty who may be struggling in the designing and teaching of their courses.

In addition, the Capstone program director reviews all course evaluations and works with faculty one-to-one to address student concerns. She follows up with faculty who consistently receive student comments about lack of structure, complaints about a community partnership, and concerns about the workload or pacing within a course. In addition, Vicki Reitenauer, a seasoned Capstone faculty, serves as a consultant to faculty around all elements of course design and structure, including community partnership issues, the design and development of course structures, and the inclusion of specific assignments and reflections to support student learning outcomes. Increasingly, faculty development efforts have included a strong one-to-one element, since it is possible that faculty who have difficulty building sufficient structure into their courses may be among those who are less likely to attend or learn best through structured group retreats.

Using all of these strategies—the continuous generation of course assessment data through mid-term qualitative assessments and end-of-term course evaluations, the reporting out of this data regularly in a variety of faculty development settings, and the developing and sharing of best practices in both group and one-on-one settings—the program intentionally and systematically addresses the concerns expressed by students and furthers the quality of teaching and learning in Capstones.