SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY.

Program-Level Assessment: Annual Report

Program: Prison Education	Department: Prison Education
Degree or Certificate Level: AA	College/School: CAS
Date (Month/Year): 12/15/20	Primary Assessment Contact: Paul Lynch, Director
In what year was the data upon which this report is based collected? 2020	
In what year was the program's assessment plan most recently reviewed/updated? 2015	

1. Student Learning Outcomes

Which of the program's student learning outcomes were assessed in this annual assessment cycle?

"Students will use research to sustain an argument and conduct analysis through an academic essay."

2. Assessment Methods: Artifacts of Student Learning

Which artifacts of student learning were used to determine if students achieved the outcome(s)? Please identify the course(s) in which these artifacts were collected. Clarify if any such courses were offered a) online, b) at the Madrid campus, or c) at any other off-campus location.

We collected artifacts of student writing from two courses: English 3750, the students' final English course, and AS 4960, our one-hour capstone course.

These courses were offered online and asynchronously. Due to COVID restrictions, we have not been able to enter our partner prison since March, and so we have to pivot to online instruction for the first time in the program's history. As a result, we were not able to collect artifacts from some of the courses called for in our assessment plan. We therefore decided to focus on two of their most recent courses, which allowed us to collect artifacts of student writing.

Because we are not able to see our students in person, communication with them has been strained, and some students are still catching up on these courses. Where we might have expected 18 artifacts from our incarcerated cohort, we have only 16 for one course and 13 for another.

It is also important to note here that our students did this writing through a technology and a learning CMS with which they had only recently become familiar. Normally, we would have collected paper copies of writing; here, we had to pull them from the CMS, which many students found challenging to use. I mention this b/c I suspect that may be a reason why students are score lower on certain areas of the writing rubric than we might have expected. For example, two of the rubric criteria are "source citation" and "syntax and mechanics," two areas that are pretty typical for writing rubrics. However, b/c our students were using new word processing and CMS systems for the very first time, I suspect that their work might show more errors than usual. On a similar note, another criterion speaks to "sources and evidence," which addresses our students' ability to include research sources in their writing. However, due to the limitations of our CMS, along with library restrictions imposed by our partner facility, we were simply not able to offer student a rich range of resources for students to research. As a result, I suspect that their work with show less complexity and richness than rubric describes.

In addition, I also want to say a word about the general context in which this work was produced. The COVID pandemic not only interrupted our contact with our students; it also caused them enormous problems inside the institution. An outbreak of COVID among both prison staff and incarcerated people led to a cascading chain of effects: understaffing among the overall prison staff meant that our staff students were faced with increased hours and workloads, which affected their ability to keep up with course work. In addition, they were also very quickly learning

new technologies. For them, Zoom and Google drive were brand new. Also, many students live in rural areas where internet access is spotty, which increased the challenges of keeping up with school.

For our incarcerated students, the problems were worse. Understaffing meant that movement inside the prison was slowed to a crawl. This lack of movement meant that our students very often could not get out of their cells to sync their tablets and thus access course content. Meanwhile, they were denied the kind of class discussion and interactions with their professors that are the hallmark of our program. They could not even confer with each other since they were very often confined to their cells for most of the day. Meanwhile, the understaffing problems, exacerbated by required quarantines for staff exposed to COVID, led to further upheaval and even violence within the facility.

All to say: during the period in which our students produced this work, they were under a great deal of stain; therefore, I doubt very much that this work is representative of our students' full capabilities or what our program has taught them.

3. Assessment Methods: Evaluation Process

What process was used to evaluate the artifacts of student learning, and by whom? Please identify the tools(s) (e.g., a rubric) used in the process and include them in/with this report.

We took a writing sample from the two courses above and from both our staff and incarcerated cohorts. We anonymized them and read them according to the writing rubric included in our 2015 assessment plan. (The rubric is attached to the email that accompanies this report.) They were read and scored by both the Program Director and the Academic Coordinator. We collected the scores on two spreadsheets. A spreadsheet with the averages is also attached to the report.

I want to be upfront here about some problems with this approach. The 2015 assessment plan suggests that outcomes will be keyed to certain courses and that assessment will happen annually and that results will be shared with the Prison Program team and other stakeholders. However, since 2015, the program has seen a fair of bit of upheaval, including three leadership changes in four years. During the current director's first year, the pandemic broke out, which meant further upheaval. As a result, I think this current report represents a hastily taken snapshot rather than a fully valid assessment of our program's effects.

4. Data/Results

What were the results of the assessment of the learning outcome(s)? Please be specific. Does achievement differ by teaching modality (e.g., online vs. face-to-face) or on-ground location (e.g., STL campus, Madrid campus, other off-campus site)?

The average of our scores across the rubric for both cohorts came in at the "milestone" or "benchmark" range, where I would have liked to see these artifacts at "capstone" range. While there were some differences in the two scorers' averages, I'm less concerned about that than am I concerned that both scorers seemed to agree that our students' writing—at least on average—was not where it might hope it to be at this point in their program. Certainly, many students were scored at the capstone range on a number of different areas. But the number of students whose writing was scored well below this range is a cause for concern.

It's hard to compare the results since we don't have good prior data with which to compare current numbers. The last time we did assessment in 2018, it was for a different outcome: "Students will utilize intentional reflection." So we don't have a good before and after picture for either cohort.

One point of comparison is that our incarcerated students used an asynchronous learning platform, while our staff students used Zoom. In other words, we were able to talk with our staff students in a way that we could not with our incarcerated students. However, that difference also meant that our incarcerated students had access to mini-lectures that they could re-watch. That resource may have been a factor in the way our incarcerated students approached their assignments—that is, they may have had more opportunities for review.

5. Findings: Interpretations & Conclusions

What have you learned from these results? What does the data tell you?

First, I'm not sure I can trust the data. As I discussed in #2, we collected data at the worst moment in our program's history. I'm not sure it's indicative of our students' accomplishments. The abrupt shift to asynchronous instruction made it very difficult to communicate with students. The shift undergone by our incarcerated students in PEP should not be compared to the kind of shift undergone by SLU's traditional students. Our incarcerated students do not have Zoom. We have not seen their faces, nor they ours, since the pandemic began. Moreover, they had to learn how to use this technology largely on their own. In many cases, glitches with the technology prevented students from submitting work in the usual form. For example, many students could not create word docs, but instead had to email entire essays over Lantern. This played havoc with the kind of formatting issues that are scored in a couple of parts of the rubric. Moreover, as I've described above, our staff students faced a different but equally daunting set of technological challenges.

Despite these difficulties, the students displayed a level of insight, sensitivity, and imagination that is not easily captured on a rubric such as this. Like all rubrics, this one can observe certain academic moves, which are certainly important. But any rubric will miss as much as it sees.

So, as to what we've learned from these results? I'm not sure I think we do need to rethink how we're approaching writing instruction in the program, and I've begun to review syllabi to get a rough sense of how much writing they're being assigned. It's not always possible to tell how much writing is being assigned by the syllabi, but my initial glance suggests that it may not be enough. This would not be surprising: in fact, the new university-wide core at the St. Louis campus requires much more writing from students as a result of perceived deficits in writing instruction (and as a result of student demand). It would not surprising to find that the same deficits in instruction exist within the prison program. This is something we need to address going forward.

6. **Closing the Loop: Dissemination and Use of <u>Current</u> Assessment Findings**
   A. When and how did your program faculty share and discuss these results and findings from this cycle of assessment?

   We will do so in early 2021 as we begin with a new cohort of both staff and incarcerated students. The students assessed in this cycle will complete their coursework in January, and the new cohort will begin in March. This shift gives us an opportunity to anticipate how we might better encourage more writing in the curriculum.

   B. How specifically have you decided to use these findings to improve teaching and learning in your program? For example, perhaps you've initiated one or more of the following:

Changes to the Curriculum or Pedagogies	• Course content • Teaching techniques • Improvements in technology • Prerequisites	• Course sequence • New courses • Deletion of courses • Changes in frequency or scheduling of course offerings
Changes to the Assessment Plan	• Student learning outcomes • Artifacts of student learning • Evaluation process	• Evaluation tools (e.g., rubrics) • Data collection methods • Frequency of data collection

   Please describe the actions you are taking as a result of these findings.

   The challenge for assessing our program is that it is entirely interdisciplinary. Unlike a department, in which faculty trained in a given discipline are assessing the student work in that discipline, the director and coordinators of the prison program come from a variety of disciplines and are assessing work in a variety of disciplines. This became clear as we began to use the writing rubric, which, according to our academic director, was designed with philosophy in mind. One could make the argument that student work in our program should be assessed with the various departments' plans, rather than our own. But at the very least, we need to rethink the writing rubric, which seems be too tied to a kind of disciplinary approach that we're not necessarily in the best position to assess.

We also need to be clear about what we're looking for in the capstone course, whose content needs to be tied more explicitly to assessment by asking for particular kinds of artifacts that might reflect student accomplishment.

If no changes are being made, please explain why.

Besides the pandemic, the main issue we've faced is consistency in executing the assessment plan over the past three years. Our current plan calls for assessment at different points throughout the program. However, the program has had three directors in the last 3.5 years, two "permanent" and one interim. Moreover, the other demands of running the program—coordinating with the facilities, writing grant reports, fundraising, etc.—very often leave very little time. While we do have an academic coordinator whose job description includes assessment, the current position already demands a great deal of time to recruit and prepare faculty to teach in the program. Running assessment is further demand. Without more institutional support for the program, it's hard to see how we can pursue assessment more rigorously. For example: we are about to enter an admissions cycle. Unlike every other department and program in the university, we handle our own admissions. This requires a significant amount of volunteer work from faculty. Granted, this process happens only every fifth year. But my point is that basic and required program functions require faculty to volunteer. If we're relying on volunteers, we cannot do adequate assessment on an annual basis. So, for us the issue is not changing the plan, but rather finding the time and resources to follow it. I would welcome the opportunity to rethink the plan in the next year, especially as a new cohort gets underway. But the next six months need to be dedicated to grant writing; otherwise, there will be no program to assess.

7. **Closing the Loop: Review of _Previous_ Assessment Findings and Changes**
   A. What is at least one change your program has implemented in recent years as a result of assessment data?

   Changes have yet to be implemented because we have not begun a new curriculum. We will implement changes included in this report and previous reports in the new cohort, which begins spring 2021.

   B. How has this change/have these changes been assessed?

   N/A

   C. What were the findings of the assessment?

   N/A

   D. How do you plan to (continue to) use this information moving forward?

   N/A

   IMPORTANT: Please submit any assessment tools and/or revised/updated assessment plans along with this report.

Writing Rubric

Measure: Students will use research to sustain an argument and conduct analysis through an academic essay.

	Capstone 4	Milestones 3	Milestones 2	Benchmark 1
Content Development	Uses appropriate, relevant, and compelling content to illustrate mastery of the subject, conveying the writer's understanding of content and context.	Uses appropriate, relevant, and compelling content to explore ideas within the context of the discipline and shape the whole work.	Uses appropriate and relevant content to develop and explore ideas through most of the work.	Uses appropriate and relevant content to develop simple ideas in some parts of the work.
Presentation of Argument	Student presents conclusion and all premises, including suppressed ones. All statements are very precise.	Student presents conclusion and all obvious/stated premises. Student may leave some (less-obvious) assumptions suppressed. All statements are precise.	Student presents conclusion and all obvious/stated premises. Student may leave some (less-obvious) assumptions suppressed. Most statements are precise.	Student presents the argument's conclusion and at least one key premise. Some statements are precise.
Sources and Evidence	Demonstrates skillful use of high quality, credible, relevant sources to develop ideas that are appropriate for the discipline and genre of the writing.	Demonstrates consistent use of credible, relevant sources to support ideas that are applicable to the discipline and genre of the writing.	Demonstrates an attempt to use credible and/or relevant sources to support ideas that are appropriate for the discipline and genre of the writing.	Demonstrates an attempt to use sources to support ideas in the writing.
Source Citation	Demonstrates expertise of appropriate style guide (e.g. APA, MLA, AP) with proper in-text source citation and reference page.	Demonstrates understanding expertise of appropriate style guide with proper citations and references.	Demonstrates an attempt to use an appropriate style guide with some citations in the correct form.	Missing or ineffective use of any style guide and incorrect citation form.
Syntax and Mechanics	Uses graceful language that skillfully communicates meaning to readers with clarity and fluency, and is virtually error-free.	Uses straightforward language that generally conveys meaning to readers. The language in the portfolio has few errors.	Uses language that generally conveys meaning to readers with clarity, although writing may include some minor errors	Uses language that sometimes impedes meaning because of errors in usage or form.

Reader 1

	content development	presentation of argument	sources of evidence	source citation	syntax and mechanics
Capstone: Incarcerated	2.94	2.81	2.94	2.69	2.50
English: Incarcerated	2.92	2.69	2.69	2.38	2.54
Capstone: Staff	3	2.43	2.86	2.57	2.71
English: Staff	2.8	2.4	2.4	2.8	2.6

Reader 2

	content development	presentation of argument	sources of evidence	source citation	syntax and mechanics
Capstone: Incarcerated	2.75	2.19	2.38	3.44	2.38
English: Incarcerated	2.69	2. 62	2. 00	2.08	2.62
Capstone: Staff	1.57	1.71	1.71	3.14	2.00
English: Staff	2.8	2.8	1.4	1	3