

QUALITATIVE NARRATIVE ASSESSMENT: CORE TEXT PROGRAMS IN REVIEW

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Introduction

This second group of reports on the Qualitative Narrative Assessment Project, a long-range initiative begun by the Association for General and Liberal Studies (AGLS) and expanded by the Association for Core Texts and Courses (ACTC), reflects a broadening in scope as a second cohort of institutions builds on the groundbreaking work begun by the first. The participants developed and implemented assessment processes that focused on a core value, whether a commitment to a faith-based mission or to a clearer articulation of the aspirational goals and desired outcomes of core curricula. The tension between the expectation of easily discernable quantification of learning outcomes and the recognition that narratives of evaluation are more effective but unwieldy methods of conveying the profound but subtle deepening of intellectual maturity provides the impetus for increasingly sophisticated assessment instruments.

QNA II indicates an outward direction of its influence into faith- and mission-based programs and its growing influence in international higher education. These projects are also gaining recognition for their innovation and careful attention to the demands of the current emphasis on data-driven decision making. Through “Tradition and Innovation: An Inquiry into Fundamental Questions of Politics, Morality, and the Human Condition in Texts from Antiquity to Modernity,” the ACTC Liberal Arts Institute—sponsored, multiyear seminar on curricular development, two international institutions—the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the University of Navarra—developed and implemented new core text programs from initial approval through assessment in two distinctly different situations. St. Mary’s College of California dealt with the difficult task of reconfiguring a long-established core text program in response to a mandate from the administration,

itself prompted by the strictures of regional accreditation, while facing resistance from faculty colleagues, alumni, and students who prized the existing program as the salient aspect of the curriculum. Another faith-based institution, Villanova University, took bold steps to reposition its charismatic mission to meet and engage new media and new pedagogical approaches. Mercer University and Concordia University–Irvine drilled down into the assessment process itself to sharpen and focus effort to ensure that institutional goals for character formation were effectively communicated and assimilated. The results are noteworthy: the QNA projects of the Chinese University of Hong Kong and of St. Mary’s College of California were recognized with the AGLS Award for the Improvement of General Education Exemplary Program Award in 2015.

Chinese University of Hong Kong

International Tradition and Innovation Participant

In 2012, while participating in a general reform to adopt a four-year undergraduate curriculum by all universities funded by the University Grants Council, the Chinese University of Hong Kong adopted the General Education Foundation Program. The six-credit, two-semester sequence, entitled *Dialogue with Nature* and *Dialogue with Humanity*, is required of all students and includes selections from the writings of Eastern and Western writers throughout history. Because of the many challenges of implementing this entirely new core curriculum—including training faculty in pedagogy and attaining consensus regarding learning outcomes and goals—the program administrators elected to adopt already existing assessment models upon which to base their baseline and subsequent assessments to produce relevant data on student success. After an exhaustive research and program review, it became clear that, while the course content appeared to address the desired themes, the rubrics chosen for evaluation produced inadequate results that did not reveal the desired depth of information necessary to evaluate the program’s success. Continued work to improve both course content and evaluation eventually showed that the root difficulty experienced by most students was adjusting to the demands of open-ended questions requiring reflection, when they had been conditioned from an early age to understand that their role as students is to arrive at a correct answer or judge a stated idea as right or wrong. Faculty members also struggled with how to evaluate and score the improvement of students’ intellectual processes rather than achievement of definitive answers. With this information and continued institutional support, the program leaders continue to strive for the proper balance of content, pedagogy, and assessment.

University of Navarra

International Tradition and Innovation Participant

The University of Navarra was established in 1952, combining two radically different ideas at the time: clear emphasis on business and professional training and

deep commitment to a salient Roman Catholic identity. In developing a new core text-based curriculum, its goal was to integrate these seemingly dissimilar objectives by reclaiming the traditional liberal arts, especially the trivium, seeing it as a natural outgrowth of tenets implicit in the institution's deep roots in the Western intellectual tradition rather than the grafting of a new branch on a mature tree. As with any curricular development, obstacles to implementation, both anticipated and unanticipated, arose, but the program's leaders attribute their ability to successfully address difficulties without impeding growth to the advanced planning methods learned in the Tradition and Innovation seminars. Grafting a program of new content and methods into the existing degree structure and its faith-based substructure reinvigorated the curriculum with an even richer yield than expected.

Saint Mary's College of California

The Collegiate Seminar Program at St. Mary's College of California was established in the first wave of Great Books-style education that gained prominence in the United States in the 1940s. Beginning in 2006 the college began conducting a complete review of its general education curriculum, which resulted in an articulation of new core learning goals, labeled "Habits of Mind" and representing a revision of the collegiate seminar that shifted emphasis from core texts to a focus on shared inquiry, critical thinking, and written and oral communication. While seminar-style classes were maintained, reading loads were reduced (excerpts rather than whole texts), and pedagogical learning goals were expressed as skill mastery (replacing value-centric language relating to mission or religious/moral virtues).

Villanova University

With the faith tradition of its founding religious order as the groundwork, Villanova University's "Augustine and Culture Seminar" aims to: provide a foundation in significant texts of human civilization from ancient to modern times; enable first-year students to develop the skills of deep reading, critical thinking and discussion, and analytical writing; inculcate a meaningful understanding of the Augustinian and Catholic intellectual tradition; create a community of scholars inside and outside the classroom.

The *Confessions* of St. Augustine is the common reference point of reflective essays collected in portfolios. An interactive, heavily annotated, and augmented electronic edition of the text is a required text for all students. Implementation of this new technology in service to the founding intellectual tradition of the university prompted marked improvement in reflective essays, while technology, rubrics, and artifact selection, along with some weaknesses in data collection, were noted as areas needing further development. Intermediate steps are leading to a full portfolio assessment in the near future.

Mercer University

The Great Books program is the one of two general education tracks at Mercer that has undergone fewer modifications over time. Common texts are taken from several disciplines and are taught by faculty from virtually all departments. Strict focus on

primary texts has made “The book is the teacher” the unofficial maxim of a program that stresses free exploration of texts in discussion and writing. The Qualitative Narrative Assessment instrument the university devised addressed whether students gained the intellectual tools required to address fundamental questions about the “good life.” How does intellectual growth translate into moral discernment and civic responsibility? The goal was to more deeply identify what makes a successful program successful and how that probity might support continuous improvement.

Concordia University–Irvine

As part of a larger curricular assessment, Concordia University–Irvine, a faith-based institution that emphasizes the practice of clearly articulated virtues and character development in conjunction with vocational discernment, formulated an instrument that seeks to ascertain if study of core texts in fact made students wiser, more cultivated, more virtuous (honorable), in accordance with the mission statement. After having taken a first-year required philosophy course, students in a second-year required English course are prompted to write a five-page essay addressing the question “What is the highest virtue?” Written evaluations that followed a rubric were taken from faculty, and, more significantly, senior undergraduate students submitted blind evaluations of the younger students’ work, which produced a third data point to demonstrate development in the inculcation of virtues/character development over time as a function of making connections between what students study and how they choose to live.

As progress toward conveying more meaningful indicators of students’ intellectual maturity proceeds, so does the awareness that programs are most successful when curricular change and assessment change are seen as components of a single process that has both administrative support and active faculty engagement. A review of the work of the first cohort shows that retrofitting an assessment instrument, however creative, on a preexisting program is seen as onerous and unsustainable. Institutions achieve best results when able to take the necessary time, in some cases more than a decade, to fully develop, implement, and evaluate change.

With the generous support of the Bradley Foundation, ACTC’s Liberal Arts Institute will sponsor its next curriculum development seminar, “Rejuvenating and Re-Inventing the Liberal Arts,” in the summer of 2019. Institutions that participate in the summer seminar will form the nexus of the third cohort of the Qualitative Narrative Assessment Project. Interest in participating in these initiatives may be directed to me at kathburk@coretexts.org. My co-director, David DiMattio, and I again express our appreciation to the faculty and administrators who dedicated so many hours to the Qualitative Narrative Assessment project and to Debra E. Soled and her copy-editing team for their careful and capable preparation of the final version of the report. We especially recognize and applaud J. Scott Lee, who initiated the project and served as series editor, as he retires as executive director of ACTC.

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Qualitative Narrative Assessment of Two Dialogues at the Chinese University of Hong Kong

Chan Hin Yan, Julie Chiu, Gao Xin, Lam To Kam,
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Institutional Choices

Background: Two Dialogues as Foundational Core Courses

General education, built upon a balanced approach to whole-person education, has been a key component of the undergraduate curriculum at The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) since its establishment in 1963. Prior to the 2012 territory-wide curricular reform in all publicly funded universities in Hong Kong, CUHK had required its undergraduates to take nine credits of University General Education, with a choice of a course each from one of the Four Areas,¹ and six credits of College General Education, with two or three required courses designed and offered by students' home colleges.² In 2012, as all universities funded by the University Grants Council adopted a four-year university curriculum, CUHK introduced a common core, the General Education Foundation Program (GEFP), to its existing University General Education. Beginning in 2012–13, therefore, new entrants of CUHK are required to take GEFP as a prerequisite for the Four Areas. The new core program is to supplement the distribution model underlying the Four Areas and to serve as foundational training for undergraduate studies. The GEFP comprises two courses of three credits, *In Dialogue with Nature* (hereafter referred to as *Nature*) and *In Dialogue with Humanity* (hereafter *Humanity*), inviting joint reflection on the human condition through texts selected from the sciences and the humanities.

Both dialogues are taught in a seminar setting, engaging students in direct dialogues *with* and *on* selected classic texts. The syllabi include religious texts and prominent thinkers/theorists like Plato, Aristotle, Confucius, Zhuangzi, Rousseau, Marx, Darwin, Isaac Newton, Rachel Carson, Henri Poincaré, and Joseph Needham. While exploring the world of science and knowledge and ideas about good life and good society, students are encouraged to ponder the limitations of scientific inquiries, and to rethink their own conception of self and society. The dialogues are meant to empower students with qualities necessary for becoming independent and critical learners, providing opportunities to read, think, relate (orally and in writing), and rethink. The intended outcomes for each of the two courses are as follows.

In Dialogue with Nature aims to develop students' capacity to: (a) *comprehend* and discuss science-related texts; (b) *identify* the essential characteristics of how human beings view nature; (c) *formulate* informed personal views on the societal implications of scientific explorations; (d) *relate* the developments in natural sciences

highlighted in the course to the contemporary human condition; and (e) *evaluate* the scopes of application, achievement, and limitations of highlighted scientific methods using multiple perspectives.

In Dialogue with Humanity aims to foster students' capacity to: (a) *recognize* major ideas that shape contemporary views of good life and good society; (b) *read* and *discuss* primary texts of the humanities with confidence; (c) *evaluate* the validity of different approaches to good life and good society from multiple perspectives; (d) *relate* arguments and views expressed in the selected texts to contemporary human conditions; and (e) *appreciate* diverse values and *make* informed personal *judgments* on good life and good society.

Being a new addition that brings a structural change to university general education affecting 3,800 freshmen per year, GEFP calls for regular assessment of its effectiveness in attaining the stated learning outcomes. Since its 2012 launch, this is done every term through a Course and Teaching Evaluation questionnaire, and every year through interviews of students in focus groups. The two evaluation exercises, centrally administered and taking the quantitative and qualitative approaches respectively, have shown favorable reception of the two courses. The results seem sufficient to demonstrate to stakeholders—from the university to society at large, from top administrators to teachers and students—the value of the newly added core component. Meanwhile, individual teachers of the two courses have looked for other means to understand student learning and also to inform their teaching, in the form of self-initiated Teaching-and-Learning Research. The Qualitative Narrative Assessment (QNA) project at CUHK can be seen as one such initiative.

NQA of the Two Dialogues: Objectives and Analytical Model

In terms of approach, the present project aims to supplement the above-mentioned methods of course assessment of the two dialogues. Both methods are subjective in nature, as they depend on students' recollection of their learning experience, and both look at students' learning in the two courses separately. The objective evidence of student learning to be examined in the present project is the final term paper submitted at the end of the two dialogues. The papers were randomly sampled for analysis by teachers working in pairs, applying an analytical tool to evaluate the attainment of a learning outcome deemed significant for both courses.³ It is hoped that the project will serve formative as well as summative purposes—understanding gained of what students have and have not attained in GEFP will help teachers adjust and improve their teaching accordingly.

After the initial discussion among members of the start-up team,⁴ development of “critical thinking” was seen as a common goal of the two dialogues, as is expressed in one of the stated goals of University General Education: to “develop the attitudes and skills that are conducive to *critical thinking*, self-expression and communication with the others” (*italics added*). The Wolcott-Lynch Model (2006), consisting of a set of “Steps for Better Thinking,” had been used by one of the participating universities in the First QNA Cohort of ACTC⁵ and found effective by the Adjudicating Panel for

the General Education Best Essay Award in 2015. Considering the above, the start-up team decided to adopt the model for narrative assessment of students' performance in term papers from the two dialogues.

Specifically, the Wolcott-Lynch Model can be used to assess students' level of thinking when answering open-ended questions. The assessment model is theoretically grounded in King and Kitchener's (1994) reflective judgment theory of cognitive development and Fischer's (1980) dynamic skill theory. It looks into students' thinking and classifies students' performances into different levels according to the reasoning strategies employed when addressing open-ended problems, and to the sets of assumptions about knowledge that underlie those strategies. The assessment model serves as a lens through which teachers may better understand students' thinking patterns and reasoning strategies with reference to several developmental models in cognitive psychology.

The goals of the QNA project were set as follows by the start-up team:

- To evaluate the *level* of cognitive complexity acquired by students at the end of each of the two dialogue courses;
- To assess students' *progress* by comparing students' performance on completion of the first and of the second dialogue courses; and
- To collect findings for the program's *self-examination* and possible improvements, including the refinement of assessment methods and learning outcomes.

In due course, it was realized that while the first goal remains valid, the second goal could not be accomplished, and the third has been realized mainly in terms of self-examination and improvement of teaching design. Queries have also been raised about the identification of "critical thinking" as the common and representative objective of the dialogues, about what "critical thinking" entails,⁶ and about the suitability of applying the Wolcott-Lynch Model in assessing our students' "thinking" performance in the term papers. Problems of the terminology in the Wolcott-Lynch rubrics and their restrictions in application have unexpectedly become the focus of many meetings of the QNA team. Such discussions appeared to have distracted the team from producing and analyzing narrative assessments of student papers, but they also helped team members to clarify their expectations on student performance and to rethink the way questions should be formulated for class discussion and essays to facilitate students' cognitive development. This will be taken up again in a later section.

Action Steps

Two sets of the Wolcott-Lynch assessment rubrics were employed at different stages of the QNA project. In the early stages of assessment (Stages 1 and 2 below), a simpler assessment rubric was adapted from Lynch and Wolcott's (2001) *Idea Paper: Helping Your Students Develop Critical Thinking Skills* (hereafter *Idea Paper*). For ease of referral, we will call it the "Cognitive Complexity Assessment Form" (see

Appendix 1). After the formation of a core research group (Stage 3 below) to look into Wolcott's (2006) *College Faculty Handbook: Steps for Better Thinking Faculty Handbook* (hereafter *Handbook*), a more sophisticated assessment rubric adapted from the *Handbook* was employed in a final round of assessment (Stage 4 below). We will call it the "Performance Patterns Rubric" (see Appendix 2). Beginning with a start-up team of four in 2014, the QNA team grew to seventeen at its height in 2016 and has resulted in individual extended projects in the classroom that are still ongoing when the present report is written. Work on the QNA project can be seen as having gone through five stages. Below is a table summarizing the actions taken from Stages 1–5. Detailed descriptions are given after the table.

Stage	1 Trial run	2 First round	3 Core group	4 Second round	5 Extended studies
Time period	late 2014–early 2015	mid-2015–late 2015	early 2016–mid-2016	late 2016–early 2017	mid-2016 onward
Task	Rank cognitive levels 0–4 + Produce narrative	Rank cognitive steps 0–4 + Produce narrative	Conduct literature review + Test performance patterns rubric	Identify performance patterns + Produce narrative	
No. of participant teachers	10 (5 pairs)	17 (8 pairs/gps)	7	15 (7 pairs/gps)	4
No. of papers assessed	40 (randomly selected) (each pair: 4 FH+4FN)*	48+48 (randomly selected) (each pair: 3 FH+3FN)	6 (selected from first round; each to re-assess same 6 papers showing great rating discrepancies in previous round)	30 (randomly selected)	
No. of returns	40	55	42	30	
Reference	Idea Paper (Figure 2)	Idea Paper (Figure 3)	Handbook (A-5)#	Handbook (A-5)#	Handbook (A4, A5, A6)#

*FH: In Dialogue with Humanity; FN: In Dialogue with Nature

#A4, A5, and A6 are page numbers of tables included in the appendices to Wolcott (2006).

Trial Run (late 2014–early 2015)

In late 2014, the start-up team extended an invitation to all twenty-seven teachers of the Dialogue courses, and succeeded in forming a team of ten to conduct a trial QNA assessment exercise.⁷ The purpose was to collect experience and fine-tune the methodology in preparation for a full-fledged evaluation. Students' thinking

performance demonstrated in their term papers was assessed using criteria listed in Figure 2 of Wolcott and Lynch's *Idea Paper*, which ranks patterns of thinking skills (named as "Skill Pattern") from 0 to 4, according to the corresponding "Major Improvements Over Less Complex Skill Pattern" and "Common Weaknesses" (see Appendix 3). In the trial exercise, a total of forty randomly selected term papers submitted at the end of Term 1, 2014–15, were evaluated by ten teachers, who were divided into five pairs, each pair comprising a teacher of Nature and a teacher of Humanity. Within the pair, each member selected four papers (randomly chosen) for ranking (0–5 according to the Wolcott-Lynch Model [Figure 2 of the *Idea Paper*]) and for forwarding to the other member in the pair for his/her ranking. The grader was not only to rank the paper concerned but also to write a few lines explaining the ranking, saying how the writer of the paper displayed the "common weaknesses" laid out in Figure 2 (and/or other weaknesses), how the writer displayed qualities associated with ranks other than that assigned to him or her (e.g., a paper ranked as "1" for overall performance may still show qualities or weaknesses associated with "0").

The team of ten met in January 2015 to share the experience, where discrepancies in rating and concerns about the qualitative nature of the assessment method were raised. To address the issues, the team decided to switch from Figure 2 to Figure 3 (see Appendix 4) of the *Idea Paper*, the latter of which provides a description of each cognitive step and their corresponding task prompts. The thinking steps are:

Foundation: mastery of knowledge and skills

Step 1: identification of problem, relevant information, and uncertainties

Step 2: exploration of interpretations and connections

Step 3: prioritization of alternatives and communication of conclusions

Step 4: integration, monitoring, and redefining strategies for readdressing the problem.

The team renamed these steps as "Levels of Cognitive Complexity" and used the cognitive-task descriptions as prompts for narratives of students' actual performance in the term paper in question. The team hoped that this new form, which we will call the "Cognitive Complexity Assessment Form" in this report, would free members from the dubious matching game regarding students' strengths and weaknesses, and they agreed that for the project to deserve the name of "qualitative," emphasis should *not* be placed on the exactitude of decision on *the cognitive level attained*, but *rather* on *a narrative of the quality of cognitive tasks carried out*. With this understanding, the trial team proceeded to the full-scale study in the next stage.

First Round of QNA Study (mid- to late 2015)

In 2015, the "Cognitive Complexity Assessment Form" (Appendix 1) established in the trial run was employed to track students' progress from Term 2, 2014–15, when they completed their first dialogue course, to Term 1, 2015–16, when they would complete their second dialogue course. The number of participating teach-

ers was expanded to 17,⁸ with a teacher of Nature paired up with a teacher of Humanity as in the trial run (with the exception of one group of three teachers), so that there would be a balanced perspective on the cognitive complexity demonstrated in the term papers under analysis. Each pair assessed the cognitive complexity shown in six randomly selected term papers submitted at the end of Term 2, 2014–15 (three papers from Nature and three papers from Humanity).⁹ A total of forty-eight papers were analyzed. Although disagreement of ranking persisted, most of them were sorted out between the teachers of the two dialogues. It was agreed that it would be more important *to identify the cognitive tasks performed* in the paper and describe how they were performed, rather than focusing too much on the step ranking.

In January 2016, these students' term papers submitted to the other dialogue course at the end of Term 1, 2015–16, were traced and assessed by the same pair of teachers using the same assessment form.¹⁰ In the ensuing discussion, a lot of questions were raised about the assessment form derived from Wolcott and Lynch's *Idea Paper*, and difficulties also arose in comparing the students' performance in the first course and that in the second course. It was decided that a core research group be formed to address the problems.

All in all, a total of fifty-five returns were collected, with the participating teachers applying the adapted the "Cognitive Complexity Assessment Form" (Appendix 1). They met several times to discuss their observations about student performance, reflections on their teaching, and queries about the Wolcott-Lynch Model. Some of the findings recorded in the next section ("Informed Judgments") are based on records of these meetings.

Inevitably, the number of returns (fifty-five) fell short of the projected ninety-six (assessment of forty-eight papers from each of the two terms in question). As explained in note 11, not all the forty-eight students went on to take the second dialogue course in Term 1, 2015–16; submissions of completed forms by participating teachers during busy terms also turned out to be incomplete. In the following section ("Informed Judgments"), the analysis of students' cognitive level attained and of teachers' narratives of student performance are based on the fifty-five forms collected.

It was in this stage of the QNA study that the team decided it impractical to track students' cognitive progress from one dialogue course to the other (as stated in objective (b), p. 4, above), applying the 0–5 divisions in the Wolcott-Lynch Model. The problem lies not so much in the incomplete number of returns but in students' tendency to remain in the lower cognitive level throughout their first and second years of study, a normal phenomenon, according to studies reported by Wolcott and Lynch. The agreement, nevertheless, is worth reporting.

Research of the Core Group (early to mid-2016)

In January 2016, a core group of seven members¹¹ (from the above team of seventeen) was formed to study the theoretical grounds of the Wolcott-Lynch Model and to make recommendations on future directions of the QNA study (including how to

analyze the students' performances and teachers' narratives so far produced).

The core group noted that since the release of the *Idea Paper* in 2001, the Wolcott-Lynch model had been further tested and developed, the result of which was published in Susan K. Wolcott's *College Faculty Handbook: Steps for Better Thinking Faculty Handbook* (2006). A more sophisticated version of the assessment rubric¹² (Appendix 2) was identified from the *Handbook* (A-5), which conceptualizes student thinking into five performance patterns, namely, *Confused Fact Finder*, *Biased Jumper*, *Perpetual Analyzer*, *Pragmatic Performer*, and *Strategic Re-visioner*. Each performance pattern denotes an *overall thinking strategy*, with a different combination of performances in four thinking steps, namely, *Identify*, *Explore*, *Prioritize*, and *Envision*. The rubric divides each thinking step into one or two thinking components, with detailed descriptors of how these components are performed in association with each thinking pattern. The underlying principle is that students perform the four thinking steps simultaneously when addressing open-ended questions. Students with a lower level of thinking complexity may perform weakly in all thinking steps, while students with a higher level of thinking complexity may perform well in most or all thinking steps. Their "Performance Patterns" are evaluated with regard to their performance in all of the four thinking steps and to their overall thinking strategy (from simplistic to advanced), as follows:

- ***Confused Fact Finders*** tend to engage in open-ended questions as if the goal is to find the single "correct" answer.
- ***Biased Jumpers*** proceed as if the goal is to simply stack up evidence in supporting their conclusions.
- ***Perpetual Analyzers*** seek to establish an unbiased, balanced view of evidence and information from different points of view, but are deterred from prioritization and making a conclusion.
- ***Pragmatic Performers*** are committed to producing well-founded conclusions based on objective consideration of priorities across viable alternatives.
- ***Strategic Revisioners*** build upon the well-founded conclusions made initially, but also seek to move toward better conclusions more confidently over time with additional information.

The core group conducted a pilot testing of this rubric (which we will call "Performance Patterns Rubric" in this report) on six term papers from the previous round of QNA study, for each of which the two teachers in the pair had shown great discrepancies in their ratings (using the previous "Cognitive Complexity Assessment" rubric). The pilot test showed that the Performance Patterns Rubric was more effective in reducing rating discrepancies between teachers.

Second Round of QNA Study (late 2016 to early 2017)

With the focus on the narratives of students' thinking performance, the team saw the value of looking closely into students' thinking patterns applying the Performance

Patterns Rubric. In late 2016, thirty student essays from Term 2, 2015–16, were assessed by fifteen teachers.¹³ Each student essay was assessed twice by one Nature and one Humanity teacher, or on some occasions, two Nature teachers. Teachers were allowed to leave the assessment items blank if they found the descriptors of a particular thinking step or the overall thinking approach inapplicable to illustrate a particular student's thinking performance by assessing the student writings per se.

Individual Extended Studies (mid 2016 to present)

Beginning from summer 2016, individual members of the core group started transferring understanding and reflections gained from the QNA research to their teaching. Inspired by Wolcott-Lynch's idea of "scaffolding questions" (Appendix 7) that help students progress to the next level of cognitive complexity, Pang Kam-moon designed an extended learning activity for a selected reading (*Silent Spring*) in Nature, which invited students to answer questions targeting level-one and level-two skills. Wu Jun asked students to assess their own performance patterns using the Wolcott-Lynch division of thinking patterns at the beginning of the course, the results of which were compared with her assessment of students' written works applying the same thinking-patterns division at midpoint and end of the term. A preliminary study was carried out in Term 1, 2016–17. The ongoing data analysis suggests improvement for the future implementation. A detailed report will be written in due course rather than being included in the present QNA report. Gao Xin tried a similar exercise with her groups in Term 1, 2016–17, at entry and exit points of Humanity, showing a change in students' perception of their thinking strategy before and after completing the course. She used a simplified version of the Performance Patterns Rubric (A-6 of Wolcott's *Handbook*, Appendix 6). Beginning with the perplexities expressed about the term "uncertainties" in the Wolcott-Lynch rubrics, Yeung Yang proposed that "uncertainties" could be a desirable learning outcome of GEFP, and she focused specifically on the use of questioning and self-questioning in her classroom. Pang, Gao (with the help of Chan Hin Yan), and Yeung will each report on their extended studies in the latter half of Section III, below.

Informed Judgments

As pointed out above (at the end of Section I), when members of the QNA team met to discuss results of the two rounds of QNA studies, much time was dedicated to considering the justifications for adopting the Wolcott-Lynch Model and the problems arising from its application. This section, therefore, will be dedicated not only to findings from the two rounds of QNA studies, but also to reflections on the model's limitations as well as implications for teaching adjustment. This will be followed by a report on three extended studies that tried to transfer insights gained from involvement in the QNA project to the classroom.

Findings from First Round of QNA Study (Stage 2)

As outlined above, the first round of QNA assessment was conducted in two consecutive terms with the wish to compare selected students' cognitive development

from the first to the second dialogue course. The Lynch-Wolcott Model of five thinking steps in increasing cognitive complexity was adopted, each step characterized by certain thinking skills as shown below (Lynch and Wolcott's Figure 3, *Idea Paper* 2001):

Level of Cognitive Complexity	Characteristic Thinking Skills
FOUNDATION: Knowledge and Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>repeat</i> or <i>paraphrase</i> information from text-books, notes, etc. • <i>reason</i> to single "correct" solution, perform computations, etc.
Step 1: IDENTIFICATION Identify the Problem, Relevant Information, and Uncertainties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>identify</i> problem and acknowledge reasons for enduring uncertainty and absence of single "correct" solution • <i>identify</i> relevant information and uncertainties embedded in the information (may include "stacking up" relevant reasons and evidence to support some solution or conclusion)
Step 2: EXPLORATION Explore Interpretations and Connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>interpret</i> information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ recognize and control one's own biases ○ articulate assumptions and reasoning associated with alternative points of view ○ qualitatively interpret evidence from a variety of points of view • <i>organize</i> information in meaningful ways to encompass problem complexities
Step 3: PRIORITIZATION Prioritize Alternatives and Communicate Conclusions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • after thorough analysis, <i>develop</i> and <i>use</i> reasonable guidelines for prioritizing factors to consider and choose among solution options • <i>communicate</i> appropriately for a given audience and setting
Step 4: ENVISION Integrate, Monitor, and Refine Strategies for Readdressing the Problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>acknowledge</i> and <i>explain</i> limitations of endorsed solution • <i>integrate</i> skills in an ongoing process for generating and using information to monitor strategies and make reasonable modifications

Participating teachers assessed the students' cognitive complexity by examining their thinking skills exhibited when addressing the open-ended questions in the sampled essays. An assessment form with empty boxes for comments was developed

from the above figure, which allows the teachers to produce a narrative on the students' strengths and weaknesses in each thinking step. The form and a sample of the teacher's assessment can be found in Appendix 1 and Appendix 6, respectively.

Of the fifty-five students whose papers were evaluated in the collected assessment forms, thirty-four demonstrated cognitive complexity only at Foundation or Step 1 level. The assessment result suggests that over 80 percent of the students were capable of performing such cognitive tasks as *repeating* or *paraphrasing* information (Foundation), *identifying* the problem (Level 1), and *acknowledging* reasons for enduring uncertainty and absence of single "correct" solution (Level 1). However, these students failed to perform more advanced thinking steps that demand higher levels of cognitive complexity such as exploration, prioritization, and envisioning. Such research findings are consistent with the results of many education literatures that suggest that most college seniors still struggle with Steps 2, 3, and 4 skills (Baxter Magolda 2004; King & Kitchener 1994; Wolcott & Lynch 1997). Given that the majority of students enrolled in the two dialogues are freshman or sophomores, it is concluded that the cognitive complexity of our students, as reflected in the QNA findings, does not deviate from the average cognitive level of college students.

In our original design, the same group of students selected by random sampling would be evaluated twice, each after the completion of one core-text course (Term 2, 2014–15, and Term 1, 2015–16) in the students' preferred order. In this way, we hoped to trace the students' progress on their cognitive complexity with a time spread of one year and to collect findings for the program's self-examination and possible improvements, including the refinement of assessment methods and learning outcomes. Unfortunately, our research finds that very limited progress was observed within such a short time. Further literature review (Baxter Magolda 2004; Wolcott & Lynch 2001; Wolcott 2006) suggests that cognitive development in general takes quite a long time and the progression to the next cognitive stage might take as long as three years. In spite of this, the study brings a valuable chance for the teachers to reflect on their teaching. By knowing students' average cognitive capacity and the time required to make changes, teachers can adjust their expectations and improve their question design, avoiding overly simple questions to not bore the students and overly difficult questions to not frustrate them.

Limitations of the Wolcott-Lynch Model

Meanwhile, we gradually realized that the Wolcott-Lynch model, along with the assessment rubric used in the study, was originally designed for business students. Though we were able to apply the "Cognitive Complexity Assessment Form" (Appendix 1) to assessing students' thinking performance in their term papers, difficulties arose one way or another in its application, leading to the agreement that much calibration is needed for the rubric to align with the two dialogues' target learning outcomes and course design.

One fundamental problem of the Wolcott-Lynch Model, which sometimes caused rating discrepancies between the teachers, is that it considers cognitive development as a one-dimensional progression. The mastery of Knowledge and Skills

is seen as an activity of the lowest cognitive complexity (Foundation), involving only the skills of repeating and paraphrasing information and reasoning to a “single” correct solution. However, according to Krathwohl (2002), knowledge can be divided into *factual*, *conceptual*, *procedural*, and *metacognitive*, while acquiring it requires multiple and complex cognitive processes. This is particularly true for the two courses Nature and Humanity, with core texts selected from philosophers or scientists such as Plato, Zhuangzi, Rousseau, Darwin, Newton, and Poincaré, each addressing certain enduring questions in human civilization with theories and concepts that take a high level of cognitive complexity to understand, not to say critique. The current Wolcott-Lynch rubric does not address the different levels of sophistication of knowledge, which sometimes caused us difficulties in numerically ranking the student papers under analysis. As one teacher queries, “Is it not too demanding to ask students to justify that ‘single solution’ they manage to put together for a complicated problem, having processed knowledge of high complexity, given that they are in a program meant to be a foundational program?”

Another question often raised in the discussion is the meaning of the word “uncertainties” that appears in the descriptor of Step 1. With the present rubric pitched at a low level of cognitive complexity, so long as two perspectives are involved in the student term paper, we classify the student as having addressed “uncertainties,” but the quality of the “uncertainties” is not taken into consideration at all. Similar to the problem of “Knowledge and Skills,” the “Cognitive Complexity” rubric seems to oversimplify the uncertainties, leading to the teachers’ confusion and discrepancies when ranking the term papers. We feel that the meaning of uncertainties needs further calibration and exploration.

A third problem arose when applying the “Cognitive Complexity” rubric to certain types of term papers—for instance, when a student chooses to write a dialogue (in imitation of the Platonic dialogue or simply to present an exposition or argumentation in a literary form) or to write a personal reflection. The Wolcott-Lynch rubric was constructed to assess students’ thinking performance in problem-solving. Other cognitive components such as creativity or self-reflection are not its concerns, yet they are valued by the teachers and can be found in some of the student papers evaluated. Nonetheless, such a limitation of the Wolcott-Lynch Model enabled us to ponder the broad spectrum of cognitive components involved in the two dialogue courses and motivated us to maintain a balanced assessment tool in teaching.

Findings from the Second Round of QNA Study (Stage 4)

The second round of assessment was conducted in late 2016 using a more sophisticated version of the Wolcott-Lynch assessment rubric adapted from the *Handbook* (the “Performance Patterns Rubric,” Appendix 2). Prior to mass employment by teachers, this version of assessment rubric has gone through intense discussion and pilot testing conducted by the core group. The new rubric still bears the understanding of the four thinking steps as the key component of comprehensive thinking. However, instead of categorizing students into different groups according to the level of thinking step they achieve, the new rubric conceptualizes students’

thinking into five different performance patterns: Confused Fact Finder, Biased Jumper, Perpetual Analyzer, Pragmatic Performer, and Strategic Revisioner. Each thinking-performance pattern refers to a different composition of performances in the four thinking steps, as follows:

Table 1: List of Thinking Steps and Thinking Components

Thinking Step	Thinking Component
Step 1: Identify	A (Identify and use relevant information)
	B (Articulate uncertainties)
Step 2: Explore	C (Integrate multiple perspectives and clarify assumptions)
	D (Qualitatively interpret information and create a meaningful organization)
Step 3: Prioritize	E (Use guidelines or principles to judge objectivity across options)
	F (Implement and communicate conclusions for the setting and audience)
Step 4: Envision	G (Acknowledge and monitor solution and limitation through next steps)

The underlying principle of this rubric is that students perform the four thinking steps simultaneously when addressing open-ended questions. Students vary only in terms of the degree of performance in each thinking step. According to this thinking-performance pattern model, students in the lower level of thinking complexity perform weakly in all thinking steps, while students with a high level of thinking complexity could strongly perform all thinking steps. This more advanced rubric is empirically found to be more focused and more effective in reducing teachers’ rating discrepancy than the one adopted in our first round of assessment. Before studying the results of the QNA study applying the rubric, it may be helpful to refer to the rubric in its totality in Appendix 2.

In the overall thinking approach, over 80 percent of students were classified as *Confused Fact Finder* and *Biased Jumper*, in which their overall thinking approach was understood as proceeding as if the goal was to find the single “correct” solution, or as if the goal was to stack up evidence and information to support one’s own conclusion. Only around 15 percent of students were either *Perpetual Analyzer* or *Pragmatic Performer*, both of whom employ thinking strategy as if the goal is to establish an unbiased, balanced view of evidence and information from different points of view or as if the goal is to come to a well-founded conclusion based on objective consideration of priorities across viable alternatives. No students were classified as *Strategic Revisioner*, who proceeds as if the goal is to strategically construct knowledge, to move toward better conclusions or greater confidence in conclusions as the problem is addressed over time.

Table 2: Student Distribution of Overall Thinking Approach

	Confused Fact Finder	Biased Jumper	Perpetual Analyzer	Pragmatic Performer	Strategic Revisioner	Total	Not Applicable
Frequency	10	30	6	2	0	48	12
Valid Percentage	20.8	62.5	12.5	4.2	0.0	100.0	

Further analysis suggests that students on average barely met the performance standards of Confused Fact Finder or Biased Jumper in almost all thinking components. It was found that students were even relatively weak at articulating uncertainties (thinking component B) and acknowledging and monitoring solution and limitation through next steps to be weak at component (thinking component G). The spectrum of thinking-performance patterns is converted into a scale of scores from 0 (Confused Fact-Finder) to 4 (Strategic Revisioner), and each box containing detailed descriptions of the performance of the thinking component is given a score. While the average score for most of the component is more or less equal to 0.90 or 1.00, the average score for the two components (B and G) is only around 0.65.

The analysis suggests that most students performed adequately in identification of relevant information (Step 1 skills: Identify). They were capable in using limited information, primarily evidence and information supporting their own conclusions. They were also capable in identifying at least one reason for significant and enduring uncertainties. However, most students performed weakly in Steps 2 (Explore), 3 (Prioritize), and 4 (Envision) skills. Students managed to acknowledge more than one potential approach or viewpoint, but failed to acknowledge their own biases in reasoning. They either tended to portray perspectives dichotomously as right or wrong, good or bad, or they would interpret information rather superficially as supporting or not supporting a point of view, and they tended to ignore information that disagreed with their own position. Most students provided little evaluation of alternatives, offered only partially reasoned conclusions, and failed to address sufficient information or motivation for readers to adequately understand alternatives and complexity.

Table 3: Students' Mean Score on Each Thinking Component

A		Thinking Component						
		B	C	D	E	F	G	
N	Valid	52	43	48	47	49	38	41
	Missing	8	17	12	13	11	22	19
Mean (Max = 4)*		1.02	.65	.87	.90	.89	.98	.66

*The scores represent the assessment of the students' performance pattern. 0: Confused Fact Finders, 1: Biased Jumpers, 2: Perpetual Analyzers, 3: Pragmatic Performers, and 4: Strategic Revisioners, in the particular thinking component A-G. (See Table 1.)

Correlation analysis was conducted to examine if correlation between students' actual academic performance (represented by their actual course grade points) and their particular thinking component (A–G in Table 1) exist. Analysis suggests that positive moderate correlation exists between thinking component D (qualitatively interpret information and create a meaningful organization) and students' grade point.

Another correlation analysis counting only student essays that were marked by teachers teaching the same courses—i.e., only UGFN essays that were marked by UGFN teachers and UGFH essays that were marked by UGFH teachers—was conducted. It is believed that the assessment results produced by teachers teaching the same course as the student essays would represent a more precise representation of students' thinking performance. It is because the teachers are more familiar with the course content, pedagogy, teaching activities, and examples that would possibly appear in student essays. They are more familiar with the assessment criteria of the courses.

More thinking components were found to be positively and moderately correlated to students' grade points when only counting student essays that were marked by teachers teaching the same courses in this correlation analysis. Thinking components that were found in medium correlation with the grade point were thinking component C (integrate multiple perspectives and clarify assumptions), thinking component D (qualitatively interpret information and create a meaningful organization), and thinking component E (use guidelines or principles to judge objectively across options). More importantly, the overall thinking approach was found to be in medium correlation with the course grade point.

The difference between the two correlation analyses is suggested to be attributed to the nature of the marker, i.e., whether the essays were marked by teachers teaching the same course as the student essay. It is believed that the precise assessment of performance in cognitive skills like evaluation, interpretation, and clarification has to be grounded on the assessment of the content adopted. The further empirical evidence that teachers who do not teach the same course as the student essays tend to rate higher than teachers teaching the same course provides further support to the argument.

The correlation analysis also confirms that the measurement of the Wolcott-Lynch assessment rubric is consistent with the existing assessment rubric employed in the two courses. Students' thinking performance has been reliably taken into account by the existing assessment rubric of the course. In other words, whether students are Confused Fact Finders or Biased Jumpers, their performance in different thinking components has been reflected in their performance in the existing assessment framework of the course, to a different extent.

Table 4: Correlation Between Students' Mean Score on Each Thinking Component and Course Grade Point

		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	Overall Thinking Approach	Course Grade Point
Course Grade Point	Pearson Correlation (r)*	.060	.179	.360	.382*	.350	.386	.170	.182	1
	Sig. (two-tailed)	.751	.353	.051	.045	.063	.076	.386	.336	
	N	30	29	30	28	29	22	28	30	30

*Note:**According to Cohen (1988), when $r = 0.1-0.3$ (small correlation), $0.3-0.5$ (moderate correlation), $0.5-1$ (large correlation)

** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 5: Correlation Between Students' Mean Score on Each Thinking Component and Course Grade Point (Counting only Essays Marked by Teachers Teaching the Same Courses)

		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	Overall Thinking Approach	Course Grade Point
Course Grade Point	Pearson Correlation (r)*	.098	.319	.425**	.463**	.401**	.388	.254	.389**	1
	Sig. (two-tailed)	.599	.129	.022	.012	.031	.067	.231	.041	
	N	31	24	29	29	29	23	24	28	36

Notes: * According to Cohen (1988), when $r = 0.1-0.3$ (small correlation), $0.3-0.5$ (moderate correlation), $0.5-1$ (large correlation).

**Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).

Limitation of the Wolcott-Lynch Assessment Rubric

The second Wolcott-Lynch assessment rubric has been effectively adopted to assess students' thinking performance pattern in the two dialogue courses. However, the research team still encountered several difficulties when applying the rubric to specific essay designs. Our conclusions come in three points. First, the Wolcott-Lynch assessment rubric intends to assess thinking by partly taking account of students' ability in implementing and communicating conclusions for the open-ended questions they are addressing (thinking components F and G). However, given that the issues and readings the two courses covered address significant questions with regard to defining lasting beliefs and values in the course of human civilization. They are questions that are too difficult to be solved at ease by students. As such, the primary aim of the two courses is not to ask students to solve the problem by implementing

a solution, but to cultivate their sensitivity to the concerns of human existence, to develop their intellectual inquisitiveness in addressing issues related to their life and society, and to engage them into dialogues that are ultimately about what it means to be human, about the core values of being human in the students' own time and place, about the achievements and limits of human understanding. Since the courses do not seek to ask students to solve problems, but rather to address different lasting ideas and beliefs with critical evaluation, the thinking component F (implement and communicate conclusions for the setting and audience) and G (acknowledge and monitor solutions and limitations through the next steps) are found less applicable in the two courses. In fact, research data shows that more than 30% percent of teachers intentionally leave the two components (F and G) blank when conducting an essay assessment of the rubric.

Second, the rubric did not effectively differentiate a majority of students, as most students clustered at the lowest two categories of the rubric. Over 80 percent of students fell into the classification of Confused Fact Finder and Biased Jumper. These students proceed as if the goal is to find the single "correct" solution, or as if the goal is to stack up evidence and information to support their own conclusions. While the rubric is useful in putting students into distinct categories, it fails to provide insight into the slight difference between students who fall in the same categories. It shall be noted that the distribution of students' thinking performance patterns is consistent with education literatures (Baxter Magolda 2004; King & Kitchener 1994; Wolcott & Lynch 1997). A more detailed rubric with stronger differentiation power when employed in the setting of the first or second year of higher education would be deemed useful in shedding light on our understanding of student thinking in our courses.

Third, the rubric does not address the level of difficulties of different types of knowledge adequately, but rather reduces the understanding of knowledge to a relatively lower level of thinking (Krathwohl 2002). The content covered in the courses deals with prominent theorists and scholars. Each issue discussed in the courses is backed up by sophisticated systems of thought. These lasting questions in the course of human civilization are too big to be digested by students at ease, and a sufficient understanding of the factual, conceptual, procedural knowledge of each system of thought already requires a very high level of thinking. However, the assessment of knowledge understanding tends to be reduced to a rather lower level of thinking in the rubric (Step 1a: Identify and use relevant information). In other words, the knowledge dimension of the rubric does not capture the difficulty and complexity of different types of knowledge covered in the courses sufficiently.

Reports on Individual Extended Studies (Stage 5)

5.1 Extended Studies by Pang Kam-moon and Yeung Yang

Introduction

Students' performance patterns in cognitive complexity had already emerged in early investigations. More than 80 percent of the students demonstrated performance pat-

tern “0” (associated with the Confused Fact Finder) or “1” (associated with the Biased Jumper), regardless of the courses they majored in. These patterns symbolized that students tended to look for a single correct answer or stack up evidence and information to support a preferred conclusion when they were facing an open-ended problem. In particular, about 60 percent of the students failed to identify a single reason for enduring uncertainty, as revealed in the assessment of sample term papers in 2015 fall term.

Students’ Attitudes Toward a Controversial Issue

The investigation of students’ cognitive development solely through assessments of one or two writings is definitely not comprehensive. We invited ten students to join a two-session focus group interview in the 2016 fall term to understand more about student attitudes toward a controversial issue. In the first session, the students were required to read a piece of news in the 1950s about the adverse effects of the indiscriminate use of pesticides on the environment, and then they joined a discussion to comment on the article. Most students expressed the opinion that the evidence provided in the article was complete and adequate, and, in addition, they approved the accusation that the chemical industry was spreading disinformation and public officials were unquestioningly accepting the industry’s claims. Afterward, the students were given another piece of reading material advocating “Better living through chemistry,” giving the argument that many pesticides, such as Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane and 2,4-Dichlorophenoxyacetic acid, were used in controlling insect populations and thereby reducing disease, as well as increasing crop yields. Then, in the second group discussion, quite a large percentage of participating students had changed their mind. They questioned the correctness of the first article and suggested that the article possibly had a prejudicial attitude regarding the uses of synthetic pesticides. However, the students failed to criticize the articles by pointing out the significant uncertainties or the logical flaws or one-sided arguments. Seemingly, albeit aware of the imperfection of authoritativeness, students tended to agree with the viewpoints of renowned figures or to easily alter their attitudes toward controversial questions.

Unaware of the uncertainties when responding to an open-ended problem, the students were short on an ability to “coordinate concrete knowledge of how different people draw different conclusions, based on their own circumstances or biases,” according to Kitchener & Fisher (1990, 55; see also Wolcott 2006, 2–21). This ability is essential to categorizing information conceptually and to deal with problems that do not have single, correct answers. In other words, the interview revealed that the students had difficulty in distinguishing between a problem that called for a single correct answer and an open-ended problem filled with significant, enduring uncertainties.

Self-Assessment of Performance in Cognitive Complexity

A survey in the 2017 spring term granted some insights into students’ perception of their performance patterns in cognitive complexity. Features of various performance patterns were introduced to forty-five students from various disciplines (Wolcott 2006, Appendices A-5), and then they were asked to rate themselves in a perfor-

mance pattern. Students in general overrated their cognitive complexity. About 70 percent of them placed themselves at performance patterns 2 (Perpetual Analyzer) or 3 (Pragmatic Performer). However, teacher assessment of student reflective journals showed a lower rating, mostly falling into the patterns 0 (Confused Fact Finder) or 1 (Biased Jumper).

Later, the students expressed confidence that they had managed to evaluate evidence logically and to consider viable options objectively, and therefore they rated themselves at performance patterns 2 or even 3. In addition, they considered identification and comprehension of information and evidence as a rudimentary ability. Yet the students were not well aware of their weakness in making an inference from information that is intricate and complex. This has been revealed from the assessment of student writings, in particular, for a discussion question that calls for an in-depth analysis of a text or a comparison of two or more texts. Students are hardly able to exhibit better thinking skills if they have yet to grasp the content of the texts. Students' awareness or ability to "self-question" might be essential for them to have better understanding of the texts. We will discuss how this strategy has been implemented in in-class discussion in the second part of this paper.

Enhancement of Performance in Cognitive Complexity

With experiences in the QNA project, we have obtained some insight into the design of discussion topics and learning activities that could maximize or enhance students' thinking skills. Earlier investigation on cognitive complexity shows that the critical thinking skills do not develop automatically as students grow older or are exposed to information or course content (King and Kitchener 1994). Wolcott (2006, 1–13) further states that students are unlikely to develop desired critical thinking skills if educational efforts are aimed at skills that are either too simplistic or too complex.

The example below introduces the design of a discussion question in *Nature* and explains how it encourages student better thinking, especially for those with performance pattern "1" (associated with the "biased jumper"). Rachel Carson in *Silent Spring* (63–83) advocates the success of biological control on eradication of weeds or undesirable pests over chemical control. The discussion question is:

Rachel Carson [2002, 63–83] said, "Biological control has achieved some of its most spectacular successes," for instance, the moth borer, *Cactoblastis cactoum*, was introduced from Argentina in 1925 and by 1935 had cleared prickly pear, *Opuntia* spp., from 95% of the infected land in Queensland and from 75% in New South Wales. Yet, Gruenhagen [2015] in "Pest Control in Ornamental and Landscape Plantings" explains various limitations of biological pest control. Evaluate the limitations that it might have considered for selecting the moth borer as a predator to attack prickly pear.

This question aims not to evaluate the influence of introducing the moth borer on the environment in the course of history, but also to logically and qualitatively evaluate the limitation of biological pest control under the question in concern, instead of jumping to or stacking up evidence to support one's own favorable conclusions as

commonly manifested in performance pattern “1.” Of course, not all students were able to handle the question well. Yet students in general demonstrated better thinking by comparison with the cases where a discussion question is not designed to scaffold students to a high level of thinking. In short, the question designs, for oral discussions or written assignments, are crucial for maximizing student cognitive performance.

In 2017 spring term, another tryout was to incorporate collaborative learning to the model. It starts with a discussion question, for instance:

The International Whaling Commission (IWC) urges Japan to stop killing whale for scientific researches [WWF 215]. What is the justification for that we (as a society) care about the loss of whale?

Students looked on the internet to find articles or news that took different positions. Then, they worked together to identify which reading provided stronger support and which concealed sources of uncertainties. This exercise not only touched upon science and values but also helped students learn to acknowledge the stronger argument no matter whether its position the students would agree with and, in addition, to exhibit awareness of the relative importance of uncertainties in the open-ended question in concern. It is worthy of noticing that students in peer collaborative learning activities generally showed better thinking skills than when working on their own. This collaborative learning activity and the evaluation will be presented in details elsewhere.

The Importance of “Self-Questioning”

Meanwhile, the “Steps for Better Thinking” model has showed limitations when it was applied to the dialogue courses. The model was designed to evaluate critical thinking for problem-solving: “better thinking” is signified by a progressive process of identifying or using information, exploring quality information, prioritizing various solutions, and finally envisioning a problem-solution strategy. Nevertheless, not all discussion questions in the GEFP are problem-solving in nature. When the research team assessed students’ writings using the Wolcott-Lynch rubric, difficulties arose with about 10 percent of the questions, which could be divided into two categories: The first requires students to engage reflection on, for instance, moral values or the nature of science, and the second requires an in-depth understanding of a text, or comparison of two or more texts. Students who choose these questions in general would not seek and compare viable solutions. The model can assess students’ ability to identify and explore information, as well as to go through in-depth analysis and reflection which the question will call for. However, students’ writing on these questions will not reflect their ability to prioritize and envision viable solutions.

Nonetheless, students are possibly not able to exhibit better thinking skills in their writings if they do not have a good understanding of Nature or Humanity texts. Student’s awareness or ability to “self-question” might be essential. Next, Yeung Yang, speaking in the first-person’s point of view, is going to discuss it in details.

Individual Report on Yeung Yang's Study

In this part of the report, I would like to focus on one specific aspect of the QNA core group's reflection—understanding the idea of “uncertainties” in the Wolcott model for Better Thinking. I am interested in thinking more about this for two main reasons. First, the idea has been in contention among teachers, which I think shows both care and caution. Care, because learning to identify and tackle uncertainties goes right to the core of how better thinking is to do with self-regulation and reflective judgment on knowledge and its limits. It is foundational to General Education pedagogy. Caution, because what it means to be teaching uncertainties in the two courses—*In Dialogue with Humanity* and *In Dialogue with Nature*—could be quite different. Could “uncertainties” then be taken as a common and unifying learning outcome for both courses on the program level?

The second reason is that I have been reflecting on my teaching in which questioning is a core activity. My concerns have been, in terms of teaching and assessment, how to improve the questions I design for students, and in terms of comprehension of reading materials, how to encourage and guide students to discern the questions that authors of the texts may have, and to formulate their own as a response. So far, I have been contextualizing questioning as a localized activity in the classroom that serves to enhance students' understanding of key ideas; it is one learning activity among others. The QNA exercise offers an expanded perspective: could questioning be an interpretation of uncertainties so that its potential to contribute to better thinking is recognized and channeled into an essential learning outcome for the course?

“Uncertainties” is one of the two components in Step 1 of the Steps for Better Thinking Rubric (Wolcott 2003, <http://www.WolcottLynch.com>). B0 is the less/least complex performance pattern, where uncertainty is either denied or it is attributed to “temporary lack of information or to own lack of knowledge,” while the most complex level, B4, registers a “complex awareness of ways to minimize uncertainties in coherent, on-going process of inquiry.” Some of the questions raised in our discussion include what uncertainty is with reference to our course content, how far (if at all) it has been modeled and encouraged in our teaching, how important it is among other components of better thinking, and how important it is at all as a learning outcome on the course and program level.

In a footnote to the Steps for Better Thinking Competency Rubric adapted from the Steps for Better Thinking Rubric for students' self-evaluation, “uncertainties” is explained to be relating to “many aspects of the problem, including the problem of definition, availability of solution alternatives, quality and interpretation of information, effects of alternatives, priorities, and values of the decision maker and others, and so on. Temporary uncertainties relate to conditions that will become known in the future (e.g., experts will find the answer, information will become available, or effects will be knowable)” (A-6). This footnote suggests how uncertainties may present themselves in a problem, but acknowledging the pervasiveness of uncertainties does not tell teachers what habits of mind they need to help students cultivate so that uncertainties are taken as a positive and prospective component of better thinking. This is an immediate challenge. Students often begin in the course with the percep-

tion that they lack “background” knowledge for some or all of the texts. This shows uncertainty understood on a personal level rather than a line of objective analysis. One aspect of this problem is how to translate theory to practice in my teaching. Another aspect is better integration of the course and communicating it effectively to students. I began imagining what my classes would look like if I were to offer support for this goal of identifying uncertainties, how the steps in training my students might be.

In *Dialogue with Humanity*, the course I have been teaching since 2009, was founded with a set of core and common focus questions for all teachers. They address ideas that teachers have agreed to be essential in engaging with the text. Teachers also have the freedom to approach the texts as they find meaningful. Every semester, I spend time trying to design new written assignment questions and refining discussion. This process reflects my own changing and ongoing reflection on particular ideas from any one text. It is also a process of alignment between ideas across texts. In addition to questions I design, there is always an open question in the final paper assignment, where students have to formulate their own question. I also encourage them to ask questions in the tutorial discussion as a way of responding to others who speak. These could be questions for clarification, questions that propose alternative interpretations, etc.

Last semester, I strengthened the component of encouraging students’ questioning by designating more time for it in the lecture and the tutorial discussion. I made the decision to do so after having been introduced to Peter Doolittle’s reading strategy model PQ4R in the Association of American Colleges and Universities Summer Institute 2016. PQ4R stands for “Preview, Question, Read, Reflect, Recite, and Review.” Doolittle defines PQ4R as a strategy that “provides an organized approach to reading that focuses on deeper retention and understanding. The strategy is designed for students to use on their own, regardless of the type of reading.” (2016).

The P and Q—Preview and Question—interest me in particular because they highlight the importance of students’ active engagement and their self-generated question, and they are concrete steps aiming at helping students understand and retain ideas as they read. “Question,” for instance, instructs that students write a question that relates the major section of a chapter to the students’ goal for reading the chapter. It also suggests that major headers could be turned into questions. These questions should be formulated before the students start reading and should be kept actively in their minds when they are reading. In other words, the PQ in PQ4R encourages a kind of purposeful reading, as distinguished from reading for pleasure or for specific information. It is an attentive reading that bring the reader’s interests and process of thinking and growing into encounter with the text.

This model offers insight as to how I might re-organize and re-prioritize my teaching around the questions I design and questions that students discover by themselves and for themselves. It also brings to my attention the importance of modeling and training: in the past, I have encouraged students to ask questions, but it is challenging for them if there is no explicit and recurrent instruction and practice. The most important insight, I would argue, is that the skill of P and Q are not only salient as

a strategy of reading, but also for life-long learning, a potential purpose of general education—the ability of students to regulate their way of relating to ideas no one can predict may arise, and to sustain a sense of agency and curiosity in relation to the world.

Doolittle's model has been informed by research that gives positive findings on how questioning contributes to reading comprehension. But they have also pointed to areas needing further research. For instance, in the paper "Teaching Students to Generate Questions: A Review of the Intervention Studies," Rosenshine, Meister, and Chapman (96, 181) argue that "Question generation is an important comprehension-fostering and self-regulatory cognitive strategy." By means of questioning, students' attention is focused on content and on checking their understanding of it. The authors set out to evaluate "questioning" in the form of "procedural prompts" (190)—signal words, generic questions, or question stems, and main idea. However, the pervasive use of questioning has not been met with concomitant rigor in the analyses of differentiation of teachers' practice and action:

[N]one of the authors provided any theory to justify using specific procedural prompts. The theoretical rationale for studying question generation does not provide a teacher or an investigator with specific information on how to develop prompts or how to teach question generation. As a result of this gap between theory and practice, investigators developed or selected a variety of different prompts. (197, emphasis added)

In another paper, by Joseph, Alber-Morgan, Cullen, and Rouse (2016) titled "The Effects of Self-Questioning on Reading Comprehension: A Literature Review," self-questioning is further developed as focusing on self-regulation regarding content of the materials. This paper acknowledges the effectiveness of self-questioning as a strategy for improving reading comprehension performance, applied before, during, or after the readings, and across whole-class, small-group, and one-on-one settings after reviewing thirty-five studies. One of the conclusions is the need for further research on the quality of questions students asked.

I have not done comprehensive literature review on this area of inquiry for the purpose of this report. This will be my next step. What follows is a report on how one student has been "responding" to my goal that he learns and practices identifying uncertainties through questioning and self-questioning. I will call him K. K is an A student and I don't pretend that this is any implication of a correlation between my teaching and the student's ability demonstrated. I rather propose that the way he has asked questions and presented them shows me a vision that I would like to try making my own for my teaching. I have learned from him and others, and gained confidence that this might show me the way to resolve the questions I raise in the beginning of this report. Let me explain.

The first opportunity in the formal classroom course structure for students to practice questioning is the ten-minute written assignment "Lecture Participation." I ask one question at the last ten minutes of a lecture. I aim at asking questions that would help students recall what I have just delivered. These questions serve multiple purposes.

For me, to check if they have been listening or to see if I have been clear in my delivery;
 For students, to spark interest by activating the potential engagement of their personal life and ideas in the texts;
 To acknowledge the importance of their lives and their thinking process in our course;
 To collect evidence about possible biases or habits of thinking that students have that could become barriers to their understanding, and giving them early attention;
 To help them find a question before they start reading (PQ in PQ4R).

In the first lecture on Karl Marx's "Estranged Labour," I gave students a generic stem: "I wonder what more he has to say about . . ." Students were given a small piece of paper to write a short response. K's response is as follows:

I wonder what more he has to say about the non-instrumental nature of human being. How humans were able to share the common nature. Then what about the capitalists?

This is a highly informative response for my teaching. In addition to showing his interests, he also shows a broader, theoretical struggle. He seems to be asking, first, if there is a "common" human nature, whether there are also significant differences among humans, between workers and capitalists, for instance. While this conflates or is confused as to where and how human differences present themselves and where and how to draw the line between nature and its social manifestation, the student nevertheless registers the tension and discrepancy between Marx's goal and the phenomenal world. Secondly, K seems to also have noticed how critical Marx is of capitalism, which he understands as equivalent to particular capitalists. He is concerned that Marx's analysis seems to give more attention to workers. In this assignment, therefore, K shows the ability to identify uncertainty in the scope and reach of Marx's problem, and the persuasiveness of his analysis and proposed solution.

K sent me an email after the first tutorial discussion:

I would like to share something I had in mind during yesterday's tutorial. I tried to erase this thought from my mind but I just couldn't help. While I was reading Marx's [*Wages of Labor*], I was surprised by the fact that I actually agreed to some ideas of Karl Marx, but maybe in a totally different perspective. In modern days, maybe "workers" are human beings as a whole, and "products" are either machine or technology. I believe the more powerful or valuable the technology becomes, humans' existence will have less value. I have recently read some articles about how A.I will replace hundreds of jobs in the near future, even the musicians and artists. In this sense, I think it should be "deprived" labor rather than estranged labor, but I still think it will hurt the value of human's existence. (January 19, 2017)

As information for my teaching, I realize he's bringing something that he believes is Marx's ideas to class while reading something new about him. It's a surprising experience for him. I don't know if he finds the experience positive or negative yet, though it seems he already wants to conclude about the value of humans for the future. There are ambiguities, but there is evidence of ambition in understanding. It is my duty to address this aspiration.

The first written assignment I had from K is a Reflective Journal on the Gospel of Mark. The question is, Among the several instances where the idea of "authority" is addressed, identify one of them to explain how Jesus' authority is questioned. Analyze from the point of view of those who question Jesus whether there are good reasons for doing so.

Has he identified uncertainties? I would argue yes, and these are the excerpts that provide evidence for uncertainties.

When the crowd gathered at Jesus' house, the scribes from Jerusalem were also in the crowd, and they claimed that the power was given to Jesus with the help of Beelzebul, the ruler of demons. Here, although the scribes seem to be questioning the source of Jesus' authority, they made this comment not because they doubted his power, but due to other reasons. [Excerpt 1]

In the above excerpt, he says the scribes "seem to be," showing uncertainty, although without giving reason for this uncertainty. But this uncertainty is quickly closed—he wants to tell us the right answer: they "doubted" not because of this, but for other reasons. So while inadequate reason has been given for prioritizing why they doubt, at least he shows he's reading the text as evidence and that he's aware he has to find reasons to substantiate his claim.

Although it is unclear in what aspects or details Jesus' teachings were different from the scribes, but it must be referring to his persuasive argument that made him look authoritative, since Jesus had not shown any miracles or supernatural power at this point. Therefore, it can be inferred from the text that the scribes didn't regard Jesus as a spiritually higher being, yet treated him as a human rival who threatened their status and reputation, which could have aroused their envy and jealousy to debase Jesus' authority. It is presumable that the inequality was a cultural phenomenon in the Jewish society since it was a usual thing for the scribes to avoid seating with the people who were not lawful. [Excerpt 2]

Here, he suggests it's not clear in the text which aspects of Jesus' teaching the scribes doubt. By doing so, he shows that he's trying to deal with two layers of complexity—he wants to look for the reason for them to doubt and what exactly they are doubting. It's not organized in an articulate way, but the stuff is there.

By saying "it must be," he's giving emphasis, but not demonstrated adequately, how the two choices of either performing miracles or making a persuasive argument

come about. He seems to be arbitrarily landing on these two ideas, without explanation. So the uncertainty is again quickly closed without adequate demonstration of reason (though suggestive).

There is some evidence of his recognition of the complexity of uncertainties, e.g., how to understand the “spirituality” or divinity of Jesus and its impact on the human world/the authorities. If this were organized around the idea of demons, a question could also be developed about whether their doubt is based on fear, and if both the demons and the divine rule them/make an impact on them by fear. Also what could be developed is a hidden question, perhaps, whether the text should be read and understood as a linear narrative. Jesus has done miracles before this part of the text, in textual time, but in historical and mythical time, how do we make sense of the scribes’ knowing or not? These could all be the questions that K’s line of thinking suggests.

Another learning activity is to be prompter twice in the semester. By prompting, I ask students to ask a question in the last twenty minutes of class. They need to draw ballots. Typically, there are three prompters but could go up to six. I find K’s question on the Qur’an revealing, compared to more common student comments, including how the Qur’an seems to draw a strong and rigid line between believers and nonbelievers. Students project themselves as nonbelievers, but the implication of being excluded from its blessing makes some uncomfortable personally. K is seeing more beyond the personal relationship when he asks this generic question: “How am I related to the Qur’an? Does it see me?” I read this as beyond the personal because he is proposing two perspectives of seeing. Instead of jumping to the single conclusion that the Qur’an is irrelevant to non-believers, he is asking how non-believers could be involved in understanding what the Qur’an is and how it teaches. He is setting up a subjective position—his way of reading the Qur’an, while being aware of the objective position the Qur’an presents—its depiction and regard by nonbelievers.

In the second written assignment, K chose to engage Zhuangzi with this question: “Explain how a thinker distinguishes between living and living well in a human life.”

The idea conveyed in Zhuangzi’s anecdotes about usefulness is that what is meaningful can be different to each one of us. . . . A big gourd might be treated as trash by someone, while others might use it to float around the rivers. . . . Therefore, readers might be quick to conclude that distinguishing between living and living well is pointless in the context because according to this idea, a good life can have different definitions based on different perspectives. However, notwithstanding his unclear evidence, Zhuangzi does explicitly signify the existence of an absolute way and a wise life that we ought to pursue. [Excerpt 3]

In the first excerpt above, he is identifying an uncertainty that has to do with a common view, or an opinion—Zhuangzi’s ideas present the importance of staying value-free, to not judge, or even be cynical or fatalistic. He then goes back to the text and counters this view, speaking for Zhuangzi, while acknowledging “unclear” evidence. This is to identify uncertainty in two aspects of engaging with the text.

[One] might argue that everyone is actually living a good life because if human beings were too ignorant to discriminate right and wrong, then, depending on one's own standard, what is good for one could be bad for others, and vice versa. However, there is another key thing to remember, that Zhuangzi acknowledges the existence of an absolute standard which he calls "the Way," "True Master," or "True Lord." Although he states that the source of the Way and how it is formed are unclear. [Excerpt 4]

In this excerpt, he does something similar—engaging with a common view, and then countering it with Zhuangzi, going through the hermeneutic circle, while acknowledging "unclear" articulation. It's clear there's an intention and gesture of regulating the movement of his thinking here.

Almost at the end of term, K sent me another email:

I never expected that I would go through so many challenges this semester. Yet I am sure the teachings and different point of views that I had in UGFH course helped me to face the challenges. Although my speaking and writing in English were not fluent enough to wholly and correctly convey my ideas during tutorials, but I tried nonetheless because I learned from you that, even in a small group of the classmates, people have different thoughts and understandings about the world, and it helps me to grow by just sharing and quietly listening to them . . . and maybe that's the attitude how we should face our lives, trying our best to understand and interact with each other. (May 2, 2017)

There is evidence that he knows his weaknesses as a learner, how he has experienced them, what he is learning from, and how it may be relevant in a broader way, in relation to others.

In conclusion, this new kind of questioning hopefully gets them to focus on what they have (ability to engage = questioning) and not what they don't have—e.g., "background" or prior knowledge they always think will give someone an advantage, convenient labels that are influential but may not be true, over-emphasis on assessment components, knocking off assignments rather than complex thinking we require of them as the purpose of the course.

As mentioned, I have benefited fully from this experiment, which will continue. For now, I have crystallized the following:

Questioning and self-questioning need to be explicitly walked through together. It is a new mode of learning for many and needs repeated practice.

Don't assume that if students don't ask questions, they are not interested or curious about the texts.

Repetition of key ideas and their variation important—don't underestimate human forgetfulness.

Topics specific to each text and topic that is generic to inquiries into humanity are both important and must be explicitly pointed out.

When something is an interpretation, always point it out explicitly and the possibility that there could be other interpretations. They tend to think of all questions as aiming for explanation (one explanation, closing off and moving on). But we need interpretations, not explanations too soon.

Explain to students what process of thinking “analysis” involves (a student asked me what I mean by “to analyze”).

Be prepared for criticisms from students and perplexities that there are more and more questions. Emphasize that I do so not to test their knowledge, but for all of us to share the bits and pieces we know and also to show how open-ended and complex some ideas could be, and to encourage them to not be afraid of pursuing questions, which could be an equally—if not more—choiceworthy intellectual activity compared to chasing after answers too soon.

There is a lot to be done.

5.2 Report on Gao Xin’s Study

a. Introduction

Previous studies in this report have been working on objective assessment of students’ thinking performance by looking into their performance in term essay writing. The two rounds of objective assessment, employing two different versions of Wolcott-Lynch assessment rubric, indicated that a majority of students were either “Confused Fact-finder” or “Biased Jumper.” From the eye of teachers, most students were only capable of adequately performing several low-order thinking skills in terms of identification of relevant information or gathering limited information in support of their conclusions. However, students performed weakly in higher-order thinking skills related to exploration of perspectives, prioritization of alternatives, and envisioning in terms of further perfecting conclusions with additional information.

While the data suggest that there is still much room in developing students’ thinking performance, what remain unclear to teachers is: *How do students understand their own thinking pattern?* The question addresses the issue of self-efficacy and is believed to provide further hints to teachers in better understanding students’ performance. It is well established that accurate self-evaluation enables students to see what they have mastered and identify what needs further work (McMillian & Hearn 2008). It also encourages students to commit more resources to continued study by leveraging their learning motivation and setting higher goals in the future (Schunk 1995).

Based on the Wolcott-Lynch assessment model described in previous sections, this extended study seeks to ask two research questions: (1) *What is the distribution of students’ self-reported level of thinking pattern before and after taking the course?* (2) *Do students show changes in their perception over their thinking pattern after taking the course?* The extended study serves also as a practice for students to reflect on their thinking performance, with guidance from the assessment model. Guided reflection enables students to go one step backward to think about what they

have achieved, to identify area of confusions and to create new goals (McMillian & Hearn 2008). Reflection benefits students by bringing their unclear or ambiguous work or skills into conscious scrutiny and to make students aware of possibilities for further improvement. With the theoretically and empirical grounded Wolcott-Lynch assessment model, students are presented with clear standards for self-evaluation and achievable working steps in how to advance into a higher stage of thinking.

b. Self-Assessment of Thinking Performance

The extended study about self-assessment on thinking pattern was conducted in the 2016–17 spring semester. A version of the Wolcott-Lynch assessment rubric was distributed to students at the beginning and at the end of the semester. The entry-exit assessment allows teacher to better understand students' self-perceived achievement of thinking performance before and after taking the course and also their longitudinal changes of self-perception within a semester of time. The Wolcott-Lynch assessment rubric (see Appendix 1) employed in this study is designed primarily for student self-evaluation or to be used for student feedback (Wolcott 2006). To avoid overly-discouraging students or students being overwhelmed by the complicated descriptions of thinking patterns, the rubric adopted focuses only on the positive aspects of thinking performance with shorter descriptions, but to focus more on ways students can improve their performance. As a result, the cells originally denoting the negative aspects of thinking performance are left blank. The rubric shares the same arrangement of columns shown in the rubric discussed in the previous sections where each of the four key thinking steps (Identify, Explore, Prioritize, and Envision) for comprehensive evaluation is divided into two thinking components, so it is once again theoretically and empirically grounded in well-founded developmental models in psychology.

c. Positive Changes in Self-Efficacy

Analysis suggests that the overall thinking approach of students advanced to a higher level of thinking, i.e., a general development of cognitive complexity is observed among a majority of students over a semester of time. At the end of the semester, while a majority of students still found their overall reasoning strategies meeting the performance pattern of *Biased Jumper* and *Perpetual Analyzer*—i.e., they tend to simply stack up evidence and information in support of their conclusions or, as if the goal of reasoning is to establish an unbiased, balanced view of evidence and information from different points of view, a small portion of students advanced into the stage of *Pragmatic Performer*, where they tend to reason in order to formulate a well-founded conclusion based on objective consideration of priorities across viable alternatives. An overall positive change in self-efficacy in thinking is observed among students.

However, no students found themselves fulfilling the standard of *Strategic Reviser*, which requires students to constantly and consciously look back, to reflect, to continuously revise and polish their conclusion over time with additional evidence, at the entry and exit assessment. In another words, though development in cogni-

tion is revealed at the end of the semester, a majority of students still tend to look at a problem superficially, to stack up information quantitatively. They also tend to ignore the complexity of the problems and address problems with similar types of perspective, or they tend to produce a list of pros and cons, listing out many possible perspectives when addressing the issue but resisting selecting a perspective that they find most appropriate in addressing the issue. A positive interpretation of the findings would be that students are aware of the possibilities for further advancement.

d. A Gap Between Perpetual Analysis and Commitment in Decision-making?

Further analysis of thinking components suggests that a general development in cognition has also been observed in all thinking steps (Identify, Explore, Prioritize, and Envision) over a semester. A majority of students perform adequately in conducting single abstraction and abstract mapping, i.e., they find themselves capable of coordinating concrete knowledge of how different people draw different conclusions, based on their own circumstances or biases, and to relate abstracted knowledge and understanding to each other. They are good at doing analysis, extracting, abstracting, and categorizing information. However, they also considered themselves relatively weak at prioritizing alternatives and implementing conclusions, i.e., they are weak at coordinating several sides or contexts for justification and establishing principles to select the most appropriate options. Most of them fail to advance to the stage of selection, prioritization, and elimination. They might see themselves as good at including all possible alternatives, but they do not perform adequately on formulating sets of standards in order to select the most important relevant information, to provide reasonable justification to rank options, to maintain objectivity while establishing reasonable priorities for reaching a well-founded conclusion. They are also weak at envisioning and directing strategic innovation, engaging in an ongoing process that requires them to continuously reflect on and revise their knowledge or to articulate the limitations of a solution as a natural part of addressing open-ended problems.

The findings suggest that a gap between perpetual analysis and decision making might exist. A possible reason could be a lack of experience. Frontline experience suggests that students are more prone to relativistic thinking than to be committed in risk-taking-decision-making. They were unfamiliar with the exercise of prioritization across alternatives and elimination of valid and legitimate proposals in their previous studies. In some focus group studies we conducted on other occasions, students often revealed their frustration when they touched upon the issue of university transition. Part of the worry arises when students become aware that a completely different habit of thinking is required in university studies. Describing the common practices of thinking in their previous intellectual training in high school as repetition and memorization of information or, in better scenarios, objective evaluation and a balanced list of pros and cons, students often found their university transition frustrating when they realize that they have to deal with open-ended questions that have no clear marking scheme or with no clear answers.

A sense of insecurity in dealing with “ambiguous” open-ended questions and

a lack of practice in going beyond analyzing for elimination and selection is understandable. However, students risk the danger of trapping themselves in relativism where they find all available options entirely valid and fail to make choices that affirm their roles and responsibilities within a relativistic world (Baxter Malgoda 2004). In William Perry's world, they are trapped in the stage of relativism and fail to advance to a higher stage of commitment *within* relativism (Perry 1970). Commitment within relativism is a stage where knowledge from other sources is integrated with personal experience and reflection and to formulate guiding principles for beliefs and behaviors. Students are reflexive and are committed to values that matter to them, and they learn to take responsibility for their committed beliefs in this stage. It is also a stage where students accept uncertainty as a fact in their lives, but are capable of constructing meanings in the sea of relativistic beliefs.

e. Some Further Reflections

When read along with other studies about objective assessment of thinking conducted in this report, the research findings in this extended study might seem to contradict their results. One does not need to be too quick to conclude that students tend to overrate their thinking performance and thus devalue the significance of this research. There are at least two reasons. First, the objective assessment makes use of students' term papers, the "signature assignment" of the course, as the *only* research material. However, particular essay designs do not necessarily address all core thinking components in the assessment model—students might have performed badly in that particular assignment but demonstrated advanced thinking in other assessment components of the courses. In fact, whether a reflective journal or essay represents *the* best proxy of students' thinking performance remains open (Andrew 2003; Hammer & Griffiths 2015; Norton, 1990) when critics challenge the reliability of written assignments for their underlying measurement of how learners write (Race 2009). This is not to devalue the significance of objective assessment of thinking through written products, but only to suggest that self-assessment of thinking could possibly enrich our understanding of students' thinking performance. To examine whether students are incapable in precise self-assessment, extended studies with concrete justification from students would be necessary. Second, even if students do tend to overrate their cognitive ability, the study could shed light on illustrating the fact. It provides hints to teachers to be aware of the tendency of students to overestimate their cognitive abilities. The tendency of overestimation must be made explicit to students, as inaccurate self-assessment could misguide students' goal setting, dampen their learning motivation, and inhibit cognitive development (Schunk 1995).

The final question goes beyond the debate between subjective and objective assessment of thinking performance, but to address the issue of development. It asks whether there is an upper limit of thinking level that a General Education (GE) program could develop. The debate on whether teaching and the development of critical thinking is disciplinary remains unresolved. The central concern is the role of knowledge in scaffolding better thinking (Krathwohl 2002; Perin 2011; Simpson et al. 1997). If the development of thinking, or critical thinking in a more accurate

sense, has to be domain-specific, it involves discipline-specific knowledge. Would this be in tension with the philosophy and practice of GE in our current setting, when GE tends to recruit students from a wide range of academic backgrounds who might be unfamiliar to what is to be studied? When the primary aim of GE is to provide students with a taste of unfamiliar knowledge from different disciplines, to cultivate their intellectual inquisitiveness and sensitivity, and to engage them in issues with lasting significance to humanity, instead of building specialized knowledge, then how far the development of better thinking could a GE program reach and which level of thinking shall a GE program target? The question will be more important for its practical implication in teaching when we take account of the fact that the development of better thinking often requires specific and tailor-made stimulus in learning (Fischer 1980).

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List of Appendices

1. Cognitive Complexity Assessment Form (Adapted from Figure 3 in Lynch and Wolcott's *Idea Paper* [2001])
2. Performance Patterns Assessment Rubric (From A-5 of the Appendices to Susan K. Wolcott's *Handbook* [2005])
3. Figure 2 of Lynch's and Wolcott's *Idea Paper*
4. Figure 3 of Lynch and Wolcott's *Idea Paper*
5. Performance Patterns Rubric (Simplified Version) (From A-6 of the Appendices to Susan Wolcott's K. *Handbook* [2005])
6. Sample of teacher's assessment applying the assessment rubric shown in Appendix 1
7. "Scaffolding Questions" (from Lynch and Wolcott's *Idea Paper*)

Notes

1. The four areas are: Chinese cultural heritage; nature, science and technology; society and culture; and self and humanity.

2. CUHK began with three constituent colleges and subsequently saw the addition of a fourth one. Anticipating a substantial expansion of the student population, the university strove to create small communities within the university by establishing five more colleges. Each of the nine colleges runs its own dormitories and facilities and delivers its own College General Education courses designed in accordance with its tradition and mission.

3. The seven reports of the First QNA Cohort gave us a good overview of the different ways and scales in which QNA can be adopted. Given the small scale of GEFP (consisting of two courses of three credits each), and given the heavy teaching workload (six sections per term per teacher), we could not engage our teachers heavily in a process-writing approach or assign as many as nine to twelve writing assignments in one course. Presently, each of our dialogue courses assigns two to three short essays and one long essay. We decided therefore not to track the student's intellectual development by following his or her performance at every stage in the same course. Instead, we will look at the end product of each course, i.e., a student's performance in the final term paper for, say, In Dialogue with Humanity at the end of the first year of study (term 2), and then the same student's final term paper for In Dialogue with Nature in the middle of the second year (term 1). Half of our students take the two courses in the sequence of Humanity followed by Nature; another half take them in a reverse order. We will track the students' development with an equal number of samples drawn from students of both sequences.

4. Formed in September 2014 comprising four members, namely, Julie Chiu, Gao Xin, Pang Kam-Moon, and Wong Wing-hung.

5. It was from the interim report of Lynchburg University that the QNA team at CUHK learned about the Wolcott-Lynch model. Lynchburg's interim report reads, "As part of the Senior Symposium and the associated Lynchburg College Symposium Readings (LCSR) program, faculty are trained in the use of the Wolcott-Lynch model for evaluating critical or higher order thinking. This is a developmental model of higher order thinking which posits that thinking skills develop over time and that a general level of higher order thinking skill can be determined and promoted through examination of written work. The scale for the Wolcott-Lynch model runs from zero to four, with zero being the most basic type of thinking in which there is always a correct answer to any problem or question, and four being highly functional strategic thinking that balances diverse views and understanding of issues to construct knowl-

edge and draw well supported conclusions. For undergraduate students such as those examined in this project, a goal of level two thinking upon graduation is a significant achievement. Level two thinkers understand issues and problems in a balanced fashion and control their individual biases in an attempt to reach sound conclusions based upon evidence.”

6. And whether Wolcott and Lynch have been inexact in the equivalence they seem to draw between “critical thinking” and “better thinking,” “high-order thinking” and high level of “cognitive complexity.”

7. The team of ten was formed in December 2014 with the following members: Cheung Derek, Julie Chiu, Gao Xin, Ho Wai-Ming, Kwok Samson, Lam To-Kam, Pang Kam-Moon, Wong Wing-Hung, Yang Jie, and Yu Chi-chung.

8. The participating teachers were: Cheng Wai-Pang, Cheung Hang-Choeng, Julie Chiu, Fong Sing-Ha, Gao Xin, Ho Wai-Ming, Hoi Wan-Heng, Lai Chi-Wai, Lam To-Kam, Li Ming, Ng Ka-Leung, Pang Kam-Moon, Wong Bon-Wah, Wong Wing-Hung, Wu Jun, Yang Jie, Yeung Yang, and Yu Chi-chung.

9. To ensure uniformity in the student background, caution was taken to ensure the first batch of forty-eight papers were sampled from students (1) who had taken the first dialogue course in Term 2, 2014–15, with a passing grade, when they were in their first year of study, (2) who had not taken two dialogue courses in the same term, and (3) who had not immediately registered for the second dialogue course in the summer term (2015). Subsequently, these students were traced in Term 1, 2015–16.

10. Not all of the forty-eight students went on to take the second dialogue course in Term 1, 2015–16, so fewer than forty-eight papers were collected for analysis.

11. The seven members were: Julie Chiu, Gao Xin, Lam To Kam, Pang Kam-Moon, Wu Jun, and Yeung Yang.

12. The 2006 *Handbook* includes several different rubrics, each tailor-made for a specific usage. The rubric we adopted was the one entitled “Steps for Better Thinking Rubric” (A-5 in *Handbook*), which is included as our Appendix 2 under the title of “Performance Patterns Assessment Rubric” to distinguish it from Appendix 1. A simpler one designed for distribution to students that is entitled “Steps for Thinking Competency Rubric” (A-6 in *Handbook*) was used by a teacher in her extended study, which can be found below in Appendix 5.

13. The fifteen teachers were: Cheng Wai-Pang, Cheung Hang-Choeng, Julie Chiu, Fong Sing-Ha, Gao Xin, Hoi Wan-Heng, Lai Chi-Wai, Lam To-Kam, Li Ming, Ng Ka-Leung, Pang Kam-Moon, Wong Wing-Hung, Wu Jun, Yeung Yang, and Yu Chi-chung.

Steering through Uncharted Waters: The “Narrative Assessment” as a Corrective Factor in the (New?) Core Curriculum of the University of Navarra

Álvaro Sánchez-Ostiz and José M. Torralba

In October 2013, the University of Navarra, a private not-for-profit Catholic-inspired university in Spain,² assigned a committee for the development of a core curriculum. Its earliest results, in the academic course 2014–15, were two core texts seminars offered for the first time to students of two schools. Rather than deal with specific contents, those new courses were intended to teach basic habits for the life of the mind: how to read (carefully), to write (persuasively), and to argue (thoughtfully). The initiative did not start from scratch, given that the University of Navarra had provided an interdisciplinary program since its foundation in 1952 as a part of its educational mission and Catholic identity. Nevertheless, the new interdisciplinary program was a major innovation in our country’s university culture of professionally oriented degrees. Although we had in mind a clear destination—to train in a practice of active search for the truth through a Great Books approach—we had to navigate uncharted waters across the rigidity imposed by our tradition of higher education. After six semesters, the Core Curriculum at the University of Navarra has grown and strengthened its position: during the academic year 2017–18, fifteen core texts seminars will be open to students of ten schools, fifteen faculty members will be active in the project, and the intensive Inter-College Itinerary will enter its second year. Obviously, there is still work to be done, but this experience allows us to be optimistic and has persuaded us that a cross-disciplinary, integrative, and seminar-based program is achievable in a European university of Napoleonic tradition.

However, evaluating whether our students are reaching those essential intellectual habits we were longing for goes way beyond just attesting to the enthusiasm among the teaching and learning community.

The quantifiable consolidation of our Core Curriculum program has been due to different factors, among which three are worth mentioning: the wholehearted support given by the institution, the encouraging practical help we have found in the conversation with other institutions’ individuals through the ACTC, and, to a no lesser extent, the evaluation of the development by students and faculty, in which the narrative approach has been a reliable beacon from the beginning.

In this chapter, we will first present the choices for modeling our new program in the context of the institutional mission and of the restraints imposed by our educational tradition; second, the action steps made for the improvement of the new project will be explained, from the first meetings of a Committee for the Core Curriculum to the launching of our flagship project: a two-tier program that offers a track based

on core texts seminars; third, we will describe which procedures of narrative assessment have been implemented, and how those have helped us adjust course; finally some concluding remarks for further improvement will be added.

Institutional Choices: Napoleonic Tradition, the Core Curriculum, and the University of Navarra

The first paragraph of the document “Principles of the Core Curriculum,”³ dated October 2014, defines the University of Navarra’s institutional mission in the following terms:

1. Since its beginnings, and in accordance with its mission, the University of Navarra promotes the development of its students’ personalities in all aspects; it contributes to scientific, human and Christian formation; it promotes solidarity and fraternity in students, which is reflected in acts of service to society, primarily through the exercise of one’s own profession; it develops in students a critical capacity and a knowledge of problems, which permits them to freely form their own convictions in a legitimate pluralism; it aspires to be a place of community, study and friendship, for people of diverse political and ideological tendencies.

Some lines further, paragraph 6 delineates five objectives for the kind of instruction that the Navarra interdisciplinary program tries to offer:

6. The objective of Core Curriculum is to help students:

- Reach intellectual maturity through study and reflection on questions of human existence.
- Acquire a global interpretation of reality on their own, that gives meaning to their lives and serves as a space of integration for the rest of the subjects they take in their degree
- Develop their capacity to judge as well as their intellectual liberty.
- Cultivate their moral and esthetic sensitivity, through art, literature, and intellectual dialogue.
- Discover the truth, good, and beauty both in the world and in the human person, who, by having been made in the image of God has been giving infinite dignity.

Another significant document in this regard, the university’s “Statement of Core Values,”⁴ also contemplates interdisciplinarity as one of its seven main principles, along with work, freedom, respect, responsibility, service, and international dimension:

Interdisciplinarity: The University’s mission statement—to seek and present the truth—is a collective enterprise that requires dialogue between spe-

cialists from different academic areas. With this approach, the diversity of the sciences is mutually enriching, students acquire an overall vision and knowledge is not overly compartmentalized.

The means to achieve those ends have varied over the years. In the beginning, from 1952 on, students were required to take lecture-based courses on theology and ethics regardless of their major. However, from the creation of the Institute for Anthropology and Ethics in 1998, the university had been quite explicitly promoting a more liberal education approach to its programs.

Further down this road, the need to set up a new core curriculum at the University of Navarra arose about five years ago, when the institution had decided to start an in-depth conversation on our identity as a research-oriented university of Catholic inspiration. This dialogue aimed not at changing the mission but at fostering reflection about it, and at invigorating our institutional culture. Great efforts are also being put into strengthening the intellectual community among faculty members. The challenges we face are the usual ones: career pressure, multitasking, and sociocultural trends toward individualism.

The Core Curriculum at the University of Navarra: Grafting or Raising?

In 2011 one of the authors of this chapter was a visiting scholar at the Committee on Social Thought of The University of Chicago. One day, as he was walking through the campus, he read the following ad: “Why did Socrates die?” It was part of “The Core” activities for freshmen. In the following months, he learned more about that program and got to know some of the students and faculty involved, and he could read through its exciting and controversial history, dating back to 1919 at Columbia.⁵ Though the idea of a core curriculum did not appear unfamiliar to him, the teaching methods were entirely new: seminar discussions based on the reading of core texts and essay assignments. These seemed to be a more proper pedagogy for an interdisciplinary program than what is usual in Europe, since the primary aim of a core curriculum demands the basic intellectual habits. In other words, helping students grow in critical thinking requires teaching how to read, write, and argue.

Recently, after reading the *Apology* in one of the new core texts courses at Navarra, a student asked: “If Socrates’ arguments were so sound and convincing, why did the jury finally condemn him?” The answer sparked a lively discussion: “Well, unfortunately, we live in a world where reason does not always win.” This kind of intellectual conversation is precisely what the University of Navarra has committed to offer its students since it was founded in 1952: dialogues on complex questions that require reflection and have regard to the preceding great conversation. Some time ago, a well-known Spanish philosopher visited Navarra and gave a lecture on Socrates for undergraduates. He began by saying that, were he ever to meet an oracle and given the opportunity to ask two—and only two—questions, he would choose: “Why did Socrates die?” and “Why did Jesus Christ die?” The answers to them offer fundamental insights into the interpretation of our culture and, thus, to understand who we are.

In this sense, the University of Navarra's Catholic identity has been crucial in maintaining the interest in educating the whole person throughout the decades and in nurturing the attitude necessary for joining the great human discussion: engagement with the truth.⁶ With this pledge, the nonideological character of the core curriculum is safeguarded, since it aspires to provide every student with the tools for a free, personal, and responsible pursuit of the truth, and not to pass on certainties through the exercise of power. By its nature, education must have a liberating effect on the person, while ideology enslaves people, intellectually, politically, or even religiously, which would openly contradict the core principles our institution is committed to. So, at least in its most visible outcome, the pedagogics of core texts courses combines our institution's founding values and updated methods. That is, we would like to think that the process has not entailed grafting a strange branch into an adult tree, but the natural growth of tenets that existed from the beginning. A quick look at the model of university in force in Spain in recent centuries may be useful to better understand this approach's novelty.

A Core Curriculum within the French Tradition of Higher Education?

Since the mid-nineteenth century, universities in Spain, as in many other European and Latin American countries, follow the French (or the "Napoleonic") tradition of higher education,⁷ the leading aim of which is to prepare professionals. Students must declare their major before entering the university and usually take courses almost exclusively on their specific subject throughout their four years of study. Consequently, including general education requirements in the curriculum has been barely feasible. Regarding the teaching methods, lectures and textbooks are still privileged over seminars and the study of primary sources. The average number of students per class usually ranges from 50 to 150 students, which prevents the students from receiving feedback, since one faculty is usually in charge of a group with very scarce or no help from teaching assistants.

At the institutional level, universities have a vertical and rigid structure: Department, School, Rectorate. There is nothing like the "college" of American universities, which takes care of the education provided to all undergraduate students. Each department is usually responsible for one degree or one area of knowledge and looks with suspicion at other colleagues approaching their expertise's field. In sum, interdisciplinary research, programs, or degrees are still uncommon. Certainly, the so-called Bologna Process in Europe favored some reforms in the past decade that have strained to improve teaching methodologies, but which have often been interpreted as a chance for stressing the entrepreneurial character of the degrees, so that the situation remains substantially as described.⁸

Consequently, both to fulfill the institutional aspirations and to cope with the restraints imposed by our university system, it became necessary to make a new effort to clarify the purpose of the core curriculum, to update the pedagogy, and to engage faculty interested in the project.

Action Steps: From a Lecture-Based to a Core Curriculum Model

The Committee for the Core Curriculum

The first action step in this regard was the appointment, in October 2013, of the Committee for the Core Curriculum, composed of six members: the deans of the School of Humanities and the School of Theology, the director of the Institute for Anthropology and Ethics, and three representatives from the Rectorate (offices of the Provost and of Student Affairs). The committee initially gathered experiences and suggestions. Along this line, in December 2013 they invited Professor Roosevelt Montás, director of the Center for the Core Curriculum at Columbia University, to give a lecture in a faculty seminar on “The Identity of the University Institution.” Acquiring first-hand knowledge of how a liberal arts college works within a research university proved crucial to making the case that our project was not just commendable but a utopian idea: it had already been in place for almost a century and even with great success in some of the most renowned universities in the world.

The committee also undertook a better intellectual justification for the idea of an interdisciplinary program. A substantial outcome of this process has been a five-page document, prepared in collaboration with the different schools, on the “Principles of the Core Curriculum of University of Navarra,” which was validated by the Rectorate in October 2014. The document provides the rationale for our program,⁹ describes its future development, and addresses common misperceptions among the faculty.¹⁰

The “Tradition and Innovation” Workshop as a Catalyzer

Some months after Roosevelt Montás’s seminar in Pamplona, in June 2013, the two authors of this chapter took part in the project “Tradition and Innovation: Liberal Arts Education through Core Texts,” which clarified our choices¹¹ and worked as a catalyzer on our campus for three reasons:

First, although the institution was determined to improve its current curriculum, it was not evident how to do it: core texts seminars came as the answer, and at least two faculty members had direct experience of doing it. So the weeks in Columbia and Yale furnished us with the necessary expertise and intellectual impulse.

Second, the “Tradition and Innovation” experience was presented together with the document “Principles of the Core Curriculum of University of Navarra” to the over 100 professors in three seminars in Autumn 2013. The intellectual and pedagogical benefits of core texts seminars could be explained in detail, and some faculty volunteered to teach them. In addition, the experience of the Tradition and Innovation 2013 had continuity: two other professors, G. Insausti and M. Cruz, attended the Workshop 2016 at the universities of Columbia and Chicago.

Third, given the lack of such a tradition in Spanish universities, to be part of a community of liberal education institutions through the ACTC reinforces our mission, provides us with helpful resources, and has significantly enhanced the perception of the Core Curriculum among students and faculty.

Following this line, the University of Navarra co-organized the conference “Liberal Arts and Sciences Education and Core Texts in the European Context,” held at the Amsterdam University College (September 11–12, 2015), as well as the conference “European Liberal Arts Education: Renewal and Re-formation” at the University of Winchester, UK (September 1–2, 2017). Both events are the visible peaks of an emerging network of European institutions interested in liberal education. From a Spanish perspective, we also see the opportunity to share our experience with Latin American universities. For instance, one of the authors of this paper gave a presentation on teaching core texts seminars at a meeting in Chile in October 2014 for universities from ten different countries.¹²

Toward a Two-Tier Core Curriculum

The first two seminar-based core text courses were created in 2014–2015¹³ with the purpose of reinvigorating the current program. This is structured as follows: each major (degree program) consists of four years of study, or 240 credits, of which eighteen are included in the following four compulsory courses: Anthropology (six credits, two semesters, first year), Ethics (six credits, two semesters, second year), two elective three-credit courses called “Cultural Keys” (one semester each on history, literature, science, or theology, third and fourth years). Thus, our curriculum of interdisciplinary studies represents 7.5 percent of the credits a student needs to graduate, doing at most 2.5 percent of his studies through Great Books seminars.

Therefore, a more robust and ambitious midterm project was needed to improve the Navarra Core Curriculum. The idea of implementing a full-fledged program with a significant number of credits, based on core texts seminars and obligatory for the over 1,500 students entering each year, was not feasible. During the week we spent in Yale, we learned that their Directed Studies program was optional, selective, and consisted of six semesters of study. Stimulated by this example, we envisioned throughout the workshop a two-tier program:

- a. The “ordinary track,” in which the eighteen required credits of Anthropology, Ethics, and Cultural Keys are imparted in lectures for large groups of 50–100 students, but also in an increasing number of optional core texts seminars for groups of 25 students max.
- b. The optional “intensive track,” where students take the same eighteen required credits but taught exclusively as core texts seminars.

Despite the ostensible benefits, the new idea had to get to grips with seemingly unassailable obstacles: to raise more funding, to convince different schools to join the new track, to coordinate class time schedules (initially the most unsurmountable hindrance), and, most importantly, to find faculty interested in and capable of teaching it. Fortunately, the supportive atmosphere described above made it possible, and

the “intensive track” began in September 2015 under the name Inter-College Itinerary (hereafter ICI, “Itinerario Interfacultativo” in Spanish).¹⁴ In 2016–17 freshmen of four schools (Architecture, Communication, Humanities, and Law) enrolled in the ICI from the beginning of their studies, so that they are to become the first cohort of students to complete the whole track of ICI in 2020 and will provide perspective over the whole educative process of the program.

A selection of the syllabi included below can give an overview of the seminars: five belong to the ICI, and three belong to the “ordinary track,” offered to the students of one school. Each professor was free to configure their course, both in the arrangement and in the selection of texts. In fact, even though the document “Principles of the Core Curriculum” endorses core texts seminars, it allows other kinds of courses as part of the curriculum, and there is no common or obligatory list of readings for core texts seminars. Faculty can freely design their own syllabus, but they must submit it to the Committee on the Core Curriculum for approval. This has proved to be the right decision, since, first, our focus was more on the pedagogy than on the content of the courses, and, second, faculty feel more comfortable and prone to teach new courses when they are granted such freedom.

Syllabi of Great Books Seminars in the ICI

Ethics J. M. Torralba	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • J. Ortega y Gasset, <i>La rebelión de las masas</i> • E. Waugh, <i>Brideshead Revisited</i> • Plato, <i>Apology</i> of Socrates • Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> • W. Shakespeare, <i>Macbeth</i> • St Augustine, <i>Confessions</i> • Homer, <i>Odyssey</i>
Literature, Violence, and Liberties R. García	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • F. Douglass, <i>A Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave</i> • H. Lee, <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> • C. Achebe, <i>Things Fall Apart</i> • R. Kapuszinski, <i>The Shadow of the Sun</i> • P. Levi, <i>If This Is a Man</i> • H. Arendt, <i>Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil</i> • Solzhenitzyn, <i>Matryona's Home</i> • Akhmatova, <i>Requiem</i>

Great Books of Greece and Rome A. Sánchez-Ostiz	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sophocles, <i>Oedipus Rex</i> • Plato, <i>Phaedo</i> • Thucydides, <i>History of the Peloponnesian War</i> • Xenophon, <i>Anabasis</i> • Plautus, <i>Miles gloriosus</i> • Cicero, <i>Pro Archia poeta</i> • Virgil, <i>Aeneid</i>
Anthropology M. Cruz	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sophocles, <i>Oedipus Rex</i> • R.L. Stevenson, <i>Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde</i> • M. de Unamuno, <i>Abel Sánchez</i> • W. Golding, <i>Lord of the Flies</i> • F. Scott Fitzgerald, <i>The Great Gatsby</i> • Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, “Live Not by Lies”
Great Protagonists of the Bible F. Varo	<p>Selected passages from the Bible on the following figures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First settlers of the earth: Gen. 1–11 • Patriarchs: Gen. 12–35 • Moses: Exod. 1–24 • Samson and the Judges: Judic. 1–5; 13–21 • David: 1 Sam 16–21; 24; 26; 31; 2 Sam 1–2; 4–7; 11–19; 1 Reg 1–2 • Solomon I: 1 Reg 1–11 • Solomon II: Cant; Sap • Jeremiah: Jer. • Tobias: Tob. • Jesus I: Luc Lc 1–14 • Jesus II: Luc 15–24 • Paul: Act 9–28

Syllabi of Great Books Seminars in the “Ordinary Track”

Classic Characters in English and American Literature (School of Economics) R. Baena	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • M. Shelley, <i>Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus</i> • K. Chopin, “The Story of an Hour” • W. Faulkner, “A Rose for Emily” • H. Lee, <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> • J. Swift, “A Modest Proposal” • S. Beckett, <i>Waiting for Godot</i> • G. George Orwell, “Shooting an Elephant” • N. Gordimer, “The Ultimate Safari”
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Modern Literature and Film (School of Architecture) G. Insausti	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • O. Welles, <i>F for Fake</i> • Ch. Baudelaire, <i>The Flowers of Evil</i> • Hitchcock, <i>The Rope</i> • S. Zweig, <i>Letter from an Unknown Woman</i> • J. Frankenheimer, <i>The Train</i> • R. M. Rilke, <i>Letters to a Young Poet, First Elegy</i> • R. Redford, <i>A River Runs Through It</i> • E. Thomas, Wilfred Owen, <i>War Poems</i> • R. Rossen, <i>The Hustler</i> • Dinesen, <i>Babette's Feast</i> • J. Huston, <i>The Dead</i> • S. Heaney, <i>Singing School</i>
Literature, Power, and Leadership (School of Economics) A. Sánchez-Ostiz	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Xenophon, <i>Anabasis</i> • Plato, <i>Krito</i> • F. Lope de Vega, <i>Fuenteovejuna</i> • W. Shakespeare, Richard III • T. More, <i>Utopia</i> • Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, <i>Castaways</i> • J. Conrad, <i>Heart of Darkness</i> • W. Golding, <i>Lord of the Flies</i> • Achebe, <i>Things Fall Apart</i>

In addition to the new courses specifically designed for the ICI,¹⁵ other actions during the last three years have helped the consolidation of the program: an inaugural lecture “On the Aims of Education,”¹⁶ a series of practical seminars on teaching methodology,¹⁷ and, more significantly, a six-hour workshop “Rhetorical and Argumentative Skills” that all students in the itinerary are required to take at the beginning of the spring semester.

The need for such sessions was felt already in the first core texts courses taught in 2014–15, when we verified that the seminars’ running was compromised by superficial reading and poor verbal expression. A significant number of the attendants simply overlooked the nuances in the texts’ arguments, or that the text was part of a wider conversation. During the seminar sessions, some spoke up to share feelings rather than to put forward their own stand. Others brought in evidence strange to the text, composed merely descriptive essays, or gathered insights without a line of argument.

In such weaknesses, two different difficulties affecting the educational process could be distinguished: ignorance of the goals and lack of skills. On the one hand, the students were not clear about which performance was being required of them, because the class methodology was new to them. On the other hand, many of the students had never implemented basic procedures on an ongoing basis so that they had turned it into a mastered technique.

As for the communication of the purposes, the experience of the first year prompted us to develop a detailed rubric, which could be applied to both the weekly essays and the longer papers. The rubric deals with questions of form (presentation, grammar, references, style, structure) and content (topic; question formulation; understanding; taking a stand; line of reasoning; connections; aptness of introduction, middle part, conclusion). Also in line with the gradual awareness of the seminar's aims, most ICI teachers have opted for a progressive assessment by considering only the better marks for the final evaluation, which provided more opportunities for the students to improve.

As for the deficiency of dexterities, the core of the problem was paradoxically that those capacities were the ultimate goals of our Core Curriculum—the basic habits for the life of the mind: how to read, how to write and to argue—while the seminars could not work appropriately without the students' being elementarily trained. For this instruction, we could have entrusted the students to a raw "learning by doing," directed them toward some learn-it-yourself bibliography, or enhanced the seminars with extra specific guidance. This last was our choice in the form of practical sessions focused on the basics of note taking while reading core texts, reasoning, and essay writing.

It has been a general perception among ICI teachers that students quickly improved their discourse quality after some weeks. This improvement might have been due to the confluence of three factors: the workshop on argumentative skills, the classroom experience itself, and the one-on-one tutorials. Giving feedback to the students has required a highly dedicated faculty, glad to spend a significant amount of time reading paper assignments and in tutorials, but the results certainly made it a worthy investment. Yet, verifying whether the students have made real advancements over and above subjective impressions from the part of the teachers is the task of the narrative assessment.

Informed Judgments: The Narrative Assessment

As a first step toward the QNA, we set up in April 2015 a task force of four teachers who were to hold monthly meetings throughout the course and to collect narratives. Although this measure soon proved unrealistic, principally because of lack of time, the coordinator of the QNA has maintained constant communication with those and other professors involved, at the seminars on pedagogy or in personal interviews. At the same time, since April 2015, students in different Great Books seminars have completed questionnaires on acquired skills, appropriateness of readings, and personal appraisal. The forms' results in 2015 and 2016 have allowed us to assess our first courses and discuss improvements implemented in the academic years 2015–16 and 2016–17, mainly in the following four lines of action:

- Focus on guiding the discussion rather than on giving context.
- Elaboration of a detailed rubric for the essays.
- Improvement of feedback and comment on the essays.
- More practical approach of the argumentative skills workshop.

Finally, interviews with teachers and tracking of some assigned essays through Blackboard have completed the evidence.

Questionnaires: Self-Assessing Narratives

Many students have voluntarily completed the evaluative questionnaires in writing toward the end of each course, or through Google Forms in May 2017, in a final wave intended to widen our range of data. The questionnaire has followed a common structure, with minor adjustments from one year to the other.

Regarding the inquiring approach, questions of a quantitative nature were avoided as far as possible, since the specific answers often requested by forms can easily turn into computable judgments. On the other hand, we could not afford to collect extensive narratives of every student involved. Consequently, we attempted a middle course, so that the students faced detailed evaluative questions but had the freedom to answer by means of keywords, short sentences, small paragraphs, or a continuous essay. The aim was to help respondents articulate their self-awareness about advancements, prospects, or frustrations.

Concerning general tendencies in the answers, both extremes of opinion have been noted: a majority have agreed with the purposes of the course, but there have also been a few conflicting judgments that have been worth considering. From a methodological point of view, it is noteworthy that the sample was not homogeneous and controlled but voluntarily provided by the students, which may reveal an important bias.

The courses in which the questionnaires were distributed are listed below. As can be seen at first glance, they belong both to the ICI and to the “Ordinary track.” All students have been faced with virtually the same questions but referred to seminars with different lists of readings, approaches, and teaching style. However, all courses had discussion sessions and assigned essays in common:

1. Anthropology (ICI)
2. Anthropology
3. Ethics (2 groups, ICI)
4. Great Books of Greece and Rome (ICI)
5. Great Books: Genius and Creativity (ICI)
6. Great Protagonists of the Bible (ICI)
7. Literature and Major Human Themes (ICI)
8. Reading the Contemporary World
9. Reading the Contemporary World (ICI)
10. Literature, Violence, and Liberties (ICI)
11. Modern Literature and Film
12. Literature, Power, and Leadership

Personal Appraisal of the Course's Purpose

An important part of the questions dealt with time invested, difficulty of the assignments, and inner reward of the experience in comparison with other courses related to their disciplines. Through these parameters, we aimed to ask if they consider that

the Great Books seminar has brought some benefit and how that benefit could be defined. On the one hand, we wanted to avoid having the question of learning or skills too obvious and becoming patronizing; on the other hand, the general appraisal of the seminar essentially determines one's own assessment of the benefits.

A substantial majority have expressed satisfaction about the experience, regardless of skills acquired, not to say of having been educated, an issue remarkably absent in the responses (see appendix with a selection of answers). If possible, they would take similar courses in the future and would recommend them to other students. Asked about the main object they have acquired ("What have I learned in this course?"), most favor general answers "learn to think," "deepening in human question," "listen to different opinions held by my classmates," "the mere opportunity to read books that otherwise I would have never read." Minority diverging opinions complained about inaccuracy, superficial level of discourse, lack of expert knowledge in analyzing texts ("misteaching" of philosophy or literature from an expert point of view), evaluations out of historical context, and deficient feedback from the teacher.

Significantly, there is a wide consensus in having invested proportionally more time, both in terms of quality and quantity, in the core texts course than in other courses of their discipline (but with more pleasure). Many of them have considered that the mere act of reflecting on issues not necessarily related to their discipline was both more demanding than other subjects' assignments. And in terms of difficulty, meaningful notetaking and writing the essays were considered by far the most arduous tasks.¹⁸

Perception of Acquired Skills outside Their Discipline

A specific set of queries related to the students' perception of the capabilities and skills acquired or improved in the courses, which was one of the main aims in our Core Curriculum. Students predominantly appreciate the acquisition of academic writing and oral skills, which might be useful for career purposes, but only a few attach usefulness to having improved their argumentative abilities (establishing connections, taking a stand, advancing an argument, refuting opinions). In the same vein, respondents who have attended the workshop on academic and rhetorical techniques considered it helpful to fulfill the requirements rather than crucial for intellectual development. (See a selection of answers in the Appendix.)

Judgment about the Readings' Suitability

Likewise, most students consider that the readings were well chosen to discuss great human issues. Interestingly, when asked to exclude a book from the list, respondents have not shown remarkable consensus on rejecting one text in particular, and virtually all of them chose the book for being difficult. The perception of complexity relates to the critical abilities exposed in the previous section. However, being able to read an arduous book is a nonconscious benefit as well: the students themselves do not recognize it as a goal of the course, but their narrative subjectively denotes that they have ascended to a higher level of "demanding books."

Most respondents on the questionnaires regard the mere reading of the selected books as one of the most profitable elements of the seminar, at least at the same level as other high-valued aspects (sharing views with students from other disciplines, going in-depth into “issues essential to life,” learning how to articulate their own thoughts). About the preferences, while there have not been books completely rejected by students, only a few would prefer to do argumentative rather than narrative texts, fictional or historical.

Interviews with Teachers

The evidence collected from teachers in interviews shows that they perceived some improved attitudes and capabilities overlooked by students in the questionnaires. They agree that the students have advanced in achieving the major objectives, although not all students to the same extent. In their opinion, the skills in which the students have progressed more clearly are: level of argumentative discourse, critical reading, connection making, consistency in referring to the text, and, above all others, the ability to listen to other opinions in the seminars. Significantly, there is consensus that students have been able to draw their own conclusions about man and the contemporary world, although the core texts were very different from one course to another: from Biblical texts to 20th-century literature.

All teachers report that they had the opportunity to exchange experiences about their subject, although some say they have listened to, more than have contributed, ideas, since they were teaching Great Books seminars for the first time. Several, even with long teaching experience in their field, affirm that they still should develop their way of guiding the discussions in class. On the other hand, some have also mentioned that they have significantly changed their reading style and the way they pose questions about the text, trying to point toward universal issues and away from their field of expertise, as their own interest in these issues has grown.

Essays: Tracking Argumentative Skills during the Courses

The most obvious procedure for assessing the students’ fulfillment of the Core Curriculum’s goals is to examine the development of capabilities reflected in their essays, from the beginning to the end of a course, according to the rubric. This task has been facilitated because some of the teachers have managed the assignments through Blackboard Learn, a tool that has made it possible to give feedback in a personalized and detailed manner. In general terms, a diachronic overlook of the assignments points to an improvement from the first to the last tests in the course, which is in line with the general impression shared with students and teachers about the results of the course.

Two different examples of that evolution, named LLM121022 and MSR124377, are given below, which may illustrate the nature of the progression verified in writing and argumentation habits (permission granted from both students). These cases have not been selected because they were necessarily the brightest in their seminars, but because they show different general tendencies. In addition, it has been possible to

contrast the progress of both cases with the self-assessment that they have provided through the questionnaires.

LLM121022

LLM121022 is a fifth-year student in the double degree Philosophy and Journalism, who took “Great Books of Greece and Rome” of the ICI in the spring semester 2017. He wrote his first course essay on *Oedipus Rex* January 23, 2017 (see Appendix for a copy of the essay and the corrections). The instructions he had been given were: “Write a personal essay of approximately 200–300 words on an aspect of Sophocles’ *Oedipus King*, which you deem relevant. The evaluation will pay particular attention to the argumentative coherence, the structure (title, introduction, middle part, conclusion) and the support of the argument in the text itself, according to the rubric.” The first paragraph reveals that the topic of discussion is diffuse and not formulated as a question. A title, a statement of a controversial issue that guides the argument, and a structuring roadmap are missing.

- Ensayo ^[1]Edipo Rey -

Después de la clase en la que se vieron algunas de las claves de lectura de esta obra. Juzgo importante tratar aquí el tema de la identidad. Igual^[2] es recurrente y poco original, pero creo que da en el clavo debido^[3] a su centralidad en la obra. Como se expresó en clase, “*Edipo es un relato acerca de la identidad.*” Además también escojo este tema porque conecta directamente con otro ámbito central de la obra: la culpa.^[4]

In the subsequent paragraphs, his wording is more appropriate to oral than writing expression and mixes academic and colloquial registers. From a more general perspective, the student has seemingly not understood what he is being asked for; he rather continues the conversation in class accumulating intuitions and arguments from outside the text.

Con todo, ^[5]inferimos que el rey de Tebas tiene una visión distorsionada de su realidad, y peca de uno de los problemas más gordos^[6] de la historia de la humanidad: la soberbia de la razón. ^[7]Personalmente, todo este conjunto de reflexiones, evocaba en mí una serie de lecciones del Dr. Alejandro Vigo, en el que nos mostraba cómo precisamente se está en el error mientras no se es consciente del mismo. Es decir, la fuerza operacional de este^[8] llega cuando no se tiene consciencia de él. De aquí deduzco que el pobre Edipo es una contradicción encarnada, creyéndose el más inteligente por una serie de sucesos que él juzga haber resuelto con éxito, se da que es el que menos consciente de su realidad es.

Through corrections and a more general comment, he is advised to take the role of the “impartial observer” and to avoid the “mindflow,” the authoritative line of reasoning and colloquialisms.

On March 7, 2017, LLM121022 presented his fifth essay in the course, on the first book of Thucydides (see Appendix). The title “The Writing of Memory” and the first paragraph already show that he has developed a clear idea of the essay’s

requirements. Although the scope remains broad, the issue focuses on one aspect. An interesting methodological reservation on the implicit evidence to be analyzed is added. Overall, this essay displays more coherence of argument, greater reference to the text, and better style than the previous one.

Ensayo V: Tucídides I

- La escritura de la memoria -

Las reflexiones que se quieren traer aquí giran en torno a la problemática del método histórico. Parece que Tucídides se hace las grandes preguntas de la historia: ¿Qué es la historia?, ¿Cómo podemos acercarnos a ella? Es cierto que no las encontramos explícitas a lo largo del texto, no obstante, su modo de abordar los acontecimientos y las consideraciones, es indicativo de ello.

Al leer el prólogo adivinamos una suerte de avance con respecto a los modos de hacer historia de sus coetáneos. Podemos afirmar que Tucídides es original en su pretensión: es la primera vez que se busca lo que hoy llamaríamos "rigor histórico-científico". Por esta razón, aludiendo a sus antecesores (Herodoto y Homero) los considera historiadores, aunque lo hace marcando una clara frontera.

MSR124377

MSR124377, a fourth-year student in the Double Degree Business Administration and Law, has taken "Literature, Power and Leadership" in the "ordinary track" during the winter semester 2016. She had not done Great Books courses before. The second of her essays, handed in September 15, 2016, deals with books V–VII of Xenophon's *Anabasis*. The text is succinct and decontextualized (see Appendix for a copy of the essay and the corrections): a title and a clear argument are missing, the relation to the text is too general, and grammatical and lexical errors hinder a fluent reading. Apparently, she has focused on a controversial issue ("I will now discuss Xenophon's behavior in these last chapters"), but the terms deployed reveal a merely descriptive point of view.

Anábasis Libros V-VII

En los últimos tres libros toda la trama gira en torno al ansiado regreso de los griegos bajo el mando, **sobretodo**, de Jenofonte, quien ya se nos muestra como un perfecto líder en los primeros libros, y sigue apareciendo como tal en los últimos. Enfrentándose a diferentes pueblos, e incluso al propio ejército, consigue mantener la **compostura**.^[2] Y así hay en ocasiones en los que se asoman signos de debilidad humana. A continuación analizaré el **comportamiento** de Jenofonte en estos últimos capítulos. El primer signo de debilidad humana surge cuando Jenofonte trama a espaldas del ejército quedarse por la zona de Sínopo y formar una ciudad **griega**.^[3] Jenofonte es consciente de que posee un fuerte ejército y del poder y renombre que le podría dar esta hazaña, incluso superior al regreso a Grecia. Sin embargo, **se** **desenmascaran** sus intenciones y enseguida se descubre y decide continuar la vuelta a casa como si nada hubiese sucedido, comportamiento un tanto cínico por su parte. Pero, como no, el gran Jenofonte vuelve a resurgir cuando lo culpan de haber agredido a varios soldados y él se defiende de modo que todo el ejército acaba en contra de los que denunciaron. **Llega un momento en el que** recupera la confianza con Jenofonte, lo intentan nombrar jefe, pero este se niega. Otra vez más, su gran retórica hace pensar que es por humildad y porque así se lo han mostrado los Dioses.^[4] Pero la verdadera razón es porque teme que le de una peor reputación si las cosas salen mal; **claro signo de** **cobardía y egoísmo**, más que de humildad, diría yo. A partir del episodio con Cleandro, Jenofonte decide marchar solo a casa, para evitarse mayores problemas, pero en un momento de necesidad del ejército, acude a donde ellos, signo casi **utópico** de gran liderazgo.

She was advised to structure her arguments around a single issue, to take and defend her position using the text as a basis, and to improve her style.

Two months later, November 4, 2016, she put forward her seventh essay in the course, about Cabeza de Vaca's *Castaways* (see Appendix). It conveys a general impression of improvement in argumentative and formal aspects: there is a coherent argument that connects the title, the opening introduction, the middle parts, and the concluding paragraph.

Cabeza de Vaca, Naufragios: “La evolución del yo”

En esta obra autobiográfica de Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, el autor narra su experiencia de colonización de la zona Norte de Florida, en la relativamente recién descubierta América. A lo largo de la narración vemos como la misión de colonización resulta ser un absoluto fracaso y como el objetivo de los personajes pasa de ser del enriquecimiento y la gloria, a la supervivencia. En este desarrollo de la trama uno de los aspectos fundamentales es la evolución de la persona con respecto al colectivo, en concreto la evolución de Cabeza de Vaca, debida principalmente a las circunstancias que les rodean. Evolución que dividire en cuatro etapas: el Cabeza de Vaca español colono, el Cabeza de Vaca descubriendo su yo, el Cabeza de Vaca como individuo independiente y el Cabeza de Vaca indígena.

La primera etapa de la obra se centra en la colonización. Cabeza de Vaca pertenece al colectivo de españoles que van a conquistar tierra de indígenas. Se da a lo largo del texto una clara dicotomía entre el conjunto colono, “nosotros”, y los indígenas, “ellos”. Este uso de los diferentes pronombres personales me sorprendió, pues, aunque la palabra indígena tenga de por sí cierta connotación despectiva (aunque sea meramente cultural), al hecho de sí mismos llamarlos por este nombre colectivo según a mi parecer la

The essay’s coherence is built around a clear taking of position on a not evident issue: the person of Cabeza de Vaca inwardly evolves with respect to the collective that surrounds him. She adds a roadmap of the essay, announcing that four stages in the character’s evolution can be detected: “Cabeza de Vaca the Spanish colonist; Cabeza de Vaca the discoverer of his self; Cabeza de Vaca the independent individual; and Cabeza de Vaca the Indian.” References to the text could have been better defined, but have been used as evidence of her hypothesis.

The cases selected show two opposing types of problems faced by students. LL121022 used to write essays in the degree of Philosophy and Journalism and had no grammatical difficulties but at first tended to an emotional exposition of his views. According to his own words on the questionnaire, he has attempted a more balanced approach as the course advanced:

- *To my mind, the course was more demanding than others, but I wish there were more subjects like this in all the schools.*
- *Personally, I most enjoyed more works that dealt with everyday human affairs. In other words, the war narratives that raised problems of international law and ethics with validity nowadays were less interesting than, for example, the psychological introspection we saw discussing the characters of Aeneas and Dido.*
- *What I value most is that the subject was about human issues that everyone should consider at least once in life.*
- *One of the problems is that I talked too much. However, the discussions worked quite well in terms of exchanging ideas.*

For her part, MS124377 had not had to develop writing skills in her degree in Business Administration and was not used to striving after linguistic correctness. In this regard, some of her opinions on the questionnaire reveal her progression:

- *The subject has seemed to me as demanding as the conventional subjects, because, although we have not had to memorize, a book per week and an essay is plenty of work. If it had been less demanding, we would not have been thirteen people in class.*

- *The sessions of the workshop on argumentative skills were sufficient and practical enough. I have certainly improved my speaking ability.*
- *There was feedback on many of the essays I have delivered.*
- *The mere reading of one of the “Great Books” is . . . valuable, opens your eyes and gives you a different perspective on many of the subjects.*
- *I at least have acquired the very useful and advisable habit of reasoning on subjects that you may not usually reason on, but that are equally important.*
- *A highly recommendable and interesting subject: well focused, well taught, very enjoyable.*

Both cases have in common at least the improvement in practical skills that indubitably go hand in hand with refining their critical ability and rigor in the “basic habits for the life of the mind.” After completing the course both were able to read more carefully, to write more persuasively, and to argue more thoughtfully. However, both also substantiate an improvement related to their rhetorical ethos, the character to be guessed between the lines: both have journeyed from looking at the text from outside to talking with the text face to face. In other words, their improvement is based on enhanced intellectual techniques, but it also has to do with the effort they claim to have invested in reading and writing and with the enjoyment they express at the end of the course. They have reached engagement with the text and have gotten involved in the conversation, a gain that cannot be attributed exclusively to their training in skills, but also to personal maturation through intense analysis and dialoguing with peers.

Further Improvements and Concluding Remarks

Only three years have passed since the first courses of great books in Navarra. So, we do not yet have a broad perspective to assess the potential long-term effect of the Core Curriculum on our graduates. However, the approach of the nonquantitative assessment carried out since the beginning, in which faculty and students were involved, has served to adjust the course in a program we were not, at first sight, prepared for. The adjustments have made it possible not only to improve specific issues, but also to focus on which was feasible: we could not substitute one model for another, but rather we could grow a small cutting. This has had a broader multiplier effect than we had imagined.

In the mid- and long term, we will continue to gather narrative evidence about our courses through questionnaires. This will allow us to accumulate experience and keep track of the necessary alterations in the following years. For example, as already mentioned, the first students to complete the entire ICI track will be finishing their studies in 2020, which will be a good time to reevaluate the educational process. For the time being, the results of the assessment provided by the questionnaires and the interviews have been evaluated and digested mainly by the core of the faculty more involved in the QNA from the beginning. It is therefore necessary to reach a wider circle in our discussion of the results. The practical sessions on pedagogy in core texts seminars may be the best place to achieve this goal.

Appendices

I. Rubrics. A. Sobre la forma

	DEFICIENTE (3–4)	SUFICIENTE (5–6)	NOTABLE (7–8)	SOBRESALIENTE (9–10)
Presentación		Incluye título y nombre. Texto dividido en párrafos. Se ajusta a la extensión pre- vista.		Limpia y elegante.
Corrección tipográfica, or- tográfica y gram- atical	Algún error ortográfico o gramatical grave.	Algún error ortográfico o gramatical menor. Varias er- ratas tipográficas.	Alguna errata tipográfica.	Correcto.
Citas y referen- cias	Plagio (0).	Las citas textuales van en- trecomilladas y se indica el número de página y el autor (si no es el del libro que se comenta).	Se usan adecuadamente las citas y paráfrasis: extensión, relevancia, ilustran una idea o apoyan un argumento.	Están bien integradas en el texto. Hay el número de citas que el tipo de ensayo requiere.
Estilo		Emplea ejemplos y califica adecuadamente.	Texto bien trabado y convin- cente.	Texto muy bien trabado y muy convincente.
Estructura del ensayo	No tiene una estructura reconocible (frases o párrafos inconexos) (0–2). Tiene estruc- tura reconocible, pero le falta alguna parte esencial (3–4).	Tiene estructura reconocible pero no es la adecuada para expresar el argumento o con- tenido.	Tiene estructura reconocible y es la adecuada.	La estructura hace sólido o convincente el argumento.

B. Sobre el contenido

	DEFICIENTE (3–4)	SUFICIENTE (5–6)	NOTABLE (7–8)	SOBRESALIENTE (9–10)
Tema del ensayo	No es claro.	Es claro, pero obvio y de respuesta fácil.	Es claro, relevante y de respuesta elaborada.	Es claro, relevante, de respuesta elaborada y original.
Propuesta, pregunta o problemática del ensayo	El ensayo no aporta ninguna propuesta, respuesta a pregunta o solución a una problemática.	El ensayo aporta alguna propuesta, respuesta a pregunta o solución a una problemática.	El ensayo aporta, de modo relevante, alguna propuesta, respuesta a pregunta o solución a una problemática.	El ensayo aporta, de modo relevante y convincente, alguna propuesta, respuesta a pregunta o solución a una problemática.
Comprensión del texto leído	No demuestra haber leído el texto (0) o no haber comprendido los aspectos fundamentales (3–4).	Demuestra haber leído el texto y comprendido en sus aspectos fundamentales.	Demuestra haber comprendido los aspectos complejos del texto.	Demuestra la capacidad de tomar postura (formular tesis o preguntas relevantes) acerca de los aspectos complejos.
Formulación de las ideas (“ellos dicen” – “yo digo”)	No se describen correctamente las ideas del autor o de los personajes.	Se describen correctamente las ideas del autor o de los personajes.	Se describen correctamente las ideas del autor o de los personajes y se ponen adecuadamente en relación con otras ideas del autor o del personaje.	Se describen correctamente las ideas del autor o de los personajes y se ponen adecuadamente en relación con otras ideas del autor o del personaje, además de con las propias ideas.
Argumentación	Elucubración.	Justificada.	Sólida y convincente.	Sólida, convincente y original.
Comparaciones y contrastes	No hay.	El ensayo establece comparaciones y contrastes (personajes, ideas, pasajes, etc.) dentro del libro.	El ensayo establece comparaciones y contrastes relevantes (personajes, ideas, pasajes, etc.) dentro del libro.	El ensayo establece comparaciones y contrastes relevantes (personajes, ideas, pasajes, etc.) dentro del libro y con otros libros.

	DEFICIENTE (3–4)	SUFICIENTE (5–6)	NOTABLE (7–8)	SOBRESALIENTE (9–10)
Sobre la introducción	No hay o no formula el tema, la tesis o hipótesis.	Formula el tema, la tesis o hipótesis.	Sitúa el tema en su contexto.	Muestra la relevancia o importancia del tema elegido.
Sobre la parte central	No contiene argumentos reconocibles.	Tiene argumentos claramente reconocibles.	Tiene argumentos bien formulados y justificados. Considera los argumentos contrarios (posibles o reales).	Tiene argumentos bien formulados, justificados y convincentes. Refuta los argumentos contrarios (posibles o reales).
Conclusión	No hay.	Se sigue lógicamente de la parte central.	Sitúa la conclusión en su contexto más general.	Muestra la relevancia de la conclusión alcanzada.

II. Example of Questionnaire

Cuestionario para asignaturas de Grandes Libros – Curso 2015/2016

La finalidad de este cuestionario es mejorar la calidad de esta y otras asignaturas del Core Curriculum. Puede completarlo de manera anónima o indicar su nombre, si lo desea. Algunas de las preguntas sólo requieren una escueta respuesta al margen. Para otras, en cambio, necesitará utilizar hojas adicionales. También es posible contestar varias preguntas en un mismo párrafo. O sencillamente, si lo prefiere, tome las preguntas como un posible guión para redactar sus impresiones generales en torno a “¿Qué me ha aportado esta asignatura que resulte digno de reseñar?”...

A. Sobre la selección de lecturas o temas

1. ¿Qué libro o libros le parecieron más adecuados para discutir de “grandes temas”? ¿Cuáles considera más “fáciles” y más “difíciles”?
2. ¿Le pareció excesivo el tiempo dedicado a discutir alguno de los libros? ¿A cuáles? ¿Habría bastado una sola sesión?
3. ¿Había algún libro que no deba ser incluido entre los “Grandes Libros” o el “Canon”? ¿Había alguno irrelevante o superficial en comparación con los otros? ¿Cuál? ¿Por qué? ¿Qué libro excluiría de la lista si tuviera que descartar uno?
4. ¿Profundizaban los libros de ficción de la lista en los “Grandes Temas” tanto como los no ficcionales? ¿Pueden ser literatura esos libros no ficcionales?
5. ¿Qué libro de la lista le recomendaría a su mejor amigo? ¿Qué libro de la lista le recomendaría a su peor enemigo? ¿Para hacerle cambiar de opinión o para infligirle un cruel y doloroso tormento?
6. ¿Qué libro o libros sugeriría incluir? ¿Incluiría alguno que no fuese “del canon de siempre” pero que usted leyó en su momento?
7. ¿Había leído o oído hablar de los libros propuestos antes de hacer esta asignatura? ¿Ha cambiado su opinión, fundada o no, sobre ellos?
8. ¿Había leído alguno de los libros de la asignatura si no hubiera sido lectura obligatoria? ¿Cuál no le importaría volver a leer?

B. Sobre el método utilizado en clase

9. ¿Había hecho antes —en la Universidad o en el Bachillerato— otras asignaturas basadas en la discusión de opiniones acerca de un texto? ¿Le ha parecido más o menos “exigente” que una asignatura “de las de memorizar”?
10. ¿Podría aplicarse este método a las demás asignaturas de su Grado? ¿a algunas? ¿a ninguna otra?
11. ¿Le pareció una asignatura “de letras,” “de literatura,” “de historia,” “de derecho,” “de filosofía,” “de retórica,” “de nada en particular”?
12. ¿Le ayudaban las lecturas previas a acercarse a la lectura siguiente? ¿Hubiera

- sido igual si la secuencia de lecturas hubiese estado ordenada de otra manera?
¿Prefiere que los libros estén ordenados cronológicamente de acuerdo con su época o según el desarrollo de un tema? ¿Por qué?
13. ¿Preferiría haber leído sólo fragmentos significativos para ajustarse a las cuestiones controvertidas, o haberlos leído enteros, aunque parte de su material de trabajo no se haya reflejado en la discusión?
 14. ¿Introdujo el profesor los libros suficientemente? ¿Prefiere que el profesor revele lo que piensa desde el principio para saber a qué atenerse, o que dé rienda suelta a la discusión, aun a riesgo de que el diálogo se torne caótico o tome derroteros imprevistos?
 15. ¿Ha echado en falta más literatura secundaria, bibliografía opcional y lecciones magistrales que dieran marcos generales? En cualquier caso ¿lo considera una ayuda o un modo de manipular y prevenir sus opiniones?
 16. ¿Había hilos comunes a todas las lecturas? ¿Estaban esas ideas en los libros, en su mente, o en la mente del profesor (en la medida en que pueda usted sospecharlo...)?
 17. ¿Ha hecho usted sus propias conexiones fuera de la conversación en clase entre las diferentes lecturas, entre éstas y otras lecturas u otras cuestiones de su interés, o más bien eran piezas extraviadas de puzles incompletos?
 18. ¿Era razonable y realista la carga de trabajo, tanto en el número de páginas como en la extensión de los ensayos? ¿Ha podido leer los libros enteros?
 19. ¿Ha dedicado más o menos tiempo de trabajo que a otras asignaturas “de memorizar”?
 20. ¿Hubo retroalimentación o *feedback* sobre sus trabajos y sobre sus intervenciones en clase? ¿Eran estrictamente necesarias las entrevistas con el profesor?
 21. ¿Fueron respetadas sus opiniones en la discusión o en la corrección de los trabajos? ¿Cree que todas las opiniones que se han defendido eran respetables? ¿Igualmente valiosas? ¿Igualmente válidas?

C. Sobre el contenido

22. ¿Los temas planteados en la discusión le parecieron novedosos, convencionales o tediosamente previsibles?
23. ¿Ha construido ideas propias a resultas del proceso de lectura y redacción, o más bien ha confirmado lo que ya sabía o pensaba? ¿Merece la pena dar a conocer esas ideas a otras personas o es mejor que esas personas lean los libros directamente?
24. ¿Le resultaron útiles las sesiones sobre lectura crítica y escritura académica? ¿Fueron demasiadas o escasas? ¿Demasiado teóricas o prácticas? ¿Ha mejorado sus habilidades de lectura crítica, escritura, argumentación, exposición etc.? ¿En qué lo ha notado?
25. ¿Es la mera lectura de uno de los “Grandes Libros” algo “valioso” en sí mismo, o sólo un medio para reflexionar sobre “grandes temas”?

26. ¿Ha aprendido “algo útil” o “recomendable” en esta asignatura? Si es el caso, ¿eran actitudes, hábitos, destrezas? ¿Pueden ser de utilidad en otras asignaturas de su grado? ¿En otras actividades en el campus? ¿En la vida misma en general? ¿En su carrera profesional?

D. Sobre el futuro

27. ¿Le gustaría hacer otra u otras asignaturas similares en el futuro, si existiese la posibilidad?
28. ¿Qué “Grandes Temas” le gustaría que se trataran: arte y creatividad, teoría política, amor y matrimonio, medio ambiente, psicología del carácter, hitos históricos, naturaleza y cultura, identidad...? ¿Qué épocas o géneros literarios deberían contemplarse: novela, cuento, ensayo, poesía, teatro, cine...? ¿Literatura “del mundo,” otras culturas, clásicos anteriores al siglo XIX, literatura del siglo XX y XXI...?
29. ¿“Donaría sus ensayos a la ciencia”? Es decir, ¿tendría inconveniente en que se usase alguno de sus trabajos o ensayos —de modo completamente anónimo y confidencial— como ejemplos en los talleres de lectura, argumentación y retórica académica que se organicen en próximos cursos? *En caso afirmativo, escriba, por favor, su nombre.*
30. ¿Ha oído hablar del “Itinerario Interfacultativo” para cursar su *Core Curriculum*?

Añada, por último, si lo estima conveniente, otros comentario o sugerencias. Muchas gracias por su ayuda.

III. Selection of Answers

A. Personal appraisal of the course's purpose.

“Personalmente me parece un método de estudio muy bueno, moderno y en el que puedo aprender mucho más; agradezco al maestro.”

“La posibilidad de ahondar en ciertos temas más esenciales de la vida y de la persona.”

“Lo que considero más valioso en esta clase es escuchar las diferentes ideas y opiniones que elaboran mis compañeros.” Son temas relevantes, que todos debemos reflexionar. No solo lees, aprendes y reflexionas, sino que ayuda para la vida. Los libros tratan los asuntos básicos de toda vida humana: amor, amistad, religión, cultura...”

“Son lecturas frecuentemente citadas, pero no leídas, que vale la pena conocer.”

“Debería haber menos ensayos filosóficos y más novelas. De esta forma, sería más cercano e ilustrativo y se vería la ética en los personajes, no sólo en la parte teórica que nos ofrecen los filósofos.”

“He leído libros que, si no me hubiesen sido recomendados en esta asignatura, creo que no habría leído por mi cuenta y me han parecido muy interesantes a la par que diferentes.”

“Me apunté a la asignatura porque quería leer todos los libros seleccionados, pero sabía que no lo haría si no tuviera un cierto grado de obligación. Están muy bien escogidos porque, además de ser esenciales en la formación ética y, al fin y al cabo, humana, es sencillo encontrar relaciones entre autores.”

“NUNCA hubiera leído ninguno de los libros. Quizá *Edipo Rey*, pero sólo si estuviera en una isla desierta sin nada más que hacer.”

“No había hecho nunca una asignatura de este tipo, pero me parece una idea genial. Respecto a la exigencia, me ha parecido que lleva mucho tiempo y trabajo, pero es bonita.”

“En resumen: la asignatura es muy interesante, está muy bien planteada, se podría incluir otro tipo de libros también y no se puede pensar que los alumnos leerán los nueve libros, aunque quizás es la única manera de que contactemos con ellos, lo cual es una experiencia valiosa por sí misma. Muchas gracias. Fue un placer.”

B. Perception of acquired skills outside their discipline.

“Era la tercera vez que las cursaba” (workshop on academic skills).

“Creo que al inicio de la asignatura tendría que haber una clase en la que se explique mejor la estructura de un ensayo crítico y lo que pide el profesor. Por otra parte eche de menos una entrevista con el profesor para comentar el ensayo final que se hizo al terminar la asignatura.

“Sí he aprendido algo ‘útil o recomendable’: analizar un libro, entender la literatura, hacer ensayos.”

“Sí he aprendido algo ‘útil o recomendable’: siempre viene bien algo de cultura general y saber expresarse.”

“Sí he aprendido algo ‘útil o recomendable’: la constancia y volver a tener un tiempo en mi vida cotidiana para leer, no sólo en vacaciones.”

“Merecería más la pena una corrección exhaustiva e individual de estilo después de haber entregado uno de los ensayos.”

“Creo que he mejorado mi lectura crítica y escritura. Lo noto en la facilidad para expresarme y en los detalles en los que me fijo cuando leo: ya no leo sólo por entretenimiento, también me pregunta más el por qué y ‘persigo’ más al escritor para saber qué pensaba él al escribir una determinada parte.”

“El hábito de leer más a menudo y centrarse en lo importante de la lectura.”

C. Judgement about the readings' suitability.

“Creo que los libros son adecuados y que cualquier obra de este tipo podría ser usada, lo importante no es tanto el libro sino las ideas que salen en grupo, los debates y el aprender de tus compañeros.”

“Leer la *Anábasis* en primer lugar fue algo duro.”

“Quitaría de la lista *Ricardo III* o *Fuenteovejuna*, porque en los dos hay villano.”

“Creo que los libros son adecuados y que cualquier obra de este tipo podría ser usada, lo importante no es tanto el libro en sí, sino las ideas que salen en grupo, los debates y el aprender de tus compañeros. La forma de la clase es innegociable: es un funcionamiento simple que ayuda a pensar y a soltarse.”

IV. Essays Analyzed

LLM121022, Essay on *Oedipus Rex* (1/23/17)

- Ensayo ^[1]Edipo Rey -

Después de la clase en la que se vieron algunas de las claves de lectura de esta obra. Juzgo importante tratar aquí el tema de la identidad. Igual^[2] es recurrente y poco original, pero creo que da en el clavo debido^[3] a su centralidad en la obra. Como se expresó en clase, “*Edipo es un relato acerca de la identidad*.” Además también escojo este tema porque conecta directamente con otro ámbito central de la obra: la culpa^[4].

Vimos que el determinismo es un tema implícito, que se describe pero no se narra: el destino va cayendo implacablemente sobre el protagonista. Ahora bien, lo que cabe^[5] preguntarse es si Edipo merece que ese destino recaiga sobre él. Responder con afirmaciones rotundas sería hacer afirmaciones muy fuertes sobre temas humanos que han dado lugar a prolíferos desarrollos posteriores. Por la parte que me atañe y aportando mi punto de vista, creo que fue clave hacernos la pregunta del concepto que^[6] tiene Edipo acerca de sí mismo.

Con todo, ^[7]inferimos que el rey de Tebas tiene una visión distorsionada de su realidad, y peca de uno de los problemas más gordos^[8] de la historia de la humanidad: la soberbia de la razón. ^[9]Personalmente, todo este conjunto de reflexiones, evocaba en mí una serie de lecciones del Dr. Alejandro Vigo, en el que nos mostraba cómo precisamente se está en el error mientras no se es consciente del mismo. Es decir, la fuerza operacional de este^[10] llega cuando no se tiene consciencia de él. De aquí deduzco que el pobre Edipo es una contradicción encarnada, creyéndose el más inteligente por una serie de sucesos que él juzga haber resuelto con éxito, se da que es el que menos consciente de su realidad es.

^[12] Una repuesta a si Edipo tiene la culpa o no creo que es^[11] desacertado en cierta medida porque el autor de la obra no nos pone en esa tesitura, es decir, los datos que nos da y que juegan en la obra, no son suficientes como para determinar la culpa del monarca. Más bien he visto que las intenciones de Sófocles son las de plantearnos el problema: un destino implacable cae sobre una persona imprudente (en la medida en la que no ha conseguido hacerse cargo de su propia realidad). Edipo se quita los ojos al ver, ya Platón habla de una ceguera inicial cuando se sale de la caverna. Igual para Sófocles fue tan cegadora esa luz de la verdad, que al descubrir para sí cuál era su verdadera identidad no quiso aceptarlo e hizo lo que estaba acostumbrado: apartarla cegándose a sí y pidiendo que lo desterraran de lo que había sido su propio reino.

Tenemos por tanto una obra total que, de un modo no poco sutil, va desencadenando mediante el diálogo, la realidad de un rey^[13] que cae sobre él con todo el peso con el que puede caer la verdad.

1. Te ayudará pensar bien un título que centre el ensayo. 2. coloquialismo. 3. ídem. 4. el contenido del párrafo está bien, pero fíjate que la redacción es más propia de la expresión oral que de la escrita. No te dejes llevar por el “flujo de pensamiento” poniendo las ideas tal como surgen en tu mente. Mejora la calidad si lo reelaboras adoptando la máscara de “observador imparcial.” 5. ¿Podría ser éste el verdadero tema del ensayo? 6. ¿o más bien “éste”? 7. redacción difusa. 8. coloquialismo. 9. Evidencia externa al texto, que resta fuerza a tus propios argumentos y excluye al lector de la conversación. 10. éste. 11. Restricción mental que quita fuerza a tu argumento. 12. El orden de palabras denota “redacción oral.” En esta línea mencionas un segundo tema del ensayo más concreto (la culpa), pero ambas cuestiones son tratadas de manera difusa y superficial. 13. ¿Cambiaría el sentido de la tragedia si Edipo no fuera rey? ...

LLM121022, Essay on *Thucydides I* (3/7/17)

Anábasis Libros V-VII

En los últimos tres libros toda la trama gira en torno al ansiado regreso de los griegos bajo el mando, **sobretudo** de Jenofonte, quien ya se nos muestra como un perfecto líder en los primeros libros, y sigue apareciendo como tal en los últimos. Enfrentándose a diferentes pueblos, e incluso al propio ejército, consigue mantener la **compostura** aún así hay en ocasiones en los que se asoman signos de debilidad humana. A continuación analizaré el **comportamiento** de Jenofonte en estos últimos capítulos.

El primer signo de debilidad humana surge cuando Jenofonte trama a espaldas del ejército quedarse por la zona de Sínopo y formar una ciudad **griega**. Jenofonte es consciente de que posee un fuerte ejército y del poder y renombre que le podría dar esta hazaña, incluso superior al regreso a Grecia. Sin embargo, **se** desenmascaran sus intenciones y enseguida se desdice y decide continuar la vuelta a casa como si nada hubiese sucedido, comportamiento un tanto cínico por su parte. Pero, como no, el gran Jenofonte vuelve a resurgir cuando lo culpan de haber agredido a varios soldados y él se defiende de modo que todo el ejército acaba en contra de los que denunciaron. **Llega un momento en el que**, recuperada la confianza con Jenofonte, lo intentan nombrar jefe, pero este se niega. Otra vez más, su gran retórica hace pensar que es por humildad y porque así se lo han mostrado los **Dioses**, pero la verdadera razón es porque teme que le de una peor reputación si las cosas salen mal; **claro signo de cobardía y egoísmo**, más que de humildad, diría yo. A partir del episodio con Cleandro, Jenofonte decide marchar solo a casa, para evitarse mayores problemas, pero en un momento de necesidad del ejército, acude a donde ellos, signo casi **utópico** de gran liderazgo.

En una conversación que mantienen Seutes y Heraclides con un líder espartano que quiere el ejército griego, los dos primeros llegan a admitir que el único defecto de Jenofonte es que “mima demasiado a su ejército” **11** la vez en la época clásica ese era un signo de debilidad del jefe, pero **más 10 tarde** el autor nos vuelve a mostrar la grandeza de Jenofonte demostrando que la lealtad hacia su ejército es su mejor virtud.

En conclusión, Jenofonte en este libro es el líder ejemplar. El autor, el propio Jenofonte, nos deja asomar rayos de debilidad por parte de éste, no **se 12** sin querer, o para demostrarnos que es un ser humano y no un **Dios 13** realmente pinta un jefe con habilidad no solo retórica, sino motivacional. Jenofonte sabe como mover la masa por voluntad propia, y sabe también cómo defender su posición ante cualquier ataque, aspecto también importante para mantener el respeto de un líder.

MSR124377, Essay on Xenophon's *Anabasis* (9/15/16)

1. Corregir: sobre todo. 2. Corregir: la unidad / la disciplina / vida ... la compostura es lo que menos importa... 3. Analizaré **ESTE** comportamiento, es decir, la debilidad... 4. Falta la referencia. 5. Incierto: ¿se? 6. ¿Cuándo? Falta la referencia. 7. Corregir:

dioses. 8. Corregir: es difícil juzgar el fuero interno. 9. Corregir: grotesco / paradójico / absurdo / contradictorio... pero no utópico. 10. Sin la referencia, es difícil valorar si el argumento es válido. 11. Falta la referencia: ¿en qué pasaje del libro se dice esto? 12. Corregir: sé. 13. Corregir: dios

MSR124377, Essay on Cabeza de Vaca's *Castaways* (11/4/16)

Cabeza de Vaca, *Naufragios*: “La evolución del yo”

En esta obra autobiográfica de Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, el autor narra su experiencia de colonización de la zona Norte de Florida, en la relativamente recién descubierta América. A lo largo de la narración vemos como la misión de colonización resulta ser un absoluto fracaso y como el objetivo de los personajes pasa de ser del enriquecimiento y la gloria, a la supervivencia. En este desarrollo de la trama uno de los aspectos fundamentales es la evolución de la persona con respecto al colectivo, en concreto la evolución de Cabeza de Vaca, debida principalmente a las circunstancias que les rodean. Evolución que dividire en cuatro etapas: el Cabeza de Vaca español colono, el Cabeza de Vaca descubriendo su yo, el Cabeza de Vaca como individuo independiente y el Cabeza de Vaca indígena.

La primera etapa de la obra se centra en la colonización. Cabeza de Vaca pertenece al colectivo de españoles que van a conquistar tierra de indígenas. Se da a lo largo del texto una clara dicotomía entre el conjunto colono, “nosotros”, y los indígenas, “ellos”. Este uso de los diferentes pronombres personales me sorprendió, pues, aunque la palabra indígena tenga de por sí cierta connotación despectiva (aunque sea meramente cultural), el hecho de ni siquiera llamarlos por este nombre colectivo acentúa, a mi parecer, la sensación de superioridad. La diferencia e imposibilidad de acercamiento entre los dos grupos se ve en aspectos también como el del lenguaje: no se entendían, no se podían comunicar, lo que suponía la falta de información. En esta etapa Cabeza de Vaca aparece como miembro de un grupo, no como individuo; no hay un “yo”, hay un “nosotros”.

En la segunda etapa, ante los contratiempos de la expedición, aunque Cabeza de Vaca sigue sintiendo su pertenencia al grupo, se da un aumento de la individualización. Muestra en varias ocasiones su opinión (cosa que antes no hacía), incluso siendo opuesta a la del Gobernador, que es quien lidera la expedición. En un momento, ante la oposición de Cabeza de Vaca en el asunto de seguir por mar o tierra, el Gobernador le insta a que abandone el grupo si quiere obrar a su parecer. El protagonista recula y sigue con el grupo (todavía no se da la separación completa). Por otra parte, cambia su concepción hacia los indígenas. Ya no habla de “ellos”, sino de “gente”. Incluso alaba su fortaleza, su disponibilidad y destreza. En esta etapa se da una nueva perspectiva del sujeto: es un “nosotros”, ya que sigue perteneciendo al grupo, pero aparece y se va fortaleciendo el “yo”. También cambia el objetivo del grupo: ya no es la riqueza, sino la supervivencia; cambio que es crucial para el cambio de la persona.

En la tercera etapa Cabeza de Vaca asume el mando después de que su barca haya sido la única en salvarse de los continuos naufragios. Y es en este momento en el que se rompe su vínculo con el grupo: quedan muy pocos supervivientes, los cuales se ven obligados a adoptar las costumbres indígenas para sobrevivir: el protagonista aprende diversas lenguas, se procura el oficio de Chamán (aunque sopla y santigua, reflejo todavía de una cierta vinculación a su yo español), camina desnudo al igual que los demás, comen lo que les dan... El sujeto ya no se ve parte de un grupo, ya no es colono, pues ese objetivo quedó lejos, pero tampoco es indígena. Se adapta para sobrevivir, pero tiene claro su nuevo objetivo: llegar a tierra cristiana, por lo que ya no hay un “nosotros” colono, pero tampoco un “nosotros” indígena. Se produce aquí la exaltación del individuo, la aparición del “yo” puro.

La última etapa comienza con la marcha hacia tierras cristianas y su entrada en ellas. Algunos de los compañeros de Cabeza de Vaca habían alcanzado tal grado de pertenencia al grupo indígena (para ellos ya había un nosotros) que no querían marcharse, poniendo excusas para retrasarlo. Cabeza de Vaca, en cambio seguía queriendo volver, aunque en la entrada en las tierras se da una posible identificación del sujeto con el grupo indígena: habla de “nosotros”, los indígenas. Rechaza el trato de los cristianos colonos con los indígenas, llegando a criticarlos. Rechaza su hipotética pertenencia a ellos, se ve como un completo opuesto: la comida, vestimenta, incluso el pensamiento. Sin embargo, vuelve con ellos dejando a los indígenas. Esto nos deja con la duda: ¿llega a pertenecer al “nosotros” indígena? En un principio parece que sí, pero tras su marcha queda en el aire.

La identidad del sujeto y su percepción del indígena sufren un gran cambio a lo largo del relato: de español a escéptico, de escéptico a individuo, y de individuo... ¿a indígena? Yo concluiría afirmando que Cabeza de Vaca acaba rechazando cualquier pertenencia a un colectivo. Ha llegado a sentir a los indígenas como sus iguales, incluso habla de un “nosotros”, pero ha sido una equiparación un tanto forzada por las circunstancias. Cabeza de Vaca se transforma y acaba siendo un “yo”, la necesidad de supervivencia le empuja a integrarse en el grupo indígena pero su condición como español sigue ahí escondida. No quiere identificarse ni con unos ni con otros, por lo que termina como individuo a secas.

Notes

1. Álvaro Sánchez-Ostiz, Associate Professor, Department of Philology (Classics), asostiz@unav.es; José M. Torralba, Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy— Director, Institute for Anthropology and Ethics, jmtorralba@unav.es. We thank Rosalía Baena, Juan Chapa, Juan A. Díaz, Rafael D. García, and Cristina Martín, members of the Committee for the Core Curriculum, for their comments and suggestions; special thanks are owed to Reyes Duro for her help with the questionnaires, and, of course, to the many anonymous students who have helped us by sharing their insights and perceptions through the questionnaires and interviews.
2. The University of Navarra is a private, nonprofit university, founded in 1952 by St. Josemaría Escrivá, the founder of Opus Dei, an institution of the Roman Catholic Church: see *Statutes of the University of Navarra*, n. 1: “La Universidad de Navarra, fundada por san Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer en 1952, es una Universidad de la Iglesia Católica que se dedica a la enseñanza y a la investigación de las distintas ramas del saber, de acuerdo con su espíritu fundacional y su ideario propio.” It has a student body of 8.000 undergraduates and 4.000 graduates in the Social and Natural Sciences, Humanities and Engineering. A research-oriented institution, it also has a prestigious business school (IESE) and university hospital (Clínica Universidad de Navarra).
3. <https://www.unav.edu/en/web/core-curriculum/what-is-it/principles>.
4. <http://www.unav.edu/en/web/conoce-la-universidad/ideario-de-la-universidad/>.
5. See Torralba, J. M., “La idea de educación liberal. De cómo se inventaron las humanidades,” in Arana, J. (ed.), *Falsos saberes. La suplantación del conocimiento en la cultura contemporánea*, Biblioteca Nueva, Madrid, pp. 61–74.
6. In this regard, see Torralba, J. M., “La doble identidad de las universidades de inspiración cristiana según *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*,” in *Rivista PATH (Pontificia Academia Theologiae)*, 14 (2015), pp. 131–50. On the educational principles of University of Navarra, see del Portillo, Á., “La Universidad en el pensamiento y la acción apostólica de Mons. Josemaría Escrivá,” in *Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y la universidad*, Eunsá, Pamplona, 1993, pp. 13–39; see also Llano, A., *Repensar la universidad. La universidad ante lo nuevo*, Ediciones Internacionales Universitarias, Madrid, 2003 (lecture of a former rector on occasion of the university’s 50th anniversary).
7. Although the reduction and centralization of Spanish universities in the hands of the state, which affected in many cases both Hispanic America and the Philippines, has some precedents. In the reign of Charles III (1771 “Plan Aranda”), it took place by means of diverse actions between 1814 (“Informe Quintana”) and 1857 (Law of Public Instruction).
8. See van der Wende, M., “The Emergence of Liberal Arts and Sciences Education in Europe: A Comparative Perspective,” *Higher Education Policy*, vol. 24 (2011), pp. 233–53. On the Spanish higher education system, see Pérez-Díaz, V., y Rodríguez, J. C., *Educación superior y futuro de España*, Fundación Santillana, Madrid 2001, who argue for the need of liberal education in our country.
9. See <https://www.unav.edu/en/web/core-curriculum/what-is-it/principles>.
10. The dialogue between the committee and the schools has become also a key factor for faculty development, since it has fostered the reflection on our university’s essence: the education of the future generations. Against the centrifugal forces of the contemporary multiversity, the Core Curriculum can operate as a centripetal force that provides a compass for integrating the multiple demands on the faculty: teaching, research, advising, and management.
11. We owe a special thanks to profs. Kathy Eden and Norma Thompson as leaders of the core texts seminars in Columbia and Yale, as well as to Scott Lee and Roosevelt Montás for the organization of the workshop and their very helpful advice on curriculum development.
12. Sánchez-Ostiz, Á., “El *Core Curriculum* y los seminarios de grandes libros,” lecture at

the V Encuentro Internacional de Humanidades, Universidad de los Andes, Santiago de Chile (10.24.2015) [forthcoming].

13. "Ethics," "Reading the Contemporary World," "Literature and Major Human Questions" and "Literature, Power and Leadership."

14. Of the two semesters of Anthropology (3 + 3 credits), the first is lecture-based for a group of 50–100 students, while in the second semester the group splits into core texts seminars of 25 students. The same scheme will be followed in the Ethics course (3 + 3 credits). The two semesters of elective courses (3 + 3 credits) will be taught only as seminars. In 2015–16 it will enroll 50 sophomores and 50 juniors of three different schools and in 2016–17 it will eventually expand to 100 freshmen, 100 sophomores and 100 juniors of six to eight schools.

15. Three courses in the ICI are not listed above: "Jesus Christ: His Person and His Mission," "Great Books: Genius and Creativity," and "Literature and the Great Human Issues."

16. In the style of "The Aims of Education Address" of the University of Chicago, the speakers being Prof. Pablo Pérez López ("La educación y la chispa," October 27, 2015) and Prof. Rosa Fernández Urtasun ("2084: ¿El fin de la educación?" October 18, 2016).

17. The practical seminars addressed both the Great Books and the Ethics and Anthropology courses. There were also two seminars given by guest speakers: Emma Cohen de Lara, Amsterdam University College, and Gesche Keding, Leuphana Universität Lüneburg, ("Conversation as understanding: Gadamer's approach to reading a text," November 11, 2016); Scott Lee, ACTC ("Teaching core texts: Arguments and perspectives," March 29, 2017).

18. However, some, most of them students at the School of Architecture, express unequivocal complaints about the time required for the weekly assignments.

St. Mary's College of California: Metaphysics and Metacognition at the Seminar Table

José Feito and Ellen Rigsby

Introduction

The Collegiate Seminar Program is the cornerstone of the general education requirement at Saint Mary's College of California, a Catholic liberal arts university with approximately 2,800 undergraduates. Over the past eight years, the College has been immersed in a process of collaboratively reenvisioning its entire core curriculum, including the Seminar Program. We have endeavored to facilitate a democratic, inclusive, and transparent community process that respects the values and traditions of our institution while also identifying and integrating best practices from across the nation. In multiple formats, the process has highlighted collective reflection, earnest consultation, and genuine engagement among faculty, students, and administrators. Throughout we have embraced a firm commitment to ongoing and frank inquiry into the educational effectiveness of our curriculum, relying on innovative measures of student learning.

Institutional Choices

Identifying the Need for New Program Creation and Revision

Since 1941 the Collegiate Seminar Program has played a key role in the undergraduate experience at Saint Mary's College. The program seeks to engage our students in a critical and collaborative encounter with the world of ideas as expressed in great texts of the Western tradition in dialogue with and exposure to its encounter with other traditions. The four-course sequence is designed to foster a genuine sense of collegiality and intellectual community by providing an authentic forum for students to meet and partake of a common experience—the reading and discussion of shared texts under the guidance of faculty from all disciplines. Classes meet around a seminar table in small groups so that each person can participate actively in the discussion. Equally concerned with teaching a practice of reading as with encountering a specific set of readings, the courses seek to heighten the student's awareness of the existence and use of different kinds of knowledge and, through the discussion of challenging texts and compelling ideas, to improve their skills of analysis, comprehension, and expression. Designed to serve the college's goals of a liberal education, the program strives to put students in possession of their powers to think clearly, critically, and collaboratively, and articulate their ideas effectively—powers that will serve them for the rest of their lives.

These goals enhance and harmonize with the three identifying traditions of Saint Mary's College—Catholic, Lasallian, and Liberal Arts. It is in Seminar where students are most expressly and overtly given the opportunity to think freely and where they are most consciously given the occasion to practice those “liberal arts” of analysis, reflection, and articulation, which will nurture the habits of such freedom. The search for truth beyond the mundane world of information, the commitment to wisdom both theoretical and practical, and the love of the beauties of mind, spirit, and world are values that the Catholic tradition embraces in its institutions of higher learning, and these are values both inherent in the Seminar Program and essential to its goals and objectives. Finally, student-centered education and the nurturing of the whole person are qualities at the heart of both the Lasallian mission and of the Collegiate Seminar Program.

Since 2006, the College has been conducting a thorough review of the general education aspects of our curriculum, in the context of maintaining Saint Mary's values while taking into account best practices across the nation. This “core curriculum” revision has involved a large-scale community effort to reenvision our core learning goals and outcomes in order to nurture a common undergraduate educational experience that is guided by the mission of the College. Among the new core learning goals, those labeled “Habits of Mind” represented a renewed commitment to the traditional objectives of collegiate seminar—specifically a focus on shared inquiry, critical thinking, and written and oral communication. The program revisited its own learning outcomes in 2010 to align them more explicitly with the new core language and intent.

Within this overarching context, the Collegiate Seminar Program undertook its own review process to further build upon its strengths and more directly address some of its weaknesses. While the program has always attempted to embody the mission “to probe deeply the mystery of existence by cultivating the ways of knowing and the arts of thinking,” the review asked us to seriously consider how we might rethink our curriculum and pedagogy to promote deeper “probing” and more skillful “cultivation.” We also wanted to revisit how our program might more effectively embrace the mission's exhortation “to create a student-centered educational community whose members support one another with mutual understanding and respect.”

We began our own review by carefully listening to our students. In 2009, we consolidated and analyzed four years of data from the senior survey that students take as they leave the college. A qualitative analysis of students' comments over those years highlighted some key areas for potential improvement. Students reported that they did not understand or appreciate the objectives of the program; there was too much reading assigned in too short a time frame, which left insufficient time to thoroughly analyze the texts; there was not enough cultural and gender diversity in the reading lists; the courses did not seem relevant to their daily concerns and “real lives”; there was a lack of consistency across Seminar instructors (e.g., expectations, standards, facilitation skills).

In 2010–11, we used these student concerns as a backdrop for extensive faculty discussions of how the program might evolve alongside the new goals and outcomes emerging from the overall core curriculum process. On the basis of a faculty-wide

survey, we identified both the commonalities we continued to embrace with respect to the program as well as our differing opinions. The Collegiate Seminar's Governing Board hosted a year of public fora, meetings with departments, individual consultations, and student focus groups to further refine the consensus as well as the disagreements within the community. We then developed five potential models of curricular reform that all embodied the consensus while also articulating competing visions of how to move forward. The models all continued the established traditions of student-driven discussions, a common reading list, and a four-course sequence. They also incorporated to a greater or lesser extent a mandate from the new core curriculum to create a curriculum that was more explicitly developmental, i.e., with increasing challenges and expectations across the four years. The models differed most significantly in the structure of the reading list: chronological versus thematic, Western or crosscultural, and shorter readings or similar to previous practice. But they also highlighted different pedagogical concerns such as developmental progression, scaffolding, incorporation of historical/cultural context, and focus on shared inquiry skills. In the fall of 2011, the entire faculty voted online on the five models, and the Academic Senate ultimately endorsed the model with the most votes. The approved model will be described more fully in the next section, but it should be noted here that the decision was a democratic one but not based upon a full consensus. While a majority of the faculty endorsed the new model, a minority strongly believed that the program did not require any significant revision. This dynamic added a level of complexity to the implementation of the new model that will be revisited later in this narrative.

Action Steps

Identification of Goals and Procedure Used to Address Goals

The primary curricular innovations of the new model were (1) a developmental progression of readings and assignments; (2) the scaffolding of shared inquiry, critical thinking, and writing skills; (3) an emphasis on reflective practice and meta-learning; (4) a more deliberate integration of global and multicultural voices; (5) and an explicit alignment between writing in Composition and in the Freshman Seminar.

Developmental Progression of Readings and Assignments

The Core Curriculum process identified and endorsed best practices in developmental learning as central elements in achieving academic excellence. An institutional commitment to a general education curriculum that embodies incremental learning and increasing levels of challenge clearly emerged from the core revision conversations among faculty. In addition, our Seminar students were telling us through the senior surveys that they felt overwhelmed by the quantity and difficulty of the reading expected of them and that they did not see how many of the readings were relevant to their own lives. In dialogue with these concerns, and in keeping with the Lasallian principle of "meeting the students where they are," the new Seminar model shortened the readings in the lower-division seminars and reorganized them to en-

gage students more fully from an early point. For instance, in the past the Freshman Seminar had been chronologically based and confronted incoming students with long reading assignments of Classical philosophy and literature that presented significant difficulties. The new Freshman reading list abandoned the chronology and instead juxtaposed contemporary and ancient texts to facilitate how the students make connections to their daily human concerns. They would read Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" alongside Le Guin's "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" and wonder what it means to challenge the status quo. Or they would read Aristotle's chapter on friendship from the *Nicomachean Ethics* alongside Dana Johnson's "Melvin in the 6th Grade"—a short story about the challenges of friendship for a young girl.

Scaffolding of Shared Inquiry, Critical Thinking, and Writing Skills

In the spirit of the mission's commitment to fostering a "student-centered educational community," the new model also attempted to developmentally scaffold some key skills required to participate effectively in the intellectual community of the Seminar classroom. The goal was to deliberately and consistently introduce new students to the foundational writing, reading, and discussion skills necessary for success in the seminar sequence. We wanted to make these skills explicitly developmental, such that more challenging or complex skills could follow upon more basic or comparatively simple skills in a progression of learning.

In the initial stages of implementation, when designing the first Freshman Seminar to be piloted in 2012–13, we attempted to identify these skills by tapping into the accumulated pedagogical experience and wisdom of the faculty. In November 2011, an email poll of the faculty at large asked two questions: "What specific seminar skills do you find your students have the most difficulty mastering and you would want us to specifically address in the Freshman Seminar? Do you have any pedagogical approaches that you have successfully used to guide students in this particular area?" The 11 themes that emerged from that poll have come to be called the "seminar learning modules" or "skills modules." They included things like Finding a Voice, Listening, Questioning, Close Reading, Collaborating, and Disagreeing. Our goal became to find ways to explicitly foreground and scaffold these skills through the use of classroom activities, written assignments, and structured reflections. Once a module had been introduced, students might return to it in later courses as they learn to grapple with its increasing levels of complexity. So the curriculum would have an iterative developmental structure that highlights relevant skills within the ongoing practice of text-centered discussions.

Emphasis on Reflective Practice and Meta-learning

The Core Curriculum process had identified and endorsed best practices in self-reflection as a powerful support for effective learning. In addition, we were hearing from our Seminar students that they did not understand or appreciate the objectives of the program. With these concerns in mind, the new model set a goal to incorporate reflective practice throughout the Seminar sequence. We wanted to be more transparent about our own learning objectives and engage our students in a more explicit

dialogue, with themselves and with one another, about their progression toward those objectives. The primary design element in this area became a self-reflection essay that each student completes at the end of each Seminar course. In it, they step back and consider their learning with regard to the program's learning outcomes. These essays become part of a portfolio so that instructors have access to their students' prior self-reflections and thus can track their students' progress through the Seminar sequence. These essays culminate in a capstone assignment in the Senior Seminar where the students are asked to synthesize and integrate their learning across their core courses as well as their majors.

In March 2015, we invited Ellen Woods, the associate vice provost for undergraduate education at Stanford University, to complete an external review of the program. In her final report she stated that "student engagement in self-reflection and metacognition anchors the achievement of learning outcomes for the new Seminar. This emphasis ensures a learner-centered pedagogy and encourages students to think critically and to be intentional about taking responsibility for their own education."

Integration of Global and Multicultural Voices

In response to long-standing requests from both students and faculty, the new model specifically prioritized the integration of more cultural and gender diversity into the reading lists. The Freshman Seminar "Critical Strategies & Great Questions" would include a significant number of texts representing American Diversity (one of the Core Curriculum learning goals) and the Senior Seminar "Global Conversations of the 20th and 21st Centuries" would include more Global Perspectives (another core learning goal).

Alignment Between Writing in Composition and in the Freshman Seminar

The Core Curriculum process also encouraged more integration across core courses. To better prepare students for the experience of Seminar, the freshman course was moved to the spring semester so that students could adjust to college life and have already completed one course in composition, English 4. Our goal was to more explicitly align the writing assignments between the two courses, so that students entering the Freshman Seminar could build upon the foundational writing skills that they had developed in their fall Composition class.

Actions Taken

Faculty Development

The significant changes in the curricular design of the Seminar Program called for more extensive opportunities for faculty to gather to discuss operationalizing and implementation strategies. This was an opportunity to reinvigorate our teaching community, share existing best practices amongst ourselves, and embrace our shared commitment to the program. Beginning in 2011, we inaugurated a new series

of faculty development experiences dubbed the “Formation”—a term used by the Christian Brothers for their own process of deepening their understanding and commitment to their vocation. The Formation was designed to

1. provide a grounding in basic seminar pedagogy for both new and returning instructors;
2. guide all instructors through the innovations of the new sequence (e.g., the developmental progression of skills, more guidance in shared inquiry processes, emphasis on reflection and meta-learning, etc.);
3. support them in developing individualized curricula that meet its spirit and intent (e.g., class plans and common assessment processes).

Before teaching in the revised sequence, all faculty participated in an intensive two-semester faculty development process, beginning in the semester before they taught in the new sequence and continuing through the semester when they actually taught their first new course. Every participating faculty member received a \$1,000 stipend at the end of their two semesters. These stipends were made possible by a four-year grant awarded to the program by the president’s office.

The first two years of the Formation (2011–13) focused on maximizing opportunities to bring faculty together in face-to-face retreat formats and lunchtime workshops. These meetings were run as collective reflections on how to best address the goals of the new model. The fruits of these labors were collected in a searchable online archive that acted as a virtual teaching commons for the program. The second two years (2014–16) shifted to focus more on sharing the approaches that had been developed. In order to provide faculty with more flexibility in participating, the Formation moved to a hybrid format. Face-to-face meetings continued in traditional retreat formats, but the lunchtime workshops were phased out and replaced with online and small group activities. In essence, the Formation was “flipped.” So the delivery of content (e.g., curricular frameworks, examples of best practices, and other such resources) occurred mainly via online videos, presentations, and documents, while precious face-to-face time was devoted to the more interactive activities such as text discussions and class visit exchanges. Our goal was that this community development approach would have the benefit of disseminating the accumulated pedagogical wisdom of the faculty and thus organically addressing students’ previous concerns about consistency across those teaching Seminar. We made special efforts to invite faculty who did not support revising the curriculum during the model vote described in Section #1; participation was genuinely framed as an opportunity to continue to contribute their perspective and expertise with their colleagues, including their skepticism about the changes. Our external reviewer, Ellen Woods, noted that

bringing faculty together for a common learning experience parallels the students’ experience of Seminar. It builds a sense of community and purpose while acknowledging that developing students’ shared inquiry and metacognitive skills is not part of the typical doctoral preparation for the

professoriate. Commitment of such a considerable amount of faculty time to this activity demonstrates convincingly that Collegiate Seminar matters to the mission of Saint Mary's.

We have just completed the third year of the Formation, and a total of 85 faculty members have finished the process, with another 70 due to complete sometime in the final fourth year (2015–16). This represents the vast majority of ranked faculty previously teaching in the program, including many but not all of the faculty who did not support revising the curriculum in the first place. Ranked faculty and Christian Brothers comprised 70 percent of the participants, and contingent faculty 30 percent.

This year (2014–15) we also piloted a mentoring program for new faculty whereby they are assigned a veteran Seminar mentor who receives a course release for serving in the role for three mentees. These mentors orient new instructors to the structure, outcomes, and philosophy of the program while offering one-on-one guidance through individual meetings and regular class visits.

Implementation Committees

The revised Seminar courses were rolled out in a staggered fashion over four years while the old sequence courses were phased out in parallel. Each course required a year of development by faculty committee before being offered. Thus the Freshman Seminar was designed in 2011–12 and first offered in 2012–13, while the Sophomore Seminar was designed in 2012–13 and first offered in 2013–14, etc. We have just completed the design of the Senior Seminar, which will be offered in 2015–16. An Implementation Committee was designated for each course, comprised of roughly 610 ranked as well as contingent faculty who volunteered and were approved by the Collegiate Seminar Governing Board, the elected faculty oversight committee.

The Implementation Committees were charged with shepherding faculty-wide participation in deciding the reading lists and common assignment structures for each of the four new courses. They each began by soliciting recommendations from the faculty at large for text suggestions appropriate to the Seminar they were developing. They communicated the program's general text criteria as well as any additional criteria specific to their particular Seminar. All text suggestions (typically 200–300) were vetted by the committee, and then reading groups were organized to read a few texts, discuss them, and make a recommendation regarding their inclusion. These reading groups were comprised of volunteers from across the college and represented a vast outpouring of effort and community participation in the text selection process. For instance, there were over 20 reading groups considering three or four texts each for the Freshman Seminar. Texts under consideration were also regularly discussed at the Formation retreats and lunchtime meetings where more input was solicited. Through intense deliberations, and in consultation with the Governing Board, each committee then decided upon a draft reading list. This draft was then presented to the community through lunchtime fora where all could comment before the list went before the Governing Board for final approval. Every effort was made to make the process as inclusive and transparent as possible. Ultimately, it only

succeeded through the tireless efforts of the Implementation Committee members as well as all the faculty volunteers who supported them. Referring specifically to the Freshman Seminar implementation, external reviewer Ellen Woods expressed an

immense appreciation of the work involved to create this integration of social-intellectual-personal development. It is a testament to the program leadership and governance groups that first-year students experience a seamless learning/living environment steeped in the liberal arts tradition. It is no small task to agree on a set of texts, to define a shared inquiry pedagogical approach, and to establish professional development opportunities for the faculty who deliver this learning-centered program.

Informed Judgments

Evidence of Improvement and Continuing Commitment to the Processes

Throughout the implementation process, we have been collecting various forms of assessment data to track the impact and efficacy of the improvements. Early results with regard to reading practices, understanding and appreciation of seminar learning goals, transfer of seminar skills, and alignment with Composition have been encouraging. Our long-term assessment plan expresses our commitment to continuous improvement. While the four years of intensive implementation have been quite labor-intensive, we look forward to reaping some of the benefits of our collective labor while continuing to refine our curriculum at a more sustainable pace.

Of all the effects the curricular revisions had on educational effectiveness, few manifested more directly than the impacts on students' reading practices. Following the first round of course offerings in the new curriculum in spring 2013 and fall 2014, the program surveyed seminar students, asking them to estimate the percentage of the assigned reading they had completed for each text. Results revealed students were reading 15 percent more overall compared to previous survey data. As the curricular revisions were enacted in part to address concerns that too much reading in too short a time frame left students insufficient time to complete their assignments and thoroughly analyze the texts, these results suggest the new curriculum works as designed in this regard. Curating the length of reading assignments is a foundational change that not only improves reading practice, but also sets the stage for myriad other curricular revisions to take effect, as shorter readings leave more time in class for meta-discussion, informal writing, and reflection.

Analysis of student writing suggests that understanding and appreciation of the objectives of the program also improved as a result of the curricular revisions. As mentioned above, students complete self-reflection essays at the end of every Seminar class, and they are collected in an electronic database. This database allows both students and faculty to access their reflection essays from previous Seminars, which facilitates a more integrated narrative of their learning across the sequence. Beyond its pedagogical advantages, however, this portfolio system also presents unique op-

portunities for longitudinal programmatic assessment of student learning. In 2013-14, Professor Ellen Rigsby designed and completed a qualitative assessment project of the existing self-reflection essays. With the help of a team of faculty coders, she conducted a qualitative thematic analysis of a sample of self-reflection essays from the Freshman and Sophomore seminars. Analysis of the reflections revealed that the depth with which students understood the learning outcomes varied across a broad range, from misunderstanding a given outcome to reflecting on it in a way that indicates a multidimensional transfer of knowledge through several parts of the seminar experience and beyond, such that activities focused on one area of learning (e.g., listening, annotation) produce skills or abilities that manifest in other areas of learning (e.g., discussion, questioning). Single- vs. multidimensionality was identified as a potential rubric divider or benchmark for developmental progression in Seminar, as increasing levels of dimensionality in metacognitive reflection were considered indicative of greater transfer of knowledge and deeper learning. Our current plan is to perform a comparable analysis in 2016 when the first cohort of students completes the new sequence of courses. This will allow us to follow individual students longitudinally across their four years and assess the ongoing development of their learning in Seminar. We will also continue to explore and refine the possible developmental rubric based upon dimensionality. This research is part of ACTC's Qualitative Narrative Assessment Project, and we look forward to pursuing it in discussion with our institutional partners. We believe that this ongoing database of self-reflection essays will provide a unique and powerful window into our students' learning experiences.

The first phase of assessing the desired alignment between first-year Composition and Seminar courses involved an analysis of the over 300 student surveys completed in 2014-15. The results indicated that Seminar instructors are incorporating a wide range of writing activities that address the new learning outcomes in diverse ways. Certain skills (e.g., grammar instruction, drafting, and peer editing) are appropriately emphasized in Composition more than Seminar. While others (e.g., close textual analysis and writing as intellectual discovery) are more emphasized in Seminar, where they build upon what students were introduced to in their previous Composition courses. As a result of the Formation process, Seminar instructors are incorporating more exploratory writing assignments than Composition instructors are. These preliminary findings identified exploratory writing or "writing as learning" as an area where the two programs hope to align more fully in the future. That is an approach to writing that consciously uses the act of writing as a form and means of intellectual discovery. This past spring, the two programs convened a joint workshop to further articulate their intention and develop a plan for integrating "writing as learning" more fully into both curricula.

Since the spring of 2013, all faculty teaching the first iterations of the Freshman, Sophomore, and Junior seminars have participated in an extensive online survey. The survey was designed to be a first snapshot of the implementation of the new curriculum. There were detailed questions about the effectiveness of the new readings, the implementation of the modules, the utility of the Formation events, and the use of the online resources. In addition, the survey solicited an assessment of what the students might need help with in the next course in the sequence

(i.e., what developmental benchmarks were they hitting consistently and in what areas did they need more assistance). Preliminary analysis of this data has guided the evolution and shifting focus of the Formation. Identical survey data will be collected in 2015–16 with the first iteration of the new Senior Seminar. Once the four-year data collection is complete, we will conduct a comprehensive analysis of the full sequence and begin the first of the periodic reading lists reviews mandated by the Governing Board.

In April 2013, the Governing Board established a timeline and process for the periodic development and revision of the new reading lists. Beginning on 2016–17, the freshman and sophomore reading lists will be reviewed, and then in 2017–18, the junior and senior lists will be reviewed. Subsequently each list will be reviewed every other year according to the following process. Written suggestions will be invited from all faculty and students and maintained subsequently in a “green room” for texts under consideration. A Revision Subcommittee will make recommendations to the Governing Board, which will be responsible for the final determinations. In order to maintain the integrity of the reading lists, no more than two readings per seminar will be changed each revision cycle.

Finally, we are committed to involving our best students more actively in the governance and development of the Seminar Program. This past year we have re-invigorated our student co-leader program where veteran Seminar students become teaching assistants for faculty. For next year, we have invited our most distinguished co-leaders to join a pilot Student Advisory Board, which will serve the program in a variety of ways—as a source of ideas for curricular and co-curricular innovations, as a sounding board for administrative plans, and even as ambassadors to faculty interested in teaching in the program.

Continuous Improvements

Ellen Rigshy

We have assigned all seminar students in the “new” sections of seminar a reflective essay in which students are asked (from the accepted proposal) to “reflect upon and assess their own process of learning. Students will write a self-reflection essay that assesses their progress in the main learning outcomes of (1) shared inquiry, (2) critical thinking, and (3) written & oral communication. This self-assessment should involve some form of explicit dialogue between the student and the professor, either in conferences or in writing. The final version of the essay will be placed in a student essays database and be available to their future Seminar instructors.”

Explanation of the Choice of Thematic Analysis

We designed this essay to serve as a resource for evidence about student learning. By analyzing the essay using qualitative thematic analysis, we can aggregate student experiences to the extent that we find shared experiences among students taking seminar course. Themes are patterns that exist across a set of data (such as a set of

essays), and they speak to experience of particular phenomena. We can note students' shared experiences while keeping sight of individual student progress, or we can examine student learning across the institution. Themes are usually associated with specific research questions.

Explanation of the Research Questions or Areas

We are asking three kinds of questions, and these questions map on to three standard areas of assessment. The first is the assessment of the individual student and of students' engagement with shared inquiry across their years of attendance at Saint Mary's: *What do students think they are learning, and how do they understand their own learning?* At this stage of assessment, we do not have data complete enough to say anything about individual or institutional learning because the four new seminars have not finished rolling out into the curriculum.

The second set of questions addresses the range of student learning and will at least partially project for us how we should understand the developmental aspect of seminar learning. *How does student learning develop over the four years of seminar?*—particularly now that we have required that it be developmental. Rather than just imposing a rubric from above, we wanted to track what aspects of seminar most students seemed to understand, and through an analysis of this, we hope to construct a rubric for developmental learning in seminar that reflects students experience as well as our aspirations. This report will suggest some directions for the first two stages of the rubric.

The final set of questions addresses the programmatic level of assessment: *Does the pedagogical scaffolding that we have designed work? Are the learning outcomes clear, and do the modules address the learning outcomes?* We think that by looking at how students use the outcomes in the reflective essay, we can assess how useful they are, and insofar as the students show facility with the skills in the modules, we can indirectly assess how useful they are. There are several aspects of the outcomes that suggest some changes be made both to the outcomes and to the ways we have students approach them.

Method Statement: How We Collected Our Data

We analyzed eighty Seminar 1 essays on August 15, 2013, and January 29, 2014, and forty Seminar 2 essays on January 25, 2014, using open/emergent coding. Each essay was read by two coders, and the results were compared to produce a list of categories. These categories were compared and combined to produce themes.

We found two types of categories or themes: those having to do with students' reflection on their own learning (metacognition) and descriptive categories having to do with aspects of the seminar courses they took (description). The assessment team leader then wrote down the categories that were found and did some axial coding (the categories were sifted and grouped to better represent the findings with as little repetition as possible). The coded essays remain available, though, should we decide to look at other aspects of the essays. For example, we have not done a quantitative analysis of how many students used what learning outcomes, and this may

be a worthwhile direction to pursue as we consider whether or how to specify more directly topics that we want students to cover in the essays.

Analysis

List of Categories Found

Seminar 1

Descriptive Categories:

- Students’ preconceptions of seminar were changed (from feared to loved, or from uninterested to very interested).
- Students look to instructor for cues or help for what to emphasize (instead of thinking on their own or looking to their peers)—potential developmental rubric divider.
- Diversity/diverse opinions make the conversation better—potential developmental rubric divider.
- Students recognize that they understood the text better after a discussion than they did by just reading the text—potential developmental rubric divider.
- Challenges: Fear of judgment leads to lack of participation.
- Students consistently misuse genre classifications: “Homer’s novel”—potential developmental rubric divider.
- Engagement with design of the class: “I figured out that we read this book after the book because . . .” —potential developmental rubric divider.

To create a rubric, we can take the metacognitive themes and express them in a developmental rubric.

Seminar 1 Benchmarks 1	Seminar 1 Milestones 23		Seminar 1 Capstone 4
Student looks to instructor for cues to participate.	Students directly talk with peers.	Students seek input from peers.	Students take ownership for the health of the seminar.
Students read a text for understanding.	Students read a text and seek confirmation from peers.	Students read a text and seek disagreement from peers.	Students understand that discussing a text will teach them more than just reading it.

If there are aspects of the seminar that students are not seeing as important, then we need to find ways to increase their awareness of those aspects. One way to do this is to create standards that indicate what progress on the learning outcomes would involve. The modules are a step in this direction.

Seminar 1

Student Metacognition

Use of the Learning outcomes: Students are able to use the learning outcomes in most cases, but the depth with which they understand them comes out only through the evidence students provide. The following categories express the range we saw.

- ULO: misunderstanding the outcomes, i.e., thinking CT#2 is about one's own opinions, when it is about the assumptions, etc. in a text.
- ULO: use of outcomes with no evidence to demonstrate, i.e., "My writing has improved over time," not "After meeting with a peer who encouraged me to provide evidence for my argument, my writing improved."
- ULO: challenges of seminar overcome by osmosis or just doing more seminar (passively or through accumulation), i.e., "After a while, I got it."
- ULO: challenges of seminar overcome by engaging with discussion/writing/reflecting (levels of dimensionality increase as learning deepens—potential developmental rubric divider).
 1. One-dimensional learning: This describes a cause-and-effect understanding of a stand-alone action that yielded a stand-alone improvement: "After annotating my texts, I was better able to ask questions."
 2. Multidimensional learning: This describes a connected chain of actions and results that bleed into multiple areas of learning. "Once I began asking questions, I noticed that my peers often ignored them. As I listened to what questions they were interested in, I was able to pose better questions, and then I got really good feedback in the answers from my peers. That gave me the courage to use the discussion to hone theses for my papers, and at the same time, I began to enjoy and seek out opportunities to give feedback to my peers' writing."

Notes about the Learning Goals as Tools for Reflection

- Some of the learning outcomes, while excellent, do not serve as the basis for reflective writing. Students sometimes choose to reflect on WO#1, "to recognize and compose readable prose," but no essays in the first two batches of Seminar 2 essays seemed to indicate that it was a helpful exercise to reflect on this goal.
- Some of the learning outcomes have some repetition among certain of them: Each set of learning outcomes was written by separate faculty groups, and when considering them together here, we can see the overlaps (and those overlaps are evident in student essays). We might think about revisions that simplify the learning outcomes.
 - SI#2 and WO#4 are the most obvious examples of being about the same thing.
 - CT#4 and SI#1 are also quite similar.
 - CT#3 and WO#3 are also quite similar.

- There are no reading-centered outcomes, despite the fact that the seminar is centered on reading of enduring works of Western literature. It is suggested that we revise the seminar specific-learning outcomes, “which include reading backward and forward across the timeline to understand thread of conversation” and bring them back before the UEPC.

Conclusions about Student Metacognition

From the two coding sessions of Seminar 1 essays, the range of student metacognition varies from misunderstanding a given learning outcome to reflecting on it in a way that indicates a transfer of knowledge through several parts of the seminar experience; that is, that shows a multidimensional process of learning (an understanding of learning that allows a lesson from one area of seminar transfer to other areas of seminar or to outside the seminar). A second kind of rubric that would be possible to create could track the dimensionality of a students’ learning with respect to a learning goal. For example, look at this statement, culled from a student essay:

As I listened to the conversations [in class], I determined how to read a text and analyze it through how my classmates brought their analysis into the conversation. I have never annotated texts, either, which I found to be a helpful tool when it came to analysis, and to use in discussions. I would annotate the text with my opinions and reactions in order to help me have points to add to the conversation. By observing how others analyzed their texts, and by writing that down on my texts, I learned how to analyze. This taught me to look deeper into the text because conversations were generally about topics beyond what the text simply stated. (22)

Though listening and annotation, this student learned how to enter discussion and how to enter the text more deeply, which led the student to enter the conversation more deeply. This is an example, probably intermediate, of multidimensionality, in which activities focused on one area of learning produce skills or abilities that move over into other areas of learning. It would be possible to produce a rubric that would measure amounts of dimensionality like this one (which is based on the state rubric for science teacher lessons):

Seminar 1 Benchmarks	Seminar 1 Milestones		Seminar 1 Capstone
1	2	3	4
The learning described has either no evidence, no relation to the outcome or is one-dimensional in nature, e.g., “I’m a better reader because of Seminar 1.”	The learning described is primarily a one-dimensional explanation of the outcome, e.g., “annotating the text made me a better reader.”	The learning described has a progression of learning tasks, all of which are related to the outcome, e.g., the quote above.	The learning described is multidimensional and demonstrates a deep understanding of the learning outcome described and moves beyond the outcome by applying the learning to new contexts.

Or some learning tasks may be complex enough that they carry over between seminars. This will become clearer when we have taught through the new seminar all the way through. By the end of the four seminars we want students to reflect deeply on the learning outcomes. Some may do that by the end of Seminar 1. Others won't.

Seminar 1	Seminar 2 and 103		Seminar 104
Use of the Learning Outcomes Benchmarks	Use of the Learning Outcomes Milestones		Use of the Learning Outcomes Capstone
1	2	103	
The learning described either has no evidence, has no relation to the outcome, or is one-dimensional in nature, e.g., "I'm a better reader because of Seminar 1."	The learning described is primarily a one-dimensional explanation of the outcome, e.g., "Annotating the text made me a better reader."	The learning described has a progression of learning tasks, all of which are related to the outcome, e.g., the quote above.	The learning described is multidimensional and demonstrates a deep understanding of the learning outcome described and moves beyond the outcome by applying the learning to new contexts.

Seminar 2

Coding: It is not possible to construct themes from the seminar coding because only fifty papers were analyzed the first time. Next fall, we will run a second session of coding to round out the analysis. Nonetheless, here are some preliminary categories from the first round of reading/analysis.

Preliminary Descriptive Categories

- The reading was much harder in Seminar 2 than in Seminar 1.
- Seminar 1 prepared me for Seminar 2, except (in some cases) for the difficulty of the reading.
- Students are realizing the importance of listening beyond their own viewpoints.
- Students claim to become better readers.
- Students are challenged, in a good way, by classmates' ideas.

Developmental Categories

- ULO: writing outcomes almost universally were presented with no evidence or were discussed at the level of goals, not outcomes, i.e. "my shared inquiry improved."
- ULO: shared inquiry outcomes were presented with indirect evidence.

- ULO: quiet students: i.e., a high number of essays showed that students understood that “quiet students” negatively impacted the discussion and showed concern about wanting to help them in.
- ULO: Quotation of outcomes is replacing evidence.

Conclusions

Writing: student reflection on writing is lacking evidence. Is this a function of student emphasis on improving reading?

By the end of Seminar 2 students show evidence of thinking deeply about seminar discussion and the process of preparing for discussion; they do not show similar evidence about writing and the writing process. This would suggest that we need to enhance our attention to writing and the writing process.

Technical Suggestions from the Coders

- The essay coders suggested making a different version of the goals that students would use foster better essays.
- They also suggested that giving students more direction in the assignment would foster better essays:
 1. Give students a choice of outcomes, but require they write about at least one in which they feel weak.
 2. Direct students to one specific topic for the later seminars, but allow flexibility in the others, i.e., in Seminar 2, explain the differences between Seminar 1 and Seminar 2 for the students, and reflect on the difficulty of the readings.

Final Conclusion: We are halfway through the seminar rollout, and three-eighths of the way through the assessment for the first cycle of seminar courses. We have two potential directions to go for rubrics and several observations about clarifying the learning outcomes, including trying to add in some of the seminar-specific language that has not been passed by the UEPC about reading outcomes.

Action Items

1. Revise our learning outcomes to eliminate redundancy and to make the outcomes simpler for students.
2. Use the findings to create rubrics (probably developmental) for key elements of the seminar rubric, based on the simplification.

In the meantime, our accreditation agency will require a 2018 report on institutional goals in the area of critical thinking, and Collegiate Seminar, along with English Composition, will be the primary disciplinary locations for collecting evidence for the institutional critical thinking outcome. The following discussion of our Critical Thinking Assessment plan was written by Vice Provost Chris Sindt, with input from Frances Sweeney and Ellen M. Rigsby.

2018 Assessment of Critical Thinking Competency

Saint Mary's College of California (SMC) will produce an institutional assessment of critical thinking. Critical thinking is both one of the WASC core competencies and one of the essential student learning outcomes (SLOs) of the SMC core curriculum. In 2012, Saint Mary's launched a fully revised general education, known as the "Core." The first general area of the core learning outcomes is called Habits of Mind and includes written and oral communication, shared inquiry, information evaluation and research practices, and critical thinking.

The SMC core curriculum defines critical thinking in the following way: the ability to think in a way that is clear, reasoned, reflective, informed by evidence, and aimed at deciding what to believe or do. Dispositions supporting critical thinking include open-mindedness and motivation to seek the truth.

The faculty-based Core Curriculum Committee initially designed an assessment plan for critical thinking. The first step was to pilot the use of a national test for critical thinking, the Tennessee Tech University's Critical Thinking Assessment Test (CAT). During the 2014–15 academic year, a random sample of approximately eighty students (forty freshmen and forty seniors) were selected for the test. SMC faculty scored these tests using CAT's scoring procedure and rubrics. Based on this pilot, we now seek to expand our assessment of critical thinking to evaluate the outcome across Collegiate Seminar (the SMC four-course "Great Books" sequence) and composition courses, looking longitudinally across students' four years.

SMC's 2013 Institutional Report states that "the core curriculum is developmental and integrated, and aligned with disciplinary study." We would like to design an institutional assessment of our critical thinking that measures that development and how the courses align with Habits of Mind, particularly focusing on how Composition and Collegiate Seminar are integrated with each other and with student learning in the major disciplines. The institutional assessment will also include an engagement with communication (particularly through the core curriculum website) of the assessment process and results.

How does the project relate to our institution's mission, its strategic or academic plan, and/or current student achievement initiatives?

This project directly supports our student achievement initiatives, primarily the roll-out of the core curriculum (now in its fifth year) and the goal to have a comprehensive and sustainable assessment plan for the core. As noted above, the Core Curriculum stresses the integration of learning, which is a hallmark of SMC's strategic plan, which states that "our distinctiveness stems from our ability to inspire passionate problem-solvers who integrate their intellectual and spiritual lives, and who work and thrive at the front lines of the world's great challenges. Today's world needs the blend of critical thinkers, scientifically and technologically literate citizens, ethical and inclusive leaders, and working professionals to build the kind of community we model on campus."

How will the project address specific WSCUC Standards (list standards as appropriate)?

This project primarily addresses Standard 2: Achieving Educational Objectives Through Core Functions. It responds to nearly all of the criteria for review in Standard 2 and particularly addresses core competences (2.2a), SLOs for student learning at all levels (2.3 and 2.6), and the faculty's responsibility for assessing student learning (2.4).

How will the project address the Community of Practice initiative outcomes?

This initiative will address the first learning outcome (Learning Outcomes Capacity-Building) by building capacity among a wide range of faculty serving on our Core Curriculum Committee and as instructors of these large Core Curriculum programs (Composition and Collegiate Seminar). Faculty will gain the capacity to effect institutional change through assessment-based revision of the core curriculum.

The initiative will address Outcome 2 (Improved Learning Outcomes Visibility) through the development and expansion of the public-facing Core Curriculum website, which will display and explain both the assessment process and the results of the critical thinking learning assessment. We want this project to be a pilot for other assessment communication, particularly in relation to the Core Curriculum.

The initiative will address Outcome 3 (Quality Assurance/Accreditation Resource Development, Curation, and Dissemination) by the development of standardized assessment processes, rubrics, and dashboards to share internally and with the WSCUC region. It will be our goal to produce replicable and sustainable processes and documents, to be shared internally in future years and to contribute to a larger region-wide collection of resources.

What is the intended scope of the project (institutional, departmental, co-curricular, programmatic, etc.)?

We hope to develop an institutional assessment of critical thinking that tracks our students' development throughout their four (or two) years at Saint Mary's. This is an institutional assessment that will span two primary programs (Collegiate Seminar and Composition).

What is/are the goal/s of the project?

The goal of the project is to create a transparent and sustainable institutional assessment plan for critical thinking across both English Composition and Collegiate Seminar. In order to reach this goal, we have the following action items:

1. Review the results of the pilot to identify key areas to be addressed in the development of assignments to be used as artifacts for collection.
2. Continue to review literature about critical thinking assessment in order to increase understanding of best practices nationwide, especially at peer institutions,

and at other institutions with Great Books programs. Create an access for all faculty to take advantage of these resources.

3. Engage Collegiate Seminar and Composition faculty and leadership in developing assignments and a measure of evaluation (e.g., rubric), and a timeline for distribution, collection, review/evaluation, and analysis.

4. Work with faculty teaching the courses to complete the work of assignments and collection of artifacts.

5. Evaluate artifacts against the rubric.

6. Complete an analysis of the usefulness/worth of the structure. Close the loop by making use of results in courses and by adjusting the structure of assessment as necessary.

7. Revise the Core Curriculum website to track progress, display results, and reflect on continuous improvement.

Augustinian Virtues in a Modern World

The Augustine and Culture Seminar and the Foundation Course Sequence at the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Villanova University

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Institutional Choices

In response to a Middle States Evaluation, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences of Villanova University in 1992 revised its core curriculum to include a new mission-centric Great Books course originally called the Core Humanities Seminar (and as of 2003 renamed the Augustine and Culture Seminar [ACS]). The intention of the new two-semester sequence, required of all liberal arts and sciences students, was four-fold: to provide a foundation in significant texts of human civilization from ancient to modern times; to enable first-year students to develop the critical skills of deep reading, critical thinking and discussion, and analytical writing befitting a college graduate; to inculcate in first-year students a meaningful understanding of the Augustinian and Catholic intellectual tradition; and to create a community of scholars inside and outside the classroom. A central element of the core humanities sequence was to introduce students to the thought of St. Augustine of Hippo through reading the *Confessions*.

By 1996, the other three colleges (the schools of Business, Nursing, and Engineering) had opted into the new core humanities sequence, making it the de facto core course of the university, along with the Theology 1000 introductory course.

In 2010, as part of a core curriculum revision in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, five courses were identified as the Foundation Courses within the college: ACS 1000/1001; Theology 1000; Philosophy 1000; and Ethics 2050. At that time, a committee was created to oversee the process of shaping these courses as a coherent unit within the core experience (particularly within the first-year experience) and to assess both the individual courses and the Foundation sequence as a whole.

Action Steps

Starting in 2015, we began to actively develop and implement an assessment plan for both the ACS two-semester sequence and the Foundation sequence.

For ACS, we took the following action steps:

1. Use the culminating writing portfolio required for all ACS classes as the starting point for assessment;

2. Identify the writing artifacts to be assessed: one diagnostic essay; one analytical essay from the fall semester; one analytical essay from the spring semester; one creative assignment; one reflective essay about the ACS experience.
3. Create an electronic portfolio environment.
4. Assessment: “read-around” committee of faculty to read a significant sample of ACS portfolios (to be completed summer 2018).

For the Foundation Courses, the first step was to come up with a common description of what the Foundation Courses are and what they are intended as a whole to do. The description follows:

The Foundation Courses help define what makes a Villanova education distinctive and work together to answer a series of related questions:

- “Who am I?” — The Augustine and Culture Seminar 1000 (Ancients) and 1001 (Moderns)
- “What can I know?”— Philosophy 1000: Knowledge, Reality, Self
- “What do I believe?”— Theology and Religious Studies 1000: Faith, Reason, and Culture
- “How should I live?”— Ethics 2050: The Good Life—Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems

By seeking answers to these questions, you will conduct an interdisciplinary inquiry that is informed by Augustinian and Catholic intellectual traditions, develop your skills in critical thinking and communication, deepen your understanding of yourself and the world, and engage with issues of personal responsibility and social justice.

The next set of action steps were as follows:

1. Develop boilerplate language and common syllabi header (see attached). The language includes a brief overview of the four foundation questions listed above, as well as an eye-catching graphic to identify the foundation courses as part of the “Tolle Lege” Foundation courses. *Tolle Lege* is a key phrase from St. Augustine’s *Confessions* meaning “Take Up and Read”; it marks the moment where he hears a child’s voice singing “Tolle Lege,” and it inspires the start of his conversion experience.
2. Creation of essay topic which services first as a diagnostic “snapshot” of where students start before the Foundation course sequence and then as a concluding indication of how students are using the knowledge they have gained after the sequence. The essay topic is “The Life Well-Lived,” and it uses the following prompt: “Please answer the following question drawing on your education thus far: *What is a life well lived? In your response identify the key intellectual and moral influences that shape your answer to the question.*” Students are given the assignment on the first or second day

of their ACS class in the fall; they are then asked to revisit the question in their Ethics 2050 class in sophomore year.

3. Electronic portfolio access created for all Foundation Courses. We have tried two different electronic portfolio platforms; we are currently using a platform that intersects with Blackboard (but is not tied directly to the student's course). The portfolio stays with our students for all four years at Villanova, and it uses a template that allows students to upload the ACS artifacts, along with the artifacts for Philosophy 1000, Theology 1000, and Ethics 2050. At present, the artifacts requested for Philosophy and Theology are simply "best essay"; the Ethics 2050 artifact is the rewritten, revisited "Life Well Lived" essay. The entire portfolio template is now entitled CLAS Foundation Courses portfolio.
4. Subcommittee on Foundation Courses develops two protocols and rubrics for use by assessment teams (each program/department offering Foundation Courses nominates four faculty to establish four ad hoc assessment teams):
 - a. Protocol and Rubric 1 for assessing goals (direct assessment).
 - b. Protocol and Rubric 2 for assessing essay 1 + essay 2 (indirect assessment).

Learning Goals and Rubrics

The Subcommittee on Foundation Courses first created a set of Common Learning Goals. We identified three main goals: Knowledge, Skills, and Values.

Learning Goal 1

Knowledge: Inquiry Informed by Augustinian, Catholic Intellectual Traditions

Objective: Through interdisciplinary inquiry focused on fundamental human questions of identity, knowledge, faith, and morality, students will

- demonstrate understanding of significant ideas and values in the Augustinian and Catholic intellectual tradition;
- explain the relevance of the past to their understanding of the present while coming to understand the perspective of their own cultural assumptions and values; and
- analyze the complexity of both shared and diverse human experiences from multiple points of view.

Learning Goal 2

Skills: Critical Thinking and Communication

Objective: Through close reading of texts in diverse genres, intensive writing, and active class participation, students will

- develop the ability to read, reflect upon, analyze, and evaluate primary sources;

- write essays that contain well-supported, arguable theses and demonstrate personal engagement and clear purpose; and
- express ideas clearly, listen carefully, and enter into dialogue with others in a respectful manner.

Learning Goal 3

Values: Social Justice and Personal Responsibility

Objective: Through reflection on their own values and beliefs in conversation with the central themes and values of the Augustinian Catholic tradition, students will

- grow in self-knowledge and connection to others.
- synthesize and articulate a philosophy of life grounded in clarity of purpose, belief, and values;
- demonstrate an understanding of human agency and the impact of personal and communal choices on the world.

The committee then created a rubric using a four-point scale and based on the three learning goals listed above (see attached). The challenge, however, was to fine-tune the rubric to distinguish appropriately between the (as it turns out) very different types of artifacts that were submitted for each of the courses. The main focus of the rubric was on the two bookend “Life Well Lived” essays in each portfolio. The rubric categories for these two essays were:

1. Explains the relevance of the ideas and values of the Augustinian and Catholic intellectual tradition to his/her life.
2. Expresses ideas clearly.
3. Articulates a philosophy of life grounded in clarity of purpose, belief, and values.
4. Demonstrates an understanding of human agency.

The remaining artifacts were judged on one main category: “Meets one or more of the Foundation Courses’ learning goals.”

All the categories were scored with the following standards:

1. Unacceptable (below standard)
2. Acceptable (meets standard)
3. Good (occasionally excellent)
4. Excellent (exceeds standards)

Timeline

Our first cohort completed the Foundation Course sequence using the “Life Well Lived” essays in 2016. Our intention was to do a sample of these portfolios and attempt an electronic scoring of the portfolios in the summer of 2016. However, we ran into a few problems immediately. It proved to be more difficult than we anticipated to capture the electronic portfolios in a way that permitted the readers access

to completed portfolios in a user-friendly way. But an even greater challenge turned out to be a weak link in the Ethics essay upload. The Ethics faculty had not been given adequate information about requesting their students to upload their artifacts and, even more importantly, submitting their portfolios (which reside outside of the Blackboard environment) to Blackboard through an assignment created within the Ethics class. Without the Ethics artifacts, and more specifically, without the final bookend “Life Well Lived” essays, we were left without a true comparison point from starting point to finish. As a result, the readers found it difficult to identify clear trajectories in the students’ progress on any of the Foundation Course learning goals.

Our second cohort completed the Foundation Course sequence in May 2017. This time, the Ethics faculty were given adequate instructions in how to guide their students in uploading the necessary documents. As a result, we ended up with enough completed portfolios for a statistically significant sample of 82 portfolios.

Because the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences assessment plan has prioritized the Foundation Courses assessment, we have focused our energies on that rather than running parallel readings of the ACS portfolios alone. We are still in the process of redefining the rubric for the ACS portfolios; in addition, we are still in conversation about whether to add an Augustinian essay artifact and eliminate the creative assignment artifact (or retain it as an optional artifact).

Informed Judgments

Our first complete Foundation Courses portfolio assessment provided us with some clear positive results concerning how effectively we have conveyed our institutional values through the Foundation Courses. To that end, we found the most marked improvements in the Life Well Lived essays, particularly for the categories of “Explains the relevance of the ideas and values of the Augustinian and Catholic intellectual tradition to his/her life” and “Articulates a philosophy of life grounded in clarity of purpose, belief, and values” (see attached grid). There was also development in the scores for “Demonstrates an understanding of human agency,” but the changes were not as dramatic.

The overall comparison of averages between the ACS and Ethics essays likewise showed a modest but distinct trend upward (see attached). It was not as dramatic as we would have hoped, but it was definitely an upward trend.

The other artifacts in the portfolio, however, turned out to be more difficult to assess in relation to each other, or even within the categories of the question. Because of the variability of when a student takes the various Foundation Courses (with the exception of ACS, which is generally the freshman year), it was not always clear what the student’s trajectory was through the courses; it was also not always clear what type of assignment had been uploaded (which meant some of the assignments were simply difficult to assess without the context of the course). And the reviewers frequently felt that they were not clear about how to compare the essays across the courses. The reviewers noted that it was especially difficult to assess the portfolios on the final category of “Overall: Growth in Self-Knowledge and Connection to Others.” The category was open to more subjective opinions on the part of the reviewers,

and as a result it seemed that the numbers skewed artificially negatively (in contrast to the clearer positive numbers demonstrated in the comparison of the *Life Well Lived* bookend essays).

Further Improvements

There are three main areas for improvement: technology, rubrics, and artifact selections. The feedback from our team of reviewers was very helpful in pinpointing some of the problem spots; in addition, the data collected indicated some of the holes and weak areas of our data collection.

Technology

In terms of technology, the primary issue was accessing the portfolios. Reviewers encountered problems with formatting of some of the artifacts, depending on the format that the students chose to upload. Incomplete portfolios were another problem encountered by the reviewers. We have to keep reminding our faculty to assign and collect the portfolio in each Foundation class.

We have already begun to work with our technology team to reassess the platform and the instructions given to our faculty for collecting the artifacts and portfolios.

Rubrics

The rubrics, and how the reviewers understand the rubrics (and the courses being assessed), continue to be something we need to tweak further. Due to time constraints, we did not do an initial in-person read-around to clarify the process and the rubrics and to address consistency questions. One reviewer noted.

It would be helpful to see what those who designed the curriculum had in mind for each category in practice, perhaps by walking through an example portfolio together, rather than separately. . . . Perhaps a section could be added to the training session wherein we work through a practice portfolio together as a group and can discuss our thoughts on difficult cases together.

Another benefit of doing a sample portfolio together is to establish rating categories. Another reviewer noted that “as the evaluating went on . . . I became less confident in my ‘Acceptable’ rating; I worried that I alternated between using it as a category for adequate papers versus a category for uninspiring papers. It might have been useful if there were 5 levels of ranking.”

The category of “overall growth” was noted by several reviewers to be particularly difficult to judge. One reviewer commented, “The final question on the rubric—overall growth—was problematic to score in many cases since both philosophy and theology can be taken any time in the first two years. The best artifacts from a comparison standpoint are from ACS 1000, the “*Life Well Lived*,” to compare against the same topic in Ethics, but this is not a formal essay (and often seemed written very

slap-dash), and so seems of limited value for ascertaining growth. . . . It would be great if the courses or essays were dated in some way so that we knew the sequence the students took them in and so could better ascertain growth.”

Finally, the category of “Meets one or more of the Foundation Courses learning goals” was felt to be too wide of a category, with the result that the scores were not all that helpful in defining a student’s growth.

Clearly, the next task for the Foundation Courses committee is to sort out how to tighten the rubrics to better fit the artifacts submitted. We are considering eliminating the “overall growth” question unless we can add an artifact that would serve as a midway point (something at the end of the first year of a student’s trajectory) that might be a universal topic across all ACS sections.

Artifact Selection

The most frequent comment the reviewers made was that they often felt like they were comparing “apples to oranges.” Since students have a wide range of what they can upload for several of the artifacts (e.g., “best paper”), and since there is a wide range of assignments and approaches within each Foundation Course, the artifacts uploaded ended up ranging from short to long essays, thesis-driven to more personal reflections, book reviews to exam responses, etc. As a result, it became difficult for the reviewers to compare across portfolios, and sometimes even within the same portfolio.

We are currently examining whether we can tighten the language on the required artifacts from Philosophy and Theology to prevent the current wide range of possible essays that might be uploaded. In addition, we are exploring whether Philosophy and Theology would be open to creating a standard assignment across their 1000 sections.

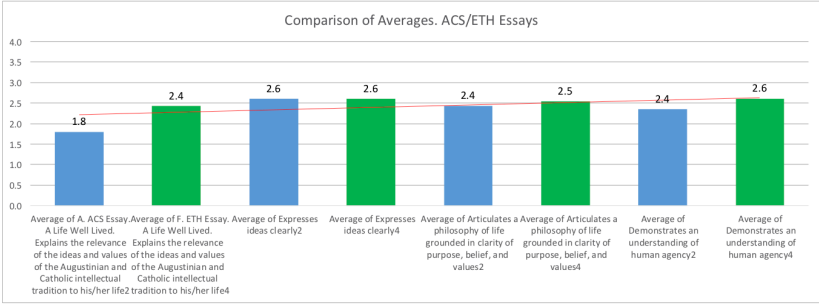
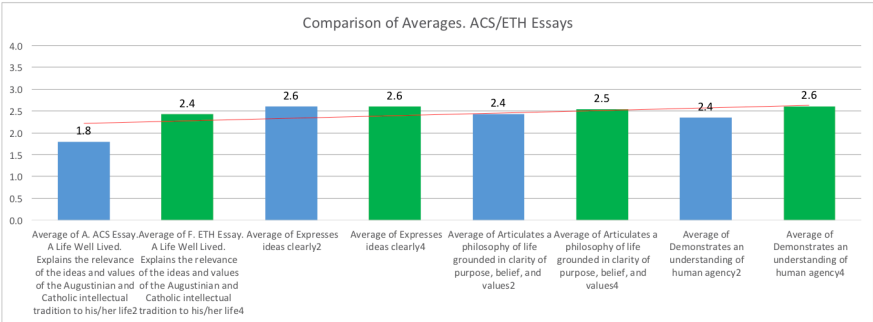
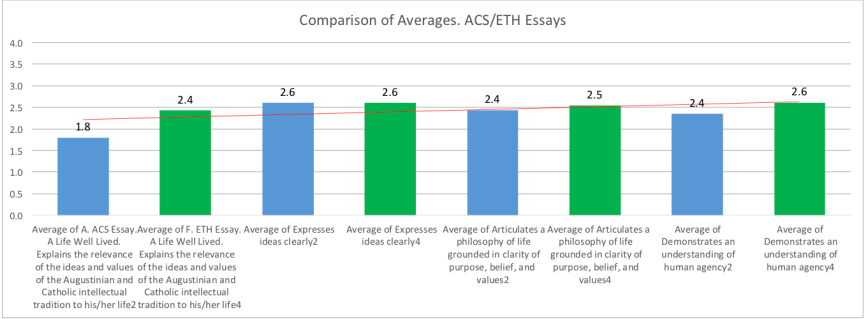
Another possibility is to use the existing ACS reflection essay (which is uploaded into the ACS portfolio but not currently used for the Foundation Courses assessment), and ask faculty to assign a common prompt for the reflection essays. This would give us another way to map how the students progress from the start of ACS (with the “Life Well Lived” essay) to the end of ACS, and then to the end of Ethics 2050. With an easily identifiable midway point, we might find a solution to the problem of recognizing the trajectory within any given portfolio.

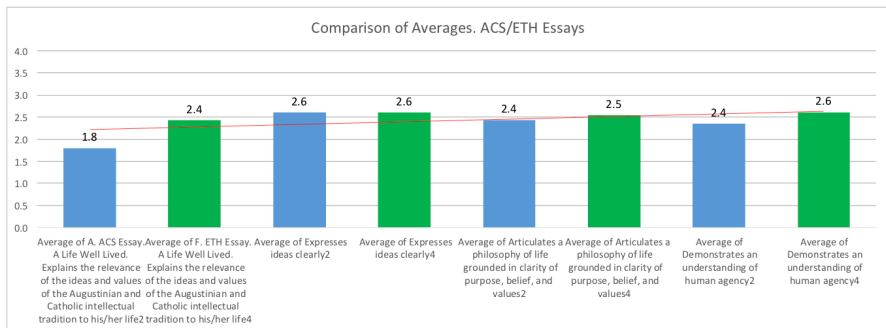
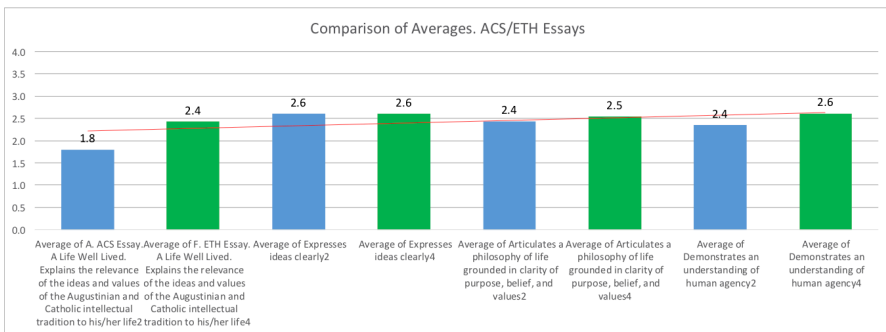
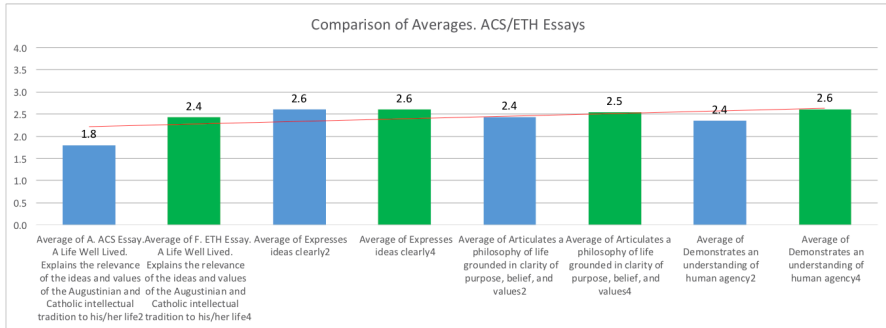
Given these improvements, we are aiming to do a small sample group this coming summer (2018), with the goal of doing a full Foundation Courses portfolio assessment with a larger selection in the following summer of 2019.

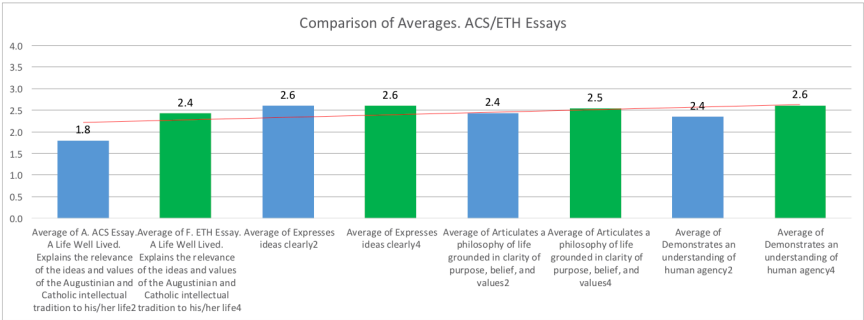
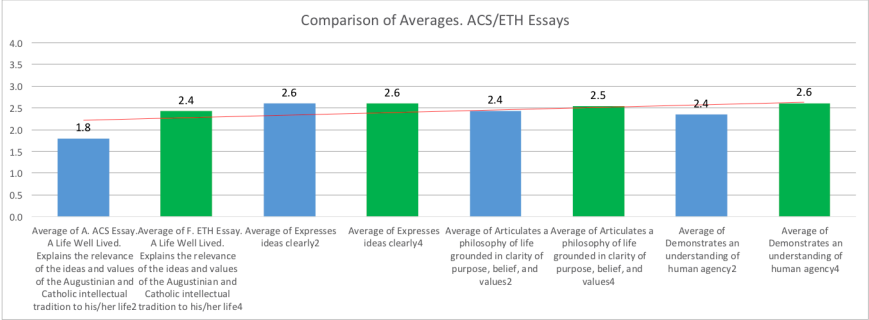
	Unacceptable (Below Standards) [1]	Acceptable (Meets Standards) [2]	Good (Occasionally Exceeds) [3]	Excellent (Exceeds Standards) [4]	Artifact meets the fol- lowing Foundation Courses Learning Goals
A. ACS Essay. <i>A Life Well Lived.</i> Explains the relevance of the ideas and values of the Augustinian and Catholic intellectual tradition to his/her life.	Minimally recognizes the relevance of the ideas and values of the Augustinian and Catholic intellectual tradition for his/her life.	Recognizes and adequately illustrates the relevance of the ideas and values of the Augustinian and Catholic intellectual tradition for him/her.	Situates his/her point of view in the context of the Augustinian and Catholic intellectual tradition and shows emerging awareness of his/her own cultural assumptions and values.	Situates the argument by (a) explaining the broader context of the Augustinian and Catholic intellectual tradition, (b) describing developments or processes relevant to a life well lived, and (c) making connections among them. Shows keen awareness of his/her own cultural assumptions and values.	
Expresses ideas clearly.	Expresses ideas randomly and/or in isolated pieces.	Expresses ideas with some clarity but without clear overall structure.	Expresses ideas clearly, providing suitable support and detail.	Expresses ideas clearly and provides support that contains rich, vivid detail.	

Articulates a philosophy of life grounded in clarity of purpose, belief, and values.	Makes no attempt to articulate a philosophy of life.	Presents a broad philosophy though lacking depth.	Presents a broad philosophy that synthesizes some sources (incl. experiences).	Presents a sophisticated philosophy by compiling/combining information together in a new pattern.	
Demonstrates an understanding of human agency.	Does not comprehend the meaning of human agency.	Provides some evidence of understanding human agency with minimal detail.	Demonstrates understanding of human agency, giving descriptions and stating main ideas and relating these to personal and communal decision making.	Articulates human agency with full understanding of levels of complexity, including the impact of personal and communal choices on the world.	
B. PHL Artifact. Meets one or more of the Foundation Courses learning goals.	Artifact does not reflect achievement of any of the learning goals.	Artifact conveys some association with one of the learning goals but not elaboration of, or incorporation into, a larger conceptual framework.	Artifact elaborates clearly on issues relevant to one of the learning goals.	Artifact aligns clearly with one or more learning goals and/or includes reflection on the connections among them.	<div>Goal 1 <input type="checkbox"/></div> <div>Goal 2 <input type="checkbox"/></div> <div>Goal 3 <input type="checkbox"/></div>

<p>F. ETH Essay. <i>A Life Well Lived.</i></p> <p>Explains the relevance of the ideas and values of the Augustinian and Catholic intellectual tradition to his/her life.</p>	<p>Minimally recognizes the relevance of the ideas and values of the Augustinian and Catholic intellectual tradition for his/her life.</p>	<p>Recognizes and adequately illustrates the relevance of the ideas and values of the Augustinian and Catholic intellectual tradition for him/her.</p>	<p>Situates his/her point of view in the context of the Augustinian and Catholic intellectual tradition and shows emerging awareness of his/her own cultural assumptions and values.</p>	<p>Situates the argument by (a) explaining the broader context of the Augustinian and Catholic intellectual tradition, (b) describing developments or processes relevant to a life well lived, and (c) making connections among them. Shows keen awareness of his/her own cultural assumptions and values.</p>	
<p>Expresses ideas clearly.</p>	<p>Expresses ideas randomly and/or in isolated pieces.</p>	<p>Expresses ideas with some clarity but without clear overall structure.</p>	<p>Expresses ideas clearly providing suitable support and detail.</p>	<p>Expresses ideas clearly and provides support that contains rich, vivid detail.</p>	
<p>Articulates a philosophy of life grounded in clarity of purpose, belief, and values.</p>	<p>Makes no attempt to articulate a philosophy of life.</p>	<p>Presents a broad philosophy though lacking depth.</p>	<p>Presents a broad philosophy that synthesizes some sources (incl. experiences).</p>	<p>Presents a sophisticated philosophy by compiling/combining information together in a new pattern.</p>	









Tolle Lege—Pick up and read.
— St. Augustine, *Confessions* VIII



Augustine and Culture Seminar

1000 (Ancients) and 1001 (Moderns)

Foundation Question

Who am I?

Augustine and Culture

Seminar is one of a group of five courses that we call the foundation courses. The courses make a Villanova education distinctive and work together to answer a series of related questions:

WHO AM I?

Augustine and Culture Seminar 1000 (Ancients) and 1001 (Moderns)

WHAT CAN I KNOW?

Philosophy 1000: Knowledge, Reality, Self

WHAT DO I BELIEVE?

Theology and Religious Studies 1000: Faith, Reason, and Culture

HOW SHOULD I LIVE?

Ethics 2050: The Good Life—Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems

By seeking answers to these questions, you will conduct an interdisciplinary inquiry that is informed by Augustinian and Catholic intellectual traditions, develop your skills in critical thinking and communication, deepen your understanding of yourself and the world, and engage with issues of personal responsibility and social justice.

Qualitative, Narrative Assessment of the Mercer University Great Books Program

Kathryn D. Kloepper, Charlotte S. Thomas, and Achim Kopp

Institutional Choices

In the fall of 1982, the faculty of Mercer University's College of Liberal Arts made a far-reaching institutional choice. Against the skepticism of some of their more traditionally minded colleagues, a group of faculty succeeded in implementing a Great Books program as one of two general education tracks alongside the existing, more conventional distributional program. After consultation with colleagues from St. John's College, they decided to use a seminar model, in which core texts of the Western tradition were discussed in chronological order. The selection of the texts was put in the hands of a number of subcommittees, consisting of faculty members interested in teaching the respective courses. In order to avoid lengthy discussions about what constituted a "great" book and which texts should be included in the reading list, the faculty members agreed, at least for the time being, to accept the works the subcommittees came up with, with the possibility of later revision. This method led to a remarkably stable curriculum within the Great Books Program. Thirty-five years later, both the distributional program (now called "Integrative Program") and the Great Books Program still form the two general education tracks in the college, but, remarkably, it is the Great Books Program that has undergone fewer modifications over the years.

The idea behind Mercer University's Great Books Program is simple.¹ The first assumption is that before students can begin to understand other cultures, they first "must sufficiently engage and confront the Western tradition." Secondly, the faculty teaching in the Great Books Program sees itself as part of "a community dedicated to liberal education." Third, liberal engagement of the Western tradition can best be achieved "through thoughtful conversation shaped by great books that record many of the original contributions to that intellectual tradition."

The Great Books curriculum consists of a series of seven mandatory courses plus two elective special topics courses. In addition to the Great Books courses, the Great Books track shares a number of requirements with the Integrative track, namely University 101 (a typical one-hour college freshman course), Mathematical Reasoning (satisfied by an approved course in Mathematics, Statistics, Computer Science, or Philosophy), The Natural World (typically a lab course in Biology, Chemistry, or Physics), and Foreign Language (French, German, Spanish, Latin, Greek, or Chinese).

As the following list shows, the seven mandatory Great Books courses are ordered in a roughly chronological fashion, beginning with Homer in the eighth century BC and ending with modern authors of the twentieth century:

GBK 101: Understanding Self and Others: Among Gods and Heroes

HOMER: *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*

AESCHYLUS: *Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers*, and *The Eumenides*

SOPHOCLES: *Oedipus the King* and *Antigone*

THUCYDIDES: *History of the Peloponnesian War*

PLATO: *Euthyphro* and *Apology*

GBK 202: Classical Cultures

PLATO: *The Republic* and *Meno*

ARISTOTLE: *Nicomachean Ethics*

EUCLID: *The Elements* (selections)

VIRGIL: *The Aeneid*

GBK 203: The Hebrew and Christian Traditions

HEBREW BIBLE: Genesis 1–11, Exodus 1–24, Jeremiah 1–3, Isaiah 40–55, and *Job*

NEW TESTAMENT: Two Gospels, *Galatians*, and *Romans*

AUGUSTINE: *Confessions* (selections)

AQUINAS: *Summa Theologica* (selections)

GBK 304: Order and Ingenuity

DANTE: *The Divine Comedy* (selections)

CHAUCER: *The Canterbury Tales* (selections)

MACHIAVELLI: *The Prince*

CERVANTES: *Don Quixote*

LUTHER or CALVIN: Selections

GALILEO: “The Two Chief World Systems”

MONTAIGNE: *Essays* (selections)

GBK 305: The Modern Worldview

SHAKESPEARE: *Hamlet* and *King Lear*

BACON: *The New Organon* (selections)

DESCARTES: *Discourse on Method*

PASCAL: *Pensées* (selections)

MILTON: *Paradise Lost*

HOBBS: *Leviathan* (selections)

NEWTON: Selections

LOCKE: *Second Treatise of Government*

HUME: *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*

GBK 306: Reason and Revolution

ROUSSEAU: *The Social Contract*

GOETHE: *Faust*

SMITH: *Wealth of Nations* (selections)

JEFFERSON: “Declaration of Independence”

HAMILTON: *The Federalist Papers* (selections)

ROMANTIC POETS: Selections

KANT: *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (selections)

DARWIN: *The Origin of Species* (selections)

TOCQUEVILLE: *Democracy in America* (selections)

MARX and ENGELS: *The Communist Manifesto*

AUSTEN: *Pride and Prejudice* or *Persuasion*

EMERSON: *Essays: First Series* or THOREAU: *Walden*

GBK 407: The Age of Ambivalence

DOSTOEVSKY: *The Brothers Karamazov*

PEIRCE: "How to Make Our Ideas Clear"

YEATS: *The Tower*

MENDEL: "Experiments in Plant Hybridizations"

FREUD: *Civilization and Its Discontents*

WEBER: *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*

NIETZSCHE: *Twilight of the Idols*

DU BOIS: *The Souls of Black Folk*

O'CONNOR: Selected short stories

The works belong to various fields of inquiry, ranging from literature, philosophy, and history to political science, natural science, and mathematics. Likewise, the circa 30 faculty members who teach in the Great Books Program come from virtually all departments represented in the college, comprising the humanities, arts, natural sciences, and social sciences. The texts listed underneath each course title are mandatory. However, the "80% rule," which prescribes that the materials listed for a course constitute between 80% and 100% of the total material covered in the course, allows each instructor, with the approval of the program director, to add some of his or her favorite works, so long as they originate in the same time period as the rest of the texts. Most of the works are read *in toto*, but, as the list shows, there are instances where it is necessary to focus on selections. All foreign-language texts are read in English translation, whereby the choice of editions and translations are the instructor's prerogative.

For most of the instructors, the Great Books pedagogy differs fundamentally from the pedagogy they use in their departmental courses.² The primary job of the instructor is not to lecture but to facilitate a text- and student-centered discussion.³ The strict focus on the text has led to the unofficial maxim of the Mercer Great Books Program: "The book is the teacher." "Student-centered" means that instructors are encouraged to give students as much freedom as possible in their exploration of the texts, both in group discussions and in writing assignments. To guarantee that discussions are fruitful and all course members have a chance to participate on a regular basis, Great Books courses are normally capped at 18 students. The main tasks of the students are (a) to read and reflect upon the assigned texts, (b) to come to class prepared to discuss, and (c) to express their ideas in written form. Unlike courses in the Integrative Program, Great Books courses rely exclusively on primary texts. Secondary sources are used extremely sparingly, mostly in the three writing instruction courses at the beginning of the program to teach students

how to identify, evaluate, and properly document secondary source materials. By shunning textbooks and lectures, instructors ensure that their students receive information in an unfiltered way. Rather than reading about Freud in a Psychology 101 textbook, participants read Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontent* itself and explore the meaning of the text in conversation with their peers and the instructor. Ideas expressed in the individual works stand in contention with each other, and it is up to the students to weigh and determine which ideas are best suited to help them write their own textbook of their lives.

Currently, each fall semester, between approximately 100 and 120 first-year students enroll in the Great Books Program (about 15% of all incoming freshmen). In a given semester, up to another 120 students are enrolled in non-first-year Great Books courses. By far the most participants come from the College of Liberal Arts, but the program is also used by undergraduate students in other Mercer schools and colleges, including the Eugene W. Stetson School of Business and Economics, the School of Engineering, the Tift College of Education, and the Townsend School of Music. As a complement to the rigorous academic component of the Great Books Program, students and faculty engage in various extracurricular activities, such as the annual Great Books Games, Skits Night, and Senior Picnic.

Since its inception in 1982–83, the Mercer Great Books Program has undergone relatively few changes, certainly fewer than the distributional (now “Integrative”) program, the other general education track in the college. As part of the reform of the general education program in 2011, the first three courses (GBK 101, 202, and 203) were designated as four-hour writing instruction courses. At the same time, the special-topics course (GBK 495) became an elective (with the consequence that it has been offered less in the recent past than when it was a mandatory course for all Great Books graduates). Another important recent change was the tightening of prerequisites, which ensured that students take the courses in sequence rather than jumping back and forth between periods, thus resulting in a higher degree of homogeneity within the cohorts. While the tighter prerequisites led to more scheduling problems for students with multiple majors or those studying abroad, the drop of one required course (GBK 495) alleviated the situation by giving students more time to distribute the Great Books courses over their typical eight-semester schedule.

Action Steps

As one of two general education tracks in the college, the Great Books Program currently participates in regular program assessment activities conducted by selected members of the Great Books faculty at the request of the Committee on General Education. The assessment team's charge is to examine to what degree selected student learning outcomes are met in certain Great Books courses. To facilitate a large-scale study, the assessment team routinely uses sample essays collected in student e-portfolios, which are then scored against a rubric.

The results of this type of program assessment are largely quantitative. At the end of the scoring process, each indicator for each student-learning outcome shows a numeric value. While we acknowledge that this type of assessment can yield valu-

able information for conventional academic programs, we have long felt that this quantitative assessment approach in many ways contradicts the highly unconventional pedagogical approach used in the Great Books Program. We therefore were eager to participate in the second cohort of the ACTC's Qualitative Narrative Assessment project.

The question we tried to answer for our qualitative program assessment was: "In what ways, if at all, does the Mercer Great Books Program help students develop skills and perspectives useful for engaging the world as liberally educated persons?" In other words, we wanted to know if we provide our students with the necessary intellectual tools (such as critical thinking, good academic writing, and oral communication skills) and at the same time teach them to ask the "big" questions (such as "What is justice? Wisdom? Virtue? Reason? Grace? Love? Otherness? The Good Life?") and think about the question how their intellectual growth translates into moral discernment and civic responsibility. In a second step, we wanted to identify ways to improve the program and convey them in the form of recommendations in the final section of this paper. To find out, we formed two focus groups, one consisting of four senior Great Books students and one consisting of four faculty members teaching in the Great Books Program.⁴ The faculty members had various degrees of experience in the Great Books Program, from an untenured colleague to a former Great Books director. After obtaining approval for our project from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), we drafted the following two questionnaires of nine questions each, which were used as guides during our conversations with the focus groups:

Guiding Questions for Student Focus Group

1. Please help me understand why you chose Great Books as your general education path.
2. Tell me about your experience in the program. How do Great Books courses differ from other courses you take at Mercer? How are they similar?
3. Tell me about how Great Books has helped you in non-Great Books classes.
4. Has Great Books hindered you in non-Great Books classes? Other activities?
5. Let's talk about the seven-course sequence. What are the benefits of our current sequential, approximately chronological set of courses? Some drawbacks?
6. Please share how your time in Great Books has affected your ability as a writer. As an oral communicator?
7. On the program website, the following statement is included: "The Western tradition is both the ground and the source of the conditions necessary for the very possibility and continuation of our republic. Each generation of citizens must engage and confront for itself the tradition it claims to inherit." How do you as a Great Books student "engage and confront" the tradition you inherit?

8. On our program website, we have a statement that reads, “We understand liberal education to foster intellectual growth, moral discernment, and civic responsibility.” Do you see your time in Great Books as consistent with that statement? How or how not?
9. The Great Books sequence focuses on texts from the Western tradition. How does reading these texts help prepare you to engage with other cultural traditions? What are some potential drawbacks for modifying the Great Books canon by including non-Western texts? What are some potential benefits?

Guiding Questions for Faculty Focus Group

1. Why should students choose Great Books as their general education path? Why *do* they?
2. Tell me about your experience in the program. How do Great Books courses differ from other courses you teach at Mercer? How are they similar?
3. Tell me about how Great Books has helped you as a faculty member in your non–Great Books classes. How has it helped your students?
4. Has Great Books hindered you as a faculty member in non–Great Books classes? Other activities? Has Great Books hindered your students in non–Great Books classes? Other activities?
5. Let’s talk about the seven-course sequence. What are the benefits of our current sequential, approximately chronological set of courses? Some drawbacks?
6. Please share how time in Great Books affects our students’ abilities as writers. As oral communicators?
7. On the program website, the following statement is included: “The Western tradition is both the ground and the source of the conditions necessary for the very possibility and continuation of our republic. Each generation of citizens must engage and confront for itself the tradition it claims to inherit.” How do you see our Great Books students “engaging and confronting” the tradition they have inherited?
8. On our program website, we have a statement that reads, “We understand liberal education to foster intellectual growth, moral discernment, and civic responsibility.” Do you see our students’ time in Great Books as consistent with that statement? How or how not?
9. The Great Books sequence focuses on texts from the Western tradition. How does reading these texts help prepare our students to engage with other cultural traditions? What are some potential drawbacks for modifying the Great Books canon by including non-Western texts? What are some potential benefits?

The conversations with each focus group were conducted by Kathy Kloepper and Achim Kopp. Each lasted about one hour and fifteen minutes. Both sessions were

tape-recorded and, subsequently transcribed. Each of the three collaborators then coded the two transcripts for greater themes. The collaborators then met and compared the trends they discovered in each of the two conversations.

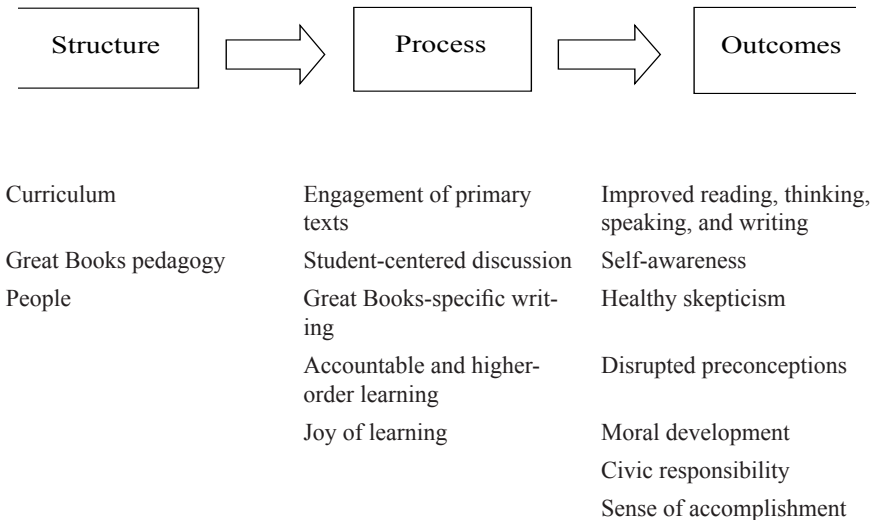
Informed Judgments

It would be disingenuous to state that we were surprised to find that both focus groups agreed that the Mercer Great Books Program helps “students develop skills and perspectives useful for engaging the world as liberally educated persons.” The success and longevity the program has enjoyed over the last thirty-five years implies that there is a perceived educational value in the Great Books Program among both faculty and students. What was new for us, however, was to arrive at an understanding of *what* it is that makes the program work, and, by the same token, what might be done to make it even better.

The following diagram shows an overarching connection among three cardinal components that, in their totality, define the Great Books Program: structure, process, and outcomes. The lists underneath each item indicate the topics that were most frequently addressed during the conversations:

Structure

One major appeal of the Great Books Program to both students and faculty lies in a number of foundational components that together form the structure of the program, namely the curriculum, the special pedagogy, and the people.



Curriculum

When asked why she chose the Great Books Program as her general education track, one student pointed to the clear structure of the program: “So, when I first entered the University, I was scheduled to be in Integrative Studies, but I switched to Great Books because to me the program was more structured in that you only had to take one class per semester and it also integrated elements of history, government, politics, and philosophy in each class.”

The coherence of the Great Books Program was echoed by one of the faculty members: “It’s a coherent program; it has an origin, it has a starting point, the texts are in conversation with one another, and the students get to carry on that conversation for seven semesters, perhaps eight if they take a special topics course. That does not, cannot, happen in the distribution model.” Another professor added: “I really like the chronological sequencing. I like the fact that you can assume—and it’s also true—that the vast majority of the students have read the earlier works and at least have some memory of what they read.”

A second characteristic of the curriculum that both students and faculty emphasized is its interdisciplinary and integrative nature. In the words of one of the professors: “There’s this push of building integrated models in gen ed and integrating cross-disciplines. This is a program that does that in a way that other courses that are attempting that really can’t pull off. . . . The general education exposure they get through Great Books, I think, is much broader and I think in some cases more comprehensive than what they would see in the other gen ed program.”

Great Books Pedagogy

Hand-in-hand with a structured and integrative curriculum goes a special Great Books pedagogy, which, as explained earlier, includes the use of primary sources, student- and text-centered discussions, and scaffolded, peer-reviewed writing. Inevitably, these pedagogies lead to special processes, which will be described in detail in the next section (under “Process”).

People

The third structural component of the Mercer Great Books Program is its people, that is, the students and the faculty. The students’ participation in the Great Books track is voluntary, and, as the following comment from one of the professors shows, there is a certain awareness of the fact that the program is self-selecting: “I think they [choose Great Books as their general education path] because they like to read or maybe they have just read some of the works in high school, and the idea of reading more of them appeals to them.” Just like the students, the faculty also come to the Great Books Program voluntarily. While all faculty members in the College of Liberal Arts, in which virtually all full-time instructors teaching in the program are housed, are expected to teach some general education course outside their home department on a regular basis, they have the option of doing so in the Integrative Program. Those who choose the Great Books Program do so because they like to teach primary texts and subscribe to the special Great Books pedagogy.

Both students and faculty are extremely diverse with regard to their fields of specialization. As one of the members of the student focus group reported, “[Great Books] students come from different majors and, going along with that, so do professors of Great Books classes; each professor that at least I’ve had in my past of the Great Books Program has been from a different discipline, from foreign language, history, science disciplines as well as others, and so I think with that each professor and student brings a unique, or has a unique, contribution to each class discussion based on their educational academic background.”

Within both groups, there is a certain sense of solidarity and camaraderie. The Great Books faculty meets several times per semester to conduct program-specific business. Many colleagues have taught in the program for several decades and have a special attachment. Although students are in the program for a much shorter time, they, too, develop a certain affinity, especially to their cohort, as the following student comment shows: “[The Great Books Program] also allows you to build up a sort of camaraderie to people. . . because you end up in a lot of the same classes with a lot of the same people over the course of the program, so it’s much easier to have the conversations that you have with them because you know them and you know how to speak with them throughout.”

Process

The structures that have been identified in the previous section enable certain processes to play out in every Great Books course taught at Mercer. These include three fairly concrete processes (engagement of primary texts, student-centered discussion, and Great Books-specific writing), but also two less tangible processes, namely accountable and higher-order learning as well as joyful learning.

Engagement of Primary Texts

One of the most distinctive characteristics of the Mercer Great Books Program is its exclusive reliance on primary texts. The texts may vary in length, period, and genre, but their common denominator is that they are original works. The program strives to have students read as many works as possible in their entirety. In their totality, the texts are seen as the building blocks of Western society, as in the following excerpt from the conversation with the student focus group: “I really enjoyed the idea of. . . getting a general idea of what builds up our culture and how our culture was formed based on these authors and philosophers.”

Another student picked up on the text-centeredness of the approach, with its strong emphasis on student exploration of interconnected texts and ideas, and a relatively small emphasis on secondary information provided by the instructor: “I think the difference is in the approach: When you are in Great Books it is student-led; you talk about the text as the text, you don’t talk about the text in context of everything else in that era. So if you. . . read Hume in Great Books, you read Hume and you’re like, ‘This is what he thought about things,’ and you maybe think about the other texts you’ve read in the Great Books canon, and you go back to those and you try to figure out where he fits.”

According to one of the faculty members, the reward of the consistent engagement of important primary works is that the students receive “consistent practice in having significant conversations about things that matter.” This comment indicates that the “big” questions mentioned earlier are indeed addressed by the program.

Student-Centered Discussion

After reading and reflecting upon an assigned text in private, Great Books students typically gather to discuss it in a group. This is when the magic happens and student-centered learning takes place. One of the students explained the process as follows: “I think the biggest difference is also you are not necessarily being taught, like it’s not a teaching/learning exercise as much as it is a thinking exercise, and so we read on our own initially so we’re able to come to class with our own development of ideas, and then from there discuss it and further form opinions based on the opinions of others and how they read things, and then taking that even further you get to then write essays.”

The faculty also believes that text-centered discussion is one of the most important pillars of the Great Books pedagogy. One of the discussants put it as follows: “So I think one of the places where the engagement and confrontation takes place is in the discussion with other students who have different perspectives and different interpretations of the text.”

Great Books-Specific Writing

The second major activity in which Great Books students express their thoughts about the assigned texts is writing. In accordance with the spirit of free exploration fostered in the Great Books Program, one of the students emphasized her preference for broad writing topics or no prescribed topics at all: “So I think that part of how Great Books has influenced my writing has to do with the prompt or lack thereof for essays and papers for Great Books classes, and personally I found that when the professor gives a prompt but a prompt that is broad enough where the students has, I guess, room to pick a theme that is still within the prompt, . . . my writing has been more natural on those essays than when I’m given a narrow and strict prompt that I have to follow.” Another student went a step further, explaining that it is actually easier to reply to a specific prompt than to explore themes more broadly, albeit for her the latter was the more effective exercise: “I also think it’s given a better understanding of how to actually develop a thesis because we have such broad prompts. . . . It’s almost easier to say okay, what is your opinion on this very specific issue or answer a very specific question rather than saying okay, . . . let’s explore a theme in Great Books—that’s a difficult thing to get a hold of, but I think it’s a good [thing] because you’re able to actually come together with all of your ideas and really think more holistically about what you’ve learned and what you’re getting from it, and so I think again, yes, that’s definitely improved my ability to write in general, but also my ability to gather my thoughts across different disciplines, even in the different sciences I know that it’s helpful to be able to read massive amounts of information and then have to think through how it actually all connects.”

Not surprisingly, students mentioned the importance of supporting one's arguments with evidence in the text, not just in class discussion, but also in written work: "My approach to papers in Great Books is focused very much on an extremely, perhaps overly, evidence-based approach that is very heavily reliant on quotes."

Accountable and Higher-Order Learning

On a more abstract level, the members of the focus groups identified another process that is set in motion in the Mercer Great Books Program. For lack of a better term, we call it accountable and higher-order learning. As one student testified, "We are held to a standard of producing our own essays based solely upon our reading of works from the very first course, which helped me, I think, in my later-on courses because . . . I was already used to being accountable for my own work."

A faculty member described the phenomenon this way: "For me the Great Books courses differ wildly from what I normally teach. The other classes tend to have laboratory components, so in] the other courses I teach, students tend to look at that material as kind of established material and not as open to interpretation, so they tend to go into the class with the idea that they are just going to receive whatever information is out there and brought up to date on the current field, whereas in Great Books students come in understanding that some of the ideas are open to interpretation."

The faculty noted repeatedly that they were able to take some of the Great Books strategies back into their departmental courses in the hopes that they will create similar learning processes there: "It's a great exercise for me to be able to think about how I present information and, particularly in Great Books, how I develop a discussion, and I've taken some of the things from Great Books, just the idea to be able to discuss and talk about things and watching how students develop as they discuss a topic, . . . into my science classes," and "One of the things I've learned teaching the Great Books is something [my colleague] mentioned, but I'll just emphasize it as getting students to actually speak and to make excerpts <AQ: Is this the word you mean? I don't find it in my dictionary. Do you mean "exceptions"?>and to interact with each other, we've been able to take that back in one of our programs and add to an introductory sequence things we call recitations."

Joy of Learning

We are listing the joy of learning under "Process" because we think that while it could certainly be regarded as an outcome of the Great Books Program, for many participants—students and faculty alike—sustained intellectual joy is just as much a process that helps to achieve the outcomes that will be discussed in the next section. Be it as it may, both students and faculty repeatedly mentioned the joy of learning as a hallmark of their experience in Great Books.

One student explained that she had this feeling of enjoyment from her very first Great Books course: "I took the first [Great Books] class and I had a very good time for a lot of the same reasons that you really enjoyed the course, so I just continued through and now I've taken all of them and I've also taken a special topics and I've

continued in the program for a couple of semesters as a preceptor.” Similarly, the professors revealed a high degree of enjoyment and satisfaction they draw from their Great Books courses: “My students get a happier [instructor] because I’m teaching in Great Books. . . . Students choose to be in Great Books, but so do faculty.”

Outcomes

A variety of comments made by members of our student and faculty focus groups show how the interplay of structures and processes results in a number of outcomes achieved in the Great Books Program.

Improved Reading, Thinking, Speaking, and Writing

According to one of the most experienced professors in the focus group, the Great Books Program makes students better readers, especially in the early courses: “I’ve taught at the beginning of the Great Books Program and I’ve taught at the end of the Great Books Program, and at the beginning of the Great Books Program I think it makes them better readers, more careful readers than if their majors involve a lot of reading. I can’t help but think it improves their ability to read whatever is put in front of them because the diversity of what they read in Great Books is great. Towards the end of the program it apparently interferes with their upper-level major courses because they don’t read as carefully as I sense that they did in the early Great Books courses. I mean they are quicker to take a day or two or three off from reading and not participate in the conversation, aware that that’s not ideal but they’re willing to do it, so I do think they feel the same time crunch in the reading and preparation for a Great Books discussion and when they think their major courses are going to suffer because of that, their gen-ed courses get shoved aside and given less attention to.” The sentiment that Great Books students are good readers was echoed by another professor: “I also see those students that are in Great Books, particularly upper-level, that we run into to represent much more what we want or what we think of our traditional liberal arts students: They tend to be obviously broadly read and they see the connections between different fields.”

The end of the last statement makes the connection between broad reading and being able to think across the disciplines. Later in the conversation, the same professor elaborated on this important skill that Great Books students acquire: “Other things [that Great Books students learn]? Critical thinking, as broadly as that can be defined, but particularly in terms of, as I mentioned previously, in terms of integration across disciplines, even within a particular time period, the diversity of what they read. We are very supportive of the critical thinking, of [their] making connections across disciplines and seeing how things [developed] chronologically or occurring at the same time, getting a sense of that.”

One of the students emphasized that working through the large amount of, at times quite heavy, material has made her a more careful reader and writer: “I’ve gotten much slower in my reading and my writing since I started taking Great Books so I can’t just power through something really quickly. I used to be able to, when I was younger, sit down—if a book was three hundred pages, it didn’t matter how dense it was, I’d be done with it in three hours because I could read a hundred pages in an

hour. . . . But now I have to sit down and take the time and I'm hyper-aware how everything I'm reading is important and how it relates, and I do the same thing with my writing, so I'll start writing something and I'll type a sentence and I'll be like, 'No, but this idea is slightly different than what I'm trying to convey,' so I'll have to go back and I'll change everything, so I'm much slower but I'm also more careful. I just can't power through as fast, not as quick."

With regard to speaking and writing, most of the faculty comments actually made a close connection between the two. There was a consensus that Great Books students develop a vocabulary and a way of thinking that enables them to express their ideas better in both the spoken and the written mode. As one professor put it: "And for outcomes, right, an improved ability to articulate positions and viewpoints and make arguments, whether it's written or oral, in a wider engagement of those things that are collective the Western tradition." The same discussant gave an example, referencing a successful Great Books alumnus who had returned to campus to address the current Great Books students: "So, we have students who come back and speak . . . at alumni weekend, and I thought one of them . . . said something that was probably true, and that was he didn't think that all the things he read in Great Books changed dramatically his position on issues or changed dramatically who he was, but it did teach him how better to articulate and explain to others what his positions were. And so I think that's probably true here. It may not change one's morality, but it probably does increase one's discernment at what's at stake in answering moral questions, although they may come right down on the same side they came down before, but they now have a vocabulary to express more clearly, they have a kind of stock of samples from all they've read, their imagination has been exercised in ways it wouldn't have been exercised if they hadn't read all this material. And they can just speak more clearly and more forcefully on what their position is." One of his colleagues also made a connection between spoken and written communication: "I think, for example, in terms of assessment and process, the University Gen-Ed Committee looks at things like written communication, oral communication, and those are clearly things that we do. The writing, I think, could be much more described as process-oriented, but even, I think, the oral communication is, as well. Because I know—and I don't know how much this is structured in class—but I know anecdotally we develop our students to make the claim, provide textual support, put forth an argument that's defensible, as they communicate, so I think that is, again, a process that they do which supports the general education goals of the University."

Although the focus on writing instruction embedded in the first three Great Books courses, with its emphasis on scaffolded writing activities (including thesis workshops and peer review sessions) and writing for different audiences, is not unique to the program (writing instruction courses are also part of the Integrative Program), it does represent a critical component in a program that is overall so writing heavy. One faculty member, who in his department teaches many pre-med students, attested to the fact that the many measures taken to improve Great Books students' proficiency in writing are, in fact, effective: "Having worked with several students who have been in Great Books and others that have not been in Great Books, as they have prepared applications for medical school or graduate

school, while not true across the board, I've noticed that many of the Great Books students tend to have better personal essays; I think they tend to be better writers as a whole."

Self-Awareness

In order to be truly relevant to students, the material they learn about the development of Western society in their Great Books courses must, in the final analysis, be in some way connected to their own lives. One faculty member expressed his sentiment that especially more advanced Great Books students do raise their level of self-awareness over the course of the program: "The other thing I . . . see a lot with our Great Books students out of class is that they, through the program, I think, they hit points where they really become reflective of themselves as products of Western culture, and so many students talk about having some sort of personal crisis. . . , but in their last two years some text. . . then strikes a chord that challenges things that they've held dear, and I don't necessarily see it in class, but I do tend to see it, I think, in one-on-one interactions with students. You can talk to them, 'What are you reading now in Great Books, how's it going?' And we even hear at the Senior Banquet, right, that *Brothers Karamazov* [is] so important to them, but, I think, because it does strike a chord in a way, that it maybe tends to punctuate the sequence, but they are challenging what really stuck, what they are going to do next, how it all fits together. And I think the great thing is that the program, as they look back, gives them the tools to work through that and, you know, it's not as dire as it feels for them in the moment. And I see the stronger students in particular being able to pull on that tradition and move through that in a way that is productive and challenges students in the ways we would like to in the program."

But it is not only the students who by engaging great texts become more aware of themselves and others, it is also the faculty. One of the professors explained how a higher degree of self-awareness in his Great Books colleagues can lead to a greater feeling of tolerance of, and empathy for, their students: "Just as I suggested the texts read the students, well, the texts read the teacher if we're reading them carefully, and I think I am much more empathetic, I am much kinder and more tolerant of students in all of my classes because that's just something I've learned engaging a lot of these texts, so when Cervantes writes that mercy is more wonderful than justice—that's not the quote exactly, but . . . "more splendid" is the word, I think, in the translation—it's more splendid than justice, I think [Professor X] 1.0 as a new faculty member was very swift with the sword of justice (haha) and [Professor X] 2.0 coming closer to retirement is much more likely to extend mercy to students who are struggling and try to understand their position more."

One of the students reported that being exposed to other points of view made her aware of the fact that she was not necessarily always right: "I actually came into the Great Books Program very dominant in conversation . . . , getting my opinion out there, and while, yes, I do still talk a lot in classes, I've also learned when not to talk, and, honestly, I did come in with a little bit more arrogance . . . and so being able to take the opinion of yes, other people's opinions matter as well, they are not going to

agree with you on everything, because that was honestly more of my opinion, was just that everyone was going to say the same thing, and so getting into a couple of those arguments . . . and having them maybe facilitated so they're not like fights but they are arguments was really helpful to me to find out that I was not right about certain things, that I didn't have the background for it, or even if I did have the background that didn't necessarily mean that that's what that author was talking about, and so being able to learn how to step back from conversation has been a really big improvement, especially when I know that it's not just a matter of arrogance, maybe I'm getting really excited about it and I just want to keep talking about it, but I am not the only person in the room."

Another student also pointed to an increased understanding that opinions and interpretations vary: "Being able to step back and see how other people approach this, for example those that don't have any sort of religious education, has allowed me to develop as a person, and instead of coming in and thinking . . . that my view was definitely right, I can see how my view may be right or may not be right, and how there is a whole different world of ideas which I have to consider."

Disrupted Preconceptions

A faculty member described the same phenomenon from his point of view: "Taking this program puts the students in the position of not only reading the books, but having the books read them; having the books offer them models and critiques and ideas that then the student has to submit . . . to and then reflect on it and decide if the book has a point and that they ought to make some adjustments."

This was echoed by another professor: "One of the places that I see students actually doing some of that in [GBK] 203 is because of their differences of opinion that come to the floor about some of the texts we discuss. And so they really do engage in [learning] from one another, around important questions . . . related to their understanding of theological issues, and I see some of that as well in 202 in terms of philosophical discussions as well. So I think one of the places where that engagement and confrontation takes place is in the discussion with other students who have different perspectives and different interpretations of the text."

One of the students stated that the process of disrupting preconceptions begins as early as the very first Great Books course: "I think that a lot of students come in, especially to the lower-level Great Books classes, with an idea of what they are going to be reading and an idea of what they are going to see in what they are reading, and they are continually proven wrong as they go through [GBK] 101 and read the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, they're like, 'I thought this was going to happen, why isn't this in the book, why didn't it end like this?' Every time they have a moment that they realize that you can't go into the text with the idea that you already had in your mind because it's not actually there a lot of times, and I think that moment of having your preconceptions broken down in Great Books would also help going into other cultural texts because you generally have some idea of what you're supposed to be reading even if you don't have a lot of context for it and a lot of times what you encounter is different."

Healthy Skepticism

The students, in particular, put their finger on another outcome of the Great Books Program they regarded as important by maintaining that being exposed to such a wide variety of texts instilled a certain degree of skepticism in them. One of them put it as follows: “I think that Great Books has given us all a healthy skepticism (laughter from the group) of life and readings that we do, which can be viewed in a negative [way], I guess, but also it’s just a side effect, I feel, of growing up, and Great Books is just helping us develop as people, so maybe we’re a little bit more cynical now.”

Later on in the conversation, the same student picked up the idea of developing a healthy skepticism again, connecting it with the importance of being able to put certain texts and cultural phenomena in the context of the evolution of thought: “I joked before that Great Books is giving us a healthy sense of cynicism. It’s kind of true, and in a good way, that you should be a little bit skeptical of what people are saying in the systems that are in place. If you want to have this notion of progress in society, you have to know what we’re coming from and why we’ve made the decisions we’ve made so far to get to now.”

In her immediate response, another student confirmed that she as well has become more questioning, and perhaps skeptical, as a result of her readings in the Great Books Program: “Going off of what [my classmate] just said, I think that Great Books has, I guess, magnified the question of ‘why’ for me, the why or the purpose of different aspects of our society in which we currently live as well as societies past, and it’s encouraged me to think about those more than I had in the past. In the past I felt like I was more accepting of things as they were, and now, like [my classmate] says as well, I have more of a sense of skepticism.”

Moral Development

Along with intellectual knowledge and a certain number of practical skills, liberal arts programs strive to further their students’ moral development. As the website indicates, the Mercer Great Books Program shares this ambition. During their focus group conversations, both the students and the faculty indicated that they believe that this moral development actually takes place.

One student commented that moral behavior is modeled especially in some of the characters in the novels that are part of the Great Books curriculum: “So something that I don’t think we’ve really touched on yet is the types of books and texts that we read in the program, and personally I think there is a good mix of novels as well as purely philosophical books, but from the novels I think something that most students have gained is we are able to relate sometimes, and I’m just speaking for myself, to the characters we read about in the novels, and as people they experience the same emotions, feelings, responsibilities we do and, going off of what Professor [X] was saying about moral discernment, I think that that’s something we’ve seen in some of the novels we’ve read, is what happens when you have moral discernment and what happens when it doesn’t exist, and what are the consequences of each, and so that helps us to develop as students.”

Another student explained how moral discernment is addressed in the Great

Books curriculum by referencing Du Bois's *The Souls of the Black Folks* and Montaigne's "Of Cannibals": "I also think it's important to note along those lines that Great Books has also taught me that you have to develop your own moral code because . . . morals are defined by society and so not necessarily right or wrong, so for instance in *Souls of the Black Folks* . . . saying that something is illegal does not necessarily make it wrong nor does it exactly make something right if it is legal, and so I think that reading more about Great Books and why people think certain ways along the lines of moral context is really important. 'Of Cannibals' is always an essay that I come back to when I think about that, and in that they talk about what is natural and what is evil, and they note that the Europeans who came to the natives, despite calling them savages for being cannibals, that they at least treated their people, even their victims, right but they learned the true ideas of torture from the Europeans . . . , and so I think reading things like that and understanding that there is actually a difference between morals and legality, and morals and what society is saying are the appropriate morals, is also really important when it does come to not only civic responsibility but civil disobedience and looking at how to improve society."

One of the faculty members had different texts in mind when he explained the place of moral discernment in the Great Books curriculum: "And I'm thinking right now of how we approach Dante at the beginning of the semester in Great Books 4. What is the *Inferno* except about moral discernment? What is *Paradiso* except how do we live in community, how do we share one goal, how do we become educated towards, in the collective, what is most valuable instead of what to the individual is most selfish? I can't help but think they kind of get it, you know, without using the exact language. We spend a lot of time on the canto that has Francesca and Paolo because students are prone to being interested in lust [all laughing]. And trying to understand, you know, is this something we are supposed to feel sorry for or, at the end of the day, is this someone we are supposed to condemn, just like God condemned them to hell? And I think the students get it by the end of the conversation about what went wrong here."

Civic Responsibility

An outcome of the Great Books Program that is of particular importance in a democracy is civic responsibility. One of the students connected a very personal statement about her growth in that area after growing up in a rather apolitical family with her interpretation of Galileo's impact on the evolution of scientific thought: "I really do feel like you know more about yourself and your own personal development through the process and even up to a sense of civic responsibility. It's very interesting because I mean I came from a family who's not politically active at all and then I was not as well, and I've been honestly more cynical about the government system in place anyway, and then coming in I'm actually less cynical about the process of voting now. It's probably the one thing that I have gained or hoped to change in because I think I am recognizing now each of these . . . works that we're reading [show how] these people start with an idea, the idea progressed, it was probably shot down a couple of times, and then it progressed more. And then you had more people that were

jumping on board agreeing with it, and then the evolution of thought was just really interesting because someone had to be the person there with that first idea and who got disagreed with. So, for example, Galileo was very adamant about his opinion . . . , realizing that with enough perspective . . . change can occur, that with . . . gathering enough facts . . . even the overwhelming opinion that's already in place can actually be taken down, can be dismantled. . . . Society is quite the driving force on its own when it creates itself because we're constantly reinventing our own society and each of these works are just showing us . . . each of the steps of reinvention."

One of the faculty members saw a connection between the sustained improvement of students' oral skills and their role as citizens in a democracy: "[The Great Books Program] is one of the few places, I think, we have a chance for students to develop oral skills, to put forth a hypothesis to back it up and engage with others who agree or disagree so that they can move on through their ideas through that conversation and so they can learn important skills for citizenship in a democracy."

Sense of Accomplishment

It is fitting to end the list of outcomes achieved by the Mercer Great Books Program by describing the sense of accomplishment the students and faculty develop by participating in such a rigorous and demanding program. Here is how one of the faculty members expressed his admiration for his GBK 202 students: "I do have a great appreciation for the sense that we're providing those foundational texts in the Western tradition that are vital. I do know that it is a challenge at times. I find 202 to be a challenge for second-semester freshmen to read the *Republic* while they are taking biology and chemistry. It's a challenge. And I always try to stress to them that they've done something remarkable, that very few people in college these days get the opportunity to read through all of *The Republic*."

Further Improvement

We believe that the comments quoted above give a good sense of how students and faculty actively engaged in the Mercer Great Books Program perceive the program. The vast majority of the things said about the program during the focus group conversations were complimentary and positive. In fact, we are hard-pressed to identify even a single comment that is explicitly critical of the program or suggests that it does a disservice to the students. Nevertheless, in the following we will attempt to make a number of recommendations of how, in light of what we have learned explicitly and implicitly from the conversations, the Great Books Program might be tweaked so as to ensure that the level of satisfaction among its constituents be maintained and possibly even increased. Our recommendations will pertain to the three areas we identified earlier in the study as forming the structural foundation of the Mercer Great Books Program: the curriculum, the pedagogy, and the people.

With regard to the curriculum, both students and faculty spoke in favor of reading the works in chronological order and of a strict sequencing of the seven courses. One of the students, for instance, made the following point: "I really appreciate [the chronological arrangement of the Great Books courses] because I feel that if you do

take courses out of order you are kind of missing something. I did in fact take two classes out of order. I took [GBK] 305 and 306 in the wrong order and . . . I think that if it had not been for the fact that my entire class pretty much was doing the same thing and so none of us really could draw from the class we hadn't taken yet, I think it was a hindrance, especially going into 305 and realizing, 'Oh that's what the person in 306 was referencing,' so I'm very glad at least that 407 I took as my actual last class in the sequence." Her classmate emphasized the importance of all discussants having the same background: "I like that when you have the sequential Great Books it allows you to build a base for the conversation so that everyone who's coming into the conversation has the same background knowledge, which is a problem in a lot of other classes." Another student thought the chronological order was important because some of the modern authors made references to earlier works: "I also appreciate the sequence of the Great Books classes because [GBK] 407 is the last Great Books class and the authors of the texts that we read in 407 have referenced previous authors from . . . earlier Great Books classes, and so without that foundation or knowledge I would have felt more lost within the text that I was currently reading, but with that previous knowledge and understanding it helped build an understanding of the current text."

The faculty, speaking before the background of a recent curricular change that tightened the prerequisites for most of the courses, confirmed the students' sentiment. One of the professors compared Great Books discussions before the reform with those afterwards: "Having taught [GBK] 305, I can say I started five years ago in the teaching, and there was a lot more scatter in the class. I would have students [for whom] 305 was the last class they needed for the sequence, and I had others who . . . had just come out of 202 or 203 at that time, so . . . it was either they had had two courses in Great Books or they had had six other courses. And so the quality of discussion, I think, was different. . . . I like the way it is now, where it is more chronological, [which] is better, particularly for just teaching at the upper level, you know, what students have had. As they're trying to reference something in class, it's clear who's had it and who hasn't had it, and so from that I've put the policy in class now that you can reference anything previously read in Great Books, but if you've happened to read something ahead, you can't. And there are very few of those students who do [take the courses out of order] now; you really can't bring that into discussion." Another professor explained how she uses the fact that the works are read in fairly strict chronological order to make students see relationships among the various periods: "Yeah, . . . it's always been chronological, right, it's just that we didn't enforce it as strictly as we do now, so students have to take it in a particular sequence; we gave much more latitude, I think. And so I would agree that the stricter sequencing helps a great deal. You know, I raised a point earlier that you don't necessarily encounter the easiest texts in [GBK] 101, right? So that's . . . a challenge—I don't know if I would call it a problem—it's a challenge in the chronological ordering of things that you start off with some pretty difficult things. I will say, because I've taught 305 as well, that one of the assignments that I do—because the course is titled "The Modern World View"—so I build an assignment that does pick a theme and they tell me why it's modern. And they have to go back and look at something

from the ancient world and something from the medieval world, they have to draw on texts that they've read, go back to them, and tell me how is kingship or authority, or whatever it is they choose, how it is modern. . . . If we had a more thematic approach, I'm not sure that would necessarily make as much sense as it does with a chronological sequencing. And perhaps because [of] the discipline in which I teach, I kind of think that sometimes chronology matters."

In light of these comments from both students and faculty, *we recommend that the recent tightening of the prerequisites for Great Books courses after the first year be left in place*. The chronological order of the works and the enforcement of strict prerequisites ensure that the majority of students in a given course are able to relate to the same material in their interpretations.

Our second recommendation with regard to the curriculum has to do with the amount of discretionary material allowed in each course. Here is what one of the students had to say in answering the question whether there are any drawbacks to the chronological structure of the Great Books courses: "I think one of the drawbacks is most students, if not all students, do not have the same seven Great Books classes together, and even though there are most books that each professor must incorporate in each of their classes, there are a few books which are chosen at the professor's discretion, and so some students might come into the class having read a book which other students have not read yet from a previous class, and so then some of the class might understand if you are taking a point from that previous text but the rest of the class will not, and so I think that might be considered a drawback." However, in her immediate response another student took an opposite stance: "At the same time—I do agree with [my classmate], but I think it's also important to have a little bit of freedom because I just know that usually some of my favorite books are the ones the professors chose. . . . So when [the professors] are picking the books, they think that they're incorporating well because despite the fact that it is student-led discussion, it's still facilitated somewhat by the professor. I think it is helpful to give some amount of freedom there so we are understanding at least that professor's point of view, like what is the really important part of that age." Therefore, in an attempt to keep a fine balance between a diverse and individualized curriculum on the one hand and the necessity to give students enough common material for a fruitful discussion, *we recommend that the current 80% rule stay in place*. It allows those instructors who want to add some of their own material to do so while ensuring that no student misses out on an important text that is included in the general curriculum.

Our third recommendation has to do with the special-topics courses and the role they might play in an eventual cautious opening of the curriculum toward non-Western texts. As described earlier, in the course of the 2011 general education reform, the number of mandatory Great Books courses was reduced from eight to seven at the expense of the special topics course (GBK 495). In responding to the question how reading texts from the Western tradition might prepare Great Books students to engage with other cultural traditions, one of the students pointed out that there is a certain deficit with regard to students' understanding of non-Western cultures. However, she was not prepared to sacrifice any of the established texts in the curriculum or saddle more materials onto existing courses. Instead, she suggested that

the special topics courses might be used for a comparative study of Western and non-Western ideas. One of the faculty members likewise made an impassioned plea for the strengthening of the special topics course, calling the dropping of the special topics course “bittersweet because I really wish we had the special topics offered on a regular basis and enrolled, because it’s kind of a little reward for the faculty who teach in the program to be able to teach something that really speaks to them, and then, hopefully, also the students.” While we understand that it was necessary to streamline the Great Books curriculum as part of the general education reform, we agree that the program would gain from more regularly offered special topics courses. *We therefore recommend that the Great Books faculty explore the possibility of offering at least one special topics course per year, giving preference to courses that incorporate at least some non-Western material.*

The next recommendation is based on merely one fleeting comment made by one of the students about the connection between Great Books and the fine arts: “I think that my reading of Great Books has significantly impacted how I view many things, especially art. I am not an artist; however, I do enjoy art history very, very much, especially works from the Romanesque and the Gothic eras, and seeing those in context with some of the books that we’ve read in Great Books has given me greater appreciation for them but also deepened my understanding of them.” While there have been various attempts to increase the faculty’s intentionality in integrating the fine arts into the Great Books curriculum (for instance, through faculty development workshops and evening lectures), these efforts have somewhat subsided in recent years. In light of the importance of the fine arts for a truly liberally educated person, *we recommend that the Great Books faculty explore new ways to increase students’ exposure to the fine arts in every Great Books course.*

Our final recommendation with regard to the Great Books curriculum addresses writing, an extremely timely topic as the college is on the brink of developing a new plan to deliver writing instruction. One of the faculty members participating in the focus groups expressed his disappointment about the fact that many of his Great Books students’ portfolios did not show evidence of significant improvement in writing between the lower- and upper-level courses. In his experience, strong writers continued to be strong without, however, putting “the extra polish on their writing.” Poor writers continued to write poorly and never made significant advances. Some of the professors surmised that many of the students “just don’t put in the time,” often completing writing assignments at the last minute. Another discussant criticized that many of her colleagues do not assign a large enough portion of the grade to the quality of their writing style. The consensus, however, was that the real problem lies in the lack of writing instruction in the upper-level Great Books courses. As one of the professors reported: “The first time I taught [GBK] 305, I didn’t have any kind of scaffolding in place and just had essays, and they were terrible! And so I went back and in subsequent teachings I had first drafts, peer edits, those sorts of things, and I saw the quality improve. . . . I think that’s one of the things that I’ve noticed, [namely that] adding in just the peer edit or hav[ing] them look at it or mak[ing] sure they do a first draft completely changes the quality of the work. Without that . . . you typically get a maybe once-reviewed first draft as a final essay submitted.” We wholeheart-

edly agree with our colleagues' assessment, and propose that the program as a whole increase its level of intentionality with regard to the quality of writing. While we do not suggest that the upper-level Great Books courses should, like GBK 101, 202, and 203, be converted into four-credit hour writing instruction courses, *we do recommend that all formal paper assignments in Great Books should have some amount of scaffolding, including activities like brainstorming, thesis workshops, drafting sessions, peer editing, and rewriting.*

To ensure that the Mercer Great Books Program continues to thrive as a unique alternative to traditional undergraduate general education, we also have a number of recommendations with regard to pedagogy. The first recommendation is based on what we learned from the students with regard to prompts for their writing assignments. As seen before, the members of the student focus group preferred broad essay topics or no essay prompts at all for their Great Books writing assignments. Further, as the following quote from one of the members of the student group shows, research papers with more specific prompts are typically only assigned in the first three Great Books courses, which, as four-hour writing instruction courses, have to include assignments in which students learn how to identify, evaluate, integrate, and cite secondary sources: "I don't think I've ever been given a Great Books prompt outside of the research papers in [GBK] 101 and 202, so I think that definitely affects how you approach texts as a reader and as a writer. If you've never had to focus on one specific thing, then you really have to read the text holistically and decide what's important for yourself, which is a very different approach to writing for a prompt." We agree with the discussants' view that a program that allows students to explore and discuss texts on their own with as little guidance by the instructor as possible should also allow them to express their interpretations in writing with as few constraints as possible. *We therefore recommend that students be given the opportunity to choose their own topics for Great Books writing assignments or that prompts be broad enough to ensure a high level of creativity and self-exploration in student writing.*

As explained above, the second area in which Great Books students should be free to explore texts on their own accord is discussion. Remarks from both students and faculty confirmed that the special Great Books pedagogy ensures that class discussion is both text- and student-centered. As the following student comment shows, leading discussion is one of the most valuable experiences for our students: "So something new I've never experienced before in my Great Books course [was] being the one chosen to actually lead discussion, . . . instead of just participating in discussion in my previous Great Books classes, [where] usually it was the professor who led discussion, then acted as a facilitator of discussion, . . . giving it back to students and then stepping in when needed to redirect or guide students to a particular topic. But that was something that was most challenging for me because I never had any previous experience of leading discussion in my area of Great Books classes, and so, looking back, that was something I wish I would have been introduced to starting with GBK 101 . . . so it wasn't such a new event for me in GBK 407." While we understand that instructors in the early Great Books courses need time to model good discussion behaviors and effective leadership in a group discussion, we also agree with the above point that such leadership must be practiced early on. *We therefore*

recommend that students in all Great Books courses should in some form or other be required to serve as discussion leaders and have the opportunity to hone this important skill.

As seen from faculty comments presented earlier in this paper, Great Books professors develop pedagogical strategies that lend themselves as well to their departmental teaching. Here is how one of the members of the faculty group put it: "Some of the material that I teach [in Great Books] is also the material that I teach in the distribution[al] track in a different format, which is much more teacher-centered, while in Great Books the center really is more the text itself, so that something I appreciate [is that] I've also found ways of taking things I've learned in teaching Great Books back to other classes and thinking through, even given some limitations, how some of those techniques and models can work well elsewhere." Since we are convinced that many of the pedagogical strategies employed in Great Books are beneficial to undergraduate learners, *we recommend that Great Books faculty be encouraged to export the strategies they have developed in their Great Books classes to their departmental courses.*

As has been shown, much of the distinctiveness of the Great Books Program is due to its special pedagogy. It is therefore imperative for the integrity of the program that all faculty members who teach in Great Books receive adequate training, both through sitting in on experienced colleagues' classes and pedagogical discussions at Great Books faculty meetings, in faculty development workshops, and even just at the water cooler. The Great Books director is charged with monitoring compliance with the principles of the special Great Books pedagogy in all courses. In addition, *we recommend that the rule that new Great Books faculty sit in on a course for a full semester continue to be strictly enforced and that more opportunities be created in the near future for discussion groups and workshops, both during the semester and in the summer, on Great Books-specific pedagogical topics.*

Our final three recommendations concern the people who make the Great Books Program work, namely the students and the faculty. One caveat that was repeatedly stated by the faculty is that the Great Books Program is labor-intensive and time-consuming. One of the professors cited reading and grading as the most time-consuming elements: "When we're talking about time, for me part of that is on the front end with the reading, also in responding to student essays, which I find very labor-intensive in order to do that well." One of his colleagues warned that nontenured faculty in particular might actually be harmed professionally by teaching in the program: "I spend a lot of time preparing for Great Books, and when I started teaching here that all seemed to be productive work. I mean, it was meaningful to me and I thought it made the class better, but I do worry about young, untenured faculty who might have an interest in Great Books and yet feel the pressure of other specific accomplishments they have to make in their first six years." These warnings must be taken seriously. All involved in the Great Books Program—students and faculty alike—have many other duties and obligations outside the program, be it an academic major or a departmental teaching load. In addition, this program is not for everybody. It takes a certain amount of what the Germans so unceremoniously call "Sitzfleisch," i.e., the ability to sit still and devote time and thought to sometimes tedious tasks, like read-

ing a difficult text or annotating a student paper with worthwhile comments. It may even require a degree of nerdiness, and certainly a good measure of intellectual curiosity. *We therefore recommend that the long-standing principle of self-selection for the Great Books Program be preserved for both students and faculty. New students should be given honest and forthcoming information about the program and then be allowed to decide for themselves whether they want to join. Likewise, no faculty member—especially no new, untenured colleague—ought to be coerced into teaching in the Great Books Program.* As long as the program is made up of people who truly want to be in it because they love to read texts that lay out the seminal ideas of Western civilization, engage these works in serious discussion with likeminded people, or love giving guidance to young minds who take their first steps in an academic inquiry into the human condition, it will thrive and be fruitful to all those involved.

Notes

1. The following remarks are adapted from the Mercer University Great Books Program website: <http://www.mercer.edu/gbk/index.html>.

2. This is why for many members of the Great Books faculty the Great Books course is often the most labor-intensive course in their schedule, and why it is necessary that the Great Books director and seasoned colleagues carefully prepare new Great Books faculty for their task.

3. There are, in fact, a few program-wide evening lectures scheduled each semester, which address issues relevant to but slightly outside the readings. An example is Charlie Thomas and Achim Kopp's lecture on "The Archaeology of Troy and Homer's *Iliad*," which has become a fixture for the GBK 101 courses over the last few years.

4. We would like to express our sincere thanks to the eight Mercerians who participated in the focus group conversations. Without their willingness to share their precious time, their wonderful insight into the Mercer Great Books Program, their grace, wit, and cheerfulness, this study would not have been possible.

Connecting and Applying Virtue in Texts and Life: A Qualitative Narrative Assessment of the Enduring Questions & Ideas Core Curriculum

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Institutional Choices

History, Vision, and Structure of the Core at CUI

Concordia University Irvine's Enduring Questions & Ideas (Q&I) Core began in fall 2010 in order to increase academic rigor, give students a common intellectual experience, and prepare them broadly for their God-given callings in life. The array of liberal arts and science courses in Q&I Core gives students a broad intellectual foundation and sound habits of mind that they can draw on and develop in their other general education courses, majors, minors, and professional programs.

Q&I Core courses are paired each semester to facilitate interdisciplinary learning. Each course engages students in dialogue about some of life's big questions and ideas (such as, who is a virtuous citizen?), close reading or analysis of great works (text, theorem, speech, art) from around the globe and across time, critical and creative thinking, effective writing, connecting academic disciplines (including theology) to address big questions, and cultivating excellent academic habits and skills. Through the Q&I Core, students develop—using Martin Luther's vision of education—as “wise, honorable, and cultivated citizens” who can serve society and the Christian church intelligently through their many vocations in life.

All students take Q&I Core courses in small, challenging, and encouraging learning communities. Each course is capped at 28 students. The same students are typically in each pair. Students entering as freshmen take eight Q&I Core courses: Core Mathematics paired with Core Philosophy and Core Biology with Core Theology in the freshman year, Core English 201 with Core History 201 and Core English 202 with Core History 202 in the sophomore year (starting in the fall of 2018, the 202s will serve as a capstone course taken during the junior year). Students entering as sophomores take a unique pairing, Core Philosophy with Core Theology, and one of the Core English and Core History pairs. Students entering as juniors or seniors take one pair, Core Philosophy with Core Theology.

Common Learning Objectives (Knowledge, Values, Skills of Inquiry)

Concordia's Q&I Core courses directly support several of the university's General Education Learning Outcomes (GELOs). These outcomes are as follows: Systematic Inquiry (or, Critical Thinking and Information Literacy), Written Communication, Oral Communication, Informed and Responsive Citizenship, Christian Literacy and Faith, Service to Society and Church, Quantitative Reasoning, and Close Reading. These GELOs directly support the university's mission. The educational aim of Concordia is to "empower students through the liberal arts and professional studies for lives of learning, service, and leadership." The Q&I Core, representing the foundation of each student's liberal arts experience at Concordia, is an essential curricular component for fulfilling the university's mission.

Leadership in the Core

Each Q&I Core course is run by a lead professor under the supervision of the director of general education. Each lead professor is responsible for organizing her/his course and its intellectual intersections with the paired course. Lead professors work with fellow instructors in the course to devise a common syllabus that includes shared texts, assignments, and tests. The lead professor regularly convenes instructors in the course to discuss core texts, pedagogy, and salient content connections with the paired course. Each is also responsible for running the assessment of any GELO connected to the course.

Action Steps

Assessment #1

Although all of Concordia University's GELOs are assessed on a regular rotating basis, the director of general education, Dr. Scott Ashmon, wanted to take the assessment one step further by investigating the multidisciplinary aspect of our core. Did our students, in fact, carry their learning from their freshman year into their final sophomore semester? To do this, in the spring of 2016 we targeted the possible connections between Core Philosophy 101 and Core English 201 (not all students take the English sequence in order), creating the following assignment for this purpose:

Write a five-page essay in which you answer the question **"What is the highest virtue?"** Use both your literary text and your philosophical text to answer this question, pointing out where the two agree and/or disagree. In addition to your primary texts, you must use at least three scholarly commentaries or articles.

Students were guided toward possible philosophical texts, many of which were taken from the philosophy course syllabus.

Finished papers were then grouped according to these categories:

1. Students who had taken Philosophy 101 (10 in total, or 20% of the 50 collected);
2. Students who had taken the version of philosophy offered to transfers (16 in total);
3. Transfers who had not yet taken a philosophy course (11 in total).

In addition, we assessed 10 papers written by the same cohort of students (Group 1) when they were enrolled in Philosophy 101 the year previously (10 in total). In these essays, students were asked to construct a philosophical argument regarding a contemporary issue of their own choosing.

All of the papers were then assessed by two English professors from the core and by two core peer tutors, seniors who had taken these courses themselves. The assessment rubric is Appendix D.

Assessment Results Summary

Each paper was assessed in four categories: Content/context; Organization/coherence; Sources/synthesis; and Integration of disciplines. Essays were assessed as exceeds or meets expectations, or needs improvement, or falls below expectations.

1. Students who had taken Philosophy 101 as freshmen:

C	25% Exceeded	30% Met	= 55%
O	30% Exceeded	20% Met	= 50%
S	15% Exceeded	45% Met	= 60%
I	35% Exceeded	35% Met	= 70%

2. Students who had had taken the version of philosophy offered to transfers:

C	13% Exceeded	22% Met	= 35%
O	6% Exceeded	34% Met	= 40%
S	13% Exceeded	13% Met	= 26%
I	9% Exceeded	31% Met	= 40%

3. Transfers who had taken no philosophy courses:

C	32% Met
O	27% Met
S	32% Met
I	32% Met

4. Students in Philosophy 101:

C	10% Exceeded	45% Met	= 55%
O	5% Exceeded	50% Met	= 55%
S	5% Exceeded	45% Met	= 50%
I	10% Exceeded	35% Met	= 45%

These results are, on the one hand, very pleasing and, on the other, a bit disconcerting. It is clear that students, as a cohort, who come in as freshmen and take four semesters of the Q&I Core at Concordia demonstrate a marked improvement in their ability to apply philosophical concepts to other content (moving from 45% to 70%). Also, they outshine those transfer students who have not experienced earlier core classes (70% compared to 32% where no transfers exceeded expectations). This is as it should be.

What is troubling is the very poor showing demonstrated by the transfer students who had taken Core Philosophy with us. In talking with one of the primary philosophy professors about this, he offered two possible explanations: (1) Transfer students are more resistant to having to take core courses, so they are less likely to delve fully into the material. (2) The major paper in the transfer Core, unlike the freshman assignment, does not ask the students to apply a concept to a contemporary issue but is more focused on philosophy itself. Although there is not much to be done with the former problem, the philosophy faculty are considering ways in which the latter might be addressed, including reformulating the writing assignment.

For a collection of assessor comments on the first set of essays, see Appendix A. For examples of student writing from the first set of essays, see Appendix B. For reflections from our core peer tutors on their assessment experience, see Appendix C.

Assessment #2

As these papers (as described above) were being assessed in the spring of 2017, the lead professor of Core English 201, Kerri Tom, decided to ask the following questions of her current students on their final exam: “Which text from this course had the greatest impact on you? How so? Which character from this course will remain in your head, like the lyrics to a much liked song?” The goal here was to ascertain if any of the core texts the class had read and discussed had made a deeper impression on them beyond an academic one. In other words, had these texts truly made our students wiser, more cultivated, and more honorable (or virtuous), in accordance with the motto of our university?

What follows are quotations from our students:

“I feel that I can apply what I learned from Odysseus [in *Iliad*] in my own life. On my team the coaches chose our leaders (or captains), and this has showed me that just because I am not declared a captain doesn’t mean that I can’t stand up for what is right.”

“Achilles has to be my favorite character. I don’t like him for his strength or skill, but rather the humbling that he goes through. . . . Life isn’t always about taking revenge or fixing everything. Sometimes you just need to be there for a friend, before it’s too late.”

“Achilles will stay in my head. He is a complicated character, and I think it would be possible to get something new out of him every time I read the *Iliad*.”

“Diomedes from the *Iliad* because he was impressive through his courage and skills. He was never afraid to challenge someone stronger and more powerful than him for the sake of victory and his people. It is the kind of attitude I pursue, to take on challenges I am unsure about and uncomfortable with and not be afraid of failure.”

“The *Iliad* is the text that had the greatest impact on me. From the epic similes to the gruesome details of how a single person can be slain, it will always impress me that words can paint such a vivid picture. Moreover, it reignited my interest to keep on reading books in my spare time.”

“The character who will remain in my head is Antigone. She has such strong faith and values her family so much so that she would die for them. I hold both my faith and family dear to my heart, I will always put my faith first and then family over anything. . . . she will always be in my mind when I may be conflicted with problems/decisions in life.”

“The text itself [*Antigone*] will remain in my head because the fight of justice and the struggle of what is right and wrong is intriguing to me. Not only is it intriguing, it really is relevant to today’s time. It is a universal struggle. When man-made laws go against your morals, it is very hard to listen to what is right.”

“Antigone was the character that stuck out the most to me because of her bravery and dedication. She showed great strength in her rebellion, as well as determination to do what was right. Her love for family and people was also admirable.”

“Antigone had the biggest impact on my life during this course. I wrestled with the question of whether divine or state law is more important. Also, the question of dying for your faith came up. This text allowed me to further explore what my beliefs are as an individual Christian.”

“The *Aeneid* had the greatest impact on me in this course because it represented love and dedication. Although it wasn’t always a positive epic poem, what it represented was faith in what you’re supposed to do, and the trust within yourself to get there. There will always be trials and obstacles in the way, but with patience and perseverance, you’ll always find a way.”

“The text that had the most impact on me was *The Book of Songs* [*Shijing*]. The woman from the story of the Cypress Boat will stick with me the most. These poems and this character will stick with me because I read them when I was going through a very difficult time. The woman from the Cypress Boat remained strong and full of self-love, and upon reading it, I realized I needed to be like her in my time of struggles.”

“These poems [by Omar Khayyam] were effective in opening my mind,

helping me see other ways of thinking. He had an interesting world view, and it is good to take other world views into account, in order to improve your own.”

“Omar Khayyam’s poems were the most impactful. Even when we weren’t in class I would still think and analyze them. I like how he saw the world with just a hopeless spirit because it makes God and religion that much better. At the same time, however, it is also comedic to see someone who does not care that much accomplish so much.”

“The *Rubaiyat* had the greatest impact on me [as] it rekindled my passion for poetry since high school. I really enjoyed reading it because there [were] so many different analogies.”

“I really liked the text the *Inferno* by Dante. The book had a lot of good vivid imagery that helped in telling the story. . . . Overall I enjoyed the book and would gladly read it again to understand something I may not have got or even see something new in the book that I may have missed reading the first time.”

“*King Henry IV* has had the greatest impact on me. When I was young my father would put in numerous hours coaching me in baseball, but once I turned 12 I was burnt out of baseball. My dad was disappointed in me quitting. I had to redeem myself by showing him I made the right choice to play water polo because that is how I got into college. Reminds me of King Henry and Prince Hal.”

“The character who struck me the most was Falstaff. His take on honor made me think. I enjoy things that make me think and maybe even change my perspective on things. His words about honor made me think. . . . Falstaff made me think that if you want to fight, don’t do it for honor, do it for something you believe in, or something to protect, or someone you love.”

Informed Judgments

Although it is gratifying to the faculty to see improvements in writing and thinking as calculated in percentages, it is far more satisfying, and meaningful, to let the students speak for themselves. This includes the reflections of seniors who evaluated their younger peers’ papers and compared them to their own academic journey (see Appendix C). It is in the students’ comments that we see the depth of their thought and, more importantly, the connections they are making between what they learn about virtue from literary and philosophical texts in a classroom and how they live. It is one thing to discuss the question of what is right, but quite another to live with a character coming to terms with the answer, and yet another to understand the answer in one’s own experiences. At Concordia University Irvine, we firmly believe that great texts assist in the transformation from college student to a true lifelong learner.

Appendix A

Narrative Assessments of Selected Papers in Group 1

Paper #1: “Although the student’s specific focus is unclear at times, the overall coherency and flow exceed expectations. The student demonstrates an understanding of Thomas Aquinas, Dante Alighieri, and Aristotle that would be expected at a sophomore level, and integrates ideas from them accordingly.”

Paper #4: “Very focused on the common virtue of serving one’s country as demonstrated by Aeneas in Virgil’s poem and as explained by Seneca (and Cicero). Offers counterexamples and nuanced differences.”

Paper #8: “Both topics are present from the beginning of the paper, and the integration of ideas was smooth and connected by textual evidence. While some parts of the paper seemed out of place, the format, organization, and use of disciplines were coherent and cohesive.”

Paper #9: “The introduction is effective and to the point. This paper makes a nuanced argument on virtue in *The Aeneid*, well supported by primary texts and scholarship. The analysis is insightful, and the language is sophisticated and elegant. The paper analyzes duty at the intersection between personal desire and civic duty, and does so effectively, employing Cicero and Virgil.”

Paper #10: “The topics were introduced somewhat quickly and efficiently with the connections drawn soon after. While the arguments include a lot of summarizing and ramble quite a bit, they are well organized and include the necessary information. Proper citation was lacking (quote dropping and less explanation than necessary), but overall the argument was adequate and the student’s intent to follow the prompt succeeded.”

Appendix B

Examples of Student Writing from Selected Papers in Group 1

Paper #1: “The similarities between these two pillars of Western thought are clear. Both Dante and Aquinas were Italian and Roman Catholics. Aquinas lived most of his life preparing men to become members of the Roman Catholic clergy, and Dante wrote to inspire men to morally improve their lives. While Dante’s work was clearly influenced by Aristotle and Aquinas, it was more political and allegorical than Aristotle and Aquinas’s straightforward work. . . . The world, both Dante and Aquinas concluded, needs to understand that the truth (in the highest sense) was God and God’s will.”

Paper #4: “Seneca, in accordance with the Stoic school of thought, believed that certain emotions and inclinations were destructive and could impede man from reaching his highest potential. His foremost instruction is that man must have control over his desires and be able to repress negative feeling. The ability to exercise self-restraint even at the cost of personal sacrifice is the necessary foundation one must have in order to be an ideal model of virtue.”

Paper #8: “In going through the nine layers of Hell, Dante gives the reader insight into how bad each sin is and to what extent they will be punished. The first circle, the souls of those who were virtuous before Christianity, are in ‘Limbo’ and not punished to the extent of other sinners, but rather not allowed into Paradise. This indicates that Dante believes that one can be virtuous without being a Christian, but that ultimate virtue or the highest virtue involves being a Christian and not doing the things listed throughout the next eight circles of Hell. This is similar to Aquinas because it informs the reader that highest virtue involves being a Christian, but at the same time is different because Aquinas did not focus on Hell but rather on God.”

Paper #9: “Both the works of Cicero and Virgil deal with the balance and prioritization of personal desires and societal needs. Cicero addresses civic obligation in three different categories. . . . In contrast, *On Obligations* is a loosely formed philosophical argument that shows how men are to interact in an ideal society. Virgil approaches the same topic but uses a different method to illustrate it. As he tells the story of Aeneas, he used this main character’s actions to exemplify the ideal citizen.”

Paper #10: “Because Dante includes in his poetry the significance of faith behind one’s actions as demonstrated in the first circle of Hell, then Aquinas would agree with this view since he, too, shares this idea. Therefore, both Dante and Aquinas would agree that faith in the Lord is necessary to gain salvation along with good actions since faithlessness cannot allow Him to bestow his gifts to people as they are not aware of what they receive.”

Appendix C

Reflections from the Core Peer Tutors Who Assessed the Papers

Tutor #1:

From the perspective of a student who had taken the core classes, it was difficult in the beginning of the assessment to think much beyond “I could have written a better paper than this.” However, once I was able to set my ego aside and read for purely content assessment, the project was entertaining. It was interesting to revisit the texts now that a few years have gone by, and recognize the impact they have had on my upper-level classes.

The assessment job, despite my attempt to read for just grading, was in many ways a comparative activity. If I wasn’t comparing the papers and students’ reading comprehension to my own, it was to each other and what I remember my classmates doing in the core classes. The core is so Concordia specific that the papers had to be compared to one another, as there is nothing else out there similar to what this project—and this university—teaches the students. The great texts are continuously relevant, that much is obvious even past graduation, but especially in classes beyond Core English. It was somewhat nostalgic to read back over papers discussing character attributes in the *Iliad*, although the application to philosophy was different than anything I encountered during the core.

The papers I assessed were diverse in topic, writing style, and ability. It was interesting to see what students took away from the reading and what they remembered from their Core Philosophy classes. If I wasn't tutoring freshmen every year, I certainly would not have remembered much of anything from Core Philosophy. That aspect of it was pleasing, as the students were clearly willing to either recall the lessons or research the material enough to refamiliarize themselves.

Assessing from a tutoring perspective was interesting as well. Because I got to work with students on CENG 202 classwork and papers, I got to witness the thought process that went behind the creation of a paper, despite it's not being the papers I was assessing. That helped with the assessing process because I got to follow the thought process of the average student when writing a core-centric paper.

From the perspective of a student who has taken the core classes, this assessment process was both nostalgic and surprising. Perhaps it's my ego and major coming forward, but it seemed as though more students should have been better prepared to write these essays, or that the essays should have been better. And while some were genuinely impressive, others were less so. I attribute that more to student apathy and skill than class preparedness. Regardless, the assessment project revealed a lot about the core and the students, and I hope that those revelations will help the university in some way.

Tutor #2:

Having completed the core curriculum, I recall how difficult it was to engage with philosophical concepts I barely understood aside from what was discussed in class. To prepare myself as an assessor, I considered what level of understanding was expected of a sophomore and even looked back on my own essays. I had to gauge students' essays not only in relation to the prompt, but also in contrast to their peers. The three most common issues I encountered were an unclear or unmanageable thesis statement (when a thesis statement was present), an unsupportable or logically unclear argument, and poor research.

While most students seemed to understand basic philosophical concepts and literary texts separately, applying philosophy to a text to answer a prompted question proved to be overwhelming for many. Students often did not present a thesis that was narrow enough to make a concise claim; instead, they argued the subjectivity of virtue. Considering how many of these individuals spent their freshman year discussing "truth," I was surprised that second-year students refused to make a claim. These students' arguments contrasted several characters to discuss how each one had their own "highest virtue."

Although the essays were generally well organized and demonstrated basic understanding of the material, originality was a problem. The individuals who tried to craft their own unique theses were the ones who had the most trouble making a valid and supportable argument. For example, I recall one student who attempted to argue that the highest virtue, in Medea's case, was killing her sons because Jason deserved it for being so cruel to her. Arguments like this, besides being logically unclear, obviously misunderstood the definition of virtue; because the very foundation of the argu-

ment was imprecise, the entire paper suffered. These students offered subpar support in an attempt to defend unconventional conclusions.

Efficient use of secondary sources was likewise problematic. It seemed that these sources were skimmed for key words or used as fillers rather than substantive support to the argument. The core papers made it apparent that many sophomores do not comprehend the function of secondary sources in an argument. I sympathize with this because, in retrospect, it was what I struggled with most in my own core essays. While working on the assessment project, I happened to have an unrelated conversation with one of my peers who mentioned that she had just finished a paper and only had to write her annotated bibliography before submitting it. I realized that many students do not actually know what an annotated bibliography is for (or else it would have been completed *first*), thus their research suffers. Although the final draft of the papers I read did not include an annotated bibliography, poor use of secondary sources curtailed many arguments.

The quality of a paper almost always directly corresponded to good research. With the exception of a few outstanding essays, most students seemed to comprehend the philosophical and literary texts at about the same level—it was the research that made all the difference between an average paper and a high-quality one.

Appendix D

Qualitative Narrative Assessment Rubric

Assignment: Write a five-page essay in which you answer the question, “**What is the highest virtue?**” Use both your literary text and your philosophical text to answer this question, pointing out where the two agree and/or disagree. In addition to your primary texts, you must use at least three scholarly commentaries or articles.

Purpose of Assessment:

1. The papers will be assessed to determine if students have thought deeply about the central question of CENG 201, “Who is a virtuous citizen?” by reading critically a primary text.
2. The papers will be assessed to determine if students can apply philosophical concepts they learned earlier in Core Philosophy 101 (for freshmen) or Core Philosophy 200 (for transfers) to literary texts.

Scoring (please circle):

Content/context: 4 3 2 1

Organization/coherence: 4 3 2 1

Source/synthesis: 4 3 2 1

Integration of disciplines: 4 3 2 1

Criteria	Exceeds Expectations (4)	Meets Expectations (3)	Needs Improvement (2)	Below Expectations (1)
Content/ context	The paper fully meets assignment expectations. The content demonstrates a complete understanding of audience, purpose, and genre. The focus is clear. Comprehensive relevant evidence fully supports the thesis or position. Discipline-appropriate argument strategies are comprehensively employed.	The paper adequately meets assignment expectations. The content demonstrates an adequate understanding of audience, purpose, and genre. The focus is clear. Adequate relevant evidence supports the thesis or position. Discipline-appropriate argument strategies are usually employed.	The paper meets some, but not all, assignment expectations. The content demonstrates a rudimentary understanding of audience, purpose, and genre. The focus is not clear enough. More evidence is needed to support the thesis or position. More discipline-appropriate argument strategies need to be employed.	The paper meets few of the assignment expectations. The content demonstrates very little understanding of audience, purpose, and genre. The focus is unclear. Evidence is rarely provided. Discipline-appropriate argument strategies are rarely employed.
Organization /coherence	The paper displays ideas that are always organized and logically developed, with clear and insightful connections among them. An introduction and conclusion fully appropriate to the genre are present.	The paper displays ideas that are adequately organized and developed, with adequate connections among them. An introduction and conclusion appropriate to the genre are present.	The paper displays ideas that are not fully organized and developed, with some but not enough connections among ideas. An introduction and conclusion somewhat appropriate to the genre are present.	The paper displays ideas that are rarely developed and/or organized, with few connections among them. The introduction and/or conclusion are not appropriate to the genre.

Criteria	Exceeds Expectations (4)	Meets Expectations (3)	Needs Improvement (2)	Below Expectations (1)
Sources/ synthesis	The paper fully incorporates source material appropriate to, and sufficient for, the assignment. Source material is comprehensively analyzed and synthesized in support of the topic or claim, and documented using discipline-specific format.	The paper adequately incorporates source material appropriate to, and sufficient for, the assignment. Source material is adequately analyzed and synthesized in support of the topic or claim, and usually documented using discipline-specific format.	The paper sometimes incorporates source material appropriate to the assignment, but source material needs more analysis and synthesis in support of the topic or claim. Documentation does not always follow discipline-specific format.	The paper rarely incorporates source material appropriate to, and sufficient for, the assignment. Source material is rarely analyzed and synthesized in support of the topic or claim, and rarely documented using discipline-specific format.
Integration of disciplines	The paper successfully applies philosophical concepts to the primary literary text. It demonstrates a clear understanding of those concepts and of the literature.	The paper adequately applies philosophical concepts to the primary literary text. It demonstrates a basic understanding of those concepts and of the literature.	The paper inconsistently applies philosophical concepts to the primary literary text. It demonstrates very little understanding of those concepts and of the literature.	The paper fails to apply philosophical concepts to the primary literary text. It does not demonstrate any understanding of those concepts and of the literature.

Please indicate a paragraph within the student's paper which best demonstrates your scoring (for example, write "Page three, paragraph 1"):

In a few sentences, please comment on the student's paper regarding any of the above criteria, with special attention to "Integration of disciplines":

