
Responses to revalidation form items:

II. Please explain how you have designed the course to intentionally help students meet the ES goal. How do course activities and assignments help students practice the ES goal?

Courses in the First-Year Seminar (FYS) Program have academic content that varies across course sections. However, all FYS Program courses must address the following FYS Program goals:

- **Successful Transitions to College**: Students should be given opportunities that implicitly or explicitly require them to consider and practice:
  - Being more reflective about their own learning;
  - Being an active and engaged learner;
  - Being an active and engaged member of the UND community;
  - Studying effectively.
- **Engagement in the Academic Life of the University**: Students should be given opportunities that help them establish connections with the academic life of the university by:
  - Working productively with faculty;
  - Sharing a meaningful academic experience with peers through significant interactions related to academic content.

Although each FYS Program section will attend to critical thinking in a variety of ways related to the course’s academic content, the FYS Program goal through which students’ critical thinking is developed programmatically is the “being more reflective about their own learning” goal.

To address critical thinking through this goal, FYS Program courses must include a common reflective essay assignment near the end of the course term. This assignment asks students to “think carefully about how you learn, how you do academic work, and the choices you make when studying or completing assignments.” Students respond to this by focusing their attention on one or more of the assignments they have completed that semester, using it to analyze their work in the class, synthesize their thinking about that work, and to evaluate their learning and draw conclusions about its future applicability. These things are done by responding, in an integrated way, to the following prompts:

- What about this course’s content did you learn by completing the assignment? How has the assignment helped you practice skills related to this course’s Essential Studies goal of “critical thinking”?
- How did you prepare for the assignment? What steps did you take in completing it? Why did you make those choices about the process? What did you learn by going through that process?
- Have you applied what you’ve learned by completing the assignment to other situations this semester? If not, how will you apply what you’ve learned by completing the assignment to your future college experiences in and out of the classroom? Are there any generalizable skills that seem particularly useful?
This assignment asks for critical thinking through reflection, and forms the basis for the common critical thinking work that students do across all FYS Program courses.

III. Please include assessment materials.

A) The direct assessment used to determine how FYS Program courses help students meet the ES “critical thinking” goal is the reflective assignment described above. Student work for this assignment is collected from each FYS section each year.

The Fall 2013 reflective essays were scored utilizing the ES Critical Thinking rubric during a scoring session at which faculty from across campus participated. There were a total of 98 student papers from across the 8 FYS sections, which represents approximately 2/3 of the total.

At the start of the scoring session two sample papers were scored by all faculty scorers as a calibration. After working to establish a common understanding about how to apply the rubric, each of the 98 papers in the data set were scored by two readers. If the subsequent scores were within 1 point of each other, no additional scoring was done for that paper; otherwise, a third reader scored the paper, with the score assigned being the average of the three.

Score distributions for the 98 papers are given below. The first chart shows the distribution of total scores (all three rubric categories summed together), and the second the same except for each rubric category individually.
B) Indirect assessment evidence comes from the standard USAT question corresponding to critical thinking. For Fall 2013, in response to the prompt, “This class improved my critical thinking skills,” the data are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No response</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>&lt;--</th>
<th>--&gt;</th>
<th>Greatly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C) The indirect evidence is a bit difficult to interpret given the large number of students who did not respond to this question. One reasonable interpretation would be that the lack of a response means a student did not feel the class helped improve their critical thinking skills.

The direct evidence paints a somewhat less pessimistic picture. Fewer than 20% of the students scored at the low end of the distribution, and approximately 1/3 in the upper half – which certainly suggests that at least this many were thinking critically to a reasonable degree. This provides no definitive evidence that the FYS course helped them accomplish this gain, but neither does it force us to conclude that it didn’t. A similar picture is painted by the distributions for each rubric category separately. Here we see students were most capable in terms of “knowledge and comprehension,” and least capable in terms of “evaluations and conclusions.”

D) At the conclusion of the scoring session mentioned above, there was discussion about whether the reflective assignment could be improved to help students better demonstrate critical thinking in their writing. There was some consideration given to the possibility that the assignment asked students to do too many things in a way that was not adequately specific, but
this point did not garner unanimous agreement as others felt the assignment a reasonable one for the intended purpose.
But this is not an answer to the question asked, being, as it is, about the assignment used to collect the data, and not about how the courses in the program could be altered. To provide an adequate answer to that question is more difficult. The FYS courses, by design, serve two masters – one focused on helping first-year students successfully transition to a university-level academic environment, and the other focused on academic content that addresses an Essential Studies Program goal.
Given this, one possible change may be to better integrate these two components. A move in that direction has already begun with the work of three FYS faculty (Nikki Berg Burin, Nicole Derenne, and Merie Kirby), who developed a suite of course resources that are intended specifically to bridge the gap between transition and academics. These materials were developed over the summer of 2014, and are being used for the first time in Fall 2014. Perhaps it will be possible, at the time of the next revalidation review, to perceive critical thinking gains in FYS students that can be attributed to these newly developed materials.

E) Both the direct and indirect evidence presented here are composites across all FYS sections, and there were no apparent systematic differences between sections. As the majority of FYS student papers were scored to obtain the direct evidence, it is reasonable, from a statistical point of view, to assume that our sample is appropriately representative of the work of all students across all FYS sections.