

## 2013-14 Student Experiences and Learning Outcomes at Mount Mercy

The Academic Assessment Plan incorporates a combination of strategies including the majors, core curriculum, and campus-wide efforts. A multi-faceted academic assessment plan provides a framework for ongoing analysis of student learning. The plan includes both direct measures of learning (e.g. instructor evaluation of student work) and indirect indicators such as student, alumni and faculty surveys. Some data are collected within courses required for specific academic majors, while other data are collected in core curriculum classes. Annual reports submitted by the academic majors also contribute to this process, with designated objectives assessed according to established timeframes.

### ***Core Curriculum- The Mercy Portal Experience***

Incoming first-year MMU students performed in the ways we expect. These students were required to take a MMU Portal course. The interdisciplinary nature of the course fosters teamwork and leadership in the students. By the time they finished the course, a survey of student perceptions and experiences in the Portal course was distributed.

In 2013-14, 10 Portal courses were offered with a total enrollment of 203 students. Survey responses were obtained from n=73 students in portal sections.

<u>Below are some survey questions</u>	<u>Notable Examples</u>
1. Taught me about Mercy Critical Concerns	82% of students agreed/strongly agreed.
2. Gave me an opportunity to participate in a service activity	95% of students agreed/strongly agreed.
3. Taught me about the value of serving others	89% of students agreed/strongly agreed.

### ***Core Curriculum- Domains of Liberal Study***

Mount Mercy's core curriculum includes seven domains of liberal studies. MMU students in all majors are also required to take Mount Mercy Domains of Liberal Studies courses. These courses give all students in all majors a sense of breadth and connection among traditional liberal arts disciplines. These courses are grouped according to the overall concepts covered by courses in that domain: Expressive Arts, Global Awareness, Historical Roots, Holistic Health, The Natural World, Self and Society and Ultimate Questions. Each class in a domain utilized a common domain assignment. Faculty from each domain collaborated to develop a common

assignment addressing the agreed upon outcomes for that area. Performance criteria were also specified and scoring rubrics created.

Starting in Fall 2009, randomly selected student assignments are scored by the faculty for domain assessment purposes using the applicable rubric. Faculty members teaching in each domain are also invited to meet periodically, discussing results and process refinements. A key intent of this approach is to empower faculty teaching domain courses to design assignments and criteria that represent meaningful measures of the targeted outcomes.

In 2013-14, 2111 students were enrolled in 100 domain courses. Five students were randomly selected from each course. 335 papers were evaluated. The findings suggest students made good progress in all domains.

<b><u>Seven Domains of Liberal Study</u></b>	<b><u>Notable Examples</u></b>
Expressive Arts Domain objectives: explore the relevance of text/work of fine art to themselves and their culture, and also interpret a text/work of fine art from two divergent perspectives.	Domain Average : 2.31/3 <sup>1</sup> Interpret a text/work of fine art from two divergent perspectives – 51% of students were rated good/excellent, 42 % of students were rated adequate.
Historical Roots Domain objectives: analysis of a major historical issue or event, and then make connection between a major historical event and the contemporary world.	Domain Average : 2.5/3 Analysis of a major historical issue or event- 52% of students were rated good/excellent, 48% of students were rated adequate.
Global Awareness Domain objectives: explore the diversity of human culture in a global context, and examine the interconnectedness of current global issues.	Domain Average : 2.64/3 Explore the diversity of human culture in a global context - 72% of students were rated good/excellent, 28% of students were rated adequate.
Holistic Health Domain objectives: Identify relationships among several dimensions of wellness (physical, occupational, emotional, social, environmental, financial, intellectual or spiritual). Engage in an activity to promote well-being in one dimension of wellness.	Domain Average : 2.81/3 Engage in an activity to promote well-being in one dimension of wellness - 84% of students were rated good/excellent, 11% of students were rated adequate.

<sup>1</sup> x/3 refers to the average on a three-point scale.

<p>The Natural World Domain objectives: Utilize the process of scientific inquiry, and explain implications of scientific knowledge for human or natural challenges.</p>	<p>Domain Average : 2.75/3 Utilize the process of scientific inquiry - 46% of students were rated good/excellent, 46% of students were rated adequate.</p>
<p>Self and Society Domain objectives: Identify and critically apply concepts or theories OR identify and critically apply methods. Examine at least two factors (social, psychological, economic or political) that shape individual behavior or social institutions.</p>	<p>Domain Average : 2.63/3 Examine at least two factors (social, psychological, economic or political) that shape individual behavior or social institutions - 67% of students were rated good/excellent, 30% of students were rated adequate.</p>
<p>Ultimate Questions Domain objectives: Understand similarities and differences between two philosophical or religious concepts about the nature or activity of God, at least one of them consistent with the Catholic tradition of philosophical or theological inquiry. Explain two religious or philosophical concepts relating to the dignity and value of the human person, at least one of them consistent with Catholic social teaching, and apply these concepts to a social justice issue.</p>	<p>Domain Average : 2.38/3 Explain two religious or philosophical concepts relating to the dignity and value of the human person, at least one of them consistent with Catholic social teaching, and apply these concepts to a social justice issue - 51% of students were rated good/excellent, 39% of students were rated adequate.</p>

### **Core Curriculum - *Mercy Experience Capstone***

MMU seniors are required to take a Mercy Experience Capstone course that is intended as a culminating experience in the liberal studies. Students integrate knowledge they have acquired from each of the core domains and will reflect on their Mercy education in the context of their major discipline. One key component of this one-credit course, in which students enroll concurrently with their major's senior seminar, is a capstone project focused on a social justice issue. The project is designed to engage students in considering disciplinary, interdisciplinary, and global perspectives, while fostering teamwork and communication.

A second capstone component used for assessment purposes is a Reflection Paper in which students begin to synthesize and reflect on their work at Mount Mercy as they approach graduation. The paper addresses the institution's mission and goals, with a focus on ways in which studies and experiences in the core curriculum have helped shape their Mercy education.

In 2013-14, 22 capstone courses were offered with a total enrollment of 332 students. Capstone instructors were asked to fill out a project rubric for each group project and a reflection paper rubric for each student enrolled in their capstone course. The findings are impressive. The

majority of students were rated strong. In addition, Capstone Student Survey responses obtained from 205 students also indicated that MMU seniors had a good Mercy Experience based on the mission-based outcomes.

<b>Highlights from the past year's findings</b>	<b>Notable examples</b>
<p>Reflection Paper- in what ways has your Mercy education helped you think critically, communicate effectively, serve the common good, and be responsible leader or participate?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 68% of students were rated strong and 16% of students were rated as moderate when integrating knowledge.</li> <li>2. 66% of students were rated strong and 17% of students were rated as moderate when reflecting on role of service.</li> </ol>
<p>Group Project – based on a social issue and required students to consider disciplinary, interdisciplinary, and global perspectives associated with a chose Mercy critical concern.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 80% of students were rated strong and 20% of students were rated as moderate when evaluating multiple perspectives.</li> <li>2. 89% of students were rated strong and 9% of students were rated as moderate when communicating effectively for various audiences.</li> </ol>
<p><u>Reflective Judgment</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Capstone Student Survey responses show that the majority of students could demonstrate “reflective judgment”.</li> </ol>	<p><u>Capstone Student Survey responses(2013-14)</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 83% of students agreed/strongly agreed that the capstone course “Helped me evaluate diverse perspectives on a topic”.</li> <li>2. 75% of students agreed/strongly agreed that the capstone course “Pulled together ideas from several disciplines”.</li> </ol>
<p><u>Strategic Communication</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Capstone Student Survey responses show that the majority of students could demonstrate “strategic communication”.</li> </ol>	<p><u>Capstone Student Survey responses(2013-14)</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 90% of students agreed/strongly agreed that the capstone course “Gave me opportunities to work with others.” Therefore students improve their strategic communication through working with others.</li> </ol>
<p><u>Serving the Common Good</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Capstone Student Survey responses show that the majority of students could make “serving the common</li> </ol>	<p><u>Capstone Student Survey responses(2013-14)</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 83% of students agreed/strongly agreed that the capstone course “made me think about the value of serving</li> </ol>

good”.	others.” 2. 84% of students agreed/strongly agreed that the capstone course “taught me about an important social issue.”
<u>Purposeful Living</u> 1. Capstone Student Survey responses show that the majority of students are committed to “purposeful living”.	<u>Capstone Student Survey responses(2013-14)</u> 1. 63% of students agreed/strongly agreed that the capstone course “encouraged me to take a leadership role in class or school activities”.

### **Learning within Academic Majors - *Academic Major Assessment***

Annual assessment of each major is firmly established at Mount Mercy. Faculty members review and assess selected student learning objectives each year, gathering and interpreting data concerning their graduates and determining appropriate follow-up action. Coordinators for the major are charged with managing and reporting on this assessment process. Chairs fulfill this role for their own disciplines and collaborate with coordinators on behalf of other majors in the department. Coordinators are expected to work closely with their department chairs, sharing findings and reports with them and contributing to ongoing improvement activities. In addition, majors participate in assessment of the college-wide objectives and the core curriculum.

Each major has established learning objectives for students graduating with a major in that discipline. At least two objectives are assessed each year, rotating through all learning objectives in a five year cycle. Assessment reports are read by the Academic Assessment committee and feedback is given yearly. Workshops focused on assessment are held each term for coordinators to discuss activities and findings.

In 2013-14, thirty-two academic programs reported how students performed in their majors. The programs used different methods to measure their program objectives and student learning. The findings show what and how MMU students did in their majors.

<b>Highlights from the past year’s assessment processes</b>	<b>Notable examples<sup>2</sup></b>
<u>Academic Majors</u> 1. Measured critical thinking	<u>Project</u> 1. Finance majors were asked to analyze financial statements of two different companies based on what students learned about the financial ratios and what those ratios

<sup>2</sup> Interested readers are welcome to contact the programs or Director of Assessment for further information.

	<p>communicated about the company. 69% of students were able to reach the correct conclusion and correctly analyze at least 2-3 ratios in explaining that conclusion.</p> <p>2. Psychology majors taking senior seminar completed an assignment that involved comparison and contrast of perspectives of psychology. Students were expected to identify two perspectives and provide a rationale for why the perspectives facilitated understanding. 57% of students were rated as exceeds expectations. 36% of students were rated as meets expectations.</p>
<p>2. Measured oral communication</p>	<p><u>Oral Presentation</u></p> <p>1. Biology majors completed an independent investigation and prepared a 10-15 minute oral presentation on their data. 21.4% of students were rated as excellent. 50% of students were rated as good.</p> <p>2. History seniors were required to summarize their research paper and prepared a 20-minute oral presentation on their work. 55% of students were rated as excellent. 37% of students were rated as good.</p>
<p>3. Measured written communication</p>	<p><u>Essays</u></p> <p>1. Art and Design Program used the Senior Thesis Exhibit to assess the creative design, technique and craftsmanship of student artwork. Students design and bind the paper for display next to their artwork in the exhibit. Use of Language and Demonstration of writing skills – 40% of students were rated as exemplary. 60% of students were rated as proficient.</p> <p>2. English majors taking senior seminar were required to write a research essay. Their writing and research skills were then assessed. Sequence and development of paragraphs -</p>

	<p>33% of students were rated as exemplary and 67% of students were rated as competent. Sentence clarity and conciseness - 25% of students were rated as exemplary and 67% of students were rated as competent.</p>
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## **Student experiences and Outcomes at MMU - *Results from Empirical, Longitudinal Studies***

### **2012-2013**

To measure the extent to which Mount Mercy students improved in strategic communication (measured through their attitudes toward engaging in literary activities) the experiences of all students new to the institution (n=283) were tracked during the 2012-2013 academic year. Pretest data were collected at the beginning of their tenure at Mount Mercy, and parallel posttest data were obtained from the same students at the end of their first year at the institution (n=126). As expected, and consistent with national survey results of college students, there was a slight decline in students' attitudes toward engaging in literary activities from the beginning to the end of the first year. Specifically, those in the sample scored 3.45/5 on the pretest, and 3.38/5 on the posttest. However, a number of effective educational practices taking place at Mount Mercy were associated with gains in this important outcome. Future research will continue to examine the influence of these effective practices on additional student outcomes that are associated with the goals of Mount Mercy University.

### **2013-2014**

The experiences of all students who were new to Mount Mercy during this academic year were tracked from the time they started at the institution (n=298) to the end of their first year (n=141). The initial purpose of tracking these experiences was to ascertain which educational practices at Mount Mercy are linked to increased odds of persistence. Unfortunately, due to differences between responders and non-responders, it was impossible to determine predictors of persistence. It was possible, however, to determine the extent to which students are being exposed to effective / high-impact practices that are empirically linked with a wide-range of important student outcomes, including student achievement and persistence.

<b>Highlights from 2012-13 and 2013-14</b>	<b>Notable patterns and examples</b>
<p><u>2012-13</u> Students' growth in the Mount Mercy goal of strategic communication was measured by assessing their proclivity to engage in literary activities.</p>	<p>Although there was a slight decline from the beginning to the end of this academic year among all students entering MMU (3.45/5 to 3.38/5, respectively<sup>3</sup>), the following MMU experiences led to gains in this important measure: Exposure to clear and organized instruction, interactional diversity experiences, and student perceptions of high faculty</p>

<sup>3</sup> x/5 refers to the average on a five-point scale, whereas x/4 refers to the average on a four-point scale.

	expectations.																
<p><u>2013-14</u>  Student experiences were assessed over this academic year using a longitudinal model. A number of factors were measured that are empirically associated with increased odds of persistence in college.</p>	<table> <tr><td>Satisfaction with MMU</td><td>3.38/4</td></tr> <tr><td>Collaborative learning</td><td>3.08/4</td></tr> <tr><td>Instructor feedback</td><td>3.74/5</td></tr> <tr><td>Instructor clarity</td><td>3.97/5</td></tr> <tr><td>Instructor organization</td><td>4.26/5</td></tr> <tr><td>Integrative learning</td><td>3.37/5</td></tr> <tr><td>Academic integration</td><td>3.70/5</td></tr> <tr><td>Social integration</td><td>3.37/5</td></tr> </table> <p>These results suggest students are being exposed to a number of “good practices” that are associated with increased odds of persistence.</p>	Satisfaction with MMU	3.38/4	Collaborative learning	3.08/4	Instructor feedback	3.74/5	Instructor clarity	3.97/5	Instructor organization	4.26/5	Integrative learning	3.37/5	Academic integration	3.70/5	Social integration	3.37/5
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**Data are also available from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The 2012 NSSE has 236 respondents among Mount Mercy’s graduating seniors. Below are some notable examples from 2012.**

<b>Mount Mercy education</b>	<b>Notable examples</b>
Mount Mercy education contributed quite a bit or very much to working effectively with others, a key skill for participation or leadership.	As indicated by the 2012 NSSE survey, 82% of seniors agreed.
Mount Mercy education contributed quite a bit or very much to acquiring job or work-related knowledge and skills.	As indicated by the 2012 NSSE survey, 81% of seniors agreed.
Seniors were “often” or “very often” put together ideas or concepts from different courses when completing assignments or during class discussions.	As indicated by the 2012 NSSE survey, 73% of seniors agreed.

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