

## **2014-15 Student Experiences and Learning Outcomes at Mount Mercy**

---

This report highlights examples of performance indicators identified through assessment processes. Further details are available in focused reports from the Director of Assessment. 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 and alumni 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 key objectives assessed according to established timeframes.

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

Incoming first-year MMU students are required to take a Mercy Experience Portal course. The interdisciplinary nature of the course fosters teamwork and leadership in the students. Before they finished the course a survey of student perceptions and experiences in the Portal course is distributed, with favorable results typically obtained.

In 2014-15, 10 Portal courses were offered with a total enrollment of 203 students. Assessment continues to show positive outcomes, with 3 of the survey items summarized below as examples of the objectives established for this introductory core course.

<b><u>Below are some survey questions</u></b>	<b><u>Notable Examples</u></b>
1. Taught me about Mercy Critical Concerns	83% of students agreed/strongly agreed.
2. Taught me about an important social issue.	85% of students agreed/strongly agreed.
3. Taught me about the value of serving others	82% 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 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 each domain: Expressive Arts (including literature and fine arts), Global Awareness, Historical Roots, Holistic Health, The Natural World, Self and Society and Ultimate Questions. Each class in a

domain utilizes 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.

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 2014-15, 1847 students were enrolled in 94 domain courses. According to established practice, some students were randomly selected from each course, with 366 papers evaluated. The findings suggest students made good progress in all domains. A brief summary of common assignments is included in the table to highlight the approaches used.

<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.	Each student wrote a 4-page paper discussing a particular text or work of art in relation to themselves, their culture and at least two divergent perspectives. 45% of students were rated good/excellent, 37% 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.	Each student submitted a 3-5 page critical review of an assigned personal memoir pertinent to the historical era or topic under study. 64% of students were rated good/excellent, 36% 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.	Each student submitted a writing assignment that explores a current global issue and incorporates a discussion about the diversity of human culture. 73% of students were rated good/excellent, 27% 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.	Each student submitted an assignment that had them reflect on the dimensions of wellness for their own life. 83% of students were rated good/excellent, 18% of students were rated adequate.

<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>Each student submitted an assignment that was a scientific investigation in which they collected and analyzed data for which the student had no prior knowledge of the outcome. 58% of students were rated good/excellent, 33% 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>Each student submitted a 3-5 page writing assignment that examines at least two factors that shape individual or social institutions and applies concepts/theories and methods of the course discipline. 65% of students were rated good/excellent, 32% 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>Each student wrote an essay that compares and contrasts two different views on a philosophical or religious topic that has a clear application to an issue of social justice. 46% of students were rated good/excellent, 42% 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 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 2014-15, 13 capstone courses were offered with a total enrollment of 242 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. As in 2013-14, the majority of students were rated strong. In addition, Capstone Student Survey responses also indicated that MMU seniors had a good Mercy Experience based on the mission-based outcomes.

Highlights from the past year's findings	Notable examples
<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 26% of students were rated as moderate when integrating knowledge.</li> <li>2. 73% 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. 70% of students were rated strong and 11% of students were rated as moderate when evaluating multiple perspectives.</li> <li>2. 81% of students were rated strong and 11% 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(2014-15)</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 74% of students agreed/strongly agreed that the capstone course “Helped me evaluate diverse perspectives on a topic”.</li> <li>2. 77% 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(2014-15)</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 94% 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 good”.</li> </ol>	<p><u>Capstone Student Survey responses(2014-15)</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 82% of students agreed/strongly agreed that the capstone course “made me think about the value of serving others.”</li> <li>2. 83% of students agreed/strongly agreed that the capstone course “taught me about an important social issue.”</li> </ol>
<p><u>Purposeful Living</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Capstone Student Survey responses show that the majority of students are committed to “purposeful living”.</li> </ol>	<p><u>Capstone Student Survey responses(2014-15)</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 60% of students agreed/strongly agreed that the capstone course “encouraged me to take a leadership role in class or school activities”.</li> </ol>

### **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 2014-15, thirty-five 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. A few examples are presented below to illustrate methods and outcomes.

<b>Highlights from the past year's assessment processes</b>	<b>Notable examples<sup>1</sup></b>
<p><u>Academic Majors</u></p> <p>1. Measured critical thinking</p>	<p><u>Project</u></p> <p>Accounting majors taking <i>Auditing Principles &amp; Practices</i> were presented with a case study involving several critical ethical issues. They were required to write a short paper evaluating the situation and addressing various ethical considerations.</p> <p>Consider applicable legal and regulatory issues- 66% of students were above expectations regarding ability to recognize key ethical issues and identify an appropriate ethically-responsible course of action.</p> <p>Code of conduct –70% of students were above expectations regarding ability to recognize key ethical issues and identify an appropriate ethically-responsible course of action.</p>
<p>2. Measured oral communication</p>	<p><u>Oral Presentation</u></p> <p>Psychology majors in Senior Seminar presented their senior thesis to Psychology faculty.</p> <p>Consistency (thesis statement conclusions) - 90% of students were rated as exemplary.</p> <p>Multiple perspectives - 80% of students were rated as competent.</p>
<p>3. Measured written communication</p>	<p><u>Essays</u></p> <p>English Program used the Senior Seminar to assess written communication. Students submitted an electronic professional portfolio including a resume, a job application cover letter, and writing samples. English faculty evaluated these portfolios.</p> <p>Quality of Writing Samples – 58% of students were rated as exemplary. 33% of students were rated as competent.</p>

---

<sup>1</sup> Interested readers are welcome to contact the programs or Director of Assessment for further information.

## Student experiences and Outcomes at MMU - *Results from Empirical, Longitudinal Studies*

### 2014-2015

To determine the extent to which Mount Mercy students' levels of socially-responsible leadership changed during this academic year, data were collected on their level of Citizenship at the beginning and end of their first year at the University. Citizenship is described as the degree to which an individual and group become responsibly connected to the community/society through leadership development. This measure taps into the Mount Mercy University goals of Serving the Common Good and Purposeful Living. To measure this construct, pretest Citizenship data were collected from most students new to the institution in the fall 2014 term (n=226/76.6% of the entering student body). The parallel Citizenship posttest was administered to the same students from the original sample who were still enrolled at Mount Mercy (n=194) as of April 2015. Of the 194 students still enrolled at Mount Mercy as of April 2015, 107 responded to the April posttest data collection (i.e., a 55% response rate).

There was a slight decline on the Citizenship measure from the beginning to the end of students' first year at Mount Mercy (4.43 to 4.16 on a five-point scale, respectively). This was expected, given similar pretest-posttest declines uncovered in the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education (WNS). Looking specifically at students attending liberal arts colleges, WNS researchers report an average of 4.0 and 3.96, respectively on the same pretest/posttest Citizenship survey – substantially lower than the Mount Mercy sample. Despite the decline among Mount Mercy students, two important educational practices led to actual gains in our students' levels of Citizenship. First, students reported an average of 3.14/5 on the degree to which they were exposed to difference (Interactional Diversity). Although the questions were slightly different, this is modestly higher than the mean for the interactional diversity measure assessed in the spring 2013 term (2.83/5). Next, students reported a mean of 3.03 (on a five-point scale) for community service/volunteering. Most importantly, prediction equations reveal that both of these measures were positively associated with gains in the Citizenship posttest measure, net of a host of potential confounding factors (e.g., GPA, race, sex, cumulative credits earned).

<b>Highlights from 2014-15</b>	<b>Notable patterns and examples</b>
Students' growth in the Mount Mercy goals of Serving the Common Good and Purposeful Living was measured by assessing changes in their levels of Citizenship development.	Although there was a slight decline in Citizenship levels among all students from the beginning to the end of this academic year (4.43/5 to 4.16/5, respectively), the following Mount Mercy educational experiences led to gains <sup>2</sup> in this important measure: Interactional diversity, and community service/volunteering.

**(Data collected and analyzed by Dr. Chad Loes, Director of Student Outcomes Research)**

<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that the longitudinal design allows e to estimate actual gains in the outcome measure. This has been demonstrated empirically elsewhere, e.g., Pascarella, E.T., Wolniak, G.C., & Pierson, C.T. (2003). Explaining student growth in college when you don't think you are. *Journal of College Student Development*, 44(1), 122–126. doi: 10.1353/csd.2003.0007

**For further information, please contact Edy Parsons, Director of Assessment, at [eparsons@mtmercy.edu](mailto:eparsons@mtmercy.edu).**