

2015-16 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 2015-16, 13 Portal courses were offered with a total enrollment of 299 students. Assessment continues to show positive and strong outcomes in some areas, with 3 of the survey items summarized below as examples of the objectives established for this introductory core course.

<u>Below are some survey questions</u>	<u>Notable Examples</u>
1. Taught me about Mercy Critical Concerns	85% of students agreed/strongly agreed. (83% in 2014-2015)
2. Taught me about an important social issue.	90% of students agreed/strongly agreed. (85% in 2014-2015)
3. Taught me about the value of serving others	93% of students agreed/strongly agreed. (82% in 2014-2015)

However, the following 3 weaker items should be addressed because they were all rated much lower when compared to the 2014-2015 results.

<u>Below are some survey questions</u>	<u>Notable Examples</u>
1. Taught me about Mount Mercy's values and heritage.	81% of students agreed/strongly agreed. (85% in 2014-2015)
2. Gave me an opportunity to participate in a service activity.	93% of students agreed/strongly agreed. (100% in 2014-2015)
3. Gave me opportunities to get to know classmates better.	80% of students agreed/strongly agreed. (87% in 2014-2015)

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 2015-16, 2417 students were enrolled in 99 domain courses. According to established practice, some students were randomly selected from each course, with 325 papers evaluated. As shown in the table below, the findings suggest students made good progress in all domains. However, more students were rated "poor/does not meet the criteria" in two domains (Self and Society Domain, Ultimate Questions Domain) when compared to the 2014-2015 findings. A brief summary of common assignments is included in the table to highlight the approaches used.

<u>Seven Domains of Liberal Study</u>	<u>Notable Examples</u>
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. 47% of students were rated good/excellent, 45% 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. 47.5% of students were rated good/excellent, 45% 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. 60% of students were rated good/excellent, 40% 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. 86% of students were rated good/excellent, 14% of students were rated adequate.
The Natural World Domain objectives: Utilize the process of scientific inquiry, and explain implications of scientific knowledge for human or natural challenges.	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. 55% of students were rated good/excellent, 35% of students were rated adequate.
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	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

behavior or social institutions.	good/excellent, 22% of students were rated adequate. 13% of students were rated poor/does not meet the criteria (3.3% in 2014-2015).
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.	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. 48% of students were rated good/excellent, 35% of students were rated adequate. 17% of students were rated poor/does not meet the criteria (12% in 2014-2015).

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 2015-16, 13 capstone courses were offered with a total enrollment of 239 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 2014-15, 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"> 1. 66% of students were rated strong and 32% of students were rated as moderate when integrating knowledge. 2. 76% of students were rated strong and 20% of students were rated as moderate when reflecting on role of service.
<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"> 1. 67% of students were rated strong and 23% of students were rated as moderate when evaluating multiple perspectives. 2. 72% of students were rated strong and 21% of students were rated as moderate when working with others to address global challenges.
<p><u>Reflective Judgment</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Capstone Student Survey responses show that the majority of students could demonstrate “reflective judgment”. 	<p><u>Capstone Student Survey responses(2015-16)</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 86% of students agreed/strongly agreed that the capstone course “Helped me evaluate diverse perspectives on a topic”. 2. 83% of students agreed/strongly agreed that the capstone course “Pulled together ideas from several disciplines”.
<p><u>Strategic Communication</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Capstone Student Survey responses show that the majority of students could demonstrate “strategic communication”. 	<p><u>Capstone Student Survey responses(2015-16)</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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.
<p><u>Serving the Common Good</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Capstone Student Survey responses show that the majority of students could make “serving the common good”. 	<p><u>Capstone Student Survey responses(2015-16)</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 81% of students agreed/strongly agreed that the capstone course “made me think about the value of serving others.” 2. 90% of students agreed/strongly agreed

	that the capstone course “taught me about an important social issue.”
Purposeful Living 1. Capstone Student Survey responses show that the majority of students are committed to “purposeful living”.	Capstone Student Survey responses(2015-16) 1. 64% 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 six 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.

Programs used different methods to measure their program objectives and student learning. The findings show what and how MMU students did in their majors. Furthermore, the program objectives and goals also correspond to university-wide objectives and goals. A few examples are presented below to illustrate methods and outcomes.

Highlights from the past year’s assessment processes	Notable examples¹
<u>Academic Majors</u> Measured Reflective Judgement (Students will demonstrate a knowledge of content, assumptions, terminology, and methodology of a broad range of academic disciplines.)	<u>Biology Program</u> Assessed Program Objective #3: After completing the requirements for the biology major, students will be competent with equipment and technology commonly used to explore biological phenomena from the cellular

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

	<p>to the organismic levels.</p> <p>Method: In order to collect information on the use and understanding of molecular and cellular technology, questions on laboratory quizzes were designed to address students' understanding of the electrophoresis of DNA, and the Polymerase chain Reaction including components used and the step in each cycle.</p> <p>Findings: In the Spring of 2016, 100% of the students understood the relationship of length of DNA fragment with how far the band runs through the gel, compared to 52.6 % of the students when last measured in Spring 2010.</p> <p><u>Mathematics Program</u></p> <p>Assessed Program Objective # 1: The graduating senior is prepared to read and to understand a broad range of topics in pure and applied mathematics at the undergraduate level.</p> <p>Method: Each senior conducted research on a higher level topic in mathematics of his/her choice. Students were required to submit written papers demonstrating that they understood in depth the topic they had researched.</p> <p>Findings: For both subject knowledge and content depth four of six students (67%) achieved a rating of Competent or Excellent.</p>
<p>Measured Strategic Communication (Students will generate, collect, organize and present ideas and information in written, oral and visual modes for chosen purposes and audiences.)</p>	<p><u>Art and Design Program</u></p> <p>Assessed Program Goal #3: Art & Design Program graduates will demonstrate the ability to present their art and design work in a professional manner.</p> <p>Method: Art and Design Program assessed each student's digital portfolio which contains a résumé, creative statement of intent, and examples of art and design work.</p> <p>Findings: 85% of students were rated proficient</p>

	<p>or higher in digital portfolio organization.</p> <p><u>History Program</u></p> <p>Assessed Program Objective # 2: History majors will be engaged in learning activities, such as, reading, writing, researching, speaking, and historical analysis.</p> <p>Method: History seniors were required to write a 20-page research paper, and do an oral presentation.</p> <p>Findings: Research Paper - 80% of students were rated as excellent. 20% of students were rated as good.</p> <p>Oral Presentation - 80% of students were rated as excellent. 20% of students were rated as good.</p>
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Student Experiences and Outcomes at MMU: Longitudinal Evidence

2015–2016

To explore whether students at Mount Mercy changed in their openness to diversity during their first year at the institution, data were collected from all incoming students new to the university during the 2015-2016 academic year. Openness to diversity is described as “students’ interest in exploring diversity in culture, ethnicity, perspectives, values, and ideas.” This measure taps into Mount Mercy’s goal of “Promoting a Purposeful Living,” (to wit, social development). Parallel pretest and posttest data were collected at the beginning (289 out of 393 incoming students [73.5%]) and end of students’ (158 out of 289 students [55%]) first year at Mount Mercy. Additionally, a battery of student experience data was also collected at the end of the academic year in an effort to determine which student experiences influence gains in the outcome measure.

Consistent with national studies, there was a slight decline in the openness to diversity measure from the beginning to the end of the academic year (4.11 to 4.03, respectively). Compared to data from other national studies or previous years’ cohorts of Mount Mercy students, those responding to the current year’s surveys exhibited higher averages than their counterparts in terms of curricular diversity (1.22 and .78 out of 4, respectively) and interactional diversity experiences (3.44 and 3.14 out of 5, respectively). The extent to which students were exposed to active and collaborative learning in 2015-2016 (2.87 out of 5) is slightly lower than the last time data were collected on this measure in 2013-2014 (3.08 out of 5). Next, students generally perceive Mount Mercy to have a non-discriminatory racial environment (4.04 out of 5). Importantly, however, racial and ethnic minorities feel more strongly than Whites that Mount Mercy has a non-discriminatory racial environment (4.11 and 4.02 out of 5, respectively).

Lastly, results from a regression analysis suggests that—even after accounting for a variety of potential confounding influences—exposure to active and collaborative learning is associated with gains in openness to diversity. Lastly, additional analyses suggest that exposure to active and collaborative learning leads to greater levels of interactional diversity, which in turn leads to more openness to diversity.

Highlights from 2015–16	Notable patterns and examples
Students' growth in the Mount Mercy goal of Promoting a Purposeful Living was measured by assessing changes in their levels of Openness to Diversity.	Although there was a slight decline in Openness to Diversity among all students from the beginning to the end of this academic year (4.11 to 4.03, respectively), the following Mount Mercy educational experiences led to gains in this important measure: Exposure to active and collaborative learning, interactional diversity, and perceiving Mount Mercy as having a non-discriminatory racial environment.

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

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