The Liberal Studies Program at the University of Montana is designed to provide an education in the Humanities based on a cross-disciplinary curriculum in the College of Humanities and Sciences. The foundation of the curriculum, and the only course specifically required of all Liberal Studies majors, is the Introduction to the Western Humanities sequence, LSH 151/152. A companion course on Introduction to the Asian Humanities (LSH 161) and array of courses on Asian and other religions, and other cultures, are also offered. While allowing ample room for electives and courses in neighboring disciplines, the LS major focuses on the literary and religious works, cultural records, and ideas that enrich our common inheritance. The aim of the Program is to foster critical understanding and appreciation of that common inheritance. Emphasis in all cases is on critical thinking, close reading, analytical writing and historical perspective. Students who graduate from the program will be prepared to enter various fields in the private and public sectors, pursue further professional training, and be better prepared to meet the demands of citizenship.

1. To foster critical understanding and appreciation of both literature and religion. This ties in with Education for the Global Century, which focuses on “interdisciplinary big questions or grand challenges that we face as a world society.” The Liberal Studies Program is interdisciplinary in both theory and practice and looks deeply into such large questions as the nature of the sacred, the endurance and disruption of traditions, and the shapes of artistic expression. Such questions clearly speak to our own world.

2. To foster historically informed thinking about cultures and their differences. Cultural differences represent a very rich form of diversity, and it is plainly impossible to educate for the global century without both showing and sowing an appreciation of such diversity.

3. To promote close reading and clear analytical writing. This ties in with Partnering for Student Success, in that strong reading and writing skills will serve the student in virtually any major. It is often said, with reason, that incoming students get lost when they find themselves in large lecture classes. LSH 151/152, the freshman-level course at the foundation of the LS curriculum, is taught in small sections. (Students in all sections meet once a week for a common lecture, in contrast to courses where students attend three lectures and meet once in a discussion section.) In addition, LSH 151/152 is a Writing course, and is capped accordingly.

4. To promote knowledge of transactions between Eastern and Western cultures. Such cross-fertilization has much to do with Discovery and Creativity. One example is the influence of Indian stories, transmitted by Arabic sources, on the literary inventions of the West. The encounter with other cultures and voices can and does yield surprising results.
## STUDENT LEARNING GOALS AND MEASUREMENT TOOLS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Measurement Tool 1</th>
<th>Measurement Tool 2</th>
<th>Measurement Tool 3</th>
<th>Measurement Tool 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. To demonstrate a critical understanding of the Western humanistic tradition and achieve a broader perspective by placing it in the context of others.</td>
<td>Analytical papers and essay examinations.</td>
<td>Short-answer examinations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. To read critically and ask perceptive questions of the text, and to synthesize findings and conclusions cogently.</td>
<td>Analytical papers and essay examinations.</td>
<td>Submission of ungraded questions for class discussion.</td>
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<td>3. To write clearly and cogently, with subtlety and acumen, and to construct arguments with skill.</td>
<td>Analytical papers (and rewrites) in addition to essay examinations.</td>
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RESULTS AND MODIFICATIONS

To demonstrate critical understanding of the Western humanistic tradition . . .

The Liberal Studies curriculum has been overhauled from top to bottom over recent years. New degree options have been added, including most recently the cross-disciplinary South and Southeast Asian Studies minor. New courses, on topics ranging from the religions of the Silk Road to the bioethics of the placebo, regularly come on stream. Even in this post-cross-listing era, a number of our courses continue to be listed in other departments and draw students with other majors.

The plenary lectures accompanying LSH 151/152 are never the same from year to year, and virtually all have been introduced recently. (Last year LSH 152 featured a new lecture by the former president of the Shakespeare society of America, who happens to live in Missoula, concerning the way colonial people adopt Shakespeare as their own after throwing off their masters. Also last year, we had a first-time lecture on the scientific revolution of the 16th-17th centuries by a visitor.)

Capstone courses are offered each term, provided only that staffing permits. They are designed to round out a student's coursework.

In addition to the new SSEA minor, the Religious Studies option regularly brings new courses into the LS curriculum. The study of religion represents an important emphasis of our program.

APPENDICES

You will learn far more about leadership from reading Thucydides’ hymn to Pericles than you will from a thousand leadership experts. You will learn far more about doing business in China from reading Confucius than by listening to “culture consultants.” Peter Drucker remained top dog among management gurus for 50 years not because he attended more conferences but because he marinated his mind in great books: for example, he wrote about business alliances with references to marriage alliances in Jane Austen. —The Economist, 4 October 2014

The term “assessment” seems to be highly ambiguous, referring all at once to (a) the program faculty’s evaluation of its own success or failure and revision of its practices in the light of that evaluation; (b) the faculty’s evaluation of the level of skill attained by our students; and (c) the students’ evaluation of the faculty. The intent of assessment seems to be to ensure that a program is adaptive or dynamic, not stagnant.

Because the LS Program is highly adaptive and continually self-modifying, and because much special effort has gone into the revision of the Program itself over recent years, I will speak to (a) first. Let me note at the outset, however, that a new double major in Liberal Studies/Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies has been proposed to ASCRC just this term (Fall 2014).
Renovation of the LS Curriculum

Over the last half dozen years or so, the LS Program has virtually reinvented itself. Two new faculty have joined the Program (two of five), and have been promoted and tenured; the requirements for our most popular option, the General Humanities option, have been brought into line with BOR requirements; the Asian Studies option, which fell into disarray following the extended leave and retirement of a former member of the program, was revived and strengthened; a new Religious Studies option was established—the first degree option in the study of religion since the dissolution of the Department of Religious Studies in 1989; and a new cross-disciplinary South and Southeast Asian Studies minor was instituted (and along with it, a number of new courses). New courses are regularly introduced into all options within the LS curriculum, including (for example) LSH 389E—a course on the influence of words on medical outcomes.

All of this is a lot of revision for one small program. The river of Liberal Studies has not stood still.

The changes in the General Option can be summarized as follows: in 2009 our requirements were revised with the double intent of making the LS degree less of a smorgasbord for undecided students and enhancing the humanities content of our curriculum. Prior to 2009 the LS curriculum was amorphous and dominated by cross-listed courses from other departments. Many LS majors graduated while taking only a few of their courses in the humanities disciplines, and many, perhaps most, didn’t even know who their fellow Liberal Studies majors were because they didn’t pursue anything like a common curriculum. In the last few years new LS courses were introduced into the upper-division curriculum and Capstone courses began to be offered regularly. The advent of a Humanities Adviser (herself a graduate of the Liberal Studies Program) has enabled us to track our students’ academic progress much more methodically and has given LS students much more of a sense of group identity. The Humanities Adviser and the Director of Liberal Studies work in close, almost daily contact.

In 2011 the number of credits required under the General Option was reduced by 15, to bring it into line with other humanities departments. It’s a sign of a self-assessing department that it is ready and willing to revise its own ground-rules in these substantial ways.

The outside reviewer of the LS Program in 2009 observed that “While the Program has developed over the years partly out of pedagogical purpose and partly out of administrative expedience, its faculty members have made fine efforts, especially recently, to clarify the hazy identity that has resulted from this genesis.” It is to give our graduating seniors a vivid sense of the tradition spanned by LSH 151 and 152 that the Capstone course on The Novel Ancient and Modern (LSH 484) focuses on one of the earliest authors read in 151 (Homer) and one of the latest authors read in 152 (Dostoevsky). Students in this course regularly report that the Odyssey seems to them a different work the second time around—one measure of the growth the students have undergone in the interim.

The process of dynamic self-revision continues. The LS Program does not have a step-curriculum, but its courses do articulate and the whole is certainly more integrated than it used to be. In one case (RLST 381) a course has been moved to the lower division out of a sense that its learning goals seem more appropriate at that level.

If the program did not assess itself open-mindedly, it would not have been amenable to making these efforts.
New Courses

As noted, concurrent with the top-to-bottom revision of LS curriculum has been the introduction of many new courses. Experimental course listings are frequently used. In Fall 2013 alone LS offered a new course on Religions of the Silk Road and a new course on the medical humanities (Placebo: The Use of Words), the latter of which meshes with the UM neuroscience initiative and has since been approved for Ethics credit by ASCRC. Also new was Prof. Levtow’s course in Religion and Violence in the Ancient World. In fact, all of our faculty in Religion have introduced courses in their specialty while also offering courses required for the RLST option. Meanwhile, Prof. Vanita now teaches an Introduction to India, which strongly reflects UM’s international emphasis while having religious content of its own. In all, the LS faculty has generated a steady stream of new courses from year to year, producing uniquely rich and varied curricular offerings. The dynamism of the LS curriculum is another clear sign of a program that adapts to new needs and interests.

Note too that a Liberal Studies GLI seminar has been offered, taught by Prof. Vanita.

New Plenary Lectures

The one and only course required of all LS majors, whatever their track, is the foundation sequences LS 151/152: Introduction to the Western Humanities. The course carries four credits because, in addition to three hours of class meetings per week, students gather on Thursday for a common lecture: the plenary lecture. Over the academic year some 26 plenary lectures are given.

Like the curriculum, the plenary lectures are a river that is never the same. In Spring 2014, for example, the first lecture given (an overview of LS 152 itself, by Stewart Justman) was completely new, as was a lecture given by a guest (Marsha Frey of Kansas State University) on the Scientific Revolution of the 16th-17th centuries. Also in Spring 2014, a plenary lecture on Shakespeare was given for by an eminent visitor (Linda Woodbridge) who happens to be a former president of the Shakespeare Society of America. Other lectures are revised from one year to the next, in the spirit of transformation and renewal. Of the fourteen lectures to be given in Spring 2014, to my knowledge only two were given as recently as a few years ago. Finally, because of the exceptional difficulty of picturing a tradition (which is one of the Learning Goals of LS courses and an overarching goal of the program itself), I have begun to use and emphasize time-lines in the first, introductory lecture for LS 152 and elsewhere.

The standard of the lectures is now very high. It is (again) a sign of a dynamic, self-assessing program that the lecture schedule for its foundational course is subject to continual revision in the interest of presenting the best possible lectures. LS faculty review, discuss and rethink the plenary lectures unceasingly.

(Additionally, to accommodate the absence of a key lecturer in Fall 2014, we have posted video recordings on Moodle. Thus, we are using different modalities as necessary.)

Because of the unusual structure of LS 151/152 (with three hours of section meetings supplemented by a plenary lecture), LS faculty concluded that standard course-evaluation forms might not apply well. With this in mind, an in-house evaluation form was devised that goes into more detail than Scantron forms and distinguishes students’ reaction to the plenary lectures from their opinion of their instructor. Some LSH 151/152 instructors now
Evaluation of Student Work

The backbone of assessment in LS is paper-writing. It is indisputable that a well-written paper on, say, *Hamlet*, demonstrates a critical appreciation and understanding of one major component of the Western humanistic tradition (a principal goal of the LS Program). In the interest of improving students’ writing, some LS faculty use a set of explicit writing standards.

The LS faculty takes the evaluation of writing and the composition and scoring of examinations seriously. Papers vary in length and topic, and exams range from quizzes on main points in the plenary lectures to traditional blue-book exams to lengthy essay exams written at home. A self-aware and self-revising program will not use only one way of assessing students’ progress. Nevertheless, in the opinion of the LS Program the evaluation of students’ work, in the form of papers and exams is certainly central to the meaning of assessment.

Following this document is a typical LS exam (in this case, for LS 152). Question one asks students to draw a connection between Dante and Homer, question eight a connection between Tolstoy and Montaigne. In this way students are encouraged to see a tradition as a tradition (Learning Goal 1; this Goal overlaps the stated goal of Group Five General Education courses: to analyze “works of art with respect to structure and significance within literary and artistic traditions.”) Question five asks students to discuss analytically the most famous of the Federalist Papers (which surely belongs to the category of our common inheritance of ideas). Indeed, in a small but definite way each and every question, whether it concerns a literary work or a work of political thought, measures the student’s progress toward the accomplishment of the stated mission of Liberal Studies. It would be absurdly pedantic *not* to regard an exam of this sort as a valid instrument of assessment. This exam exemplifies many of those administered in the Liberal Studies Program.

LS professors not only comment on student papers line by line, but state and justify their overall judgment of each paper. This is assessment in action.

In recent terms, some LS faculty have encountered plagiarism. In one case, I myself (Stewart Justman) failed to detect plagiarized work until a faculty member in another department, who received an extensively plagiarized paper from a student we had in common, got in touch with me to see if the same had happened in my course. As a result of recurring plagiarism, some LS faculty have given more in-class tests as opposed to papers, while others have changed syllabus language to make the prohibition of plagiarism more explicit and emphatic. Once again, this points to an adaptive program.

Students’ Evaluation of Faculty and the LS Program

The Liberal Studies faculty takes student opinion seriously.

A few years ago, in order to determine student opinion of the plenary lectures accompanying LS 151/52, the director asked our office manager to review hundreds of specially designed evaluation forms and compile the results. Contrary to reports that the plenary lectures are widely detested, the responses took the form of a classic bell curve, with most opinion favorable. The plenary lecture system was retained as a result.

Naturally, regular evaluation of each and every member of the LS program takes into account student comment on their courses. Indeed, the Director’s
The first item of business in the academic year is to assemble the Student Evaluation Committee. (Actually, because it is such a top priority, the composition of the SEC is arranged the prior spring.) Only students who can be counted on to synthesize important information, report it fairly, and meet deadlines are invited to serve on this panel. As to the competence of the LS faculty, please note that they are regularly invited to speak at other universities and from time to time give invited lectures at UM itself, none of which would happen if they were not very good at it. I should note, too, that a junior member of the LS Program received a Cox Award in recognition of teaching excellence.

With the hiring of a Humanities advisor who works closely with the LS Director (she is herself a graduate of our program, as noted above), an arrangement is now in place whereby student opinion about LS courses is fed back routinely to the program itself. Because students speak more openly with their adviser than they might with faculty, we now have a more sensitive way of gauging student responses to what we do.

Also very telling, though, was the interview the outside reviewer of the LS Program, Karen Sullivan, conducted with students a few years ago.

She wrote:

“Interestingly, it was the students who expressed great enthusiasm for this Program’s mission. One student related that she had been planning to major in biology but found herself one day reading Henry David Thoreau’s Walden. Impressed by the fact that Thoreau was, as she put it, ‘a scholar,’ she asked herself, ‘Where do scholars go to be educated?’ and realized that the answer to this question was Liberal Studies. Another student, speaking of the range of the humanities explored in Liberal Studies, prized the opportunity ‘to figure out the connections’ and ‘to get a bird’s eye view.’ A third student, though herself concentrating in English literature and creative writing, had taken several Liberal Studies courses because she found English instructors’ perspectives ‘stunted,’ in contrast to the ‘broader’ perspective offered by Liberal Studies teachers. A fourth student, having been trained as an electrical engineer, decided to return to school and pursue this area of inquiry because, he explained, ‘I wanted to study something where there wasn’t a right or a wrong answer.’ Liberal Studies gives you ‘food for the soul,’ a final student claimed.”

It seems many of our students assess the Liberal Studies Program very favorably indeed.

**Publicity**

The LS website has been refurbished with much input from the faculty, and we are now in the process of making it easier to post LS news on the homepage. In addition, the Humanities adviser has set up a Facebook page.
A sample LS exam.

LS 152 Final

Answer each in a well-considered short essay. Write clearly and accurately. Do not collaborate.

1. Why is Odysseus (Ulysses) placed deep in Dante’s Hell?

2. How is it that the Utopians are able to order their commonwealth with few laws?

3. “Had we but world enough and time, / This coyness, Lady, were no crime.” Paraphrase these lines.

4. According to Rousseau’s *Discourse on Inequality*, what are the characteristics of civil or social persons?

5. How does Madison propose to defend against the dangers of faction?

6. What is Mary Wollstonecraft’s chief objection to the then-existing way of bringing up girls?

7. According to Wordsworth, what is the proper relation of prose to poetry?

8. Montaigne: “Storming a breach, conducting an embassy, ruling a nation are glittering deeds. . . . Living together gently and justly with your household . . . is something more remarkable, more rare, and more difficult. Whatever people may say, such secluded lives sustain in that way duties which are at least as hard and as tense as those of other lives.” Apply these words to Tolstoy’s *Death of Ivan Ilych*.

9. According to Hannah Arendt, what distinguishes totalitarianism?”

FUTURE PLANS FOR CONTINUED ASSESSMENT

The Liberal Studies Program is a self-aware and self-revising program, and in that sense assesses its own strengths and weaknesses continually.