I. Program Information

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Program Name</th>
<th>Name of Department Chair or Program Director</th>
<th>Annual Report for Academic Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>Talbot Th.M. Program (Master of Theology)</td>
<td>Rob Price</td>
<td>2013-14</td>
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II. PLO Assessment Activity

**List the Program Learning Outcome Assessed this Year**

**Outcome 2**: Students will formulate a productive research question and conduct advanced research and writing on this topic.

**Describe the student evidence collected to evaluate the outcome (e.g. the final research paper from BBST 465)**

We collected the student research papers that were submitted as part of the Th.M. Research Seminar (891) in fall 2013, along with the grading rubrics that faculty supervisors used to evaluate each paper.

**Indicate the Number of Assignments Collected:**

10

**Indicate the Number of Collected Assignments Evaluated:**

10

**If only some assignments were evaluated, please explain why, and the selection process**

All were evaluated.
Evaluation Process (Please explain how the student evidence was evaluated. Please attach rubrics or other evaluation materials used)
I have attached rubric(s) used for evaluation _X Yes ___No

Each student produced this research paper in collaboration with a faculty supervisor who has expertise in the particular area of scholarship in which the thesis falls. This faculty supervisor then evaluated the finished research paper using a detailed rubric.

Summary of Results (Please include a description, using percentages and mean scores, of the major findings from the assessment activity. Data or charts may be attached)

The rubric assess ten criteria: clarity, concision, structure, research, argument, voice, insight, sources, Turabian, and English. Of these categories, the two weakest, on average, from this set of ten students are concision and voice. For concision, most students were marked at or near the merely “adequate” range: “Occasional unnecessary words, tangents, belabored points. Exposition may bog down at points.” For voice, most students were marked at or near the merely “adequate” range: “Voice or diction may be awkward at points or attitude less than fitting.”

Methods Used for Sharing Assessment Information

The faculty supervisors, who graded the research papers using the rubric, submitted the rubric to the Th.M. Program Director at the end of the fall 2013 semester. Th.M. Program Director makes decisions about modifying curriculum and also keeps PDFs of these rubrics.

Conclusions

As we concluded last year, students need to be able to write better.

On concision, students need to heed Orwell: “If it is possible to cut out a word, always cut it out.” Or Zinsser, On Writing Well, 6-7: “Clutter is the disease of American writing. … But the secret of good writing is to strip every sentence to its cleanest components. Every word that serves no function, every long word that could be a short word, every adverb that carries the same meaning that’s already in the verb, every passive construction that leaves the reader unsure of who is doing what—these are the thousand and one adulterants that weaken the strength of a sentence.” 12: “Writing improves in direct ratio to the number of things we can keep out of it that shouldn’t be there.” 16: “Most drafts can be cut by 50 percent without losing any information or losing the author’s voice.”

On voice, students need to know that it’s OK to try to be lively and playful and powerful and even a little quirky in their academic writing. Aristotle, Rhetoric 3.2, 1404b: “One must… give the impression of speaking not artificially but naturally (for the latter is persuasive, the former the reverse; for men are wary of it as malicious). … drawing words from normal idiom.” Or again Zinsser, On Writing Well, 6: “The airline pilot who announces that he is presently anticipating experiencing considerable precipitation wouldn’t think of saying it may rain;” or 36: “Good writers of prose must be part poet, always listening to what they write.”
Identifying Changes to Result From Faculty Team’s Conclusions

The evidence suggested that we need to:

☐ Develop a Rubric  ☐ Revise Existing Rubric  ☐ Revise the Assignment  ☐ Implement a new pedagogy  ☐ Implement new technology

☒ Provide models to students  ☒ Identify courses earlier in program where students could further practice the skill  ☐ Revise Curriculum Map

☐ Revise Course sequencing  ☒ Other – Please Specify:

Students need to learn how to write. Of course, poor writing even at the Th.M. level is a systemic problem. I saw a particularly clear illustration of the systemic nature of this problem during the fall 2013 semester. A student whose prose was little short of disastrous and who committed four grammatical errors in the opening paragraph of his paper – this student’s faculty mentor marked the paper as having “competent” English (rubric: “an error or two”) and as having “competent” clarity (rubric: “meaning generally clear and diction fairly precise”). It will be difficult to convince students that their writing is unacceptable and so persuade them to invest themselves in improving their writing when they’ve been told by faculty that their writing is already competent.

In order to address this problem, the Th.M. Research Seminar, beginning in fall 2014, will incorporate still further instruction in composition, emphasizing concision and voice.

As noted in last year’s report, it would probably be a good idea in the long term if more students entering Talbot M.A. and M.Div. programs (from which the Th.M. program draws many of its applicants) were required to take the SS 500 (or SS 520) “Theological Writing” class. I also believe more strongly than I did last year that more stringent writing requirements need to be added to the M.A. and M.Div. programs.

Implementing the Proposed Change

Th.M. Research Seminar, beginning in fall 2014, will incorporate still further instruction in written composition.

III. PLO Assessment Plan for Next Academic Year (2014-2015)

All of the items in Section III are about the assessment activity the department/program plans to complete during the next academic year.

List the Program Learning Outcome(s) to be assessed

Next year, we will assess the same outcome. The fall 2014 Th.M. Research Seminar will include an additional class session on written composition. This instruction will include explanation of the grading rubric and instruction on writing concise and lively prose.
Describe the student evidence to be collected for assessment

Next year, we will collect the same information: the grading rubrics used by students’ faculty mentors in assessing their research paper.

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<tr>
<th>Term evidence will be collected:</th>
<th>(Note: experience indicates it is often best to assess in fall, and complete the analysis in spring)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☒ Fall 2014</td>
<td>☐ Spring 2015 (if student evidence is collected in Spring 2015, the analysis may need to be completed in Fall 2015.)</td>
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IV. Follow Up on PLO Assessment and Programmatic Changes from Previous Year (2012-13)

List the Program Learning Outcome Assessed in 2012-13

Same as this year: **Outcome 2**: Students will formulate a productive research question and conduct advanced research and writing on this topic.

Describe the student evidence that was collected for assessment

Similar to this year: supervisor-marked rubrics evaluating student research papers in the Th.M. Research Seminar.

What curricular change was implemented? | Was new data collected after this change? | X Yes | No

We developed a completely new rubric, and we added instruction in writing to the fall 2013 Th.M. Research Seminar.

Has there been any observable impact on teaching or learning? If so, describe.

Part of what I realized with the 2012-13 assessment is that the rubric we were using was not adequate. So I developed a new rubric, which we used in the current 2013-14 assessment. Because the rubrics changed, it is difficult to quantify any improvement. My sense of things is that, even with the additional instruction on writing that I added to the fall 2013 Th.M. Research Seminar, the improvement was minimal. So next time I’ll include more instruction and an additional writing exercise on concision and voice. Since I plan on using the same rubric again next time, we should have a quantifiable measure of improvement (hopefully!) in 2014-15.

If no data was collected, when will new data be collected and evaluated?

n/a