

Inquiry in the Humanities (IH) Core perspective assessment—Spring 2023

Courses in the Humanities are designed to help students explore the human experience through a range of subjects, including history, literature, linguistics, philosophy, and cultural studies (e.g., Native American Studies, Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies). Specifically, the Inquiry in the Humanities (IH) MSU Core Perspective states that each of these courses will explore the “ethical and moral, aesthetic and creative, historical and descriptive dimensions of human cultural traditions, emphasizing methods of reaching a conclusion, formulating an interpretation, or making a judgment in the discipline” (MSU Core Perspective). In addition, each course seeks to teach students the methodological and theoretical foundations of the discipline through examining specific issues or topics relevant to the course.

Do the syllabi reflect the intention of the Core Perspective definition?

This assessment considered the extent to which ten Inquiry in the Humanities (IH) core classes were structured (as stated in each course syllabus) to accomplish the Core Perspective of exploring humanistic perspectives. This working group agreed that all ten courses meet the Core Perspective outcomes, but to varying degrees. Some syllabi did an excellent job of integrating the Core perspective explanation and how the course would address it in a student-oriented, clear manner. Other courses offered signs of meeting the Core perspective, but required some extrapolation to confirm that course assignments were structured in a way to actually accomplish the Core perspective. In most cases where direct achievement of the Core Perspective was less clear, this was due to not including assignment guidelines in the syllabus.

There were a couple of notable examples that stood out as models for how faculty might consider communicating the Core Perspective or structuring their assignments to achieve the Core Perspective outcome.

The first exemplar is NASX 340IH Native American Literature, as the professor uses “Inquiry questions” to guide students’ thinking and learning in the subject. The syllabus presents guiding Inquiry questions both about broader “literary status” and for each of the sub-topics covered in the course. These guiding questions are presented in the syllabus at the beginning of each unit. For example, one question in the sub-topic of ‘Political Contexts’ is “How have political changes in the relationship between tribal nations and the federal government correlated with changes in the form and function of Native American literatures?”. Students then complete an Inquiry Exam that is based on the Core inquiry topics and assess students’ working knowledge of theory and method in the discipline of Native American literature.

The second exemplar is PHL 110IH Intro to Ethics: Good and Evil. This course provides a model for how to structure assignments to achieve the Core perspective. The course is divided into three units whose topic necessitates exploring through key methods and interpretive strategies of the discipline. Further, the course requires 15 short in-class writing assignments, providing students with multiple opportunities to develop the critical

thinking skills necessary for attaining the IH Core learning outcomes. The required take-home exam for each unit and the final exam enable students to integrate the critical thinking skills developed in the short writing assignments. Both essay questions and class discussion questions are provided and are designed to effectively engage students in contemporary ethical challenges, as well as to see students' attainment of core qualities and IH core perspectives.

Do the assignment examples attached to the syllabus permit students to attain the Core Perspective learning outcomes as defined?

Assignment details were not provided across all courses, which makes it difficult to respond comprehensively to this question. That said, in all cases the working group agreed that the assignment examples provided permit students to attain the Core Perspective.

We noted a couple of exemplary examples of courses that either allowed or required students to show how they were meeting the course learning outcomes in a variety of ways. For example, in LIT 110IH Intro to Literature, students get to choose their preferred form/format (essay, short answer/essay exam, discussion post, or visual project) for assignments. In WGSS 201IH Intro to Feminist Theories, students are required to exemplify the learning outcomes through a variety of different types of learning assessment: discussion posts, a group presentation, two papers, a group project, and a final individual project. WGSS requires a variety of ways of showing learning, while LIT 110 allows students to choose how to show their learning. We noted that we liked that students were showing learning in a variety of ways, and discussed the benefits of each of these two approaches (required vs. student-selected).

Do the working group reviewers have any additional feedback related to improving student attainment in the core perspective?

Our working group noted that it is possible for professors to teach a course in a way that meets the Core perspective and allows faculty autonomy. We were pleased to see that these ten courses all approached the Core perspective in slightly different and unique ways. This allows faculty to maintain individuality of interest and content, which we believe often leads to greater faculty and student motivation, while still accomplishing the broader Core requirements.

Additional Comments and/or Opportunities for improvement:

In order to make Core assessment a beneficial process for faculty, perhaps faculty teaching Core classes could be asked (either on a voluntary basis, or required but only every couple years) to reflect on the one assignment or class activity that they felt was most effective in accomplishing Core outcomes and to share the assignment guidelines back through the MSU Core Committee and/or the MSU Center for Faculty Excellence. This information could be shared and therefore beneficial for all MSU faculty teaching in the Core curriculum.