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Towards Reliable Honors Assessment

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ASSESSMENT: THE PROBLEM

In the recent *JNCHC* volume devoted to "Outcomes Assessment, Accountability, and Honors" (Spring/Summer 2006), we can find a marked division within the honors community between those for and against the current climate of program assessment, with the "againsts" carrying the day by a two to one margin (six negative essays vs. three positive). In her editorial comments, Ada Long declares:

> Honors educators do indeed need to be in the forefront of the national conversation about outcomes assessment, but first we will each need to decide whether we should join or resist the movement. (p. 15)

I wonder if honors educators have emerged as even a tiny voice in the forefront of this national conversation; I am even more unconvinced that honors educators have the choice to join or resist the "assessment movement."

All of us struggling with assessment owe a great debt to the NCHC monograph *Assessing and Evaluating Honors Programs and Honors Colleges* authored by Rosalie Otero and Bob Spurrier, and many of us have also benefited from the work on portfolio assessment championed by John Zubizarreta. Other material contributions to this effort have been made in both the *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council* and *Honors in Practice* by, for instance, Frank Shushok, Steffen Pope Wilson, Rose M. Perrine, John R. Cosgrove, Gale E. Hartleroad, Scott Carnicom, and Michael Clump. Nevertheless, the need to develop honors assessment strategies based on student learning outcomes is a relatively new phenomenon with neither an extensive history nor a wide scholarly corpus, and honors educators have expressed serious reservations about assessment as an infringement on their authority and autonomy.

In my experience, the issue of creating effective and reliable program assessment measures is far more overarching than the natural academic denunciation of legislative threats to impose standardized testing or to create

an educational equivalent of automotive assembly lines. For better or for worse, assessment practices, now inextricably linked to the legitimate call for accountability in higher education, have become a significant piece of our academic landscape, and resisting the call to develop best assessment practices for honors education seems a bit like standing on the seashore and repudiating the tide for coming in as it laps about our feet. The honors community needs to recognize that assessment and learning outcomes are here to stay and that they haven't been put there by anti-education legislators; they have been put there by us, by the academy itself. Assessment plans and student learning outcomes are now central components of all accreditation reviews at all levels, whether focused on the institution as a whole or on specific programs. Accreditation reviews conducted by the Western (or Southern, or Middle States, or North Central, et al.) Association of Schools and Colleges all include extensive stipulations about assessment and student outcomes. An example drawn from one of the institution-level accrediting bodies (New England Association of Schools and Colleges—NEASC) indicates the status quo:

> The institution implements and supports a systematic and broad-based approach to the assessment of student learning focused on educational improvement through understanding what and how students are learning through their academic program and, as appropriate, through experiences outside the classroom. This approach is based on a clear statement or statements of what students are expected to gain, achieve, demonstrate, or know by the time they complete their academic program. The approach provides useful information to help the institution understand what and how students are learning, improve the experiences provided for students, and assure that the level of student achievement is appropriate for the degree awarded. Institutional support is provided for these activities.

Assessment practices and student outcomes are perhaps even more prominent in "specialty" accreditation reviews like those conducted by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM), the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology, the Association for the Advancement of Colleges and Schools of Business (AACSB), the Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Education Training (CAATE), and the National League for Nursing Accreditation Commission (NLNAC). All of these entities—as well as overarching bodies like the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) and the Council for the Advancement of

Standards in Higher Education (CAS), just to name two—have embraced assessment planning and learning outcomes as central and significant practices. If honors educators are to have a voice in the forefront of this national conversation, we need to recognize at the least that we are coming to the table very late in the process. It is time for us to become proactive, collectively develop the best practices for assessing honors programs, and document specific learning outcomes for our honors students.

Instead of seeking to avoid the problem by laying the blame on legislative cretins or "the business mentality," let us look instead at the published and influential positions of academic entities. In a widely disseminated piece titled "Our Students' Best Work: A Framework for Accountability Worthy of Our Mission," the Association of American Colleges and Universities states:

> . . . despite the development over the past two decades of a veritable "assessment movement," too many institutions and programs still are unable to answer legitimate questions about what their students are learning in college. The lack of evidence on student learning outcomes has proved damaging. (p. 1)

That statement can be pointed directly at honors programs; in fact, it *is* pointed at us on a fairly regular basis. How often have those of us who have been in honors for even just a few years heard cries for help from a program director under fire from a provost who wants to downsize, eliminate, or radically change an honors program? And what evidence can honors or the NCHC provide that answers these simple questions:

- What have honors students actually learned?
- What is the educational value provided by an honors program or college?
- What have honors students learned or gained from participating in honors that their non-honors counterparts have not?
- What gains in student achievement and learning have been made through the substantial investments in "living-and-learning-communities," undergraduate research opportunities, cross-, multi-, and interdisciplinary programs of study, international experiences, special honors advising, and the like?
- Why is honors important?
- Why should honors be funded?

At its meeting in February, 2007, the NCHC Board of Directors briefly discussed these questions in response to an appeal for help posted on the honors listserv, and the group came up with the following (to the best of my limited memory) list of reasons why honors education is valuable:

- High-caliber students provide intellectual enrichment for the entire campus
- Retention and six-year-persistence rates are often much higher for honors students, so graduation rates are better
- The higher retention rates for honors students have a significant economic impact on the campus
- Honors students bring social enrichment to the campus
- Honors students bring service enrichment to the community through service activities
- Honors students provide an active and effective alumni base
- Honors students have good personal experiences: the small college within the large university feel
- Honors students create a community of like-minded individuals
- Honors residential living enriches the campus
- Honors alumni create donation/development opportunities
- Honors programs foster the exploration and development of new courses/pedagogy
- Honors programs provide faculty/student interactions/mentoring opportunities
- Honors programs contribute significantly to the institution's undergraduate research agenda
- Honors students provide leadership & involvement on campus

This list is impressive, but as we all quickly recognized, there is no central repository of data, no comprehensive and direct evidence to show that any of it is true. We hope that the new NCHC research listserv and the NCHC Research Committee can provide such comprehensive data, but I am struck by the fact that not one of the items on the list relates to anything an honors student *specifically learned*. Much learning—much advanced, fruitful, and deep learning—no doubt takes place in all of these honors activities, but what exactly do the honors students learn from being in our programs? What are the learning outcomes from honors undergraduate research? What leadership skills are gained as a direct result of honors activities? What do the honors students learn about themselves, their communities, and those around them by participating in service activities?

Those questions are not trivial or ancillary; they are at the heart of good learning assessment practices. But since honors is coming late to the table, we can take advantage of what others have already accomplished, and to that end I would like to reproduce the learning outcomes recommended by the

AAC&U in "Our Students' Best Work." Their proposed student learning outcomes (SLOs) are:

1. strong analytical, communication, quantitative, and information skills—achieved and demonstrated through learning in a range of fields, settings, and media, and through advanced studies in one or more areas of concentration; deep understanding of and hands-on experience with the inquiry practices of disciplines that explore the natural, social, and cultural realms—achieved and demonstrated through studies that build conceptual knowledge by engaging learners in concepts and modes of inquiry that are basic to the natural sciences, social sciences, humanities, and arts;
2. intercultural knowledge and collaborative problem-solving skills—achieved and demonstrated in a variety of collaborative contexts (classroom, community based, international, and online) that prepare students both for democratic citizenship and for work;
3. a proactive sense of responsibility for individual, civic, and social choices—achieved and demonstrated through forms of learning that connect knowledge, skills, values, and public action, and through reflection on students' own roles and responsibilities in social and civic contexts;
4. habits of mind that foster integrative thinking and the ability to transfer skills and knowledge from one setting to another—achieved and demonstrated through advanced research and/or creative projects in which students take the primary responsibility for framing questions, carrying out an analysis, and producing work of substantial complexity and quality. (pp. 5–6)

The outcomes above, of course, developed not for honors programs but for a college-level experience centered on a fairly traditional concept of liberal education, as the statement below reveals:

> . . . in today's knowledge-based economy, a good liberal education embraces science and new technologies, hands-on research, global knowledge, teamwork, cross-cultural learning, active engagement with the world beyond the academy, and a commitment to lifelong learning, as well as the acquisition of knowledge and skills. (p. 4)

These outcomes and this description come very close to what I believe honors education is supposed to do; moreover, they correspond well to a list of learning outcomes that John Zubizarreta posted on the NCHC listserv in September of 2004. According to that compilation, an honors student:

- Thinks critically
- Thinks creatively
- Reads critically
- Employs an effective process to produce clear, persuasive writing
- Conducts research effectively
- Takes risks with learning
- Demonstrates cultural sensitivity
- Demonstrates aesthetic sensitivity
- Demonstrates gender sensitivity
- Participates actively and effectively in large and small groups
- Assumes multiple roles in groups
- Demonstrates responsibility outside classroom and school
- Demonstrates awareness of the "outside world"
- Appreciates learning for its own sake
- Appreciates diversity
- Demonstrates personal integrity

I am going to skip over the fight about whether all those outcomes really do fit all honors programs and colleges; this may well be a discussion for a later date. My focus here is on the need for and methods of assessment, and there are legitimate assessment questions that arise from these or any set of outcomes adopted: 1) Do our honors programs and colleges actually provide educational opportunities and curricular structures that enhance our student's ability to attain these outcomes and goals? 2) What is the evidence that shows that our honors students have actually achieved these outcomes? Beyond those two fundamental questions are matters of method and practice: How can an honors program consistently measure the outcomes such as "thinks critically" or "achieves strong analytic skills" given the breadth of a typical honors program (which is often quite unlike the sharp focus and coherence of the curriculum in a major)? What exactly do we mean by these outcomes? Where in the honors curriculum do honors students demonstrate these behaviors for faculty to gauge?

Although it is tempting, I don't think honors can simply afford to wave its collective hands and vaguely state that, well, they graduated as honors scholars (or whatever), so obviously they gained those skills. In my mind, too much is at stake—particularly funding. We are in a transitional moment, and even though those of us who have been in honors and higher education for a long time might wish to duck our heads and hope that the assessment fad

quietly fades away, I think we need to prepare the enterprise of honors education for an assessment-permeated future. We are all keenly aware of the damage an honors-inimical CAO can do in the name of financial expediency. We also need to be keenly aware that the next generation of CAOs will almost surely link assessment data directly to funding formulas—especially in public institutions. If honors does not have solid assessment data demonstrating that honors students "achieve strong analytic skills" while the undergraduate research program next door can trot out reams of data indicating that their students do, then we can bet that the next-generation CAO will not hesitate to shift funding from honors to undergraduate research and that NCUR, not NCHC, will be the venue of choice for administrators to highlight the achievements of their best undergraduate students. (*Nota bene*: even as I am writing this, the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education is developing and will soon publish comprehensive learning outcomes for undergraduate research programs that include at least sixteen learning outcomes that overlap with typical honors learning outcomes—as well as a host of outcomes that speak to a student's personal development).

We need to be fully aware, I think, that within only a few short years academia will incorporate this mantra into its basic culture: "Clarity about essential learning outcomes is the foundation of both a robust educational program and an accountability framework (AAC&U, p. 5). Many, if not all, institutions that have undergone accreditation reviews recently (and yes, I am at one of these institutions), have already incorporated learning outcomes; more and more will surely follow. We can expect that by the end of this first decade of the twenty-first century:

> Each college and university should make public on its Web site:
>
> a. General and departmental goals for student learning
> b. Proficiency expectations for rating levels of student achievement in relation to these goals
> c. A description of the kinds and range of performances that are used in assessing student progress (with links to different programs and departments)
> d. A report on student achievement levels (e.g., advanced, proficient, basic, and below basic) in relation to each goal (AAC&U, p. 12)

If honors programs and colleges cannot or do not embrace assessment, they are likely to be swept aside by those parts of the university that do. Assessment is here to stay. And honors programs will be at risk if they ignore the need to establish best assessment practices tailored to their specific nature.

During his plenary address at the 2006 Institute on Quality Enhancement and Accreditation hosted by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Peter Ewell made some simple points about the bottom line of assessment, assessment data, and a culture of ongoing assessment, which he said are necessary for an institution's internal management because:

- "Seat of the pants" decision-making is no longer sufficient
- Assessment information must be used openly, consistently, and continuously to inform academic decisions

For external constituencies, ongoing assessment is necessary because:

- "Trust me" is no longer sufficient
- Institutions need to demonstrate clear, understandable evidence of student academic attainment

At another session during the same 2006 Institute, a second academic leader in the assessment movement, Peggy L. Maki, Senior Scholar and Director of Assessment in the American Association for Higher Education, argued that we need to do assessment properly and do it well, that it is the right thing to do if we care about what we are teaching our students and how well we are doing our job:

> More than an externally driven act, assessment is a process of discovery about the relationship between teaching and learning. How do we position students to demonstrate, reflect on, and chronicle their learning to inform our educational practices and document their learning? How do faculty and staff position themselves to inquire into students' learning along the continuum of students' studies using multiple lenses? And, how do institutions of higher education position themselves to become learning organizations—to learning about the efficacy of collective educational practices, build knowledge, and use assessment results to improve pedagogy, curricular and instructional design, and educational experiences?

The challenge currently facing us is: how do we as honors educators position ourselves to learn about the efficacy of honors educational practices, build knowledge about the particular nature of honors education, and use reliable and verifiable assessment practices to improve honors pedagogy, honors curricular and instructional design, and honors educational experiences? We all have anecdotal evidence that shows how well we are doing our job, but to date the NCHC has not embraced or archived any reliable assessment methodology or data. We now need to do the right thing in honors education

and develop reliable assessment practices that will generate reliable data and demonstrate convincingly that honors does have the impact on students that we all assert as a matter of faith. "Trust me, honors is important and our students do very well" just doesn't work any more, no matter how much we may want to fuss or drag our heels.

In my opinion, we need to move quickly to collect hard data that demonstrates to internal and external constituencies that significant achievement in learning by honors students justifies the substantial monetary investments in:

- Living-and-learning honors communities
- Small classes
- Undergraduate research opportunities
- Special speakers
- Cross-, multi-, and inter-disciplinary programs of study
- International experiences
- Cultural enhancement trips and activities
- Special honors advising
- Student leadership opportunities
- Focused active-learning opportunities

Those of us in honors education need to face some real and difficult challenges in order to do honors assessment well. As we move into our future, we need to recognize that assessment data and funding will be closely linked and will make our efforts now critical. Virtually all honors administrators would agree that honors is an academic activity with a series of classes and specific academic experiences and that it also entails extensive extracurricular support and enrichment. As consequence of this duality, proper assessment of honors needs to mirror the assessment of an entire university in its scope. I have found it useful to draw a distinction between the assessment of the honors academic mission—which is student-learning focused—and the honors enrichment mission, which includes the many value-added activities—such as international studies, cultural and diversity experiences, speakers, and living-learning experiences—that support and enrich academic learning. The two approaches are no doubt interrelated and inextricably joined, but, like an analysis of a skeletal structure followed by an analysis of the musculature, together the two perspectives can give us a good sense of the shape of the organism.

THE FIRST STEP: TOWARD THE ASSESSMENT OF HONORS STUDENT LEARNING

Measure what you value, rather than valuing what you can measure.
—Kermit Hall, former President, University at Albany – SUNY

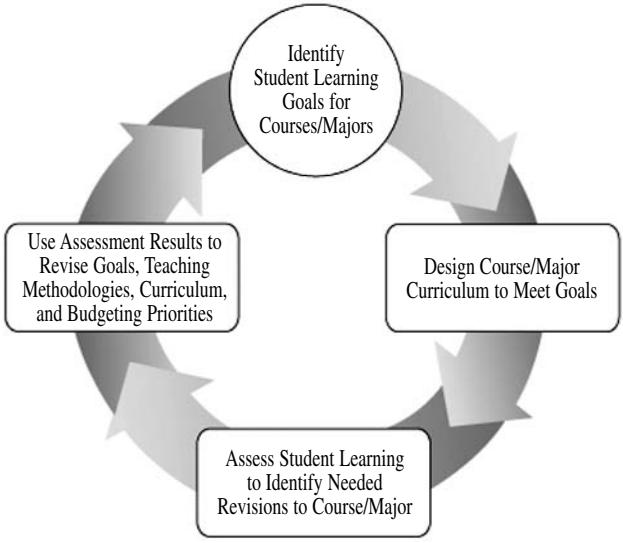
At the center of the assessment effort are the "student learning outcomes" that have provoked some controversy in the honors community. I would like to consider them as not only useful but essential to what honors educators are all about: providing educational enhancements for superior students so that they not merely succeed but excel once they have left our campuses. The first of the student learning goals articulated by the AAC&U and quoted above is: Strong analytical, communication, quantitative, and information skills—achieved and demonstrated through learning in a range of fields, settings, and media, and through advanced studies in one or more areas of concentration. (pp. 5–6)

If we start with just this first dictum, a number of us might dismiss it with "Of course our students have these skills. They're what honors is all about, and no one who graduates with an honors designation could possibly have less." But the assessment skeptic will ask first "What's the proof? Where are the data?" and second "Is that really true across the board? Do honors students who are engineering majors really have the same level of communication skills that honors English majors have? Do honors theatre majors have the same level of quantitative skills that honors mathematics majors exhibit?" Only if we are lucky will the skeptic not ask the very pointed question: "What significant, quantitative evidence do you have indicating that an honors student outperforms a non-honors student of similar ability?" In other words, what data do we have showing that honors makes a significant difference in student learning?

The first question in good assessment is "What do we want our students to learn?" The second is "How do we know they learned it?" Because every honors program or college is unique, each assessment plan must also be unique, but even honors programs typically share a common set of characteristics, as described in the NCHC's Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program, so the assessment of honors programs might have a common set of assessment practices.

Developing assessment plans and student learning outcomes is fundamentally no different for honors than for other disciplines save for the twist that honors programs in general do not have a central, shared content as do discrete disciplines like chemistry, art, accounting, or physical therapy. The cycle below graphically summarizes the assessment process:

Once in place, a good assessment plan becomes a continuous feedback cycle with the four steps indicated in the graphic.



(http://depts.washington.edu/learning/)

STEP 1: ASSESSMENT DOMAINS

Assessment domains are, generally speaking, over-arching rubrics that encompass a number of closely related student learning outcomes (SLOs). An incomplete list of possible domains that could be useful in honors assessment might include:

- Content (knowledge specific to a discipline or major as well as knowledge specific to interdisciplinary or cross-disciplinary activities)
- Communication (writing skills, oral communication skills, media/computer communication skills, numeric skills, etc.
- Critical Thinking
- Analysis
- Project management (both group and individual work)
- Moral Values/Integrity
- Problem solving
- Citizenship
- Leadership

- Diversity
- Creative ability
- Professional behavior/skills
- International experience
- Foreign language proficiency
- Active learning
- Interdisciplinary learning
- Service learning
- Community service
- Cultural awareness

The first step in an honors assessment plan is to consider which of these domains not only engage honors students in specific learning activities but are also central to the mission of an honors program. The point of proper assessment is to reflect not only on what we do but why we do it and how we can do it better. Assessment should give us insights into our programs that data such as grade point averages, graduation/retention rates, or post-baccalaureate placement statistics can't provide. For example, let us consider the domain "project management." Most honors programs have capstone projects or senior theses requirements, and the extent of that activity in honors education suggests that, as a corpus, honors values project management as one of the specific skills that honors students acquire in an honors program. The task then is to devise specific student learning outcomes related to the domain and figure out ways to gather data about whether students are actually learning and accomplishing the goals indicated in the outcomes. At the University of West Florida, we have settled on the following SLOs (more on the development of SLOs later) under the domain of project management; each student is expected to

- Exhibit disciplined work habits as an individual
- Apply discipline-based and/or cross-discipline-based knowledge to design a problem-solving strategy
- Conceive and plan a high-quality research and/or creative capstone project in the appropriate disciplinary or multi-disciplinary context

The last SLO listed above speaks to what many faculty members would cite as the first crucial step toward successfully completing an honors thesis. In order to actually write a thesis, one has to have sufficient background and training in a disciplinary context to conceive a useful and productive research design or creative project. Evaluating that step in the process obviously is not quite the same as evaluating a finished thesis. The step of conceiving and

planning is equivalent to the prewriting exercises and drafts used in composition classes; although in some composition programs some of the "prewriting" phases are graded, in practice most institutions only assess (by assigning a grade) the finished product. The final grade of "Honors" or "Satisfactory" assigned by the instructor, director, or honors thesis committee does not address the process or difficulty or learning gains that students evince in the planning stages. At UWF, the data that we received on this SLO (much more about gathering data later) revealed that some of our honors students handled the planning very well, but others did not, and it further revealed that the disparity was somewhat discipline-specific. Students from the hard sciences at UWF (where there is in general a culture of undergraduate research) did very well in this area; students from other areas, business in particular, did not fare nearly as well. We now know that we need to do something else or something more to help students from outside the hard sciences get started on their theses. We haven't yet figured out exactly what to do, but we will be trying at least one new mentoring approach for those students during the next academic year.

The first step toward building an assessment plan for honors is to identify the domains that are most central to the mission of an individual honors program or college. International experiences and foreign language proficiency are distinctive and prominent features of some honors programs, but certainly not all. Similarly, leadership development is a central concern in some but not all institutions. The key is to have frank and in-depth discussions with the faculty who teach honors courses and the students who take those courses about what is valuable and important in the honors curriculum, looking for common themes and experiences that lead to the educational enrichment of our students. Allowing ideas to emerge from wide-ranging discussions is far better than the scenario I had to face in Florida, where we all woke up one morning to discover that the Florida legislature had mandated that assessment plans based on the domains of content, communication, and critical thinking be developed for each baccalaureate degree program at every public university in the Great State of Florida.

At UWF, a rather strange thing happened when we woke up that morning and faced the legislative edict. Perhaps because we were also staring at an impending SACS accreditation visit at the same time, the faculty didn't launch a protest but instead took the task seriously; we rolled up our collective sleeves and got started. After lots of talk and some posturing, as an institution we decided to see the three state-mandated domains and raise the state two by adding the domains of integrity/values and project management to the list. We made this decision because we realized that, as an institution, we value the gains made by our students in these two areas. So now at UWF all of our assessment plans, the one for honors included, are built on the five

domains of content, communication, critical thinking, integrity/values, and project management.

Whatever domains are chosen, they should reflect not only what is valued in the program but also what can be measured with data. In general, the domains should:

Promote curricular coherence: The very concept of a "program' implies that there is a unity and definable focus in the totality of a student's educational path.

Facilitate collaboration: We all know that we gain strength and quality through interactions among faculty and students from multiple disciplines and backgrounds.

Showcase strengths: Each of us has unique areas of achievement that are models of educational quality, and these areas should be highlighted in an assessment plan.

Build from the bottom up: Honors faculty and students should decide what to assess and why; the buy-in alone will make the implementation of the plan simpler and less painful.

Satisfy multiple "drivers": Assessment data and plans are needed both for external entities (like accrediting bodies) and for internal operations.

One final caveat: had it been left solely for me to decide, I would not have included the domain "content" in my honors assessment plan because, like so many honors programs nationally, the UWF Honors Program has students in every one of the 180+ majors UWF offers; therefore, the task of defining and measuring content for all of those majors is, to say the least, a challenge. We were lucky at UWF in that we had long required an honors thesis (which is almost always done in the student's major as their capstone project) for graduation as an Honors Scholar; hence, we were able to tie the SLOs in content directly to the subject area of the thesis discipline. Without such a capstone product, finding a way to assess content across the breadth of an honors program in which student activity is spread across an entire institution will be a very tough challenge.

STEP 2: STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Once the domains are identified, it is time to develop the SLOs: statements that describe what students will be able to know, do, or value as a result of their honors educational experience. I find it curious that SLOs have attracted widespread distaste since all they really do is articulate clearly the knowledge, skills, abilities, and values a student gains from a course of study. Perhaps in honors we have become gun-shy because we simultaneously do

and do not see honors as a discrete discipline. Consider the case, say, of a student attaining a B.F.A. in musical theatre: what knowledge, abilities, and values should a student be able to demonstrate upon receipt of a B.F.A. in this major? We might say that such a graduate should be able to go to an audition and (1) quickly and crisply pick up whatever dance steps are demonstrated by the choreographer, (2) sight read and perform well whatever musical piece is thrust into his/her hand by the musical director, and 3) deliver two contrasting (one comic, one tragic) one-minute monologues for the director while exhibiting professional poise, grace, and attitude. If we start there, we are most of the way home. The major change in our thinking prompted by SLOs is a shift in focus away from course grades to student behaviors: we need to concentrate on changes in the student's knowledge, skills, abilities, and values rather than how much or how well the student can parrot back what the instructor has presented. I think this shift is a good thing.

In order to develop SLOs for an honors program, we need to remember that we are identifying overarching concepts that span several courses, not individual course objectives. Further, we need to devise statements that describe what students should know and be able to do when they finish the honors program, and these statements need to be expressed in behaviorally measurable terms. In general SLOs should focus on observable student behaviors and work products, and they should describe the products or outcomes of these activities. In other words, we need to describe what understanding or learning has occurred as well as what the students have done or produced as a result of the honors learning.

As many people have stated, writing successful SLOs stems from adapting the language of Bloom's Learning Taxonomy to the specifics of a curriculum. Bloom's hierarchy of higher-order learning skills (http://www.apa.org/ed/new_blooms.html) is roughly thus:

Higher-Order Skills

1. Create
2. Evaluate
3. Analyze
4. Apply
5. Understand
6. Remember

Since this hierarchy distinguishes the types of learning students can achieve in order of depth or sophistication, we need to remember that honors students should be expected to demonstrate the higher order skills regularly, and we should therefore craft honors SLOs primarily but not exclusively in terms of the top three skills. In order to craft language appropriate for SLOs, it is useful

to start each SLO with one of the action verbs from Bloom's taxonomy; an abbreviated list appears below (a fuller list is provided in Appendix B).

Action Words for Bloom's Taxonomy

Remember	Understand	Apply	Analyze	Evaluate	Create
define	explain	solve	analyze	reframe	design
identify	describe	apply	compare	criticize	compose
describe	interpret	illustrate	classify	evaluate	create
label	paraphrase	modify	contrast	order	plan
list	summarize	use	distinguish	appraise	combine
name	classify	calculate	infer	judge	formulate
state	compare	change	separate	support	integrate
match	contrast	choose	explain	compare	hypothesize
recognize	discuss	demonstrate	select	decide	substitute
select	distinguish	discover	categorize	discriminate	write
examine	extend	experiment	connect	recommend	compile
locate	predict	relate	differentiate	summarize	construct

As an example, let us consider crafting SLOs for the domain of critical thinking since it is an area where we would expect honors students to excel. The link between writing and critical thinking has long been established, and so an SLO that points toward the type of critical thinking that appears in a typical writing assignment might be:

- Select and organize credible evidence to support converging arguments.

Most writing teachers would argue that the organization of credible evidence into a well-shaped and pointed argument is a central hallmark of a well-written analytic or research paper; these same teachers, though, would probably not agree that selection and organization of evidence are the only criteria on which a paper is graded. Paper grading is a more holistic process that involves the evaluation of grammar, syntax, content, thesis statement, paragraph structure, tone, voice, and many other factors beyond the organization of the evidence. These multiple criteria point toward one of the reasons that overall grades are not that useful in assessment plans. Overall course or assignment grades are a function of many different factors while SLOs should focus on a single behavior or skill we would like to see our students attain. A few examples of SLOs are reproduced below:

- Identify and describe major theories in the discipline
- Evaluate competing hypotheses and select the one that is best supported by existing data

- Write clearly using the editorial style endorsed by the discipline
- Comply with professional standards of ethics associated with the discipline
- Manage time and resources to carry a long-term project in the discipline to completion

(http://uwf.edu/cutla/Assessres.cfm)

In general, well-written SLOs will provide clear goals for honors students to achieve, will promote the design of well-organized honors courses and active learning, and will provide the basis for precise, reliable, and valid assessment of the honors curriculum so that improvements can be made on the basis of empirical data rather than subjective impression.

In summary, we need to devise honors SLOs that state in objective, measurable terms the skills and behaviors we expect our honors students to achieve. As a tentative example, the Academic Learning Compact for the UWF Honors Program with its sixteen separate SLOs is attached as Appendix C. Whatever SLOs are devised, four general precepts are important:

1. Be honest! Is this something you really want to assess?
2. Be honest! Is this what really happens in the honors class?
3. Be smart! Where and how are you assessing this activity already?
4. Be efficient! How can you extract data you might already have?

In the end, each SLO should be the targeted assessment of a specific and discrete facet of the honors student's learning, and solid assessment plans for an entire program should incorporate some twelve to twenty specific SLOs (the UWF Honors Assessment Plan in Appendix C has sixteen SLOs spread across five domains).

STEP 3: MAP THE CURRICULUM

Once the SLOs for an honors program are devised, a curriculum matrix or map should be used to indicate how the honors curriculum aligns to the SLOs. Basically, the matrix is a graphic representation of the interface between the curriculum and the SLOs that lets us identify where the desired outcomes are introduced, reinforced or practiced, and then mastered by the students. The matrix also lets us see if there are curricular or educational weaknesses or gaps as well as where there the best opportunities for assessment exist. A portion of the curriculum matrix for the UWF Honors Program looks like this (the UWF Honors Assessment Plan in Appendix C has sixteen SLOs spread across five domains):

	Direct Measure: Course Number	LIT 1110	IDH 403x	IDH 4970
	Direct Measure: Course Name	Great Books 1	Honors Seminar	Honors Thesis
Content	Review and evaluate the knowledge, concepts, techniques, and methodology appropriate to the discipline of the Honors Thesis		**I, P**	**M, A**
	Identify major issues, debates, or approaches appropriate to the discipline of the Honors Thesis		**I, P**	**M, A**
	Synthesize complex information appropriate to the discipline of the Honors Thesis		**I, P**	**M, A**
	Develop an argument or project and defend or present it appropriately in accordance with the methods of the discipline of the Honors Thesis	**I, A**	**I, P**	**M, A**
Critical Thinking	Apply discipline-based and/or cross-discipline-based higher order thinking skills to a range of topics and issues	**I, A**	**P, A**	**M, A**
	Select and organize credible evidence to support converging arguments.	**I, A**	**P, A**	**M, A**
	Solve discipline-based and/or cross-discipline-based problems using strategies appropriate to the subject of the Honors Seminar or Honors Thesis		**P, A**	**M, A**

As is common practice, the individual SLOs are listed across the top of the matrix, with the courses in the curriculum listed down the left-hand side. In this matrix, I stands for Introduced, P for Practiced, M for Mastered, and A for Assessed. So for each of the SLOs in the domains of content and critical thinking, we can quickly see where the desired outcome is first introduced to the students, where it is practiced and or otherwise reinforced, where the student should be able to demonstrate mastery of the behavior/skill, and where the SLO is assessed.

Here I need to interject a few words of explanation lest I give the impression that the UWF honors curriculum consists of only three courses: Great Books 1, an honors seminar, and an honors thesis. Actually, the UWF honors curriculum consists of 27 semester hours of required honors courses, distributed as follows:

1. LIT 1110 Great Books 1
2. Honors Lower-Division Elective 1
3. Honors Lower-Division Elective 2
4. Honors Lower-Division Elective 3
5. IDH 403x Honors Seminar 1
6. IDH 403x Honors Seminar 2
7. Upper-Division Honors Elective or Honors Seminar
8. Upper-Division Honors Elective or Honors Seminar or University Honors Research Project
9. IDH 4970 Honors Thesis
10. Complete 40 hours of volunteer credit certified through the Volunteer UWF! office and participate in at least one Honors Council service event (the hours earned during the Honors Council service event count toward the 40-hour total). These hours must appear on the student's transcript in order to fulfill the service requirement.

A crosscheck of the requirements against the matrix will reveal that I have not listed any of the elective courses but only those courses that constitute what I refer to as the honors core, and there's a reason for that. Assessment is simplest in programs where students have to complete a very specific series of courses with few or no exceptions—engineering, for example. For assessment, I use the three nodes in my program that I know all honors students have to take—the Great Books course, the two seminars, and the capstone thesis—precisely because they are stable and predictable requirements. I do not include the sections of general studies courses or honors by contracts or the widely dispersed upper-division honors classes because they are hard to

fit into assessment models. What specific learning outcome could be assessed in an honors psychology course here or an honors zoology course there? The worst assessment nightmare is the "Chinese menu" interdisciplinary program that requires a student to choose any nine courses from department A, any six from department B, and any four from department C. The Interdisciplinary Humanities and Interdisciplinary Social Sciences programs at UWF used to be organized in such a way; I was charged with overseeing and changing these programs into focused and coherent curricula that could be assessed properly. As Linda Suskie of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education puts it, "the problem with many of these programs is not assessing them per se but the fact that they're poorly designed: they're simply a collection of courses, and a collection of courses does not make a program." In practice, the number of courses in a program makes no difference in assessment, but the presence of a discrete core—no matter what the focus—does; this is a major assessment challenge facing honors education, particularly those programs that have neither a common entry-level experience nor a capstone experience. Assessing an honors program made up primarily or exclusively of honors contracts could be done, but it would be difficult and costly, probably requiring blind readings or holistic scorings.

A second confusion might arise from the appearance of the A for assessment in all of the courses listed under the critical thinking domain. The reason I chose to assess critical thinking skills in all three assessment nodes was longitudinal; I wanted to see if there was appropriate progress in critical thinking as a student advanced from the freshman to senior year. Happily, the UWF core honors curriculum is structured so that only first-year students are in Great Books; the honors seminars are populated by sophomores and juniors (with some seniors on occasion); and the honors thesis is completed almost exclusively by seniors, and so I have a means to gauge whether students are improving in that skill over the course of their honors career. Happily, the data indicate that they are, just as we would all expect; more on that later.

Step 4: Gather the Data

Now that we have identified what is going to be assessed and where, the strategies for collecting the assessment data can be explored. A single caveat guided all of our work in this area at UWF, namely KISS: KEEP IT SIMPLE, STUPID. In devising a good assessment plan, we should strive for practices that are feasible, manageable, transparent, and measurable. Assessment falls apart completely if faculty members don't buy into the practice, and one sure way to alienate faculty is to force on them tasks they consider silly, worthless, confusing, or onerous. The general honors consensus seems to be that assessment is a useless pain, and this may be the primary reason that it has

often been resisted. It can be done well, however, in a way that has little impact on a faculty member's time and energy.

There are two kinds of assessment activity: direct and indirect. Direct assessment is any type of evaluation done by faculty or by recognized educational entities such as the people who put together licensure examinations; it consists of evaluations of classroom activities—course papers and presentations, honors theses, work done in capstone courses, learning portfolios, case notes, laboratory exercises—and activities that occur beyond the classroom such as state or national licensure, certification, professional examinations, or other forms of standardized tests. Indirect assessment consists of data gathered from sources such as self-reports from students (often in-class self-evaluations); reports from clients, employers, or other non-academic experts; surveys of current students and alumni; and exit interviews (one-on-one or in focus-group settings). Solid assessment plans will incorporate both direct and indirect data since the primary purpose of assessment is diagnostic: finding out what works well in our teaching practices and program designs (and why) as well as what does not work (and why) so that we can improve our classroom teaching and the layout of our curricula.

Since one of the keys to good assessment is keeping the workload for faculty to a minimum, we should look at what we already do to see if we have generated assessment data that we can capture without extra work. Many excellent assessment practices (and the attendant data) already exist, embedded in what we do in the classroom on a daily basis. One example is the critical thinking SLO "Apply discipline-based and/or cross-discipline-based higher order thinking skills to a range of topics and issues." Most of us (maybe all of us in my discipline of English) would rightly argue that we use this SLO in nearly every assignment we ask students to complete. My students apply such thinking skills every time they take one of my in-class quizzes, and in Great Books I, I give them lots of quizzes. Here is a typical quiz question on Homer's *Iliad* (the students have about seven minutes to write their response):

> How does the single combat between Aias and Hektor end, and what does that entire episode tell you about Aias and Hektor? (5 pts)

An example of a solid student response that got all five points is:

> The fight between Aias and Hektor is literally called on account of darkness. Neither soldier seems to get the upper hand in the struggle; they simply throw spears at each other and talk a lot. But it tells me that both Hektor and Aias are honorable men. They agree to do something, do it, and they fight fairly. And when the contest is over, they each speak respectfully about each other and they exchange gifts, much

like *xenia*. This episode is in great contrast to what happened between Paris and Menelaos, which ended so weirdly when Aphrodite stepped in to save Paris.

Less resonant or developed responses, of course, receive fewer points (more on scoring rubrics later). My point here is that I am already accumulating numeric data that can be used in the assessment plan. I give quizzes not to check students' grammar or writing skills nor to see if they are increasing their awareness of history or diversity or Western culture but to make certain that they are thinking critically, that they are identifying patterns, drawing analogies between episodes, incorporating a specific moment into the general context—in other words, thinking actively and critically. Every time I give a quiz, I am directly assessing their ability to apply discipline-based higher order thinking skills to a new topic, and each time I grade a quiz, I am recording the result with a 6-point Likert scale (5 for "Great!"; 0 at the other end for "Totally Wrong" or blank), so I already have plenty of assessment data; I just need to pull it out of the spreadsheet I am already using to calculate their overall course grade.

A small portion of the spreadsheet I use to track scores and calculate the overall grade for each student at the end of the term looks like this:

	IL-1	**IL-2**	**Od-1**	**Od-2**
Name	1	3	4	3
Name	4	3	4	3
Name	4	3	4	3
Name	4	2	3	2
Name	5	4	4	3
Name	5	5	2	5
Name	4	4	5	4
Name	1	5	5	4
Name	2	4	4	2
Name	4	4	4	4
Name	4	1	3	2
Name	2	2	2	4
Average	**3.1**	**3.3**	**3.4**	**3.1**
Count	**133**	**133**	**133**	**133**

When I need to find data that tell me how my freshman honors students are doing in applying discipline-based higher order thinking skills to a topic, I only need to pull up my spreadsheet and check the numbers (the overall quiz

average for the course historically has been 3.5±0.1 out of 5). Often we are already collecting hard, specific, and useful data that we can pull out and use in our assessment practices rather than building new (and often too complicated or labor-intensive) paradigms from scratch.

The process I have just outlined describes one of the key features of assessment—and one of the most common misconceptions. Student learning outcomes and grades—especially course grades—are not and cannot be the same thing. A student's average quiz grade in my class is just one factor in the overall grade; quizzes, midterm and final exams, papers, and participation are factored in as well. It is possible a student might exhibit good critical thinking skills but still fail the course. Properly crafted SLOs should reflect one specific learning behavior or skill, but a course grade is an overarching judgment about a student's performance over a range of learning outcomes; writing clear and concise prose, for instance, can also be an SLO, and it is not necessarily the same as critical thinking. When I score papers or grade final exams, I am not only estimating how well students have identified patterns, drawn analogies, and performed other critical thinking tasks; I am also checking their grammar and writing skills, seeing if they have increased their awareness of history or diversity or Western culture, and evaluating their ability to synthesize or organize large amounts of information. Assessment is one piece of the learning continuum, not the whole, but many of the pieces are useful in an assessment context.

Assessment also lets us know if our students are acquiring other skills that we value. For instance, students should have disciplined work habits. Students who do their work well, turn it in on time, and always give their work a professional polish not only do well in college but are likely to perform well in graduate or professional school or the workforce. Disciplined work habits are not the sole basis for a high grade, but we value them. We do not, however, assess them, and, maybe if we did, we might find that "exhibiting disciplined work habits" is a characteristic that distinguishes honors students from their non-honors counterparts.

STEP 4: SCORING RUBRICS AND DATA SHEETS FOR DIRECT ASSESSMENT

Even though the data embedded in everyday pedagogic practices gives us useful information, we still need to gather data from other viewpoints in order to assemble the best diagnostic evaluation of our programs. Just as a more complete picture of what actually transpired during a traffic accident comes from assembling all available perspectives (eyewitness accounts, the police report, forensic analyses of the physical damage, skid marks), so the best picture of our honors pedagogic practices and design comes from assembling feedback from multiple sources. The full picture is especially important when

we are assessing the effectiveness of what we do in courses with multiple sections taught by different faculty or when various classes are used to assess one or more of the same student learning outcomes. I face this challenge in the case of assessing student learning in the UWF honors seminars. Each term we offer four or more of these seminars, and a quick list of the titles will give a sense of the diversity in course content:

Shakespeare in Performance
Philosophy of the Horror Film
Biomedical Ethics
Buddhist Psychology
The History of Science and Technology
Tolkien and Rowling
Leadership Ethics
First Amendment Rights
Vietnam
Life Choices
History of Latin America
Dante in Florence
Cuba in Context
Marine Archaeology

The challenge is to devise methods that will provide useful assessment data about the specific skills and/or abilities that honors students gain from taking those courses (each UWF honors student must take two honors seminars to graduate as an Honors Scholar). The key is both in how we have crafted the SLOs that we measure in the honors seminars and in the development of clear rubrics that the faculty can use for direct assessment of student performance.

If we check the assessment matrix (Appendix D), we can see that, even though many of the SLOs may be practiced or reinforced in an honors seminar, not all of them are assessed. From the six SLOs that are assessed in the seminars, let me pick four:

- Communicate effectively in on-on-one or group contexts
- Employ writing conventions suitable to the research method and/or creative process of the subject of the Honors Seminar or Honors Thesis
- Solve discipline-based and/or cross-discipline-based problems using strategies appropriate to the subject of the Honors Seminar or Honors Thesis
- Exhibit disciplined work habits as an individual

If we think about the underlying purpose of these SLOs, we can see that they reveal pedagogic practices that the honors program at UWF values as central features of every honors seminar. As the name implies, these honors seminars are small classes grounded in discussion and free flowing interchanges among the students and instructor. Students are frequently assigned to be the discussion leaders for one or more classes, with the instructor functioning as a resource and/or facilitator rather than a fount of all knowledge. Hence, effective communication is a key component of the class. Each student must complete a seminar paper (or project) that is the culminating effort for the course, and that effort must reflect best presentation practices in the discipline. We expect our honors students to work efficiently, hard, and well. Because we obviously have a varied and diverse group of faculty teaching our honors seminars, we have developed a set of rubrics that guide the faculty in their assessment of student learning and help to ensure that the data are accurate and consistent across the wide range of seminars.

In general, rubrics should provide explicit criteria for assessing student work by describing the characteristics of performance at different levels of skill. As an example, here is the rubric we use to evaluate the second SLO listed above:

SLO	Exceeds Expectations	Met Expectations	Fails to Meet Expectations
Employ writing conventions suitable to the research method and/or creative process of the seminar	Presentation of work was exceptional, very well organized, and reflected a highly competent and professional level of writing standards and conventions; the work revealed great familiarity with the disciplinary standards and followed appropriate APA, MLA, etc. guidelines	Presentation of work was adequate and mostly well organized and/or reflected at least the minimal professional level of writing standards, formats, and conventions as presented in disciplinary guidelines	Presentation of work was inadequate, sloppy, disorganized, and/or failed to recognize or follow professional writing guideline standards, formats and conventions

No matter what faculty member is teaching the honors seminar, and no matter what subject the student has chosen, the instructor can use this rubric quickly and consistently to assess the students' performance on this SLO as evinced in their term papers. The scoring for direct assessment data, as this example reveals, does not have to be a 5-point Likert scale to be effective. At UWF, we were strongly counseled by experts we brought in to help us devise our assessment plans to gather only data that is useful and to remember that, the faster and easier it is for faculty members to gather and submit the assessment data, the higher the chance that they will accept the assessment methodology and incorporate it into their daily practices. Hence we adopted three-point assessment scales for nearly all of our assessment rubrics: the student failed to meet the instructor's expectation in the targeted area; the student met the instructor's expectations; the student exceeded the instructor's expectations. Since assessment data should be diagnostic so that improvements in pedagogy can be made, the questions become how much data and how the data are arrayed to identify areas for improvement. It's a little like being a car mechanic: if the car is running smoothly and getting good mileage, I don't need to do much more than routine maintenance; if it's running roughly or pulling off the road, I need to do some aggressive tinkering; and if the wheels fall off or it won't start at all, I know I have some major overhauls ahead. In reviewing assessment data (more on analyzing and using the data later), I know that, if students are failing to meet or are just meeting expectations, something is wrong and I need to figure out how to fix it. If nearly everyone is exceeding the faculty's expectations, then this assessment area is probably okay. It is reasonable for me to expect that nearly all honors students eventually exceed expectations; this is what we should all expect of honors students.

When we create scoring rubrics for the SLOs, it is wise to realize that any set of standards is somewhat arbitrary; there is nothing magical about three-point versus five-point or even twelve-point scales. The first key is to have clear indicators that enhance accurate scoring, and there are many good models of effective rubrics out there, some examples of which are included in Appendix E. The second key is to be consistent: if a five-point scoring system is chosen as the most workable, then a five-point scoring rubric needs to be developed for the direct assessment of each and every SLO.

Once the SLOs and scoring rubrics are finalized, the data collection can begin. At UWF, we decided to develop simple scoring sheets that can be quickly and easily filled out by the faculty member at the end of the semester; a section of the sheet that we use to capture assessment for the honors seminars is reproduced below (the entire sheet can be found in Appendix F):

Assessment Data Sheet

Honors Seminar: _____ Faculty _____

Department _____ Date _____

Instructions: Please fill out the appropriate area with the number of students who fit the criteria over the total number of students in the class. For example, if 10 students in a class of 12 exceed the expectation of "Exhibit discipline-based and/or cross-discipline-based higher order thinking skills," please enter **10/12** in that box, and please return this form to the Honors office, 50/224.

Critical Thinking

Learning Outcome	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Fails to meet Expectations
Apply discipline-based and/or cross-discipline-based higher order thinking skills to a range of topics and issues			
Select and organize credible evidence to support converging arguments			
Solve discipline-based and/or cross-discipline-based problems using strategies appropriate to the subject of the Honors Seminar			

In this example, using the scoring rubric as a guide, the instructor reviews the final papers/projects and then fills in the appropriate box with the requested data as is shown in the example below:

Critical Thinking

Learning Outcome	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Fails to meet Expectations
Apply discipline-based and/or cross-discipline-based higher order thinking skills to a range of topics and issues	8/15	5/15	2/15
Select and organize credible evidence to support converging arguments	6/15	7/15	2/15
Solve discipline-based and/or cross-discipline-based problems using strategies appropriate to the subject of the Honors Seminar	4/15	9/15	2/15

As the director of the program, I oversee the gathering and analyzing of the data, which are recorded in a spreadsheet. The entire process, including the data entry, takes less than thirty minutes to complete. The data sheet we use for assessing the honors thesis is, naturally, much larger since we use that capstone project as an opportunity to assess nearly all of our SLOs, but the process is the same. Once a student completes an honors thesis, the UWF Honors Program office sends the form to the thesis director, who in turn fills out the form and sends it back to the honors office where the data are uploaded into the master spreadsheet. Faculty members who have directed honors theses recently report that it normally takes less than ten minutes to complete the form, and this may be one reason why we have had 100% return rate.

Direct assessment happens whenever faculty evaluate the skill or behavior stated in the SLO, but in some cases even faculty assessments must be safeguarded in order to ensure objectivity. A charge of bias can occur if there is an aura of suspicion or paranoia on a campus, in which case the accusation runs something like this: "These scores are way too high and therefore inaccurate because the faculty are basically reporting on their own effectiveness and making themselves look good by reporting that everyone is meeting or exceeding the standard."

Here are a few ways to ensure that assessment data are gathered in an objective manner. The quickest and simplest is to find a node in the assessment plan where the student products can be evaluated by an independent group of faculty. The honors thesis or capstone project serves well as such a node. In order to get solid and objective data, all one needs to do is assemble a faculty committee and give them copies of the honors theses (or other similar capstone projects or products, such as learning portfolios) that were produced during that academic year, along with the scoring rubrics and data sheets, and have the committee score the theses using the criteria. At large schools it may not be feasible to submit every thesis to this level of scrutiny; a representative cross-section is likely to yield the same information as a consideration of the entire corpus, so a random sample (or maybe all the theses completed in, say, the fall term) can be sufficient. Each spring at UWF, a faculty committee looks at a random sample of fifteen theses completed in the previous academic year, and the results have been excellent in yielding data for feedback, expanding buy-in for the program, and generating new ideas and enthusiasm for honors. I invite a mix of faculty who are already invested in honors (they serve on the University Honors Program Committee or teach honors courses) and faculty who have not been involved in honors. The process to this point has rallied faculty to the banner of honors once they get a close look at what honors students have produced. On campuses where honors is viewed with suspicion, assembling a scoring committee composed entirely of non-honors faculty will not only produce objective results but also establish allies for honors. The only downsides are the obvious ones of time and money. So far I have been able to assemble my scoring group and get the data from them with only an invitation and the promise of pizza at the scoring meetings; however, if the task were larger and more onerous, I would probably need to devise a way to compensate the faculty for their time and professional judgment. I have avoided using the portfolio method for assessment at UWF because, even though they are probably the most extensive and sensitive assessment tool for student learning, properly assessing portfolios is extremely time-consuming, even with excellent rubrics and highly trained and efficient faculty. Typically, significant funding is required to compensate faculty for their time and professional judgment. For a small program with relatively few graduates each year, comprehensive learning portfolios would probably be the way to go, but for my program (450+, headed for 500), portfolio-based assessment would be prohibitively time-consuming and expensive.

Step 5: Surveys and Interviews for Indirect Assessment

Assessment works best when the data related to each specific SLO come from a number of different sources and perspectives. Direct assessment is no doubt the Cadillac and should be given the most weight when using data to draw conclusions, but it is not the be-all and end-all; data from indirect assessment also yield insights into what we are and are not doing well. However, we need to keep in mind that indirect assessments—particularly surveys—are subject to the bias and error of self-reporting. Typically indirect assessment instruments serve most effectively as supplementary information. However, in those cases where there is a significant disparity between what the students report they have mastered and what the faculty report their students have mastered, I have reason to look more carefully at what is going on; once again, assessment data collection should be diagnostic. The most common indirect assessment tool is no doubt the student survey, and a wide range and number of student surveys have been developed over the years. Even though the Assessment Matrix in Appendix D may make it appear that we use two student surveys ("Exit Survey" and "Alumni Survey"), they are essentially the same document, differing primarily in the timing of their administration: the exit survey has to be completed by every student graduating as an Honors Scholar; the alumni survey is sent each spring to those students who graduated five years earlier. The timing of an exit survey might well coincide with the primary vehicle used for direct assessment, namely the honors thesis. In order to get good data from a survey's self-report format, it needs to include questions that are linked to the assessment SLOs. A portion of the exit survey used at UWF appears below (see Appendix G for the entire survey):

Your Learning

Please circle the response that best describes your sense of accomplishment for each item listed below. If you did not take a course that applies to the question, please circle N/A.

29. I reviewed and evaluated the knowledge, concepts, techniques, and methodology central to my Honors Thesis:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	At times	Regularly	Very often Beyond all my expectations	N/A

30. I identified the major issues, debates, or approaches central to my Honors Thesis:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	At times	Regularly	Very often Beyond all my expectations	N/A

31. I synthesized complex information central to my Honors Thesis:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	At times	Regularly	Very often Beyond all my expectations	N/A

32. I developed an argument or project and defend or present it appropriately in accordance with the methods of the discipline of my Honors Thesis:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	At times	Regularly	Very often Beyond all my expectations	N/A

33. I exhibited discipline-based and/or cross-discipline-based higher order thinking skills in my classes:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	At times	Regularly	Very often Beyond all my expectations	N/A

As can be seen at a glance, this survey uses a five-point Likert scale rather than the three-point scale we use in our direct assessment documents. I was curious to see what the frequencies of 1s and 2s would be for the honors SLOs. My assumptions were that the responses would cluster around 4 (they did) and that the occasional 1 or 2 would signal areas that needed improvement. Out of the 200+ surveys completed to date, however, only two 2s have appeared in the responses, both on one survey in the Integrity/Values domain related to the SLOs on professional behavior. My suspicion is that, although candid enough now to admit it, one student during his/her career engaged in

some dubious practices, but, since our exit survey uses an anonymous format, I have no way of knowing who the student was.

Another inference might be drawn from the survey snippet above, which lists questions 29 through 33: many questions on our survey are not directly related to SLOs or assessment. As most of us in honors know and practice, surveys are great opportunities to gather lots of information about our programs, so, in addition to questions directly related to our SLOs, we ask about our honors courses and seminars, advising, service and social events, international experiences, etc. Surveys that have already been developed can be expanded to include questions related to the SLOs, transforming an extant survey into one that supplies assessment data. Exit interviews, in both individual and focus-group formats, are also a good source of assessment information. Some examples of questions used in exit interviews are included in Appendix H. The challenge is to capture and quantify the anecdotal data that always emerge in such interchanges, but if we have reliable data generated by direct assessment strategies, then the anecdotal data gathered in exit interviews can shed light on the practices of the honors program.

STEP 6: WHAT DO THE DATA MEAN?

Now that we have all the sets of data, what do we do with them? Obviously, if the process stops and nothing is done to analyze the data, or if meaningful changes are not implemented, then the whole assessment process has been a waste of time. There is a widespread notion that assessment is silly or pointless, but the primary purpose of assessment is to improve our programs and teaching strategies; looking at the data for strengths and weaknesses allows us to see what needs improvement. For example, here are some of the data that emerged from the first year's assessment at UWF, as was reported in my 2007 Annual Report, related to the SLO "Apply discipline-based and/or cross-discipline-based higher order thinking skills to a range of topics and issues":

> Summary of Assessment Results
>
> The data from the three assessment points (Great Books, Honors Seminars, and Honors theses) suggests that students master this SLO over time. The data from the Great Books 1 class (freshman level) indicates that 31.9% of the students exceed expectations in this area, that 62.9% meet expectations, and that 5.2% fail to meet expectations. But by the senior year, things have changed. The data from the Honors theses show that 62.5% exceed, 33.3% meet, and that 4.2% fail to meet (the Honors Seminar, most often taken by sophomores and juniors,

> reflects data that is [*sic*] almost exactly medial: 51.3% exceed, 41.0 meet, and 7.7% fail to meet).

I will confess that I was extremely pleased by the data in this area because that's exactly what I expected. Ample evidence exists that critical thinking skills develop during a student's tenure at college, and we would all hope that honors students would post gains in critical thinking as they grow from freshmen to seniors. Our UWF data indicated just such gains. Further, the data showed that UWF honors students entered college with fairly strong skills in critical thinking (only 5.2% failed to meet the minimum standard) but exited the program with much stronger critical thinking skills; nearly two thirds exceeded the faculty's expectations with another third meeting their expectations. So we can conclude, as I did in my annual report, that for this SLO "the data evinces [*sic*] that students develop their higher order thinking skills over time, just as many would expect." For right now, these assessment data tell me that I don't need to worry about any problems in that segment of my program.

There will be areas where the data signal problems. The first year's data in the domain of critical thinking were solid, but the news was not as good in the domain of communication:

> The assessment data in this area suggests [*sic*] that students struggle with the writing of Seminar papers and the Honors Thesis. The faculty reported that while 23.5% of the students exceeded and 51.7% met the standard, 24.8%—a full quarter of the student population—failed to meet this standard. This lack of writing skills is both surprising and dismaying, but corrective action needs to be taken since writing is such a fundamental skill for success, both in the Honors program and in their subsequent careers.

Further scrutiny of the data revealed that many of the cases where students failed to meet writing expectations occurred in one of the three UWF colleges—Business—while students fare best in the hard sciences. Perhaps a research culture in the hard sciences at UWF promotes good writing while the professional schools emphasize group work and projects. We have taken some steps toward improvement: students are now being exposed to the expectations of the thesis much earlier (their first term) in workshops led by honors seniors, and we are instituting "Thesis Seminars" this spring that will be offered by seasoned honors faculty and advanced students. We continue to consider other ideas for improvement, but assessment practices have already demonstrated that honors students were having problems with skills we had

assumed they already had, and we now have the opportunity to get creative, try new strategies, and fix the problem; this is what assessment is all about.

STEP 7: CLOSING THE LOOP: USING ASSESSMENT DATA TO IMPROVE WHAT WE DO

Effective assessment practices make use of the data collected to improve our:

- Instructional strategies
- Curricular designs
- Course offerings within the curriculum
- Course sequencing in the curriculum
- Support and advising services

These and other areas should be under constant review if we are serious about offering a high-quality and enhanced educational experience for our students. One of the NCHC Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program is:

> The fully developed honors program must be open to continuous and critical review and be prepared to change in order to maintain its distinctive position of offering distinguished education to the best students in the institution.

The assessment loop is closed when we develop a culture of feedback and improvement, clearly establishing continuous and critical review. At least on a yearly basis, the honors leader, honors faculty, and honors students should meet to review carefully the assessment results and devise appropriate courses of action. It may be that heretofore unnoticed problems in the curricular design or course sequencing emerge; it may be that certain desired skills are not being acquired as well as one might hope (as in the case of writing skills in my own program); it may be that certain activities do create the "distinguished education" that honors strives to attain. Whatever information emerges, however, can be used to initiate and shape improvements. At the same time, thorough records and appropriate documentation will be essential when an external audience wants to see what we have done and also when the budget cycle rolls around.

Good assessment practice also calls for continual re-evaluation of the assessment plan and practices. It may be that not all the SLOs are applicable; other skills or behaviors may emerge as important, thus needing to be included instead. Similarly, rubrics, data gathering devices, and spreadsheets need to be scrutinized regularly for their utility and potential improvement.

Assessment should tell us not only how well we are teaching our students but also how well we are practicing assessment. Nothing is so well devised and executed that it is perfect on the first pass, but assessment promotes the pursuit of excellence by letting us know where and how to focus our efforts.

Assessment-based evidence allows us to move away from anecdotal or seat-of-the-pants decision making as we refine our curriculum and classroom practices. Used properly, assessment can be one of the most powerful tools and potent practices we develop for honors education. What I have described here is just one example of assessment in one honors program. Two challenges face the honors community and NCHC: (1) developing assessment tools that indicate gains honors students make as opposed to their non-honors peers, and (2) developing assessment tools that indicate gains made by our students because of educational enrichment practices in honors such as cultural trips, international education, and campus leadership. I will be taking on these challenges for the next couple of years. Anyone care to help?

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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APPENDIX A

Useful Online Bibliographies on Assessment

The American Library Association:
http://www.ala.org/ala/acrlbucket/infolit/bibliographies1/assessmentbibliography.cfm
Clemson University:
http://assessment.clemson.edu/links/arbiblo.htm
Indiana University Southeast:
http://www.ius.edu/assessment/biblio.cfm
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
http://www.library.uiuc.edu/assessment/biblio.html

Other Resources Relevant to Assessment

APA Cyberguide on Assessment
http://www.apa.org/ed/guide_outline.html
Board of Directors of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, "Our Students' Best Work: A Framework for Accountability Worthy of Our Mission," 2004
http://www.aacu.org/About/statements/assessment.cfm
Educational Technology Training Center at Kennesaw State University
http://edtech.kennesaw.edu/
JNCHC. Vol. 7, No. 1 (Spring/Summer 2006).
Maki, Peggy L. & Borkowski, Nancy A., Eds., *The assessment of doctoral education: Emerging criteria and new models for improving outcomes,* Stylus Publishing, 2006.
North Carolina State University University Planning & Analysis Index of Assessment Resources
http://www2.acs.ncsu.edu/UPA/assmt/resource.htm
Suskie, Linda. *Assessing student learning,* Jossey-Bass, 2007.
University of Washington
http://depts.washington.edu/learning
University of West Florida: Assessment Resources Page
http://uwf.edu/cutla/Tipsheet.cfm
http://uwf.edu/cutla/Assessres.cfm
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire
http://www.uwec.edu/assess/plan/
Walvoord, Barbara E. *Assessment clear and simple: A practical guide for institutions, departments, and general education.* Jossey-Bass, 2007.
Washington State University
http://wsuctprojectdev.wsu.edu/

APPENDIX B: BLOOM'S TAXONOMY

Action Words for Bloom's Taxonomy

Remember	Understand	Apply	Analyze	Evaluate	Create
define	explain	solve	analyze	reframe	design
identify	describe	apply	compare	criticize	compose
describe	interpret	illustrate	classify	evaluate	create
label	paraphrase	modify	contrast	order	plan
list	summarize	use	distinguish	appraise	combine
name	classify	calculate	infer	judge	formulate
state	compare	change	separate	support	invent
match	differentiate	choose	explain	compare	hypothesize
recognize	discuss	demonstrate	select	decide	substitute
select	distinguish	discover	categorize	discriminate	write
examine	extend	experiment	connect	recommend	compile
locate	predict	relate	differentiate	summarize	construct
memorize	associate	show	discriminate	assess	develop
quote	contrast	sketch	divide	choose	generalize
recall	convert	complete	order	convince	integrate
reproduce	demonstrate	construct	point out	defend	modify
tabulate	estimate	dramatize	prioritize	estimate	organize
tell	express	interpret	subdivide	find errors	prepare
copy	identify	manipulate	survey	grade	produce
discover	indicate	paint	advertise	measure	rearrange
duplicate	infer	prepare	appraise	predict	rewrite
enumerate	relate	produce	break down	rank	role-play
listen	restate	report	calculate	score	adapt
observe	select	teach	conclude	select	anticipate
omit	translate	act	correlate	test	arrange
read	ask	administer	criticize	argue	assemble
recite	cite	articulate	deduce	conclude	choose
record	discover	chart	devise	consider	collaborate
repeat	generalize	collect	diagram	critique	collect
retell	give examples	compute	dissect	debate	devise
visualize	group	determine	estimate	distinguish	express
	illustrate	develop	evaluate	editorialize	facilitate

Action Words for Bloom's Taxonomy, continued

Remember	Understand	Apply	Analyze	Evaluate	Create
	judge	employ	experiment	justify	imagine
	observe	establish	focus	persuade	infer
	order	examine	illustrate	rate	intervene
	report	explain	organize	weigh	justify
	represent	interview	outline		make
	research	judge	plan		manage
	review	list	question		negotiate
	rewrite	operate	test		originate
	show	practice			propose
	trace	predict			reorganize
	transform	record			report
		schedule			revise
		simulate			schematize
		transfer			simulate
		write			solve
					speculate
					support
					test
					validate

APPENDIX C: STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

University Honors Program
University of West Florida
Honors Academic Learning Compact

Student Assessment

Students wishing to achieve the status of University Honors Scholars will be assessed through their performance in the sequence of Honors Core classes. In Great Books 1, quizzes and short answer questions will be used to assess progress in the areas of Critical Thinking and Communication. Formal papers and presentations in the Honors Seminars will be used to assess progress in the areas of Content, Critical Thinking, Communication, and Integrity/Values. The Honors Thesis, a demanding and discipline-specific capstone project, will be used to assess overall achievement in all five domains.

Student Learning Outcomes

University Honors Scholars should be able to:

Content

- Review and evaluate the knowledge, concepts, techniques, and methodology appropriate to the discipline of the Honors Thesis
- Identify major issues, debates, or approaches appropriate to the discipline of the Honors Thesis
- Synthesize complex information appropriate to the discipline of the Honors Thesis
- Develop an argument or project and defend or present it appropriately in accordance with the methods of the discipline of the Honors Thesis

Critical Thinking

- Apply discipline-based and/or cross-discipline-based higher order thinking skills to a range of topics and issues
- Select and organize credible evidence to support converging arguments
- Solve discipline-based and/or cross-discipline-based problems using strategies appropriate to the subject of the Honors Seminar or Honors Thesis

Communication

- Communicate effectively in one-on-one or group contexts
- Express ideas and concepts precisely and persuasively in multiple formats
- Employ writing conventions suitable to the research method and/or creative process of the subject of the Honors Seminar or Honors Thesis

Integrity/Values
- Practice civic engagement through Honors-related service activities
- Practice appropriate standards related to respect for intellectual property
- Practice appropriate professional standards of behavior

Project Management
- Exhibit disciplined work habits as an individual
- Apply discipline-based and/or cross-discipline-based knowledge to design a problem-solving strategy
- Conceive and plan a high-quality research and/or creative capstone project in the appropriate disciplinary or multi-disciplinary context

APPENDIX D: ASSESSMENT MATRIX

	Direct Measure: Course Number	LIT 1110	IDH 403x	IDH 4970		Indirect: Exit Survey	Indirect: Alumni Survey
	Direct Measure: Course Name	Great Books 1	Honors Seminar	Honors Thesis			
Content	Review and evaluate the knowledge, concepts, techniques, and methodology appropriate to the discipline of the Honors Thesis		I, P	M, A		A	A
	Identify major issues, debates, or approaches appropriate to the discipline of the Honors Thesis		I, P	M, A		A	A
	Synthesize complex information appropriate to the discipline of the Honors Thesis		I, P	M, A		A	A
	Develop an argument or project and defend or present it appropriately in accordance with the methods of the discipline of the Honors Thesis		I, P	M, A		A	A
Critical Thinking	Exhibit discipline-based and/or cross-discipline-based higher order thinking skills	I	P	M, A		A	A
	Select and organize credible evidence to support converging arguments	I	P	M, A		A	A
	Solve discipline-based and/or cross-discipline-based problems using strategies appropriate to the subject of the Honors Seminar or Honors Thesis	I	P	M, A		A	A
Communication	Communicate effectively in one-on-one or group contexts	I	M, A	M, A		A	A
	Express ideas and concepts precisely and persuasively in multiple formats	I	M, A			A	A
	Employ writing conventions suitable to the research method and/or creative process of the subject of the Honors Seminar or Honors Thesis		M, A	M, A		A	A
Integrity/Ethics	Practice civic engagement through Honors-related service activities	I				A	A
	Practice appropriate standards related to respect for intellectual property	I	M, A	M, A		A	A
	Practice appropriate professional standards of behavior	I	M, A	M, A		A	A
Project Management	Exhibit disciplined work habits as an individual	I	P, A	M, A		A	A
	Apply discipline-based and/or cross-discipline-based knowledge to design a problem-solving strategy		P	M, A		A	A
	Conceive, plan, and execute a high-quality research and/or creative capstone project in the appropriate disciplinary or multi-disciplinary context		P	M, A		A	A

Key: I=Introduced P=Practiced M=Mastered A=Assessed

APPENDIX E: SCORING RUBRICS

Model of a 4-Point Rubric Template from Kennesaw State University:

	Beginning 1	**Developing 2**	**Accomplished 3**	**Exemplary 4**
Stated Objective or Performance	Description of identifiable performance characteristics reflecting a beginning level of performance.	Description of identifiable performance characteristics reflecting development and movement toward mastery of performance.	Description of identifiable performance characteristics reflecting mastery of performance.	Description of identifiable performance characteristics reflecting the highest level of performance.
Stated Objective or Performance				
Stated Objective or Performance				

(http://edtech.kennesaw.edu/intech/rubrics.htm#templates)

Honors at University of West Florida
Student Learning Outcome Scoring Rubrics

Content

Learning Outcome	Exceeded Expectations	Met Expectations	Failed to Meet Expectations
Review and evaluate the knowledge, concepts, techniques, and methodology appropriate to the discipline of the Honors Thesis	Review and evaluation demonstrated extensive breadth, highly selective quality and was and superbly organized; methods were well developed or employed cutting edge disciplinary techniques or exceptional creative processes and exceeded the range necessary for the project	Review and evaluation was solid, appropriate and adequate for the task but not extensive and may have failed in spots; methods recognized traditional and accepted disciplinary techniques or creative processes	Review and evaluation was incomplete spotty, inconsistent and inadequate to the task; materials revealed haphazard disorganization; methods were pedestrian and barely up to disciplinary standards
Identify major issues, debates, or approaches appropriate to the discipline of the Honors Thesis	Major issues were addressed comprehensive, appropriately, were judiciously chosen, and well suited to the task, revealing exceptional care in approaching the project	Major issues were adequate to task but sometimes not appropriate or complete, portions seemed off task	Major issues were absent, approaches were outside of the discipline, unacceptable, inappropriate and off task

Content, continued

Learning Outcome	Exceeded Expectations	Met Expectations	Failed to Meet Expectations
Synthesize complex information appropriate to the discipline of the Honors Thesis	The information and synthesis displayed insight and thorough development of ideas, strong support, sophisticated writing, mature thought	The information and synthesis displayed some consistency and depth as well as adequate support. The writing shows analytic skill, support, and convincing facility with major thoughts	The information presented lacks convincing support, no real analysis, little attempt to connect ideas, no real integration of ideas, no convincing ability to convey the argument or purpose
Develop an argument or project and defend or present it appropriately in accordance with the methods of the discipline of the Honors Thesis	Overall impact of the argument or project was comprehensive and deeply knowledgeable and thoughtful, the presentation revealed had clear depth and sophistication, the strategy was complex and rich	Overall impact of the argument or project was adequate and at times seemed comprehensive and mostly knowledgeable, the presentation was workmanlike and up to the task, but not overly impressive	Overall impact of the argument or project was incomplete, and inadequate, the presentation was flawed, poorly designed and unworkable

Critical Thinking

Learning Outcome	Exceeded Expectations	Met Expectations	Failed to Meet Expectations
Apply discipline-based and/or cross-discipline based higher order thinking skills to a range of topics and issues	Applications revealed insight and thorough development of ideas with mature, rich, and sophisticated connections between ideas and/or concepts evident in analysis and/or synthesis over a wide range of topics and issues	Applications revealed some insight and some development of ideas with adequate connections drawn between ideas and/or concepts evident in analysis and/or synthesis over a sufficient range of topics and issues	Applications failed to reveal insight and development of ideas and/or lacked connections drawn between ideas and/or concepts; analysis and/or synthesis appeared weak, and the range of topics and issues insufficient
Select and organize credible evidence to support converging arguments	Documents reflect clear and well-developed controlling ideas that are well supported by evidence that has been judiciously and appropriately selected, all woven properly together into strong and highly convincing arguments	Documents reflect mostly clear and adequate controlling ideas that are mostly supported by solid and appropriate evidence; the parts fit together properly enough to create a credible argument	Documents lack clear and controlling ideas or the ideas are not supported well by solid evidence; the evidence selected seems inadequate or off the point, the sum of the parts don't fit together well and don't establish a credible argument

Critical Thinking, continued

Learning Outcome	Exceeded Expectations	Met Expectations	Failed to Meet Expectations
Solve discipline-based and/or cross-discipline-based problems using strategies appropriate to the subject of the Honors Seminar or Thesis	Strategies evinced were sophisticated, professional, and well developed throughout; problem solving skills seemed exceptional and salutary	Strategies evinced were sophisticated, professional, and well developed throughout; problem solving skills seemed exceptional and salutary	Strategies evinced were inadequate to the and/or inappropriate; problem solving skills seemed lacking or rudimentary

Communication

Learning Outcome	Exceeded Expectations	Met Expectations	Failed to Meet Expectations
Communicate effectively in one-on-one or group contexts	Verbal communications were articulate, clear, concise and presented with poise and maturity in both one-on-one and group contexts; in one-on-one contexts superb listening and proper interpersonal skills were always in evidence; in group contexts superb listening skills as well as respect for differences in opinion and for others always apparent	Verbal communications were sufficiently clear, articulate, and concise as well as presented appropriately in both one-on-one and group contexts; in one-on-one contexts good listening and interpersonal skills were mostly in evidence; in group contexts good listening skills as well as respect for differences in opinion and for others were predominant	Verbal communications were unclear clear and/or rambling and/or suffused with bad verbal habits (lots of "ums" or vocal infelicities) in either one-on-one and group contexts; in one-on-one and/or group contexts listening and interpersonal skills were lacking; respect for differences in opinion and for others were not evident
Express ideas and concepts precisely and persuasively in multiple formats	Ideas and concepts in documents and projects were consistently presented with precision, clarity, and thorough development so as to be very persuasive, and also appeared in multiple written and verbal formats of varying length and focus	Ideas and concepts in documents and projects were mostly presented with adequate precision, clarity, and enough development to be persuasive; not all written and/or verbal formats evinced consistent quality of focus and appropriate length	Ideas and concepts in documents and projects lacked precision, clarity, and development and were not persuasive; no range in written and/or verbal formats attempted evinced; quality, focus and appropriate length lacking or ignored

Communication, continued

Learning Outcome	Exceeded Expectations	Met Expectations	Failed to Meet Expectations
Employ writing conventions suitable to the research method and/or creative process of the subject of the Honors Seminar or Thesis	Presentation of work was exceptional and very well organized and reflected a highly competent and professional level of writing standards and conventions; the work revealed great familiarity with the disciplinary standards and followed appropriate APA, MLA, etc. guidelines	Presentation of work was adequate and mostly well organized and/or reflected at least the minimal professional level of writing standards, formats, and conventions as presented in disciplinary guidelines	Presentation of work was inadequate, sloppy, disorganized, and/or failed to recognize or follow professional writing guideline standards, formats and conventions

Integrity/Ethics

Learning Outcome	Exceeded Expectations	Met Expectations	Failed to Meet Expectations
Practice civic engagement through Honors-related service activities	Completed more than 60 hours of community/Honors service	Completed 40 to 59 hours of community/Honors service	Completed fewer than 40 hours of community/Honors service
Practice appropriate professional standards of behavior	Interactions and practices reflected thorough advance preparation; interpersonal behaviors were characterized by consistent maturity, grace, poise, and high personal standards	Interactions and practices reflected some preparation and were adequate to the task; interpersonal behaviors were characterized by flashes of maturity, grace, and poise, but were not of consistent quality	Interactions and practices reflected little preparation and were often inadequate and lacking; interpersonal behaviors were immature and awkward with little evidence of inward personal standards
Practice appropriate standards related to respect for intellectual property	Thoroughly professional and ethical behaviors were consistently in evidence; all appropriate boundaries related to property and persons were highly respected at all times	Professional and ethical behaviors were mostly in evidence; appropriate boundaries related to property and persons were mostly respected with only scattered and unintentional lapses evident	Professional and ethical behaviors were not in evidence; appropriate boundaries related to property and persons were not respected and/or acts of theft or fraud detected

Project Management

Learning Outcome	Exceeded Expectations	Met Expectations	Failed to Meet Expectations
Exhibit disciplined work habits as an individual	Student kept all deadlines; material consistently presented in a professional and organized manner; no waiting until the last minute	Student missed a few deadlines; materials were adequately organized and mostly well presented; deadlines were an at times an issue	Student missed most deadlines and waited until the last minute; presented materials were unorganized and sloppy; missed deadlines created issues for the instructor
Apply discipline-based and/or cross-discipline-based knowledge to design a problem-solving strategy	The problem-solving strategy reflected comprehensive and sophisticated familiarity with the discipline(s) and was well-thought out, complex, and very applicable	The problem-solving strategy was adequate for the task, reflected sufficient familiarity with the discipline(s), and was applicable and workmanlike, but not brilliant	The problem-solving strategy was inadequate for the task, revealed gaps in knowledge central to the discipline(s), or was not applicable or useful
Conceive, plan, and execute a high-quality research and/or creative capstone project in the appropriate disciplinary or multi-disciplinary context	Conception and planning of the project evinced comprehensive, knowledgeable, and wide-ranging familiarity with the disciplinary/multidisciplinary context; the project itself was rich, complex, or cutting-edge and reflected obvious and thorough mastery of the discipline(s) central skills and behaviors	Conception and planning of the project was adequate to the task and covered the necessary areas within the disciplinary/multidisciplinary context; the project itself was appropriate and reflected acceptable mastery of the discipline(s) central skills and behaviors	Conception and planning of the project was inadequate to the task with obvious omissions or holes within the disciplinary/multidisciplinary context; the project itself was substandard and did not reflect acceptable mastery of the discipline(s) central skills and behaviors

Critical Thinking Rubric from Washington State University:

Guide to Rating Critical & Integrative Thinking
Washington State University, Fall 2006

For each of the seven criteria below, assess the work by:

a) circling specific phrases that describe the work, and writing comments

b) circling a numeric score

Note: A score of 4 represents competency for a student graduating from WSU.

1. Identifies, summarizes (and appropriately reformulates) the **problem, question, or issue**.

Emerging		*Developing*		*Mastering*	
1	2	3	4	5	6
Does not attempt to or fails to identify and summarize accurately.		Summarizes issue, though some aspects are incorrect or confused. Nuances and key details are missing or glossed over.		Clearly identifies the challenge and subsidiary, embedded, or implicit aspects of the issue. Identifies integral relationships essential to analyzing the issue.	
Comments:					

2. Identifies and considers the influence of **context *** and **assumptions**.

Emerging		*Developing*		*Mastering*	
1	2	3	4	5	6
Approach to the issue is in egocentric or sociocentric terms. Does not relate issue to other contexts (cultural, political, historical, etc.).		Presents and explores relevant contexts and assumptions regarding the issue, although in a limited way.		Analyzes the issue with a clear sense of scope and context, including an assessment of audience. Considers other integral contexts.	
Analysis is grounded in absolutes, with little acknowledgment of own biases.		Analysis includes some outside verification, but primarily relies on established authorities.		Analysis acknowledges complexity and bias of vantage and values, although may elect to hold to bias in context.	
Does not recognize context or surface assumptions and underlying ethical implications, or does so superficially.		Provides some recognition of context and consideration of assumptions and their implications.		Identifies influence of context and questions assumptions, addressing ethical dimensions underlying the issue.	
Comments:					

(http://wsuctproject.wsu.edu/ctr.htm)

APPENDIX F: DATA COLLECTION SHEETS

Honors at University of West Florida

Assessment Data Sheet

Honors Seminar: _____ Faculty _____

Department _____ Date _____

Instructions: Please fill out the appropriate area with the number of students who fit the criteria over the total number of students in the class. For example, if 10 students in a class of 12 exceed the expectation of "Exhibit discipline-based and/or cross-discipline-based higher order thinking skills," please enter **10/12** in that box, and please return this form to the Honors office, 50/224.

Critical Thinking

Learning Outcome	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Fails to meet Expectations
Apply discipline-based and/or cross-discipline-based higher order thinking skills to a range of topics and issues			
Select and organize credible evidence to support converging arguments			
Solve discipline-based and/or cross-discipline-based problems using strategies appropriate to the subject of the Honors Seminar			

Communication

Learning Outcome	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Fails to meet Expectations
Communicate effectively in one-on-one and/or group contexts			
Express ideas and concepts precisely andpersuasively in multiple formats			
Employ writing conventions suitable to the research method and/or creative process of the subject of the Honors Seminar			

Integrity/Ethics

Learning Outcome	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Fails to meet Expectations
Practice appropriate professional standards of behavior			
Practice appropriate standards related to Respect for intellectual property			

Honors at University of West Florida

Assessment Data Sheet

Honors Thesis of: _____ Faculty _____

Department _____ Date _____

Instructions: Please mark the box that best describes the performance of your Thesis student in each area. For example, if you thought that your student met the expectation of "Exhibit discipline-based and/or cross-discipline-based higher order thinking skills," please put a check or "X" in that box, and please return this form to the Honors office, 50/224.

Content

Learning Outcome	Exceeded Expectations	Met Expectations	Failed to meet Expectations
Review and evaluate the knowledge, concepts, techniques, and methodology appropriate to the discipline of the Honors Thesis			
Identify major issues, debates, or approaches appropriate to the discipline of the Honors Thesis			
Synthesize complex information appropriate to the discipline of the Honors Thesis			
Develop an argument or project and defend or present it appropriately in accordance with the methods of the discipline of the Honors Thesis			

Critical Thinking

Learning Outcome	Exceeded Expectations	Met Expectations	Failed to meet Expectations
Apply discipline-based and/or cross-discipline-based higher order thinking skills to a range of topics and issues			
Select and organize credible evidence to support converging arguments			
Solve discipline-based and/or cross-discipline-based problems using strategies appropriate to the subject of the Honors Thesis			

Communication

Learning Outcome	Exceeded Expectations	Met Expectations	Failed to meet Expectations
Employ writing conventions suitable to the research method and/or creative process of the subject of the Honors Thesis			

Integrity/Ethics

Learning Outcome	Exceeded Expectations	Met Expectations	Failed to meet Expectations
Practice appropriate professional standards of behavior			
Practice appropriate standards related to respect for intellectual property			

Project Management

Learning Outcome	Exceeded Expectations	Met Expectations	Failed to meet Expectations
Exhibit disciplined work habits as an individual			
Apply discipline-based and/or cross-discipline-based knowledge to design a problem-solving strategy			
Conceive, plan, and execute a high-quality research and/or creative capstone project in the appropriate disciplinary or multi-disciplinary context			

APPENDIX G: HONORS EXIT SURVEY

Honors at University of West Florida

Exit Survey

Thank you for taking the time to give us feedback on how we're doing. Please call our office if you have any questions (850.474.2934). Completed surveys can be returned in the enclosed envelope or taken to the Honors Office (Bldg. 50, Rm. 224).

Please circle your answer. If a question does not pertain to your experience, please leave it blank.

Honors Program Courses

1. I utilized the early registration benefit of being an Honors Student:
   Yes No
2. Rate the value of early registration to you:

1	2	3	4	5
No Value	Poor Value	Somewhat Valuable	Very Valuable	Extremely Valuable

3. I took Great Books:
   Yes No
4. Rate the value of the learning experience in Great Books to you:

1	2	3	4	5
No Value	Poor Value	Somewhat Valuable	Very Valuable	Extremely Valuable

5. I took an Honors section of a general studies course:
   Yes No
6. Which Honors sections of general studies courses did you take?

_____

_____

_____

7. The types of general education courses offered by the Honors program fit my degree plan and timeline:

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Mostly	Always

8. Rate the value of the learning experience in Honors sections of general studies courses to you:

1	2	3	4	5
No Value	Poor Value	Somewhat Valuable	Very Valuable	Extremely Valuable

9. I took an Honors seminar:
   Yes No
10. How many Honors seminars did you take? _____
11. Rate the value of the learning experience in an Honors seminar to you:

1	2	3	4	5
No Value	Poor Value	Somewhat Valuable	Very Valuable	Extremely Valuable

12. I would like to see the following topics developed into seminars:

_____

_____

_____

13. I completed an Honors Thesis:
    Yes No
14. Rate the value of the learning experience in an Honors Thesis to you:

1	2	3	4	5
No Value	Poor Value	Somewhat Valuable	Very Valuable	Extremely Valuable

15. The benefits of being in an Honors class I have experienced include: (check all that apply):
    ___ Small class size
    ___ More teacher-student interaction
    ___ More in-depth information
    ___ More engaging coursework
    ___ Other: _____
16. My favorite Honors course (courses) was:

_____

17. I would like the following to be offered as Honors Courses:

_____

_____

_____

Honors Advising

18. What was your overall satisfaction with advising services in the Honors Program?

1	2	3	4	5
Highly Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Highly satisfied

19. What was the value of advising services in the Honors Program to you?

1	2	3	4	5
No Value	Poor Value	Somewhat Valuable	Very Valuable	Extremely Valuable

20. My Honors advisor was available during regular office hours:

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

21. My Honors Advisor responded promptly to telephone and e-mail questions:

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

22. My Honors Advisor became personally acquainted with me:

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

23. My Honors Advisor listened to my questions and was sure we understood each other:

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

24. My Honors Advisor was knowledgeable about General Studies requirements:

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

25. My Honors Advisor was knowledgeable about Honors requirements:

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

26. My Honors Advisor discussed my academic progress and goals with me:

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

27. My Honors Advisor discussed my long-range life and career goals with me:

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

28. My Honors Advisor expected me to be a responsible partner in the advising process:

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

Your Learning

Please circle the response that best describes your sense of accomplishment for each item listed below. If you did not take a course that applies to the question, please circle N/A.

29. I reviewed and evaluated the knowledge, concepts, techniques, and methodology appropriate to the discipline of the Honors Thesis:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	At times	Regularly	Very often Beyond all my expectations	N/A

30. I identified major issues, debates, or approaches appropriate to the discipline of the Honors Thesis:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	At times	Regularly	Very often Beyond all my expectations	N/A

31. I synthesized complex information appropriate to the discipline of the Honors Thesis:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	At times	Regularly	Very often Beyond all my expectations	N/A

32. I developed an argument or project and defend or present it appropriately in accordance with the methods of the discipline of the Honors:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	At times	Regularly	Very often Beyond all my expectations	N/A

33. I applied discipline-based and/or cross-discipline-based higher order thinking skills to a range of topics and issues:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	At times	Regularly	Very often Beyond all my expectations	N/A

34. I selected and organized credible evidence to support converging arguments in my writing:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	At times	Regularly	Very often Beyond all my expectations	N/A

35. I solved discipline-based and/or cross-discipline-based problems using strategies appropriate to the subject of the Honors Seminar or Honors Thesis:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	At times	Regularly	Very often Beyond all my expectations	N/A

36. I communicated effectively in one-on-one or group contexts:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	At times	Regularly	Very often Beyond all my expectations	N/A

37. I expressed ideas and concepts precisely and persuasively in multiple formats:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	At times	Regularly	Very often Beyond all my expectations	N/A

38. I employed writing conventions suitable to the research method and/or creative process of the subject of the Honors Seminar or Honors Thesis:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	At times	Regularly	Very often Beyond all my expectations	N/A

39. I demonstrated an active commitment to civic engagement through service:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	At times	Regularly	Very often Beyond all my expectations	N/A

40. I practiced appropriate professional standards of behavior:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	At times	Regularly	Very often Beyond all my expectations	N/A

41. I practiced appropriate standards related to respect for intellectual property:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	At times	Regularly	Very often Beyond all my expectations	N/A

42. I exhibited disciplined work habits as an individual:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	At times	Regularly	Very often Beyond all my expectations	N/A

43. I applied discipline-based and/or cross-discipline-based knowledge to design a problem-solving strategy:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	At times	Regularly	Very often Beyond all my expectations	N/A

44. I demonstrated the ability to conceive, plan, and execute a high-quality research and/or creative capstone project in the appropriate disciplinary or multi-disciplinary context:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	At times	Regularly	Very often Beyond all my expectations	N/A

45. We welcome general comments you have about the academic portion of the Honors Program:

_____

_____

_____

Honors Benefits

Housing

46. Choose the Housing option that best described your living situation (circle one):
    I lived in Honors housing
    I lived in other on-campus housing
    I lived off campus

47. Assuming Honors had space available in all three different residence hall options (The Village, South Sides, and North Sides), if you were given the choice between living on-campus in Honors housing OR living on-campus in general housing, what would you choose?
    Honors housing Non-honors housing

48. Rate the value of having Honors housing space in North Sides:

1	2	3	4	5
No Value	Poor Value	Somewhat Valuable	Very Valuable	Extremely Valuable

49. Rate the value of having Honors housing space in the South Sides/Villages:

1	2	3	4	5
No Value	Poor Value	Somewhat Valuable	Very Valuable	Extremely Valuable

50. Did you take advantage of any of the Honors Housing activities (Ice cream socials, etc.)?
    Yes No

51. Are special Honors Housing activities important?
    Yes No

52. Rate the value of special Honors Housing activities to you:

1	2	3	4	5
No Value	Poor Value	Somewhat Valuable	Very Valuable	Extremely Valuable

53. If the Honors Program had a new Honors Living & Learning Center near the center of campus, would you be drawn to live there?
    Yes No

54. What facilities would you like to see in a new Honors Living & Learning Center?

_____

_____

55. Did you have any problems with Housing? If so, please describe.

_____

_____

56. How has living in an Honors Housing space been of value to you?

_____

_____

57. We welcome general comments you have about Housing.

_____

_____

Service Events

58. I participated in an Honors service event.
    Yes No

59. Rate the value of service events to you:

1	2	3	4	5
No Value	Poor Value	Somewhat Valuable	Very Valuable	Extremely Valuable

60. The service event I enjoyed the most was:

_____

61. I would like to see Honors provide the following service event:

_____

Social Events

62. I participated in an Honors social event.
    Yes No

63. Rate the value of social events to you:

1	2	3	4	5
No Value	Poor Value	Somewhat Valuable	Very Valuable	Extremely Valuable

64. The social event I enjoyed the most was:

_____

65. I would like to see Honors provide the following social event:

_____

Conferences

66. I attended conferences (NCHC, SRHC, FCHC) through the Honors program:
    Yes No

67. Rate the value of conference attendance to you:

1	2	3	4	5
No Value	Poor Value	Somewhat Valuable	Very Valuable	Extremely Valuable

International Trips

68. I participated in an international travel opportunity that Honors offered:
    Yes No

69. Rate the value of international travel to you:

1	2	3	4	5
No Value	Poor Value	Somewhat Valuable	Very Valuable	Extremely Valuable

70. I would like to see Honors sponsor an academic trip to

    _____

71. in order to study

    _____

72. We welcome any general comments you have about our Honors opportunitiesother services.

    _____

    _____

73. How did being a member of the Honors Program make a difference to your *personal growth* as an individual and to your college experience (e.g., your thinking, self-image, personal outlook, values, friendships, intellectual development, preparation for subsequent academic work, career plans, etc.)?

    _____

    _____

74. If you had to make this decision again, would you be an Honors Program member?
    Yes No

75. What is your *strongest recommendation* for improving the UWF Honors Program experience?

    _____

    _____

76. What are your future plans?

    _____

    _____

Is there anything else you'd like to share with us?

APPENDIX H: EXIT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-EAU CLAIRE:

Exit Interview Project

Rationale

Exit interviews have been selected as an assessment procedure because this process provides both qualitative and quantitative data. Exit interviews provide contextual information about the UWEC learning environment. Also, the scoring procedure that has been defined for the Exit Interview Project avoids the lengthy analysis usually associated with qualitative data and provides an added benefit of actually hearing from students how they have experienced the curriculum.

Sample Exit Interview Questions

1. UW-Eau Claire requires students to take general education courses. What reasons do you see for such a requirement? In what ways, if any, have general education courses been valuable to you? How are courses you've taken in general education related to your major?
2. What are your intellectual interests outside of your major? Did you pursue any of these while in college, either through coursework or otherwise? Did you already have these interests when you came to college or were they newly developed? Are there courses or other intellectual activities that you wish you had pursued? If so, why didn't you?
3. What are the best things college has done to prepare you for life after college? Have you learned things in courses that you've used outside of the academic environment?
4. How are you different, that is, how have you grown by attending UWEC rather tan taking a job right out of high school? Identify university-related experiences that have changed you.
5. In what ways have you actively participated in the university learning community? As you think over your college career, what learning experiences stand out in your mind? What learning experiences have you had outside of the classroom?
6. How has your experience here influenced the way you think about people of different races, cultures, or sexual orientation, and about people with disabilities? Have you ever been in a situation where someone else has been insensitive and how did you respond
7. In what ways did your experience at UWEC influence your interest in the arts?

8. What values do you use to guide your life? Have those values changed since you have been in college? Explain. Tell me a few experiences here that helped you to develop or demonstrate your values/rules.

Scoring Scales

The following scale will be used for all questions except 4d:

Response	**Value**
Student has no understanding of issue or unable to make the relationship; inaccurate understanding; no acceptance/internalization of the issue has occurred; deny value of issue	1
Student provides a general or basic response; internalization may not have occurred	2
Student demonstrates an in-depth understanding; specific examples or in-depth response provided; student can clearly connect the example to the issue	3

The following scale will be used for 4d:

Response	**Value**
Communicates poorly, uses phrases and incomplete thoughts, unable to clearly present ideas	1
Student exhibits appropriate nonverbal behaviors, interacted with interviewer appropriately, avoids excessive use of slang	2
Outstanding communication, articulate, makes eye contact, appropriate pauses, interviewers understand the student	3

(http://www.uwec.edu/assess/plan/appendE.pdf)