

EXPLORATIONS: LIBERAL ARTS FOR LIFE

NARRATIVE: ASSESSMENT PLAN (Most recent update: November, 2010)

Explorations: Liberal Arts for Life, is a First-Year Transition Seminar required of all new first-year full-time students at the College. Yearly teaching staff for the course is selected from among interested Hendrix faculty and administrative staff members. In addition to the teacher of record, each section of the course has a student peer assistant (Explorations Peer Assistant), selected by the instructor.

Explorations was developed and approved by the faculty over the course of the 2002-2003 academic year. Development stages included an on-campus consultancy by John Gardner and Betsy Barefoot, both national leaders in First-Year Seminar and First-Year Experience professional circles. The informing guidelines for the content and structure of Explorations originated in large measure from their consultancy.

First taught in the Fall, 2003 semester, the course has been guided since its inception by three co-coordinators: Joyce Hardin (2003-2007) Dwayne Collins (2007-present) and Carole Herrick (2003-present). Faculty and staff interested in teaching and developing the course comprise an Explorations Working Group. About 25-30 Working Group members each year participate in four summer workshop days and a December assessment meeting. Course planning--including assessment review and discussion--for the upcoming year is the task of the summer workshops; the December meeting is an assessment “debriefing and action” meeting for the course iteration just completed.

Goals

Goals for the course, quoted below, have been in place and included in the Explorations syllabus since the faculty approved the course in March, 2003.

The goals of Explorations are as follows:

- to assist you in making a successful transition to academic and student life and Hendrix;
- to assist you in developing and refining your thoughts and abilities in areas relating to your academic and personal fulfillment and success.

In the first three years that Explorations was taught, beginning in Fall, 2003, these syllabus goals served to guide Working Group developmental and assessment efforts for the course.

The earliest version of the current guiding Assessment Plan document for the course, titled *Explorations: Course Goals and Intended Learning Outcomes*, was created in the summer of 2006 by an Assessment Sub-Committee of the Explorations Working Group. That document includes the two course goals above, reworked into appropriate assessment language, along with intended learning outcomes used in a “rotational assessment” of the course components. **The most recent version of this document is**

appended to this Narrative. In 2007, this document was distributed for the first time to all students enrolled in Explorations, a yearly practice that continues.

Assessment

Indirect Assessment

Yearly indirect assessment of the course currently includes two surveys, as follows:

- a Student Feedback Form for the course, dating from Fall, 2004, covering content and pedagogical components, and
- a pre-test and post-test, dating from Fall, 2007, focusing on student perceptions relative to their command of course content, as of the first week and final week of the course.

Indirect Assessment data dating from 2004-present are included in the yearly *Explorations Assessment Plan Reports* for 2006-07-present under appropriate headings at this link site.

Direct Assessment:

Based on one widely used national model (Walwood), Explorations began in the Fall of 2007 to conduct one direct assessment per year in the course, that assessment intended to focus over time on all major content areas of the course in a rotational format. Currently, direct assessment options for the course, consist of the following content and topic areas:

•Transition content

Liberal learning
Choices and expectations
General education; academic advising/mentoring
Academic Integrity
Social Integrity

•Critical Reading/Effective Writing

•Oral Communication

•Engaged Learning

For the years 2007-08, and 2008-09, and 2009-10, the direct assessment for Explorations focused on Critical Reading/Effective Writing. For 2010-11 the direct assessment focus will be on oral communication.

The first external review of Explorations took place in 2006. Dr. Wendy Troxel, a nationally recognized consultant specializing in the first year of college and in assessment of programs, visited campus in June, 2006, and continued to work with Explorations co-coordinators through the Fall, 2006 iteration of the course. Her consultant's report was

received in February, 2007 and is included in full in the *Explorations Assessment Report, 2006-07* under the appropriate link heading at this link site.

The “intentional era” of Assessment Planning-Review-Action for Explorations began after Dr. Troxel’s consultancy in the summer of 2006. Stemming from her recommendations and guidelines, each of the course iterations subsequent to her visit (Fall, 2006-present) have produced refinements in our assessment focus and enhanced learning outcomes for students, owing to our progressively better-informed assessment understandings and systems. Details of these yearly assessment activities are contained in the *Explorations Assessment Report of 2006-07-present*, found under appropriate link headings at this site.

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EXPLORATIONS

Course Goals and Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

Most recent review and confirmation:
Explorations Workshop of May 12-13, 2008

In structure and intent, the Goals and ILOs listed below aim to express Explorations student goals and outcomes in a way that:

- 1) can be clearly and easily assessed through both direct and indirect means,
- 2) appropriate rubrics can be developed for each student assignment to be evaluated, and
- 3) the broader (subjective) College goals of becoming a "whole person" are contained in them in a meaningful and measurable way.

Goal 1: Through its content and context, Explorations seeks to make each student aware of the importance of many of the academic, personal, and social contexts that are needed for a successful transition to Hendrix, and seeks to facilitate each student's transition.

ILO 1-1: The student exhibits an understanding of the perspectives, processes, habits of mind, and personal choices conducive to a successful transition as well as a progressive understanding of the importance of these attributes.

Course Topics:

- Course Introduction and Hendrix Statement of Purpose
- Transition and Choices
- Resources and Expectations
- Integrity and Ethics
- Diversity
- Liberal Arts Education

ILO 1-2: The student exhibits an understanding of the traditional and experiential components of the academic program of the College as well as the available student resources, mentoring and support systems in place to facilitate a successful experience at Hendrix.

Course Topics:

- Course Introduction and Hendrix Statement of Purpose

Transition and Choices
Resources and Expectations
Integrity and Ethics
Engaged Learning (Odyssey)

Goal 2: Through its content and context, Explorations seeks to make each student aware of the importance of developing and refining intellectual skills that are needed for a successful transition to Hendrix, and seeks to facilitate each student's initial improvement/maintenance of these skills.

ILO 2-1: The student exhibits an understanding of the importance of her or his ability to communicate both orally and in written form as well as gather and process information and knowledge at a level of sophistication necessary for a successful Hendrix experience.

Course Topics:

Each unit/topic that contains a formal written/oral component

ILO 2-2: The student exhibits an understanding of the importance of her or his ability to reason in an informed and ethical way, think critically, and make decisions in dealing with important issues and topics that are without definitive answers (world hunger, diversity and tolerance, service and leadership, etc.) as well as evidence of developing such abilities through the analysis of one or more such issues addressed in the course.

Course Topics:

Integrity and Ethics
Diversity
Major reading

ILO 2-3: The student exhibits an understanding of the importance of her or his ability to work effectively and sensitively in a collaborative context and the continued development of the interpersonal skills and perspectives necessary for such successful collaboration.

Course Topics:

Any topic/unit that requires collaborative effort and/or peer response
(Engaged Learning, one major or minor group assignment)

[NOTE: So long as the course contains at least one component that requires some non-trivial degree of "engaged learning" (extended Odyssey unit or major reflection paper) the following Intended Learning Outcome is adopted for the course.]

ILO 2-4: The student exhibits an understanding of the importance of increasing her/his level of sophistication in thoughtful, cogent reflection on both written and oral materials as well as experiences in engaged learning. The student will exhibit evidence of developing such abilities through the analysis of one or more major issues addressed in the course.