

AY 2012-13 Summary of Key Evidence for UCORE: Roots of Contemporary Issues Pilot Final Papers Assessment Project

Background

Roots of Contemporary Issues [ROOT] courses are foundational first-year experience courses for UCORE, WSU's new General Education program inaugurated in 2012-13. The courses introduce students to five of WSU's Seven Learning Goals of the Baccalaureate (Critical & Creative Thinking, Information Literacy, Communication, Diversity, and Depth, Breadth & Integration of Learning) by asking students to explore and understand the historical and global roots of various issues facing the world today.

Paralleling a series of in-class lessons and assignments, students work over the course of the semester to identify the historical and global roots of a contemporary issue facing the world of interest to them. The final independent research assignment asks students to use the critical thinking and information literacy skills they have developed throughout the class. A series of four integrative assignments, called the Library Research Assignments, build up over the semester to help students identify a topic, find and assess primary and secondary sources relevant to a better understanding of the topic, develop a research question and craft a thesis, learn appropriate citation standards for university writing, and compose a well-crafted final research essay.

Pilot Final Papers Assessment Project

The Roots of Contemporary Issues Final Papers Assessment Project was piloted for the first time in AY 2012-13, to provide [ROOT] faculty with information for program improvement, as well as assess student learning on two of the WSU Learning Goals (Critical & Creative Thinking and Information Literacy). The [ROOT] Steering Committee and faculty, in collaboration with the WSU Libraries, developed a rubric that aligned with course expectations and the Critical & Creative Thinking and Information Literacy WSU Learning Goals. This rubric asked whether in these final papers students 1) constructed a thesis that articulated a historical argument, 2) selected and evaluated multiple primary and secondary sources appropriate to a research paper, 3) critically evaluated the nature of those sources, 4) used those sources in a way that suggests that they understood the relationship between the nature of the source and the kinds of conclusions they could draw from it, 5) identified the historical roots of their contemporary issue, 6) used evidence necessary to construct an argument, 7) produced a complete and properly-cited bibliography and 8) used a citation system. The rubric asked whether the research paper demonstrated that students reached a level ranging between an “emerging first-year student” and proficiency at the level of a graduating senior. [ROOT] instructors and the library liaison to the program evaluated a random sample of 275 final research papers from History 105 courses.

Results

Learning Goal Achievement: Results from the AY 2012-13 Roots of Contemporary Issues Pilot Final Papers Assessment Project indicated that the average student taking History 105 performed at a “Developing First Year-Level” or higher for all eight of the elements evaluated to assess Critical & Creative Thinking and Information Literacy. The greatest success was seen in students’ abilities to integrate a significant number of sources into their research. In AY 2013-14, steps will be taken to expand this pilot project to include more student papers from the branch campuses to provide the ability to disaggregate the results and examine achievement by campus.