

AY 2013-14 Summary of Key Evidence for UCORE: Roots of Contemporary Issues 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, and compose a well-crafted final research essay.

Final Papers Assessment Project

The Roots of Contemporary Issues Final Papers Assessment Project is intended to provide [ROOT] faculty with information for program improvement, as well as gauge student learning on two of the WSU Learning Goals (Critical & Creative Thinking and Information Literacy); a practice begun in AY 2012-13. The [ROOT] Steering Committee and faculty, in collaboration with the WSU Libraries, wrote and revised a rubric that aligned with course expectations and the Critical & Creative Thinking and Information Literacy WSU Learning Goals. In 2013-14, this rubric asked whether in these final papers students 1) constructed a thesis that articulated a historical argument, 2) selected and evaluated primary and secondary sources appropriate to a research paper and critically evaluated the nature of those sources, 3) 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, 4) used evidence necessary to construct an argument, 5) produced a complete and properly-cited bibliography and 6) 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, four English Composition instructors, and one Math professor evaluated a random sample of 247 final research papers from History 105 and 305 courses.

Results

Learning Goal Achievement: Results from the AY 2013-14 Roots of Contemporary Issues Final Papers Assessment Project indicated that **97%** of History 105 students performed at the "Developing First Year-Level" or higher on their ability to *select and evaluate primary and secondary sources appropriate to a research paper and critically evaluate the nature of those sources*. Additionally, **92%** of History 105 students performed at the "Developing First Year-Level" or higher on their ability to *use evidence necessary to construct an argument*.