

## 2014-2015 Annual Program Assessment Report

**College: Humanities**

**Department: Jewish Studies Interdisciplinary Program**

**Assessment liaison: Jody Myers**

### 1. Please check off whichever is applicable:

A.  Measured student work.

### 2. Overview of Annual Assessment Project

The assessment activities we chose extended our study of a revised version of the writing policy tested in 2013-2014. A new writing policy was discussed with all the JS faculty in August 2014, and the assessment project was designed to determine whether and how to implement it more broadly across JS courses.

The writing policy, in brief: writing produced on a computer must be at least 90% correct in these areas in order to be accepted: capitalization; complete sentences; and spelling errors. If these errors appear in more than 10% of the writing, the paper receives zero credit. An option to rewrite is available for the first three weeks of the semester. Writing submitted with these significant errors will be down-graded as follows: The highest possible grade for a piece of writing in which any of these errors are present is a B+. When there are a significant number of these errors, the highest grade possible is a C+. For writing responses requiring students to reflect upon or analyze the reading, students must include a parenthetical reference to the assigned reading title and page. There will be no credit for writing assignments that do not include the reference. Students will be given an option to re-do for the first three weeks. After that, there is no option to re-do.

**Program SLOs assessed:** Students were assessed on their written communication skills with reference to Program Learning Outcome 3: "describe Jewish cultural developments as a function of a dynamic created by political, economic, and cultural forces." Evidence of students' learning on this measure would be evident in written work responding to questions about assigned readings.

**Courses:** JS 210 (History of the Jewish People) and JS 330 (Women in the Jewish Experience), both in Fall 2014, taught by the same instructor.

**Contexts:** Papers assigned at the beginning and end of the semester

**Assessment instrument used:** Student essays from the beginning and end of the semester were evaluated by the Assessment Liaison and one other JS faculty member besides the instructor. The evaluation compared the number of writing errors and citations used in these two sets of essays.

**Methodology:** Raters counted the number of parenthetical citations, spelling errors, incomplete sentences, and capitalization errors on the third page of each student paper. The results were entered into a table.

**Resulting scores:** In JS 210: Only one set of papers was submitted. In this set of papers, failure to cite sources was the biggest problem (18 out of 20 papers included no citations at all). Capitalization errors were a distant second. Spelling errors and incomplete sentences were not significant problems. In JS 330: From the first paper to the second paper, the rate of citation got slightly lower, although it was far better than that of JS 210. Capitalization errors also got slightly worse. Incomplete sentences and spelling errors were reduced (i.e., improved) from the first to the second paper.

**Relation between this year's measure of student work and that of past years:** We assessed 2013-2014 materials by counting how many papers had to be redone in the first four weeks of the semester due to the presence of writing errors or lack of citations and compared that to the number of papers with these problems at the end of the semester. The 2014-2015 assessment activity continues in that vein to examine the effectiveness of the writing policy.

**Connection to the university's commitment to diversity:** Both courses are General Education courses in Cultural Studies.

**Other assessment-related information:** We have learned from this year's assessment activity that citation of sources is the biggest issue in student work with regard to our writing policy. Assessment for 2015-2016 should examine how students' use of citations can be improved.

### **3. Preview of planned assessment activities for 2015-2016.**

Two online sections of JS 318 (instructor is Jennifer Thompson) in Spring 2016 will be assessed. The purpose of assessment will be to determine whether a more specific policy connecting grades to proper citation of sources has an effect on students' proper citation of sources. The writing policy in the syllabus, described above, will specify that references must include both parenthetical citations as appropriate throughout the student's written work as well as a works cited page at the end of the work.

This assessment will be done on work from the beginning and end of JS 318, irrespective of the assignment's connection to a Program SLO.