

Closing the Assessment Loop in Human Services 2009-2010

The Department of Human Services and Rehabilitation is committed to department level planning, collection, analysis, and discussion of assessment data for purposes of improving candidate performance and program quality.

With the advent of a curriculum revision in 2006, faculty in the Human Services Program designed and implemented an assessment plan that includes collection of entry, continuation, and exit assessment data. Each year the data is analyzed in summer and shared with the faculty at a fall department meeting. Faculty review the data and prioritize areas for continuous improvement during the coming year. A program advisory board receives updates on continuous improvements and areas requiring special attention. We are particularly proud of our graduating students who used their developing program planning and evaluation skills this year by conducting an evaluation of our benchmark exit assessment.

Given the available data this year, the department made the decision to concentrate efforts on the following areas as we work to close the assessment loop in the Human Services Program:

1. **Exit Assessment/Capstone Portfolio:**

- **Pass rate for Benchmark Exit Assessment:** Data from the Woodring Information System revealed that 12 students did not meet the benchmark exit assessment (Spring, 2009). Despite not passing the benchmark assessment, all 12 students successfully completed the major and went on to graduate. (We recognize that this goes against the purpose of implementing a benchmark assessment). Faculty discussion of this finding revealed that in the Capstone Portfolio course only 70% of the course grade was tied to the benchmark assessment. Thus, a student who might not meet the benchmark could still successfully complete the Capstone Portfolio course. Given this finding the Capstone Portfolio course has now been revised so that the benchmark includes 100% of the final course grade.
- **Student concerns about benchmark exit assessment:** Based on student (and some faculty) concerns regarding the use of portfolios as an exit assessment, two systematic evaluations of this requirement have been conducted. (See Appendix A and C and <http://www.slideshare.net/HSRWWU/capstone-assessment-project-981901>) The initial evaluation of the portfolio assessment was conducted during summer 2008, and some revisions were made to the capstone portfolio requirement prior to the beginning of the 2008/09 academic year. More substantive revisions, including a revision to the rubric and contents of the capstone portfolio, are being

implemented during 2009-10. These revisions will retain key features of a standards-based portfolio while streamlining student reflection and adding a depth requirement that highlights each student's professional accomplishments and areas of expertise acquired while enrolled in the major. Additional changes include:

- Revisions to HSP 304 and HSP 495 course plans
- Shift from A/F to S/U grading for HSP 304 (a one-credit course that introduces students to the portfolio learning process).

The Department will continue to monitor student performance and student/faculty feedback during 2010.

2. **Entry Assessments- Technology and Outreach Admissions:**
(See Appendix B)

- **Technology:** Prior to 2007 applicants were required to meet basic computer competency standards prior to entering the Human Services major. However, over time the costs (associated with staff resources) of monitoring this requirement began to outweigh the benefits. The policy seemed less meaningful as more students began entering the program with fairly sophisticated technology skills. In 2007 the Department developed a technology self-assessment rating scale to determine if there was a relationship between first year program GPA and self-reported technology skills. Results found no differences in first year GPA between students who rated themselves as highly skilled and those students who rated themselves as having poor technology skills. Given these findings faculty made the decision to discontinue the requirement that applicants meet an entry-level technology standard prior to admission to the major.

In the past year and a half we have since revised the technology self-assessment, developed web-resources for students with weak technology skills, incorporated technology into our assessment plan and capstone portfolio, and continued to monitor how we use and teach technology within the Human Services program. A summary of this data-based decision making project and associated outcomes is contained in Appendix B.

- **Outreach Admissions GPA:** The Human Services Program has a minimum GPA requirement of 2.75. An exceptions policy allows for admission in exceptional situations when GPA is between 2.2 and 2.75. Applicants with GPA under 2.2 are not admitted to the Human Services major. A review of data found that some applicants at outreach locations were being admitted with GPAs that did not meet the minimum for entry. Given that GPA is a primary entry assessment, the decision was made to centralize admissions decision-making and strengthen the relationship between WWU admissions and the Chair's office. Centralized admission was implemented for fall 2009 and will be continued in 2010.

3. **Continuation/Qualification for Internship:**

- During 2008/09 faculty involved in the practicum/internship series worked on revising the benchmark assessment to align with course (HSP 340) outcomes. The positive finding is that all 131 students who took the benchmark assessment passed the exam. It has been a challenge, however, to administer a closed-book

exam. Exam security has been compromised during each of the past two years. We will work to develop a new assessment this year.

4. **Student Exit Surveys: (See Appendix A)**

- In addition to performance assessments, student exit surveys continue to be an important source of evidence to inform decision-making regarding priorities for continuous improvement. During spring of 2009 all graduating seniors completed a comprehensive exit survey. Results revealed that the vast majority of exiting students view the program in a positive light. More than 90% of students completing the major agree or strongly agree that they are satisfied with the major, participation enhanced critical thinking and writing skills, and helped students understand ethics, systems and human diversity. Some areas where students indicate we should continue to work are in the areas of academic rigor, technology, the capstone portfolio requirement, and the value of field visits. Additionally, and somewhat surprisingly, a relatively low percentage of students indicated an interest in staying involved with the program following graduation.

Working in small teams faculty have begun to address additional issues raised by the exit survey, with the following outcomes:

- **Re: Staying Involved after graduation-** Human Services alums have always been our strongest advocates, so it is particularly surprising that only 58% of exiting students report an interest in staying connected to the Program. Recently, faculty started a Human Services facebook group to connect students and alums for networking purposes and program updates.
- **Re: Capstone Portfolio-** Addressed previously in this report.
- **Re: Academic Rigor-** The program has worked to raise the bar on program quality and rigor for the past decade. Yet, as we attract an increasingly talented pool of students to the major we need to continue to find ways to provide intellectual challenge. This is a topic that continues to be included on faculty meeting agendas and will be incorporated into an upcoming curriculum revision.
- **Re: Value of Field Visits-** Following the results of last spring's exit survey, a faculty member conducted a survey with students enrolled in one senior cohort. The survey provides focused questions regarding the value of field visits and suggestions for improvement. Results have not yet been analyzed. There is some concern that the specific wording of this item is misleading. Therefore, an additional item will be added to the exit survey next year to determine if wording impacted the result of the 2009 survey.
- **Re: Developing Technology Skills-** Students report that learning in the area of technology is an area where the Department can continue to improve. While most faculty are quite proficient with technology, many students continue to surpass faculty expertise. Our plan is to review recent research on the types of technology skills that are required for successful performance as a human services professional and focus energy on making sure that students graduate with these skills. This review will likely result in a shift away from ISTE standards in the coming year and movement towards our own set of measurable standards that are professionally relevant to the human services profession. (Also see Appendix B).

Appendix A
Spring 2009 Human Services Exit Survey
Areas of Strength and Need for Improvement

Background information

94% of students indicate they are full-time students (12+ credits per quarter)

24% worked full time while attending school; 50% part time

Responses: Bellingham=57; Bremerton=12; Everett=25

Strengths According to Graduating Students	
Item	Agree/Strongly Agree
Faculty included ample opportunities for reflection on learning.	95%
The program helped me learn about human systems and their interactions	94%
The program helped me learn and understand HS Ethics	94%
Faculty encouraged students to actively engage in learning.	93%
The HS program provided opportunities to develop and demonstrate direct service skills	93%
Faculty encouraged positive social interaction among students	92%
The HS major helped me develop written communication skills	90%
Overall experience in HS program.	90% (satisfied/very satisfied)
The HS major helped me understand human diversity	90%
Faculty members were genuinely interested in my learning.	90%
Faculty expected critical thinking in my courses.	90%
Quality of course content.	89% (satisfied/very satisfied)
Areas for Improvement According to Graduating Students	
Item	Agree/Strongly Agree
*My portfolio helps me demonstrate that I meet national standards in HS education	47%
Field visits were a valuable part of each quarter's learning experience.	51%
As an alumni I am interested in supporting and staying connected to the program	58%
*My capstone portfolio demonstrates that I meet CSHSE National Standards.	60%
My major helped me develop technology skills	60%
My major helped prepare me for possible graduate study.	63%
My major was academically rigorous.	64%
I received a quality orientation to the agency/agencies where I worked.	65%
Course materials and texts were useful	67%

Appendix B Human Services Program Report

Student Technology and the Human Services Program: Outcomes for Students who Report Beginner vs. Advanced Technology Skills and Exit Survey Results, 2006-2010

Background:

Faculty in the Human Services Program are committed to insuring that students have the requisite skills needed for success in the program and that they continue to enhance their skills as they move through the major. In recent years the department has shifted away from requiring prerequisite technology skills and moved towards a focus on enhancing skill development while enrolled in the program.

As a requirement for admission to the Human Services Program (prior to 2007) all successful applicants were required to demonstrate computer competency in the areas of word processing, spreadsheets, and basic database management.¹ Evidence of technology competency was provided in the form of previous coursework or letters from employers documenting that these skills had been demonstrated on the job. Applicants who could not demonstrate that they met minimum requirements were placed on a provisional admissions contract and were not fully admitted in to the program until they successfully completed IT 344 at WWU or a comparable course at another institution.

In recent years the Department of Human Services and Rehabilitation has expressed interest in examining alternative ways of collecting evidence to demonstrate basic technology competence. As part of a pilot project all applicants for Fall 2006 admission were required to complete the *Computer Competency Self Assessment Survey*, developed by program faculty. Given the Program's assumption (at that time) that basic technology skills are a prerequisite for academic success, it was expected that students who self-reported advanced technology skills in word processing and database management would be more successful academically, as indicated by cumulative GPA, than students who possessed limited skills in word processing and database management.

The following question was addressed:

Are there significant differences in cumulative GPA after one year in the Human Services Program for students who report advanced word processing and database management skills in comparison to students who report no skills or beginner level skills in these two areas of computer competency?

Participants:

A total of 87 applicants to the Human Services Program for Fall 2006 completed the *Computer Competency Self-Assessment Survey* and reported on knowledge and skills in such areas as word processing, email, spreadsheets, databases, virus protection, and powerpoint. Applicants represented all 4 Human Services program sites: Bellingham, Bremerton, Cyber, and Everett.

¹ This follows the ACC motion (passed 4.10.84) "The ACC proposes that students achieve competency in the use of computers in their disciplines and urges departments to define such competencies for the 1985-87 catalog.

All of the applicants reported intermediate or advanced level email skills, with the exception of one student who reported being unsure about how to attach a file to an email. While most applicants reported intermediate to advanced level word processing skills, eighteen of the 87 applicants (Bham=4, Cy=2, Br=5, Ev=7) reported no skills or beginning level skills for more than one word processing task (i.e. page inserts, headers/footers). Additionally, this same group of 18 students also reported no skills or beginner level skills in database management. Cumulative grade point averages for this group of 18 students was collected at the beginning of their second year in the Program (spring 2007; analyzed 2008). Similarly, cumulative GPAs were collected for a second group of students (matched by program location) who reported advanced level word processing and database management skills.

Results:

A t-test analysis compared the GPAs for 18 students who reported no skills or beginner-level skills in word processing and database management with GPA's for the 17 students who reported primarily advanced level skills in word processing and data base management. As indicated in Table 1, no significant differences in mean GPA were found between the two groups of students (t= .67, p-value= .51).

TABLE 1: Self Reports of Technology Competence in Relation to GPA (Mean and SD)

Self Rating- Low on Word Processing and Data Bases (N=18)	Self Rating- High on Word Processing and Data Bases (N=17)**
Mean GPA= 3.39	Mean GPA= 3.30
SD= .44	SD=.43
GPA Range= 2.6-3.87	GPA Range= 2.7 – 4.0

**Note: 1 student in this group dropped out of the program reducing the sample to 17

Implications, Questions, and Outcomes:

Overall, findings indicated that cumulative GPA's after the first year in the Human Services Program do not differ for students who report that they do not possess basic word processing and database management skills as compared with students who report advanced level skills in these two areas of technology competence. Results were not a function of restricted range in GPA.

These findings led the Department to address the following questions, with associated outcomes:

1. Should basic computer competency skills remain a requirement for admission to the Human Services Program? If so, what is the best measure of computer competency (self assessment, previous coursework, work experience, or some other measure)?

Outcome: After some discussion faculty determined that computer competency skills will no longer be a requisite for admission to the Human Services major. However, they also concluded that it is important for students to assess their technology skills prior to program entry and to seek appropriate remediation, when necessary. In 2008 a faculty work team redesigned the technology self-assessment, which is now completed by all students who apply to the program (available at: <http://www.wce.wvu.edu/Depts/HS/Admission/program.shtml>). New students are now directed to free online training modules that they are encouraged to complete prior to beginning the program <http://www.wce.wvu.edu/Depts/HS/TechSupport/>

2. What types of technology skills do we want students to possess at the point of graduation? Do we want to build technology more intentionally in to coursework and the Assessment Plan?

Outcome: Technology skills (based on ISTE standards) were built into the human services assessment plan and are assessed in the capstone portfolio benchmark assessment.

Ongoing Issues and Goals Related to Student Technology for 2009-2010:

1. The Department will determine if ISTE standards are indeed the most appropriate method of determining technology benchmarks. Some recent work has been conducted looking at requisite technology skills for success as a human services professional. The Department will review this literature to determine if a new set of standards may be more appropriately incorporated into the HS assessment plan.
2. The Department is in the process of examining the correlation between GPA (after completing the first year in the program) and overall scores on the revised technology self assessment.
3. Student exit surveys conducted in Spring 2009 (Bellingham site) indicate that students report that they have not acquired additional significant technology skills while enrolled in the major. While many students in Bellingham already possess relatively sophisticated technology skills when they enter the major, it is important to determine which skills are integral for success as a human services professional and make sure that these skills are integrated into the major. This project will be undertaken in 2010 and 2011.

Appendix C

Evaluation of the Human Services Capstone Portfolio Project

Evaluation of the Human Services Capstone Portfolio Project



By the Spring 2009 Program Planning & Evaluation class

Jn 2006, the Human Services Program moved to a curriculum designed to meet the Standards set forth by the Council for Standards in Human Service Education (CSHSE). During this revision, the decision was made to assess student learning through a capstone portfolio. While most human service programs in the US require students to complete a portfolio showing their accomplishments over the program, Western Washington University is unique in requiring a standards-based portfolio.² The portfolio is designed as a culminating benchmark assessment to evaluate students' mastery of the CSHSE Standards (see Appendix A for details of the Standards).

THE CAPSTONE PORTFOLIO PROCESS

During the program, students are required to take two courses related to the portfolio: HSP 304, Introduction to Portfolio Learning, and HSP 495, Capstone Portfolio. The first portfolio class, HSP 304, is required within the first five credits of the two-year program. The course objective is to outline expectations for the capstone portfolio and offer an introduction to CSHSE standards. The final portfolio course, HSP 495, taken within the last five credits of the program, is designed to support students in compiling their final product. During HSP 495, students are asked to write essays for each Standard, describing how program coursework and field experience led to their mastery of the Standard. Essays on professional development, critical thinking, writing proficiency, technology, and

² *Thanks to Susan Kincaid and Jackie Baker-Sennett for background information and photos. Also thanks to Diana Jones for the photograph of the 2009 Portfolio Walk-A-Bout.*

information management are required. A statement of helping, a statement of purpose, and a self-introduction are also included in the portfolio in order to provide professors and the audience with a sense of the students' individuality and professional values.

It was strongly encouraged in HSP 304 that students remember to look for linkages between future course work and CSHSE standards. Teachers included course-related Standards in each of their syllabi and identified assignments that could be used as evidence in the capstone portfolio. It was the responsibility of each student to update and manage their course work and portfolio evidence throughout the two year program. Upon the completion of HSP 495, students were asked to present and share their completed capstone portfolio with peers, future graduates, and professors.

EVALUATING THE CAPSTONE PORTFOLIO REQUIREMENT

During Spring quarter of 2009, Raine Dozier's Bellingham section of HSP 485, Human Services and Program Planning and Evaluation, chose to evaluate the capstone portfolio process for a final class project. Anecdotal evidence suggested that students were dissatisfied with the capstone process. This inspired the class to use course-related knowledge to complete a comprehensive evaluation of the capstone portfolio process. Students discussed methods for completing this project and determined that surveys, interviews and focus groups would provide a well-rounded evaluation of the capstone portfolio. Students participated in one of the data-collection groups based on their personal interests and strengths. One student was designated to be a liaison between the professor and students, as well

as provide support in the write-up process. Over the course of four weeks, students created survey, focus group, and interview questions that would be used to gather data. Questions went through a writing and revision process including test questions on other class members. Each group was responsible for distributing surveys and conducting interviews and focus groups before the final portfolio presentations. Information on study design and data compilation can be found in the following section.

SAMPLE & DATA INSTRUMENTS

The population of interest was students involved in the portfolio process and instructors of HSP 495, the final portfolio course. The sample for this evaluation included four HSP 495 instructors, one from Everett and three from Bellingham, and students from the three Bellingham senior core classes. Our survey and focus group sample is limited to Bellingham students.

Surveys

We created a survey that was administered to students in all senior core classes on the Bellingham campus (see Appendix B). In addition, the survey was replicated on Survey Monkey and the instructor in Everett encouraged her students to participate. Unfortunately, only one student responded during our data collection time frame thus we only evaluated student surveys from the Bellingham site. Since the off-campus sites have more adult learners and a different teaching style, it is possible that students' perceptions would differ between sites. Unfortunately, we were not able to analyze differences between sites. There were 48 surveys conducted in total.

The survey consisted of seven scaled questions, four agree/disagree questions and four open-ended questions that covered a variety of topics including different aspects of the process of creating the portfolio from start to finish, the Standards and teachers' conveyance of them, student preparation, and workload. The survey contained the three open-ended questions from the previous survey in Spring 2009 and the additional question, "Do you have any ideas of other ways to evaluate your mastery of the standards?" (See Appendix B).

Data was recorded in an Excel spreadsheet. Subject categories of common themes were developed for the open-ended questions, then responses were coded into thematic categories in an Excel format.

Focus Groups

Focus group questions were developed in order to explore general perceptions about the capstone portfolio process in more depth (see Appendix C). In addition, questions solicited suggestions for improvement. Two focus groups were scheduled and members were recruited from each core class. Three students from each of the three classes volunteered to participate in one of two focus groups, for a total of nine for each group. Five students attended the Wednesday group. Unfortunately, the second focus group was scheduled after the portfolio walk-a-about on Thursday and only two respondents attended. In total, seven students participated in the focus groups.

These focus groups were conducted with two recorders recording non-verbal cues and verbal dialogue as well as a facilitator who probed open-ended questions and dialogue. The focus groups were audio recorded and later transcribed. Researchers first

developed thematic categories from the focus group questions, then responses were coded into thematic categories in an Excel format. The coded data was then summarized and direct quotes were used to emphasize students' points.

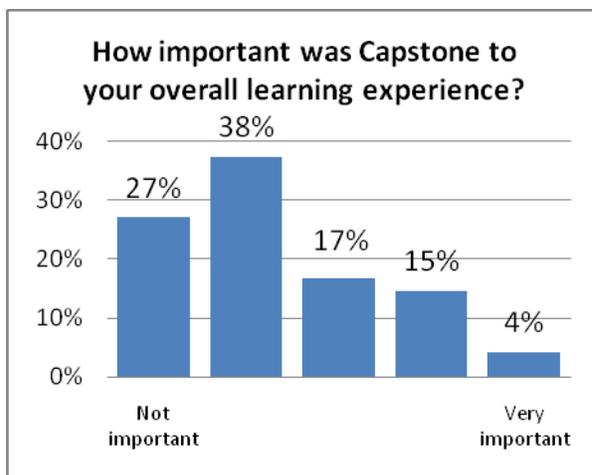
Interviews

While all interviews with instructors were asked similar questions, two of the

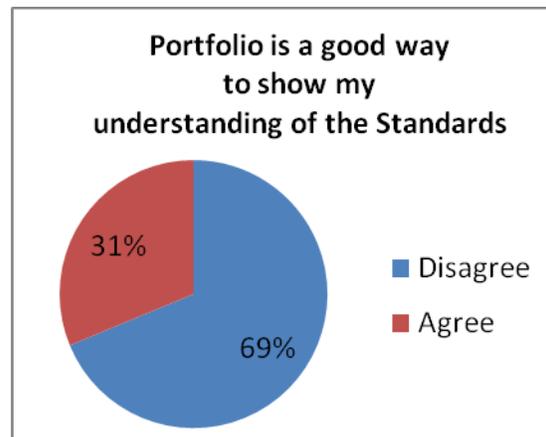
interviews had additional questions (see Appendix D). Jackie Baker-Sennett and Susan Kincaid were identified as being involved with the planning and creation of the courses and the portfolio process and were asked a few additional questions (see Appendix D). Interviewers summarized interviews with instructors during the interview process. Later, a group of students analyzed these notes for themes.

RESULTS

Beliefs and Attitudes About the Capstone Project



Graph 1



Graph 2

The survey data in Graph 1 indicate that approximately two thirds of participating students believed the capstone portfolio was not important to their overall learning experience. Students felt the portfolio process might have been more meaningful if it were spread out throughout the two-year program. According to Graph 1 above, only four percent of the students that participated in the survey thought that the capstone portfolio was important to their overall learning experience. Another survey

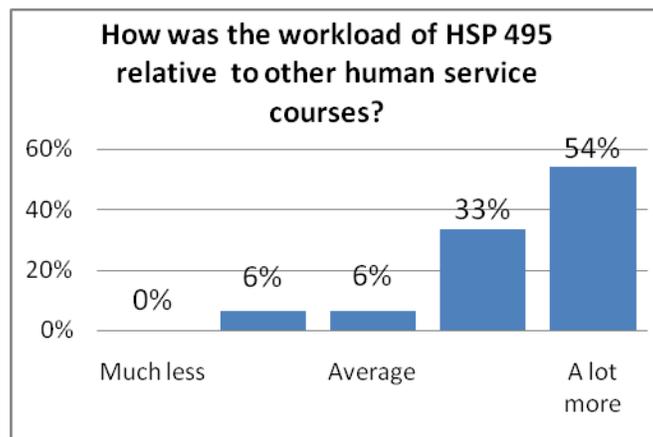
question asked whether the portfolio was a good way to show their understanding of the Standards (see Graph 2). Students did see more direct benefit in illustrating their mastery of the Standards relative to contributing to their general learning experience. Still, only thirty percent believed that the portfolio was a good way to show their understanding of the Standards.

“It only helped me reminisce. It did not help me gain any other deeper understanding of the Standards or my learning.”

In response to the open-ended survey questions, students reported that the portfolio process was largely unhelpful. Seventy percent reported that the portfolio process was unhelpful in some way, and half of those (35%) said it was completely unhelpful. Approximately one quarter felt that it was a helpful and valuable process. Two students explicitly stated that other

coursework suffered at the expense of the portfolio process; one student wrote, “My other course grade suffered because of the time it took to pull this information together.” Graph 3 (below) indicates that students felt the portfolio workload was a great burden. Almost all (87%) felt that the workload for HSP 495 was higher or much higher in relation to other human service courses.

Focus group participants also talked about the heavy workload in HSP 495. Participants reported the stressfulness of the class and that the workload did not accurately represent the credits given. “I think the worst thing is that I missed out on other classes because I had to do portfolio.”



Graph 3

Focus group participants generally expressed frustration with the process, saying that the writing felt redundant and did not necessarily contribute to their learning. Students believed that the portfolio process was helpful in the sense that it allowed them an opportunity to review their learning and make connections across courses. They also reported that the intensity of writing did not equate to the value of learning. They felt that it was somewhat

redundant in that it was simply unnecessary duplicated reflection with too much time was spent writing and compiling the essays.

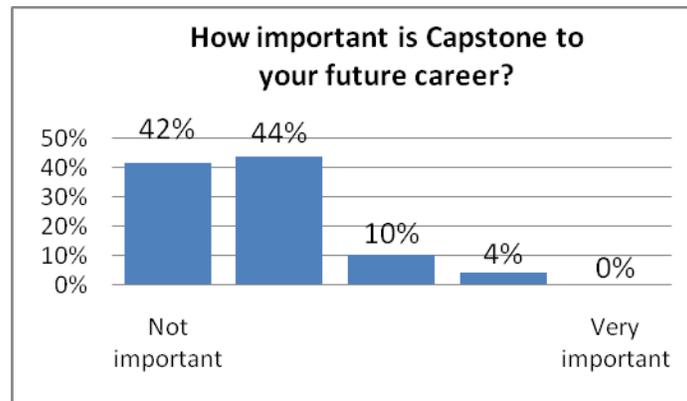
A majority of the participants in both focus groups felt the capstone portfolio class was repetitive, un-meaningful, and resembled unnecessary busy work. Despite the feeling it was time-consuming and required immense effort, participants enjoyed reminiscing and reflecting on the work

“My other course grade suffered because of the time it took to pull this information together.”

during the program. For the majority, it instilled something meaningful to present upon graduation. To this end, many participants suggested restructuring the class so it progresses throughout the program, helping prepare students much more in advance for the capstone class in order to prevent an immense workload for the final quarter in the program.

Many participants expressed an overall favorable experience with capstone and acknowledged the importance of having an overarching, reflective capstone project to complete the human services program.

However, these statements were followed by more negative judgments. Most expressed feelings of frustration and irritation at the portfolio project, and added it was incredibly repetitive. One participant said, “It’s probably one of the most frustrating assignments I’ve been given in this program.” They also highlighted the intensity of writing as a key issue with the portfolio, citing it as too much work and contributing to the repetitiveness of the process. Three of the participants also disliked the emphasis on the Standards.



Graph 4

Graph 4 indicates that no students felt that portfolio would be very important to their future career and the great majority (86%) of students judged it as not important to their future career. Students from the focus groups believed that unless their future employers actually came from the Western Washington University Human Services Program, they would not fully understand the format of the capstone portfolio. One focus group participant captured this essence saying, “...unless they’ve come from the program, they’re not going to understand the format.” Participants who implied the

capstone portfolio would contribute to their future career said the project allowed for self-awareness of strengths.

The following quotes highlight differing views of focus group participants:

“I think I might take bits of it to use, but to

“I think I might take bits of it to use, but to show my employer the whole thing, no way.”

show my employer the whole thing, no way.”

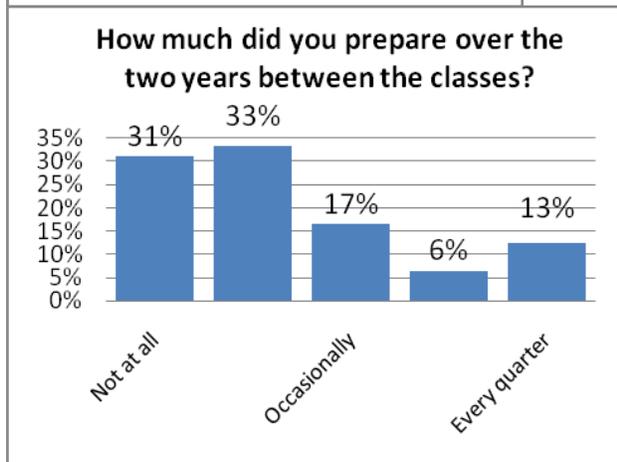
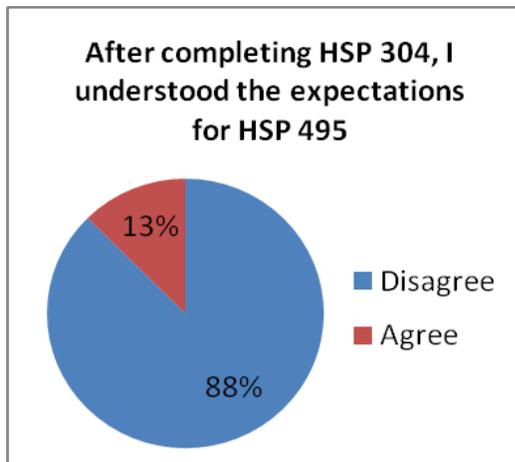
“I showed my portfolio with members from the community and many of them didn’t know what it was. They didn’t quite get it...I had to explain it to them. It’d be the same with an employer, they could read about the standards but I’ll still have to explain it to them.”

“I don’t think there is enough structure in it to show what you actually did.”

The assumption made by the participants is the capstone portfolio’s format is not relevant for organizations and/or community members outside the human services program. Participants favored a restructuring of the capstone portfolio making it more feasible and friendly for individuals outside the human services program.



Preparing for the Capstone Portfolio Project



Graph 5

Upon entering the final capstone portfolio course, students generally felt unprepared. The course is offered in their final quarter when they are expected to finish their capstone portfolio. Most students did not feel that upon completion of their initial course (HSP 304), they clearly understood the task ahead. Graph 5 shows that almost all students (88 %) said that they did not understand the expectations for HSP 495 after completing HSP 304. In response to the open-ended questions, three quarters of students reported that HSP 304 was not valuable to their completion of the portfolio because, after completing HSP 304, they

Graph 6

were still unsure of what to expect from HSP 495.

Focus group participants report that they did not understand the Standards well enough before the final course. They felt professors could have reviewed the Standards better in each class to demonstrate how they connected to the portfolio besides including them in their syllabus. “They have to write them in the

“I wasn’t sure what the format was going to be for portfolio; I wasn’t sure how to organize it, by class or what.....”

syllabi but they need to get all the teachers on board to relate them to us.”

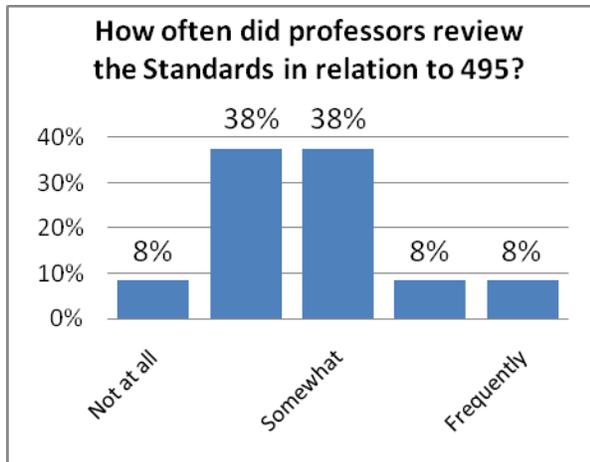
Almost two thirds of respondents prepared little or not at all for their portfolios over the two years between HSP 304 and HSP 495 (see Graph 6). Focus group respondents support this claim. While each participant saved assignments either by computer or a file system, very few actually went beyond this. The majority of the participants felt they did not understand the portfolio enough to begin creating or preparing one. Even though each participant completed the initial portfolio class (HSP 304), participants felt it did not sufficiently explain the purpose and function of the portfolio. One participant said, “I wasn’t sure what the format was going to be for portfolio; I wasn’t sure how to organize it, by class or what.....We are never prepared or told how to organize these things.” The general opinion of

the focus group participants was that they did not leave HSP 304 with a clear understanding of how to develop a portfolio.

One of the survey’s open-ended questions asked students how HSP 304 and HSP 495

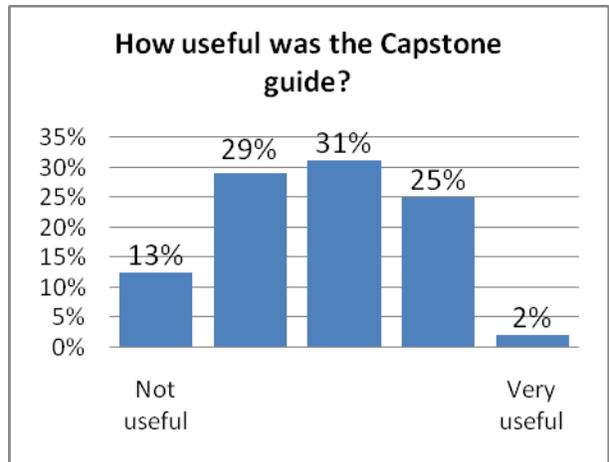
courses were valuable or not so valuable in helping them complete their portfolio. Roughly three quarters of respondents found HSP 304 to be unhelpful in assisting them with the completion of their capstone portfolio. About half of the participants (47%) found HSP 495 to be helpful, mainly because of the opportunity it provided to receive peer and instructor feedback on the essays about the Standards. One student responded: “304 wasn’t very helpful because we had just entered the program and didn’t know what human services was, let alone the Standards. 495 was helpful for editing, but not much else. The work in the course all needed to be completed individually so the class time felt unnecessary.” Students also reported that the initial class was unhelpful because it did not provide enough information on the Standards. Overall, students were dissatisfied with HSP 304 because they did not have clear expectations from the course or the capstone assignment.

On a positive note, students did find the peer editing process used in HSP 495 useful in refining their essays.



Graph 7

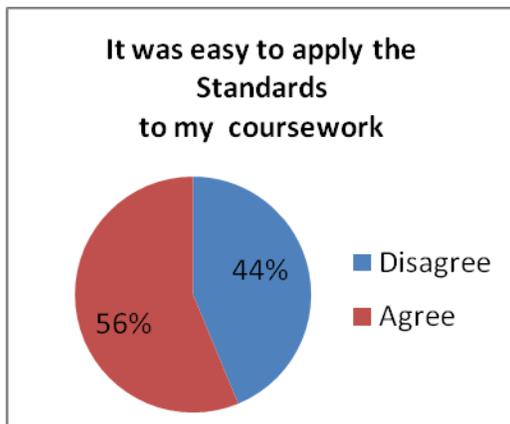
Students fared a bit better in seeking outside support for their portfolio process. They reported that over half of professors reviewed the Standards in relation to HSP 495 “somewhat” to “frequently” (see Graph 7) In addition to this, the capstone portfolio guide appeared to be somewhat useful with students answers hovering in the middle of



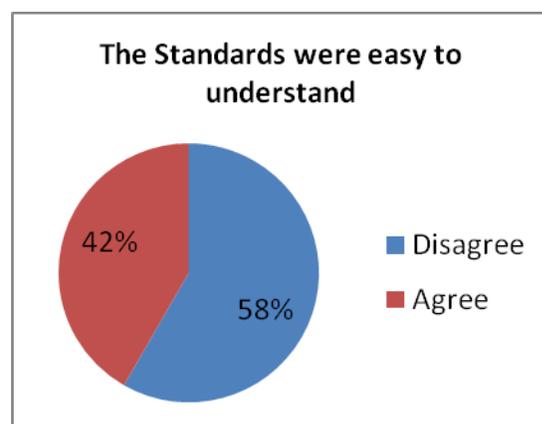
Graph 8

the five-point scale (see Graph 8). Generally, they found the guide somewhat useful. Overall, survey responses express a significant lack of preparation by students, HSP 304, and professors before students begin the capstone portfolio class in their final quarter.

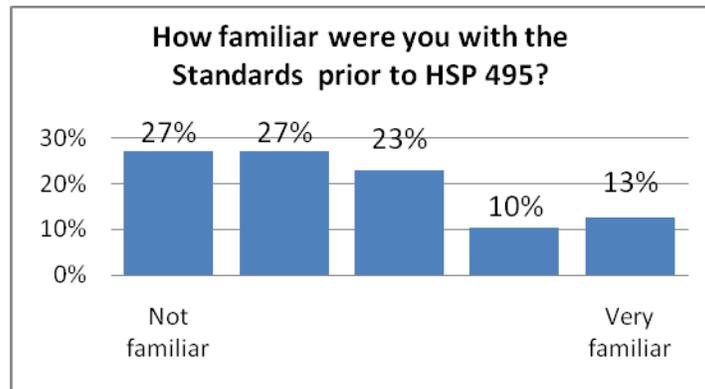
Knowledge of the Standards



Graph 9



Graph 10



Graph 11

More than half of the students questioned, said it was easy to apply the Standards to their coursework (see Graph 9). However, because of the wording of the question, it is not clear whether they found it easy to apply the Standards to their portfolio or simply saw the connections between the Standards

and their coursework more generally. The majority of the students reported that the Standards were difficult to understand and did not feel familiar to them until HSP 495 (see Graphs 10 & 11). Less than a quarter felt familiar or very familiar with the Standards prior to HSP 495.

Improving the Portfolio Process

In an open-ended survey question, students were asked for suggestions to improve the portfolio development process. Most people believed that, in order to improve the capstone process, the portfolio should be consistently worked on throughout the program. This could be accomplished by having another portfolio class or smaller classes across the final year of the program, having 304 in the middle of the program (closer to capstone), or by compiling the portfolio from previous work and essays during other classes. Two students write representative comments: “It should be a 2 credit class, all 3 quarters during senior year

so it is constantly being built upon” and “Integrate strategy for incorporating standard discussion consistently throughout 2 years.”

Focus group respondents supported the idea of a working on the portfolio process throughout the length of the program. They agreed that it should not be left to the last quarter, and that it would be potentially more beneficial to write a paper at the end of each class expressing how that class met certain standards.

Another portion of students advocated for only using artifacts to prove mastery of the Standards or getting rid of the capstone process altogether and finding another way to assess the learning of the students. One

student wrote “I’d like to be able to express my learning other than [through] writing.”

Another suggestion was to create a portfolio that could be used in career development rather than something useful just for evaluation by HSP faculty. A student commented, “More geared towards the personal growth of the student rather than the standard based.”

On an added note, focus group participants expressed anxiety that no one would show up to see their portfolios. They thought it would have been helpful to present them to juniors so that they could understand the portfolio better before the class. “I think we should have to go into the junior class. I mean we had no seniors to come in. I think it would have been really good to spend the class or half the class with seniors in our core.”

“It should be a 2 credit class, all 3 quarters during senior year so it is constantly being built upon.”

Overwhelmingly, the students suggested a different method of evaluating their completion of the program. The most common theme was that students felt that passing the classes and assignments was enough to support their own mastery of the Standards. One student wrote, “I think completion of the courses should be recognized as meeting the Standards. I understand the need for a final project in a way, but if the courses are building around the Standards then shouldn’t my grade signify that I met those requirements? I think we should be considering the Standards quarterly and have our final papers used as evidence of meeting the outlined Standards.” Although many of the students appeared to be dissatisfied, one student wrote, “No, this is a creative way to express our learning as we see fit.”

“I think completion of the courses should be recognized as meeting the standards...if the courses are building around the standards then shouldn’t my grade signify that I met those requirements?”

Alternatives to Portfolio-Based Assessment

Students were asked for any ideas of other ways to evaluate their mastery of the Standards in an open-ended survey question. Five main themes that characterized their suggestions: a benchmark or test, a final project, passing the classes, having the Standards incorporated throughout the program, and only compiling artifacts. Forty-two participants responded and many had more than one theme in their response.

Focus group participants also supported the idea of alternative projects. “A lot of the stuff we do in this program is hypothetical so if people actually put something real out there it would be really cool.” All five of the respondents in the first focus group suggested a more meaningful project for the capstone assessment. Many expressed distaste for the writing intensive nature of the portfolio and seemed in agreement for a community project or something benefiting others and while being valuable to their learning. For example, one participant said, “It’s important to have something at the end

of my experience here... I think there should be more flexibility in how we prove that we met the Standards.” Another participant mentioned students should be encouraged to study abroad and show their mastery of the Standards through a final project. This was met with many agreements from

Others in the group, despite the acknowledgment that its practicality is

“A lot of the stuff we do in this program is hypothetical so if people actually put something real out there, it would be really cool.”

questionable.

Perceptions of Teachers and Teacher-Planners

Overall, instructors believe the capstone process offers beneficial learning opportunities, but is in need of some changes. Several teachers believed it was important for students to engage in a deeper understanding of the Standards and spend more time reflecting on their overall learning in the program. They also stated that it is important to continually evaluate the capstone process and make changes as recommended by the students and faculty.

The three main themes, shared by most instructors, regarding the changes desired for the capstone portfolio process are regarding time, how to teach the class, and the need for more creative options. Instructors felt that the need to generate a portfolio within the seven week time constraint created a more impersonal, busy-work type of atmosphere. They suggested

that improvements could be made by changing how the class is taught.

Several instructors mentioned that teaching capstone was awkward, and they struggled with the best way to cover the Standards in class or whether it was even necessary due to students’ constant exposure to the Standards throughout the program.

Although instructors clearly recognize the value of the capstone process, they seemed to want to offer students additional creative options to demonstrate their learning and mastery of the Standards. Two concrete suggestions were to allow students to demonstrate learning over the course of the two year program and to offer more than one constructivist approach or design for the capstone project. So far, capstone has been a much formalized process that insures a professional display of Standard mastery, but the desire for changes indicates skepticism towards the portfolio’s overall suitability for this task.

Professors involved in the planning of the project were asked how they decided that capstone was the best way to demonstrate learning. Generally, they believed that the capstone portfolio shows evidence of the curriculum being learned which in turn gives accreditation to the program. The accreditation allows students to receive more financial aid.

The capstone portfolio is seen as a non-traditional, constructivist way to integrate ideas that have been learned throughout the years, as opposed to more traditional positivist mid-terms or a final examination. It was also conveyed how a Standards-based portfolio can help students who are applying for graduate school and jobs within the human service profession to display an air of professionalism.

Instructors were also asked about other possible ways to demonstrate mastery of the Standards. Some expressed ideas expressed were to engage in a community involvement project or offer students the choice to produce evidence of standard mastery in their own way (e.g. create a documentary, produce a photo-essay or web matrix).

Finally, instructors were asked how they believe students perceive the capstone process. Instructors in Everett and Bellingham believed students had mixed perceptions about the process. In Bellingham, the instructors felt as though the students were not especially appreciative of the capstone process. The most common frustration professors have recognized is with the design of the capstone course (HS 495). The students viewed the portfolio process in this course as busy work; the ideas were redundant and it was too much work for a seven week period. Instructors believed that students recognized the value of the portfolio, but many saw it just as a hoop to jump through and did not want to invest time in it.

In Everett, the instructor believed the students had a very different perception of the capstone process. The instructor stated although scared at the beginning of the course, their fears quickly diminished. In the end, her students find the process to be very interesting, and a good chance for reflection. She feels as though the capstone portfolio process is a celebration of accomplishment. Overall, professors believe that students are willing to acknowledge the value of bringing information together from various courses throughout the Human Service program, but are lacking enthusiasm during the progression.

Recommendations

After reviewing the feedback from the surveys, interviews and focus groups, we have a few recommendations to improve the capstone portfolio process. The recommendations fall into two categories: revising the capstone portfolio process and restructuring the evaluation process entirely.

Revisions

Among suggested revisions, many students felt that the HSP 495 course was too writing intensive. They left the writing and compilation of the portfolio until the final quarter of the program and became overwhelmed. Dispersing the work over the entire two years of the program would alleviate this problem. We recommend clearly reviewing the Standards and the applicable assignments that should be included in the portfolio at the end of each quarter. Another recommendation is to write some of the required essays during relevant courses. In addition, students did not seem to have a firm grasp of what the portfolio entails or how the Standards will relate to the portfolio before HSP 495. This should be clarified during HSP 304 and at other times during the two years. By spreading the work throughout the two years, the stress and workload for students during the final quarter would be reduced.

Restructuring the Evaluation Process

If possible, we recommend changing the process of assessment entirely by using alternative methods. Students suggested a final benchmark exam, a community service project, or a creative project such as a documentary/film or website. Another possible alternative assessment is to create a professional portfolio instead of a Standards-based capstone portfolio. This would allow students to reflect on their accomplishments while also preparing them to enter the profession by creating a tool to show potential employers.

APPENDIX A

The CSHSE Standards

Standard 11: The curriculum shall include the historical development of human services.

Standard 12: The curriculum shall include knowledge and theory of human systems, including individual, interpersonal, group, family, organizational, community, and societal and their interactions.

Standard 13: The curriculum shall address the conditions that promote or limit human functioning.

Standard 14: The curriculum shall provide knowledge and skill training in systematic analysis of service needs; selection of appropriate strategies, services, and interventions; and evaluation outcomes.

Standard 15: The curriculum shall provide knowledge and skills in information management.

Standard 16: the curriculum shall provide knowledge and skills in human services interventions that are appropriate to the level of education.

Standard 17: Learning experience shall be provided for the student to develop his or her interpersonal skills.

Standard 18: The curriculum shall provide knowledge, theory, and skills in the administrative aspects of the services delivery system.

Standard 19: The curriculum shall incorporate human services values and attitudes and promote understanding of human services ethics and their application in practice.

Standard 20: The program shall provide experiences and support to enable students to develop awareness of their own values, personalities, reaction patterns, interpersonal styles, and limitations.

Standard 21: The program shall provide field experience that is integrated with the curriculum.

Standard 22: The program shall award academic credit for the field experience.

Standard 23: It is the responsibility of the program to ensure that field placements provide quality supervised learning experiences.

APPENDIX B
Capstone Survey

Thank you for taking the time to complete our short survey. Your answers are anonymous and can in no way affect your grade.

- 1) How important do you feel the Capstone Portfolio is to your overall learning experience?

- 2) How important do you feel the Capstone Portfolio is to your future career?

- 3) How useful was the capstone guide in assisting your portfolio process in HSP 495?

- 4) How familiar were you with the Standards and their specifications prior to senior capstone portfolio class?

- 5) How would you rate the overall work load of HSP 495 in comparison to your other 4 credit human service courses?

- 6) How much did you prepare for your portfolio over the 2 years between the classes of HSP 304 and HSP 495?

- 7) How often did the professors review the standards in relation to HSP 495?

Circle one answer for the following questions:

- 8) After completing HSP 304 (Intro to Portfolio) I understood the expectations for HSP 495 (Capstone).

Disagree

Agree

9) The standards were easy to understand.

Disagree

Agree

10) It was easy to apply the standards to my coursework

Disagree

Agree

11) Portfolio is a good way to show my understanding of the standards

Disagree

Agree

12) Do you have ideas of other ways to evaluate your mastery of the standards?

13) How were the two portfolio courses, HSP 304 (Introduction to Portfolio Learning) and HSP 495 (Capstone Portfolio), valuable or not so valuable in helping you complete your portfolio?

14) How did the completion of your portfolio help (or not help) you pull your learning together over the course of 2+ years in the Human Services Program?

15) What suggestions do you have for improvement of the portfolio development process?

APPENDIX C
FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Did the first portfolio class prepare you for the final capstone portfolio class?
2. What steps did you take throughout the program to prepare for capstone portfolio?
3. How did the capstone portfolio contribute to your learning?
4. Do you believe that the capstone portfolio will be useful to your future career?
5. If there must be an overarching assessment of your knowledge and learning of the CSHSE Standards, can you think of other ways of demonstrating your knowledge and learning of the standards?
6. Do you have anything else you would like to say about the capstone portfolio?

APPENDIX D
INSTRUCTOR AND INSTRUCTOR-PLANNER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

For Faculty:

1. How do you feel your students are receiving the capstone process?
2. In your experience, what are the perceived challenges of portfolio for students?
3. Do you have a strong sense of the evaluation process?
4. Do you feel that a capstone evaluation is warranted at this time?
5. If you could change anything about the capstone process would you? What would it be?

Additional Questions for Planners:

1. What are your goals for students in this course?
2. Is it important for this program to exist for accreditation? How so in your opinion?
3. Do you feel that a capstone evaluation is warranted at this time?
4. If you could change anything about the capstone process would you? What would it be?