# 2015–2016 Student Feedback for Deanna Forsman: Learner Outcome Assessment

## Goal of Project

The goal of this project was to reduce student withdraw rates, reduce number of missing assignments, and increase student success.

## Description of Project

Normal assignment practice was followed in two courses taught Fall Semester 2016. Students were required to complete the following assignments:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | HIST 1200–01 (blended/hybrid) | HIST 1130–01 (face-to-face) |
| Primary Source Observations | 21 | 31 |
| Visual Source Observations | 21 | -- |
| In-Class Group Work | -- | 10 |
| Lab Reports | 4 | 3 |
| Synthesis Paragraphs | 3 | 3 |
| Timelines | -- | 3 |
| Exams | 2 | 2 |
| Total Assignments | 51 | 52 |

During the Spring semester, students were allowed to choose how they were evaluated. The first course period was dedicated to explaining the course outcomes, providing a brief description of types of assignments, and allowing students to work together in groups to discuss the ways they wanted to be assessed. Each proposal had to conform to the following expectations:

* All assignments had to assess more than content (no multiple choice testing was allowed as an option)
* The total value of all the assessments needed to add up to 100%
* Their assessment options had to include a final exam (but students could choose how much the final was worth)

Each student turned in a proposal. Proposals were collated, and students were given two options based on their collated proposals. Students then had the opportunity to vote on the proposals. After determining which proposal would apply to the class, students were able to choose the date assignments would be due.

Students chose the following:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | HIST 1110–01 (face-to-face) | HIST 1120–01 (face-to-face) |
| Primary Source Observations | 3 |  |
| In-Class Group Work | 9 | 7 |
| In-Class Quizzes | 5 | 4 |
| Lab Reports | 5 | 5 |
| Primary Source Analysis | 2 | 15 |
| Timelines | 2 | 4 |
| Exams | 1 | 1 |
| Total Assignments | 27 | 36 |

## Results

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| # of Students: | Fall 2015 | Spring 2016 |
| Registered (10th Day) | 77 | 48 |
| Who Withdrew | 28 (37%) | 11 (23%) |
| A | 2 (4%) | 5 (14%) |
| B | 13 (27%) | 10 (27%) |
| C | 10 (21%) | 9 (24%) |
| D | 7 (15%) | 4 (11%) |
| F | 16 (33%) | 9 (24%) |
| Proficient | 25 (52%) | 24 (65%) |
| Not Proficient | 23 (48%) | 13 (35%) |
| Missing Assignments | 43 (90%) | 31 (84%) |
| <10% | 21 (44%) | 19 (51%) |
| 11–25% | 11 (23%) | 5 (14%) |
| 26–50% | 8 (17%) | 11 (30%) |
| 51–75% | 4 (8%) | 2 (5%) |
| >75% | 4 (8%) | 1 (3%) |

## Discussion

Overall, the results indicate moderate to good success. While 37% of students withdrew during the Fall semester, 23% of students withdrew during the Spring semester. The percentage of withdrawing students was unevenly distributed between the two Spring classes, with eight students withdrawing from 1120 (30%) versus three students withdrawing from 1110 (14%). I suspect the significantly higher withdraw rate for 1120 was due to the number of assignments the students selected, which meant that they had up to three assignments a week (one in-class and two out of class), whereas 1110 had up to two assignments a week (one in-class and one out of class), and they had several weeks where they had no out-of-class assignment to complete. Student fatigue likely played a significant role.

Success rates show moderate improvement. Overall percentage of students who achieved proficiency in course outcomes were at 65% for the Spring, compared to 52% for Fall (the percentage is based on number of students who completed the course, and does not include students who withdrew). This was a key question of interest in allowing students to decide how they would be assessed: would they choose easy assessments that would reduce their likelihood of success.

Finally, the question I was most interested in was whether or not having students choose how frequently they wanted to be assessed affect the number of missed assignments. There was definite improvement in the percentage of students who were missing at least one assignment. During the Fall semester, 90% of students had one or more missing assignments, with 16% of students missing half of the assignments or more. During the Spring semester, 84% of the students were missing one or more assignments, and only 8% were missing half of the assignments or more. Seven students in 1110 had no missing assignments (37% of the class), compared to four students in 1120 who had no missing assignments (22% of the class). It would appear that the total number of assignments influences student ability to successfully complete a course. While it is possible to have no missing assignments and still not demonstrate proficiency, out of the eleven students with no missing assignments, only one was not proficient, and the rest all earned an A or B in the course.

One of the things I found very interesting in comparing across semesters was the effect of removing the Primary & Visual Source Observation assignment. This assignment was designed to ensure that students were completing all the reading and to give them practice collecting data that could be used in historical arguments. This was a very quick and easy assignment (assuming students completed the assigned reading), both for the students and for me to grade, and I noticed a significant improvement on students’ ability to perform well on the final exam after implementing this assignment. On the other hand, it seemed to contribute to student fatigue.

One of the assessments the students chose was the Primary Source Analysis, an assessment I had never before given. I found this assessment did an excellent job in encouraging students to think about documents as evidence for history, while also helping students to understand that history is not simply names and dates, but interpretation of people’s impressions, and helping students to recognize the limitations of our sources. I found myself adjusting my in-class group work assignments to more closely mirror the source analysis assignments because I liked how it seemed to encourage students to think like a historian more quickly than I’ve experienced in any other class.

One other significant difference I noticed in Spring compared to Fall is how well students did on the only exam. The average score on my midterm exam is consistently a D, largely because students do not prepare adequately for the exam. Based on the quality of exam responses, I strongly suspect that students rely on the fact that the exam is an open-book online exam to try to study as they take the exam, rather than preparing in advance. The average on the final is always consistently higher than the midterm. I was concerned that students would not do well on the final without having had an opportunity to practice on the midterm. However, only five students in Spring were not proficient (D or F) on the Final, and the majority of the students earned a B or A. In comparison during the Fall, twenty-one students were not proficient, and there were more Cs than higher grades.

One area where I was hoping to have gains was in retention of students of color. I did not see any significant change in this rate under this model.

## Next Steps

I will continue to offer students the ability to choose their own assessments in subsequent semesters, following the model I used this semester, but with the following adjustments:

* I will provide students more detailed descriptions of my assessments on D2L Brightspace and encourage them to read them before the first day of class.
* I will tell students that they cannot have more than ten of any one type of assignment, and no more than thirty total assignments.

Furthermore, I noticed a couple of significant gaps in my students’ thinking about people of the past, particularly in thinking about race. I would like to revise my curriculum to make it easier for me to problematize race and make my students think about it both more critically as a category and more historically, so that they have a better understanding of the construction of race and how ideas about race have developed and shifted over time.