Learning Outcomes Assessment Report

Inquiry & Communication 2024-25

This report details assessment of two SLOs for the Inquiry & Communication (INQ) courses in the Hollins Core Curriculum in 2024-25.

- SLO 1 Inquiry: students will be able to formulate their own questions about a particular topic, idea, or issue using appropriate methods of inquiry.
- SLO 3 Information Literacy: students will be able to identify, evaluate, use, and cite appropriate sources of information as needed for a particular line of inquiry.

Parameters and Timeline

INQ courses in 2024-25 were designed and taught by instructors from two of the university's faculty chapters: Arts & Humanities, and Social Sciences & Humanities. The rubrics used in the assessment had been developed in May 2024 by a group of faculty led by the Director of the Core Curriculum: the group used actual assignments and student work samples to develop, test, and then refine the rubrics. The assessment was coordinated by the Information Literacy Librarian, during the sabbatical of the Director of the Core Curriculum.

Instructors shared student work samples from 11 courses (see appendix I.) Because some students taking an INQ course have already fulfilled the INQ requirement, the assessment coordinator used a list provided by the registrar to identify work samples from those students for whom INQ was a current Core requirement. Those samples – 72 for SLO3 and 52 for SLO 1 – were anonymized and prepared for scoring. Scoring was completed by a group of faculty led by the Information Literacy Librarian in May 2025.

Assessment Design and Methods

The SLO1 rubric measured students' use of "appropriate methods of inquiry": first, by considering students' ability to create a query that is both relevant to their chosen topic and specific enough for their assignment. The rubric also measured authentic inquiry, i.e. the ability to ask questions beyond what is already known.

The SLO 3 rubric measured the sources students used: first, how many were relevant to the chosen topic; second, how many met quality standards set by the instructor. Finally, it

measured the quality of citations. For a high score of 4, all citations must allow the reader to identify the original source; they should also show understanding of source types, with only a few minor errors.

Fall INQ instructors were notified of the assessment requirements on September 30. The assessment goals, instructions, and rubrics were shared by email and via Teams; reminders were sent later in the semester. Spring INQ instructors were required to attend one of two November workshops which covered INQ goals and outcomes, along with instructions for collecting student work. Following the workshop, materials (including the assessment rubrics) were again shared with instructors.

Near the end of each semester the assessment coordinator contacted instructors to request a copy of the course syllabus and one assignment for each of the SLOs. In the case of unclear assignments, the coordinator contacted instructors to request clarification of the instructions provided to students. Finally, instructors were asked to submit copies of student work for those same assignments after the close of the semester.

Scoring

The team of five scorers included professors of Education, English, and History, the Information Literacy Librarian, and a second liaison librarian. All had direct experience with INQ courses except for one professor with experience in education, assessment design, and the new Core curriculum.

Scorers received lists of 10 anonymized student work samples each for SLOs 1 and 3; to ensure diversity these had been randomly selected from both semesters and across all INQ courses. The team also had access to course syllabi, assignments, and additional instructions provided to students regarding the number of sources to use, required types, citation style, etc.

Scorers first reviewed and discussed the SLO 3 rubric, then went through a process of norming: all worked on the same three samples which had been selected to represent a variety of levels of complexity. This was followed by a discussion to reach common understanding of categories and levels. Throughout the scoring process scorers worked together to resolve questions. This sequence was repeated for SLO 1.

Scoring for SLO 1 proved complex (also see *Limitations*). With fewer samples scorers still required more time and discussion to complete this part of the assessment.

Results

SLO 3: 48 samples scored

	4	3	2	1	0
Relevancy	42 – 88%	5 – 10%	1 – 2%		
Quality	38 – 80%	8 – 17%	2 – 3%		
Citation	31 – 65%	7 – 15%	5 – 10%	5 – 10%	

Ratings showed students performing best in the Relevancy category, with 88% using all sources relevant to their chosen topic and an additional 10% using mostly relevant sources. 1 student's work was deemed to have only some relevant sources.

In the category of Quality 80% of students followed criteria such as correct type, currency, and level of authority, for all sources; 17% did so for most sources. Only 3% of students' work was rated as having some sources meet criteria.

The lowest performing category was Citation: all citations met requirements in 65% of samples, while most citations met requirements in another 15%. The remaining 20% (10) was equally divided between some acceptable citations, and none.

SLO 1: 33 samples scored

	4	3	2	1	0
	12 – 36%	17 – 52%	4 – 12%		

Ratings proved more varied for SLO 1: 36% received a rating of 4, indicating such qualities as precise, well-defined scope and a coherent range of inquiry. 52% of students' work was deemed to be flawed in some way: either overly broad, or in need of better focus, or lacking definition. The remaining 12 % were coded as lacking significantly in focus and/or clarity.

Conclusions

In the area of Information Literacy (SLO3) it appears that students are performing well when it comes to identifying relevant sources of appropriate quality in their research assignments. The category of citation, which saw the most mixed results, is one area in which faculty could work on improving outcomes.

In the area of Inquiry (SLO1) the assessment team identified a significant number of work samples they considered flawed, i.e. lacking in appropriate scope or clarity.

Creating citations is a technical skill; developing a research question or other line of inquiry is less technical, but also a process in which discernment and reflection should lead to revision and refinement. For both, practice makes perfect, and it may be that the results indicate the need for students to have more time to practice in these areas.

Lastly, celebrating the positive, it appears that the current model of integrating information literacy instruction in INQ courses sets students up for success when it comes to selecting relevant, quality sources for their academic work.

Limitations

Following our initial norming discussion scorers each received a list of 10 samples per SLO. To include as many samples as possible, each sample was only scored once. Ideally, each sample would have been reviewed by multiple scorers to ensure fairness and validity of the results. This would have required additional time and staff availability.

There is always significant variety in how instructors implement SLOs when designing assignments. This variety also affects assessment. For example, the SLO 3 sample pool contained some projects created by individual students and others from groups; some bibliographies ranged from two or three sources to lists of 10 or more. Comparing these results in one set of samples somewhat muddies the conclusions we can draw.

Samples for SLO 1 were also diverse. Rather than isolating inquiry in a summative assignment, many instructors tend to address it as one step in a longer process. Unless students were required to record interim steps, it was difficult for scorers to assess how they may have developed the questions they were answering. Moreover, the topic proved inherently imprecise: scorers found it challenging to agree on the exact level, from 0-4, of specificity and coherence in the scope of an inquiry.

Finally, one category of instructors was not represented. All three adjunct instructors included the required class session with their liaison librarian and one also attended the faculty workshop, but none submitted their students' work. Based on discussion with their liaison librarian, it appears that the courses taught by adjunct instructors included either limited or (in the case of BUS 100) lacked assignments that aligned with the SLOs.

Recommendations

Recommendations for INQ instructor development include providing emphasis on citation: both suggestions on helping students to learn and practice, as well as clarification about the level of completeness expected from students' citations in a summative INQ assignment.

For Inquiry, given the significant variation in this year's assignments, one course of action might be to provide opportunities for faculty to share how they incorporate this into their teaching. This could help instructors develop better assignments; it could also help the coordinator develop better understanding of the different expressions of inquiry across the disciplines.

Opportunities for instructors to share and co-create could be increased with a redesign of the workshop. If content such as Core information, SLOs, and assessment structure are provided to instructors in a prerecorded video, workshop time could be used for a deeper dive into assignment design.

Because Inquiry proved particularly challenging for the assessment team, it might also be possible to explore an alternate method of assessment: one in which instructors assess their students' work instead. While this approach reduces centralized control of the process, it might increase instructor engagement with, and understanding of, the SLOs.

Finally, additional suggestions for improving the assessment process include adding scored samples to the rubrics when they are shared with instructors.

Appendix I: INQ Courses 2024-25

Fall 24	BLI 220	Decision-Making Strategies	Schnurman
	BUS 100	Introduction to Business	Strom
	PH 101	Introduction to Public Health	Jalloh
	REL 126	Intro to Religion in Global Context	Larson-Harris
Spring 25	BLI 220	Decision-Making Strategies	Schnurman
	BUS 100-1	Introduction to Business	Roberts
	BUS 100-2	Introduction to Business	Strom
	ENG 151	Close Reading, Critical Writing Mixtape	Sharp
	ENG 151	CR, CW: Books on the Beach	Sumra
	ENG 151	CR, CW: Concept of the Hero	Milan
	ENG 151/150	CR, CW: Environmental Literature	Larios
	HIST 117	History of American Poverty	Florio
	HUM 150	Quotidian in French Art, Lit, Culture	Trumbo-Tual

	MUS 150	Introduction to Video Game Music	Fouts
	PHIL 181	Contemporary Moral Issues	Lowney
	GWS 150	Eureka! Social Study of Science	Breitwieser

Not included in Assessment

Fall 24	BUS 100	SLO 1, 3	No work samples received.
	REL 126	SLO 1, 3	No work samples received.
Spring 25	BUS 100-1	SLO 1, 3	No work samples received.
	BUS 100-2	SLO 1, 3	No work samples received.
	HUM 150	SLO 1, 3	Coordinator error.
	MUS 150	SLO 1	No distinct assignment.
	PHIL 181	SLO 1	No summative assignment.

Appendix II: SLO 1 Rubric 2023-24

SLO 1: Inquiry

*Students will be able to formulate their own questions about a particular topic, idea, or issue using appropriate methods of inquiry.**

This SLO has two main parts:

1). Students are exploring a specific topic, idea, or issue that is relevant to the course (they are defining a scope of some kind)

2). Students are engaging in *authentic* inquiry about that topic. In other words, they are not simply stating what they already know/have already concluded. As part of the process of inquiry, they might be posing questions or stating the line of inquiry in other ways.

*"Appropriate methods of inquiry" refers to different disciplinary methods as well as the methods outlined for the particular course. For example, if an instructor has specified students need to do go beyond course readings and do "research," that would be part of the appropriate method of inquiry).

By "scope" we mean an attempt to narrow the focus of inquiry.

Tip for assessment: if a student submits multiple topic ideas, we should assess their best topic (in other words, can they define a precise focus and paths of inquiry on the same topic).

4	3	2	1	0

Topic, idea, or issue to be explored has a precise (focused) and coherent scope; paths of inquiry are well-defined and even creative. Precise/focused = student has made effort to narrow the scope Coherent = different parts of topic, idea, or issue to be explored complement each other, rather than going in too many different directions. Creative = given that this is a 4, student has exhibited a path of inquiry into a topic that goes beyond what might be expected	Topic, idea, or issue to be explored has somewhat of a scope, but it may be too broad or different parts may not complement each other well or may go in different directions; paths of inquiry are thoughtful but may need further definition and precision.	Student describes a topic, idea, or issue, but it lacks sufficient focus; path of inquiry is unclear or insufficiently developed (for example, conclusions may have already been drawn before inquiry has happened).	Student describes general themes (perhaps related to course content or methods) but does not identify a particular topic to explore; paths of inquiry are not identified or are unclear/muddled.	Does not identify a specific topic or question

Appendix III: SLO 3 Rubric 2023-24

SLO 3: Information Literacy Students will be able to identify, evaluate, use, and cite appropriate sources of information as needed for a particular line of inquiry.	4	3	2	1	0

Relevancy All, most, etc. should be in proportion to # of sources required in assignment. If sample does not include required number of sources, that may limit how high a sample may score.	All sources identified are relevant	Most sources identified are relevant	Some sources identified are relevant	Sources identified are not relevant	
Quality of sources Based on criteria provided in assignment for evaluating sources (e.g., authority, currency, audience, bias, peer-reviewed, etc.)	All sources identified follow criteria for assignment	Most sources identified follow criteria for assignment	Some sources identified follow criteria for assignment	Sources identified do not follow criteria for assignment	
Citation	All citations contain enough information for source to be identified and to demonstrate understanding of different source types based on citation elements. Errors are minor and do not impact understanding of the citation.	All citations contain enough information for source to be identified; citations also show understanding of different source types based on citation elements but include numerous errors.	Some citations contain enough information for source to be identified (other citations may be indecipherable), but overall, citations do not show understanding of different source types based on citation elements.	Citations are indecipherable based on the information provided (e.g., difficult to tell what the source is just by reading the bibliography – perhaps it includes only a URL without other identifying information	