

Explorations Assessment Meeting: Report

Please fill out this report based on your department's conversation and return via e-mail to Megan Leonard or Sasha Pfau by May 31, 2017.

Summary of past decisions

Please summarize up to three changes to Explorations made since the last HLC visit (08-09), the impetus for those changes, and any changes to information gathering about student development. Please share any evidence you have of the success or failure of these changes.

- Beginning with the Fall 2015 semester, Explorations shifted to a model where each class was made up of a single CNSA advising cohort, most often taught by that advisor. This was a decision made by the entire faculty, and was an attempt to more closely tie the Explorations class to advising. In the two years since this change, both student and faculty evaluations of the course have indicated that advisors and students see a strong mentoring relationship. In recruiting faculty for the course, many have specifically stated that they wish to teach Explorations only when they are also the academic advisor. Nearly all advisors who have taught the revised course now said this helped them in many aspects of advising and feel they know their advisees much better.
- In parallel with the above change, the curriculum has shifted focus way from specific academic content designed to solve specific issues with first year students identified by other constituencies on campus to a model focused on fostering the mentoring relationship between the instructor – often the advisor, though not always – and the student, as well as an stronger emphasis on thinking about vocational/career exploration. Again, evaluations indicate that the mentorship part of this has gone quite well, but there are two issues: Instructors who are *not* the advisor indicate that they do not always feel this closer relationship, and the student evaluation about major and vocational discernment has been the lowest rated each of the past two years.
- Finally, this change has encouraged a much wider variety of faculty to teach Explorations. For the three years before the change, we had 27 distinct individuals teach the course (61 sections) – 4 of them were first time ones. For the past two year, as well as the upcoming, 57 distinct individuals have taught at least once (90 sections) – 33 were first timers. Explorations is not being taught by the same cadre of ~20-25 folks every year any more.

Looking forward

Please summarize Explorations' focus for student development and your evaluation methods.

- Vocational discernment and selecting a major has been a consistent weak point on student evaluations. It is unclear to us what the underlying cause is, due to the single student evaluation question's conflation of these two. We plan to both make sure to emphasize and simplify the language of vocational discernment, and also separate the question in future evaluations. We will then respond accordingly.
- We are still in a period of "settling in" after the large transition mentioned above. We believe that the curriculum is strong and we hope to make only minor changes for the next few years. In addition, this both simplifies instructors' transitioning into the course – they can borrow materials and ideas from colleagues who taught previously – and instructors who teach regularly

gain the benefit of being able to refine lesson plans from past years, rather than have to work with new curriculum each year.

Achieving Explorations' goals for students

The Explorations Learning Goals have not been rewritten since the change. During our meeting, we started talking about them, and eventually rewrote them to:

1. To assist first year students in making a successful transition to academic and student life at Hendrix.
2. To assist first year students in developing your capacity to reflect critically on their values, interests, and abilities as related to academic and student life at Hendrix.

We achieve LG1 by: Our suite of Navigating New Communities part of the curriculum (Liberal Arts, Academic Etiquette, Academic Integrity, Social Conduct). We ask our students to write journal entries, some of whose prompts are centered on checking on how they are adjusting to their academic and student life at Hendrix. Finally, we also require each student to meet with their academic advisor during the fourth week of classes; this assignment includes a reflective writing component.

We achieve LG2 by: A day spent on Career and Vocation, covering the General Education requirements, as well as introducing the Odyssey program. Again, some journal prompts cover these topics as well, requiring students to write reflectively on their experiences and how they see themselves in the future.

Your department's role in achieving the college's shared goals for students

Please explain how Explorations' learning goals contribute to the Vision for Student Learning Goals. Feel free to attach a map or other supporting documents.

See the attached map of how our curriculum/goals support parts of the VSL.