



2021 Assessment Report

May 30, 2021

Overview

This report summarizes the assessment of [The Odyssey Program Learning Goals](#), as outlined in the Program's Student Assessment Plan. While we provide information on all four goals, we pay particular attention to Learning Goal 3, which states:

Development of a sense of ownership over one's educational pursuits and of the habits conducive to life-long learning by:

- *independently structuring educational projects in accordance with self-selected learning goals*
- *applying previous learning to new contexts in creative and novel ways*
- *discovering unforeseen connections among disciplines, schools of thought, or social practices,*
- *learning to learn from critical reflection upon both success and failure.*

Three instruments were used for assessment purposes:

- Completion Form Survey (indirect assessment): This is a two-question survey that was added to the standard Odyssey Project Completion Form. See Appendix A for the instrument.
- Odyssey distinction application (direct assessment): This assessment tool asks graduating seniors eligible for distinction to elaborate on their experience with the program. Instead of in-person unstructured interviews, this year we shifted to short-answers submitted online (Appendix C). In particular, we analyzed responses to Questions 6 and 8 that relate directly to Learning Goal 2. See Appendix B for the instrument.
- Focus Groups (direct assessment): This assessment activity included faculty- and staff-led conversations with two groups of graduating seniors that participated in two pilot projects: The Hendrix Multicultural Awareness Project (H-Map), and the Volunteer Action Committee (VAC) senior project. See Appendix C for the discussion guide used to facilitate the conversations.

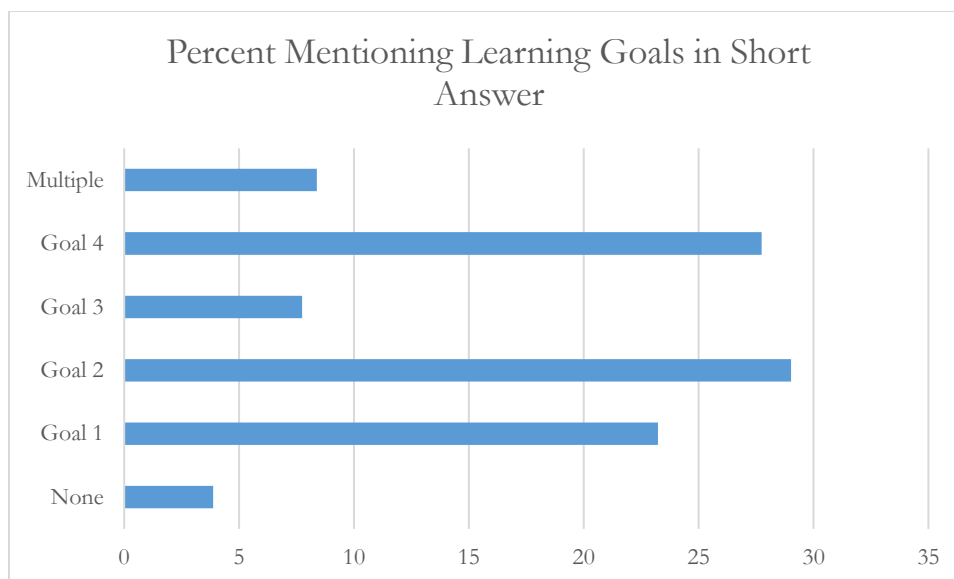
Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, we did not conduct our annual Senior Dinner event. At the time of the writing of the report we also did not have information from the Senior Exit Survey.

Summary of Results: Completion Form Survey Questions

In the past, the Odyssey Program has never implemented a survey-based approach to assessing the learning goals of the program. As a result of introducing an electronic completion form in 2020 and pandemic-imposed restrictions on our traditional Seniors Dinner assessment efforts, we decided to add two questions to our standard completion form that ask every student that has finished a pending Odyssey project to respond to a Likert-scale question listing the four learning goals and then elaborate on the one they find most relevant in short answer form.

Between March 19 and May 11, we got responses from 155 students that submitted completion forms to our office. The vast majority of students felt that their projects met the four learning goals, typically all at the same time, based on the Likert-scale question: the percentage of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that a learning goal was met ranged for 76 percent for Goal 2 (Vocational / Career Self-discovery) to 83 percent for Goal 1 (Enhancement of Learning), with between 0.5 and 6 percent of respondents indicating a particular learning goal was not applicable to their project.

The open-ended short answer asked students to elaborate on the goals that were most applicable to their project. [This spreadsheet](#) lists all responses, along with the learning goal that the response seemed to relate the most to, either as identified by the respondent or as coded by the Odyssey Office. Responses that engaged multiple learning goals were coded as “5”. If a learning goal was unclear, the response was coded as “0”.



In some ways, this was the more informative assessment of the two, since it revealed a fairly clear difference across the four learning goals. Most importantly, Goal 3 appeared to be the least likely for students to elaborate on when given the opportunity to do so. Answers also tended to be brief, even though some interesting examples of how students related to Goal 3 are listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Short Answers relating to Learning Goal 3

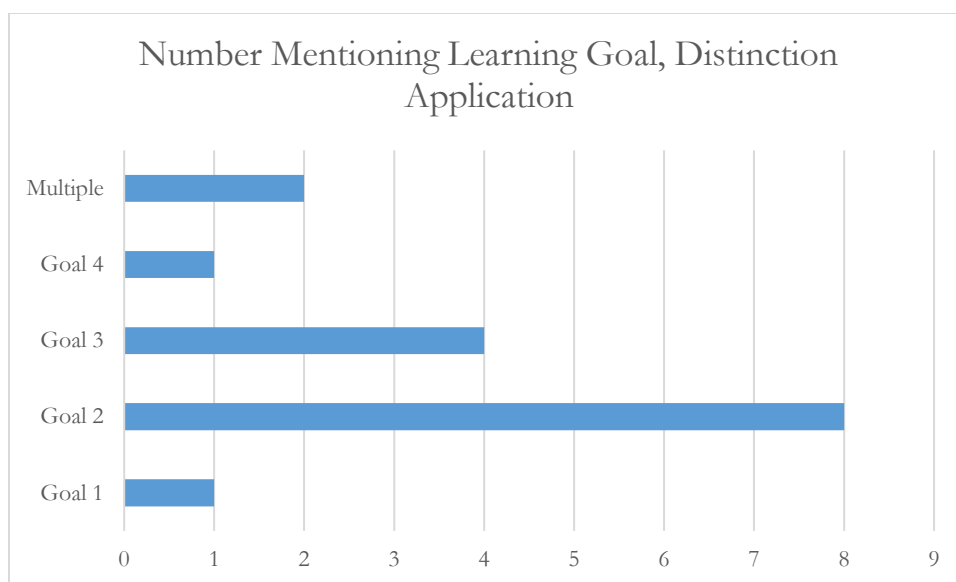
The learning goal that was most relevant to my experience was sense of ownership of educational pursuits and life-long learning. Each week, we would practice what we learned when reading, which helped reinforce the concepts we discussed each week.
I related more to the goal of a sense of ownership of educational pursuits and life-long learning. This book club helped me focus on my education but without harming my mental health. I learned multiple techniques that could help me sleep better, eat better, communicate better and manage stress better. Therefore, I believe that this book club influenced my learning in the present and in the coming future as well.
The learning goals especially relevant to my experience were: garnering a sense of ownership of ones education, as I was in charge of the research carried out to learn more about elder justice, and linking action to the needs of our time, as through my research and planning the Elder Justice Seminar, I learned more about what our community needs and how I can contribute to meeting those needs.
Going into this project, I knew from previous classes that I enjoyed lab work. This took everything to another level, though. I was able to get funding from the state and perform all the lab work on my own. It was really my project – Dr. Schurko guided me, but I was the one doing all the hands-on things. Troubleshooting, failing, succeeding, all of it! This project helped me to decide that research is something I want to do in my career. I am so thankful for this experience, and even more so that I was able to have it so early in my college career.
This project really encouraged me to learn and educate myself about other ideas and cultures that I was not familiar with before this project. I feel like I was able to take charge and be responsible for how I completed this project. I had the freedom to choose different events and discussions that I felt would enhance my learning and broaden my views. I feel like I took full advantage of this program and accomplished my learning goals.
The ownership of education was relevant because the paper was something all my own not tied to any particular course. The enhancement of learning was relevant because I was able to dive deeper into a topic I was interested in. Learning about the climatological challenges of the late Bronze Age helps me to better understand the ecological needs of our own time.
It was really eye opening to learn about the comic tropes of Ancient Rome and how much they differed and were similar to humor today. Adapting the script for today's audience was surprisingly difficult, but also fun. I also enjoyed learning about the history of performance and incorporating that into our performance.
This project connected things I had learned in class with real world experience going on in Arkansas.
The most relevant of the learning goals to this experiences was the sense of ownership of educational pursuits and lifelong learning. This project allowed me to pick a subject and develop research on what I chose. I was able to play to my interests and find something that no one else in my field had previously dedicated a significant amount of research to. In addition to this I was able to gain valuable skills used in research development and presentations that I will continue to use in my career as a graduate student and a professional.
I feel as if this experience opened my eyes into the importance of emotional and social health for those who have memory problems, and I have also gained worlds of insight into psychological research and the mountains of effort that goes behind it. I think that knowledge about the effects of dementia is very important because of its high prevalence in the world we live in.

Summary of Results: Odyssey Distinction Application

Sixteen seniors were invited to graduate with distinction in Odyssey using the online short-responses form presented in Appendix B. To become eligible, students need to have completed projects in all six Odyssey categories by the time they graduate, with at least done by the deadline to graduate with distinction. Any conclusions about the Program, therefore, need to be made with the understanding that they reflect the experience of the most involved students. It is also worth pointing out that the list of eligible students did not include a single applicant that identified as male – an issue that is worth noting but perhaps needs to be viewed within a broader picture of the role of gender in student engagement.

For the purpose of assessing Learning Goal 3, we looked at their responses to Question 6:

Question 6: Looking back on the credits you have completed, which Odyssey learning goal was most relevant for you and why?



Five of the sixteen respondents identified Learning Goal 3 as the one that was most relevant for them, either by itself or in combination with another goal of the Program. This makes Learning Goal 3 the second most prominent learning goal among the highest achieving students – a sharp contrast to its relevant lack of emphasis by the general student population discussed in the previous section. This is an important insight to keep in mind, especially when considering the nature of Learning Goal 3, which presupposes the highest degree of independence and creativity from students. It is perhaps unsurprising that, while high achievers embrace and enjoy this aspect of the Program, ownership of one’s educational pursuits is perhaps more challenging for the average student. We’ll return to this idea in the following section.

Among the students who identified Goal 3 as the most relevant for their engaged learning endeavors, the following quotes are worth mentioning:

- “My projects can be linked together by the third learning goal since I grew personally and professionally throughout my undergraduate career, so I would say it is the most relevant in

this case. Broadly speaking, I wanted to use Odyssey projects to engage with other cultures and communities as well as find how I could use chemistry to impact the world around me. Upon beginning as a first year, I took up two projects: the Multicultural Dance Showcase (AC) and the Kakehashi Tomodachi Inouye Scholars Exchange Program (GA) projects. I quickly became a participant during both projects by dancing to Bollywood tunes, cooking a local Japanese treat, working through communication barriers with exchange students, and so forth. My experiences inspired me to rigorously engage with Hendrix's cultural clubs as well as co-found the Japanese Language and Culture Club (JLCC). Although I never applied for another culturally-focused Odyssey project after, I proceeded to become the vice president and the president of events for JLCC in future years."

- "My Odyssey credits have given me a sense of ownership over my educational pursuits and of habits conducive to life-long learning. Most of my Odyssey credits are related to dance: I participated in the Hendrix Dance Ensemble for three years, took academic coursework on different theories of dance, and used my travel stipend to attend the American College Dance Association conference. I did not think I would be able to continue to dance in any capacity after I graduated high school, but Odyssey has given me the opportunity to not only continue a hobby I love, but to travel and learn about it in an academic context as well. Participating in these activities has allowed me to draw connections between the arts and my own major, Politics."
- "The Odyssey learning goal that was most relevant for me was the development of ownership over educational pursuits and habits conducive to life-long learning. I liked being able to apply previous learning to new contexts creatively. I learned about hunger through classes and Odyssey projects, such as volunteering at Heifer International inspiring me to learn about hunger in Panama. I was able to use what I had learned to create a project researching hunger in Panama and doing a documentary to present the information. Odyssey gave me the ability to explore my interest in journalism with my passion for hunger by doing field research, interviews, and a documentary for my first time."
- "In reflecting over the Odyssey projects I completed during my time at Hendrix, I have come to realize that the goal of developing an ownership of one's education to be the most influential and the most prevalent in all of my projects. The majority of my projects were student driven which gave me the opportunity to not only dig deeper into my passions, but it also provided me with important skills necessary for developing and completing complex projects. My Odyssey experiences also enabled me to find new ways to study the social movements and phenomena I am passionate about through an academic lens in a way that fueled my vocational self-discovery."

Summary of Results: Focus Groups

During the Spring 2021 semester, the Odyssey Office piloted two projects that targeted graduating seniors that did not have enough completed and pending projects to fulfill the Odyssey graduation requirement:

- The Hendrix Multicultural Awareness Project (H-Map): This project carried Global Awareness (GA) credit and was designed in partnership with the Diversity and Inclusion Office. It asked students to attend ten separate events that exposed them to cultures or viewpoints other than their own and also featured guided reflections.

- The Volunteer Action Committee Service Project: This project carried Service to the World (SW) credit and was designed in partnership with the Volunteer Action Committee. It asked students to engage in seven separate service projects and featured guided reflections.

The two pilot projects featured 12 students and ended in summative group reflection exercises that utilized the script we have previously used for the Seniors Dinner event (see Appendix C). The reflections were recorded for later reference and some of the key points are presented below.

What was unique about this initiative for assessment purposes is that it gave us a chance to have an honest conversation with the students that have struggled the most to complete the Odyssey graduation requirement: both the senior dinners and distinction graduation activities typically feature only the most motivated and successful students.

When prompted to share with us what they found most challenging about fulfilling the Odyssey graduation requirement, participants in the two pilot projects shared the following key points:

- Odyssey can be intimidating: What we often share as “success stories” can be paralyzing for students who might not have a clear sense of what their academic and extracurricular interests are. This is especially important when it comes to Learning Goal 3, since “ownership of one’s educational pursuits” could be especially anxiety-inducing for students.
- Odyssey needs to be developmental: Some students pointed out that they had to learn some fairly basic study and time management skills well into their second year on campus. Odyssey appeared to them to be above and beyond the basic “college survival” skillset that they spent a considerable amount of time to get comfortable with.
- Related to the point above, students really appreciated having a “roadmap” and a choice among pre-approved structured activities like the two pilot projects: While they were outside of their typical academic work, they had a support structure that guided them about things they could do within a well-specified timeframe.
- Advising is key: Advisors should consistently make engaged learning a priority, starting with freshers, but also consistently working with students throughout their career. Most students agreed that they were rarely prompted to think in-depth about Odyssey by advisors, especially once they selected a major advisor.
- Mentorship should be reimagined: Other forms of mentorship, such as having student Odyssey ambassadors, was an especially intriguing idea that students came up with in those sessions. This seems to be especially resonating with student athletes, who might be unlikely to seek an in-person meeting with an advisor or an Odyssey Office representative, but might be more open to advice and guidance from their peers.
- Pre-coded classes are not as effective as projects: Students stated that getting a “C” in a class overshadows the engaged learning objective of an Odyssey-coded class. We have heard this sentiment many times when talking to Senior Dinner participants. It was interesting that even students who have found Odyssey challenging hold the same opinion.

These pilot project conversations are going to be important as we assess Learning Goal 3 and the future of the Odyssey Program. When it comes to the specific goal, it might be that “ownership of one’s educational pursuits” is a higher-order goal that might resonate with students that think independently and are actively seeking to make connections among disciplines and not paralyzed by failure. Yet it might be the case that this is not attainable by all students. A more developmental approach to building skills and comfort levels seems to be in order. In a broader sense, the

philosophy of the Odyssey Program might need to be rethought holistically: Perhaps we need to be the providers of meaningful and rigorous, yet accessible, clear, and structured pre-approved activities that deliberately bring faculty, staff, and students together, along the lines of the two pilot projects that we just implemented.

Assessment Summary and Future Plans

In our 2020 assessment report, we pointed out that the Program relies exclusively on anecdotal evidence for assessment. A year ago, we launched a more thorough distinction application process to collect systematic qualitative information. This year we introduced a survey that every student who submits a completion form has to fill out. We also made a deliberate effort to reach out to students who have not been as involved with the Program. In 2021-22, we are also going to add Odyssey-specific questions to pre-coded courses, which have never been subjected to systematic assessment.

When it comes to specific goal assessment, the Program seems to deliver well when it comes to Goal 2: Vocational and career self-discovery. On the other hand, it is clear that Learning Goal 3 is aspirational for at least a subset of Hendrix students. It is prominently featured among seniors graduating with distinction – the students that are also most likely to branch beyond the confines of the course syllabus and experiment and take risks. It is less emphasized by the general student population, based on our analysis of completion forms. It is a source of anxiety and paralysis among students who find themselves in danger of not fulfilling their Odyssey graduation requirement.

Looking forward, we are preparing to propose some systemic changes to the Program that will be very much informed by our assessment work. Key among them is the need to have more structured, developmental Odyssey experiences, redouble our efforts on advising and mentorship, and rethink the value of pre-coded courses.

Appendix A: Completion Form Indirect Goal Assessment

10. On a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (to a very high degree), to what extent did you accomplish each of these Odyssey learning goals through this experience? *

Please choose "N/A" if the goal is not applicable to your experience.

If you would like more information on the goals, please see:

<https://www.hendrix.edu/odyssey/odyssey.aspx?id=72348>

	N/A	1	2	3	4	5
1. Enhancement of learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Vocational/career self-discovery	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. Sense of ownership of educational pursuits and life-long learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. Linking action to the social, spiritual, and ecological needs of our time	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. Please use the space below to elaborate on the learning goals that were especially relevant to your experience. *

Enter your answer

Appendix B: Odyssey Senior Distinction Application



Distinction Questionnaire

This form will ask you to share with us your experience with the Odyssey Program. We will review it, along with your completed Odyssey projects, to determine whether you graduate with distinction in Odyssey. The deadline to submit this form is 5 pm on Tuesday March 31, 2021.

Questions

1. First Name

2. Last name

3. Hendrix ID

4. Have you already have completed Odyssey credits in all six categories?

☐

Yes

☐

No

5. If you have a pending Odyssey credit, please describe your plans for completing it by the end of April.

6. Looking back on the credits you have completed, which Odyssey learning goal was most relevant for you and why?

Please limit your response to 500 words. You can find out more about the learning goals of the Odyssey Program here:

<https://www.hendrix.edu/odyssey/odyssey.aspx?id=72348>

7. How have your Odyssey experiences impacted your undergraduate career?

Please limit your response to 500 words.

8. How do you anticipate your Odyssey experiences to guide your professional and personal life beyond Hendrix?

Please limit your response to 500 words.

9. Is there anything else you would like to share with us?

This could include recommendations for the Odyssey Program or information that you'd like to share beyond the questions above.

Please limit your response to 500 words.

Appendix C: Oral Reflection Guide for Odyssey-Sponsored Senior Group Projects.

If your group is meeting on Teams for the oral reflection session, record it so you can review it later to take notes. This should help keep the conversation flowing.

Guide the conversation so that students talk about what they are taking away from their Odyssey experiences. Try to let *them* name the benefits and outcomes as they tell about their experiences. Avoid directly asking “Did you get X out of Odyssey?” until at the end. If towards the end, nothing has been said that is relevant to a particular learning goal, then it is time to find out if that’s just because the conversation did not bring it out yet or because no one feels that learning goal speaks to her or his experience.

I suggest something like the following flow to the conversation:

I. Introduce the purpose of the gathering—that it is to find out what they have gained from their Odyssey experiences. It is not to evaluate them or their projects. It is to allow them to reflect on the nature of the full experience. Keep the conversation focused as much as possible in the takeaways and the learning outcomes.

II. Beginning the Discussion: Get them telling their stories.

You can either ask for volunteers or call on the students. The important thing is to give each student the opportunity to add to the conversation.

- What was your favorite experience(s) in this Odyssey and what made it a good experience?

OR MAYBE

- What was your most transformative experience and why?

OR MAYBE

- What was your most engaging experience and why?

I find that in describing the experience, they inevitably begin naming what they “got from” the experience.

III. Unpacking initial comments-- They will probably begin with great generalities: it was life-changing; it gave me a whole new perspective on things. Those of course are outcomes, but we sure would like them to be more specific. Guide them into unearthing what’s behind these general descriptions *and* how the experience led to that outcome.

IV. Other suggested potentially helpful questions:

- Did any of you have experiences that did not go well? Did you learn anything from them anyway?
- What connection is there between this Odyssey experience and what you plan to do after graduation?

- Because you participated in a pilot program, are there any aspects of your experience that may need to be altered in the future? Anything that you found particularly beneficial?
- For many of you, this experience represents the final Odyssey before graduation. What was the value for you in having 3 Odyssey experiences required? (This moves the discussion away from their takeaways from individual projects to their takeaways from the requirement as a whole.)

V. Leading questions about learning goals that have not been touched on.

VI. Close with cheery thank-yous and best wishes as they look forward to graduation.