

Data-Based Decisions: Master of Arts/Sciences in American Studies (Folklore Specialization)

A. Data-Based Issue: Students taking Summer 2015 Fieldwork class, which was offered by the Folklore program in partnership with the Library of Congress, scored high in all three learning objectives. This workshop taught students the skills and techniques necessary to interview refugee communities in Logan, Utah, to launch a library exhibit based on the interviews, and to give a public lecture to the community about the project. The students in this class scored higher in mastery of all three objectives than they have in previous fieldwork classes.

Discussion: On March 22, 2016, the Folklore Curriculum Committee met to discuss the results of the partnership with the Library of Congress for the field school. All present agreed that they would like Folklore students entering the Master's program in 2016-2017 to experience a similar workshop and similarly master learning objectives.

Proposed Solution: The Folklore Curriculum Committee agreed to seek a partnership with the Library of Congress for a second field school in Summer 2017, which is proposed to be held in the Tetons, Wyoming. USU Folklore students would travel to Wyoming to attend this school in June, 2017.

Evaluation of Solution: Assuming that USU is accepted to partner with the Library of Congress in Summer 2017, after the 2017 field school is finished, the Folklore Curriculum Committee will interview students involved in the field school for their feedback, as well as evaluate the interview products. If the outcome is highly positive again, the Folklore Curriculum Committee may choose to seek a third partnership with the Library of Congress for Summer 2019.

USU partnered with the Library of Congress in Summer 2017. Students again scored high in all three evaluation objective areas.

B. Data-Based Issue: As evidenced in the outcomes data, in the required theory and methods course, ENGL 6700, only two students achieved a "high" mastery of learning objective one, which requires students to acquire knowledge of research tools, methods, and techniques with the aim of applying these in folklore research. Informal surveys of students prior to Fall

2014 also revealed that students felt they did not have enough opportunities to practice research and classification skills outside the classroom and to situate them into a real-world context.

Discussion: In the semesters leading up to Fall 2014, the Folklore Curriculum Committee gathered at least once a semester to discuss issues pertaining to students in the program. One of the ongoing discussions involved how to give student more practice with research and classification skills outside the classroom, as a way of helping them to master learning objective one more thoroughly.

Proposed Solution: In Fall 2014 the Folklore Program launched the Digital Folklore Project. The Digital Folklore Project tracks digital online trends, archives and analyzes them, and through a national panel, judges what have been the most significant vernacular online trends each year. Students participate in all aspects of the research and analysis, providing them with real-world opportunities to develop professional research skills. This project offers students an excellent hands-on experience. Students are encouraged to volunteer for positions in the project.

Evaluation of Solution: The Committee deemed the Digital Folklore Project a success in terms of providing students archiving, classification, and online research skills. The Digital Folklore Project will be conducted each year. Ongoing discussions have focused on how much of the project should/can be incorporated into seminars, and whether or not the Folklore Fellow graduate student should be required to participate in the project.

C. Data Indicating Problem: As evidenced in the outcomes data, the Public Folklore seminar, ENGL 6730, gave high priority to all three learning objectives. This course was recently dropped for two reasons (see below), and students both want and need another course that offers them the skills, tools, and experiences particular to this course.

Discussion: On February 19, 2016, the Folklore Curriculum Committee met to discuss the fate of ENGL 6730 and decided to drop it from the curriculum. This course was dropped for two reasons. First, a retirement was about to leave a gap in the offerings. Second, the Folklore Curriculum Committee recognized a need to revamp the Public Folklore offering because the field has professionalized over the past twenty years and the skills needed to acquire such positions are such that one class no longer suffices. Four current students in the program have expressed strong interest in Public Folklore as a possible career choice.

Proposed Solution: The Folklore Curriculum Committee has voted to develop a Certificate in Archiving and Public Programming to replace 6730. This certificate will offer students more skills and experiences than can be acquired in just one class.

Evaluation of Solution: The Certificate in Archiving and Public Programming is currently in the processes of being accepted by the EPC and the Graduate Council and will be hopefully

launched in Fall 2017. Extensive discussions with other departments such as History suggest that the Certificate will be useful to students beyond the Folklore Program. However, it is too early to evaluate whether or not the certificate is effective because it has not yet been put into place. When the Certificate is approved and students begin to enroll in it, the Folklore Curriculum Committee will evaluate the courses closely and conduct both informal and formal assessment measures.

D. Data Indicating Problem: As evidenced by the table under “Description” in this document, the average time to degree completion for both 2014-15 and 2015-16 was five semesters instead of four semesters (the length considered desirable by the program). Although two students with a longer time to graduation can be explained by their completing the “Women & Gender Studies Certificate,” the other students are taking longer to complete their program than desired. This past year, that time increased to 6 semesters.

Discussion: On February 29, 2016, the Folklore Curriculum Committee met to discuss this issue. Several possible factors in the five-semester time to graduation issue were discussed, including the length of Folklore theses (Plan A’s can run over 100 pages), which are significantly longer than the department minimum. Moreover, faculty noted that students who wait to defend proposal until their final semester run out of time on their thesis and end up extending their program an extra semester. Some students pursue additional education, such as a Women and Gender Studies Certificate. Additionally, because students only take 3 Folklore courses during their first year, many students do not have enough background to formulate a thesis proposal until well into their second year.

Proposed Solution: In order to encourage students to undertake work on their thesis earlier, the committee is recommending that students defend their thesis proposal in their third semester (or earlier, if possible). This change has been reflected in the handouts and guidebook given to all Folklore graduate students. The chairs of thesis committees should also encourage their students to conduct thesis research actively during the summer after their first year in order to make up for the lack of coursework during the school year.

Evaluation of Solution: This solutions above are being implemented and will be evaluated. The Folklore Program Committee will discuss the issue again in spring of 2018.

E. Data Indicating Problem: In this case, the problem is a lack of data. As evidenced by the table under “Outcomes: Courses”, we do not have data for several courses because of retirements.

Discussion: In July, 2016, the Director of Graduate Studies and the Folklore Program Director discussed this lack of data and how it could be gathered more effectively in the future.

Proposed Solution: In Fall 2016, the Folklore Program Director will meet with the Folklore Curriculum Committee to determine how best to gather this data in a more effective manner.

Proposed Evaluation of Solution: In Spring 2016, the Folklore Program Director will meet with the Director of Graduate Studies in make certain that we are collecting all the necessary data before retirements or sabbatical occur.