

GBC Virtual Humanities Center (VHC)
Review Report for HUM 111 Course
27 May 2015

This report presents the review by the VHC's NEH Challenge Grant Committee of the HUM 111 course pilot program, looking at the HUM 111 courses taught in Fall 2014 and Spring 2015. The purpose of the review was to assess whether the HUM 111 courses were meeting the design goals set out by the VHC and the requirements of the NEH Challenge Grant, and to offer recommendations.

Background

As part of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Challenge Grant awarded to GBC in 2013, GBC committed to a "refurbishment" of the Humanities 101 seminar. The goal as stated in the grant proposal was "expose first-year students to core humanities concepts and approaches" (*GBC Proposal*, 2013). Part of the refurbishment was to incorporate material from other components of the VHC focusing on Northeastern Nevada to ground students in how the humanities impact their current and future experiences, to be achieved by a small-course model of no more than 30 students. Given GBC's service area, the primary platform for the course should be online. The intent was to pilot a revised HUM 101 course and potentially institutionalize it as a core requirement for associate degrees if the pilot proved successful.

When design work on the refurbishment began in the first year of the grant (academic year 2013-2014), a problem was noted in that the HUM 101 designation in the Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) Common Course Numbering System indicated a course focusing solely on the Classical Antiquity through Renaissance periods. The HUM 101 course was designed as part of a paired chronological sequence, with the HUM 102 course covering the period from the Renaissance to the modern day. Given these constraints, the HUM 101 would not meet the grant proposal's requirement for a "refurbishment" of a single humanities survey-level course.

Course Design Goals

The VHC moved to create an alternative "Gateway to the Humanities" course, which eventually was submitted to the NSHE Common Course Numbering process under the designation HUM 111. In designing the course, the VHC settled on a format which focused on four "core questions":

1. What is "human"?
2. How do we relate to each other?
3. How do we express ourselves?
4. What boxes are we in?

These four questions would be explored in the course through a range of media and modalities. One encouraged emphasis would be for instructors to incorporate a range of content, both in terms of material and format. The course would then culminate in some form of a master project which would require students to apply these questions in a student-centric exploration.

By focusing on the four broad questions, the course intended to provide flexibility for individual instructors to incorporate course materials and approaches to guide students through the four core questions without mandating specific materials, assessments, or approaches. The purpose was to create a course outline which could readily be used by faculty from various disciplines who might be interested in teaching the course.

During the construction of the pilot course offerings, the instructor volunteering to teach the pilot classes decided to format the class around a series of “Quests” built around the four core questions. In addition, the Quests also served to explore the six essential qualities outlined by Daniel L. Pink in his *A Whole New Mind* (Riverhead Books, 2006). These qualities—Design, Play, Empathy, Story, Meaning, and Symphony—are the basis of the VHC’s biannual theme structure. Such an approach would allow experimentation with gamification theory of course navigation (in place of a traditional module/unit structure) and provide a unique approach to introducing students to the humanities. Note, however, that this model is NOT the only approach the VHC is recommending for the HUM 111 course.

Review Findings

Overall, the course has met the goals set out by the VHC’s NEH Challenge Grant Committee.

- The instructor’s assessments of the two classes and feedback provided by students indicate that the primary goal of introducing students to the humanities was met by the course. The Committee was particularly impressed with the reports of students commenting that they had not fully understood what was meant by “the humanities” before taking the class—which was a primary goal of the course.
- In addition to answering the four core questions, the Committee noted that the course further encouraged a strong mix of the Humanities Core Skills and Habits of Mind which the VHC emphasizes. Six core skills corresponding to the GBC General Education areas of Critical/Creative Thinking, Communication Skills, and Personal/Cultural Awareness were strongly emphasized in the course. A further six core skills, including those dealing with Technological Understanding, were significantly present.
- Although course enrollments to date preclude an effective statistical analysis, one item of note was considered. There appeared to be a shift in the student majors taking the course between Fall and Spring semesters, with a higher percentage of AS / AAS students taking the course in Spring semester. The Committee would like to see this breakdown tracked

in future iterations of the course, since it may indicate the course is successfully reaching traditionally non-humanities-inclined students who may be the best served by a broad introduction to the humanities.

- While the Quest format used in the classes was not part of the VHC design goals, the Committee was interested in the gamification approach. The Committee found the use of fantasy gaming structures in the form of the Quests as an alternative to traditional module/unit formats created a unique experience for students which, based on reported levels of participation, may have contributed to the success of the course in the online format. More experimentation with this format may be warranted. Note, however, the Committee is not recommending this model as the sole or even primary approach for the course.
- One area where the course pilot did not entirely meet the goals in the NEH Challenge Grant proposal was the incorporation of Northern Nevada content. However, this is less a problem with the course design or the particular implementation in these classes than the need of the VHC to collect a sufficient collection of Northern Nevada content which could be used in the course. Future iterations of the course should strive to use such material as it becomes available.

RECOMMENDATION: The Committee strongly recommends the course be continued to be offered through the Arts and Letters Department as a humanities survey-level offering. The Committee would like to have the opportunity to review future iterations of the course to assess whether the course continues to meet the goals laid out in the NEH Challenge Grant and by the VHC more broadly.

Attachments

- 1) “Course Demographic Analysis: HUM 111, Fall 2014—Spring 2015”
- 2) “Report on HUM 111 WebCampus Structure / Materials”
- 3) “HUM 111—Correlation with Core Skills / Habits of Mind”
- 4) “Humanities Core Skills / Habits of Mind”

Course Demographic Analysis: HUM 111, Fall 2014 – Spring 2015

Fall 2014 data based on completion data; Spring 2015 data current through 16 April 2015.

COURSE COMPLETION: Fall 2014: 23 enrolled; 19 completed; 4 Ws
 Spring 2015: 12 enrolled; 10 completed; 2 Ws

Notes: Grade distribution data not part of this report.
 Students withdrawn for non-payment (“purged”) are not recorded here.

CLASS STANDING (includes W students):

TERM	FRESHMAN	SOPHOMORE	JUNIOR	SENIOR	TOTAL
FALL 2014	10	6	5	2	23
SPRING 2015	7	3	1	1	12

DEGREE TYPE (includes W students):

TERM	NDS	UND	AA	AS	AGS	AAS	BA	BAS	BSN	TOTAL
FALL 2014	3	3	8	1	1	3	3	-	1	23
SPRING 2015	3	-	4	3	1	4	1	1	-	17 *

* Total exceeds enrollment because five (5) students listed dual degrees.

BREAKDOWN BY MAJOR (includes W students):

Major	Fall 2014	Spring 2015	Major	Fall 2014	Spring 2015
non-degree seeking	3	3	Elementary Ed.	-	1
undecided	3	-	Gen Std (AGS)	1	1
no major listed	8	6	Natural Resour.	1	-
Bus Admin	1	3	Nursing	2	-
Criminal Justice	-	1	Radiology	1	-
Digital Tech	-	1	Social Sciences	2	-
Early Child. Ed.	1	1			

Report on HUM 111 WebCampus Structure/Materials

Overall, the structure for the Humanities 111 course seems to effectively serve not only the content of the course, but the needs of its students. It is creative, open-ended, and allows students to tailor their personal experience of the course to their needs while still requiring them to engage in communication and meaning-building with their fellow classmates. This respect toward individuality (in terms of learning style and interests) coupled with an emphasis on collaboration and community discourse gives the class a unique structure more than suitable to its content.

Instead of using the traditional module/unit structure, the course is arranged around multi-stage Quests, which are centrally located and simple for students to navigate. Each week of a Quest contains the sum of the course material for a given week's work, as well as effectively details the week's assignments. Additionally, each Quest makes extensive use of hyper-linked materials in a variety of media that address the needs of a variety of learning styles and aptitudes.

The assignments required in each Quest are categorized and labeled with terminology taken from fantasy gaming (i.e. "Perception Checks" require students to analyze course materials from the viewpoint of their discipline; "Dungeon" assignments require students to research and find new materials related to course content, much as gamers explore dungeons for rewards). Additionally, these different assignment types reflect Pink's essential skills, and are explicitly designed for their application and development. In almost all cases, students are expected to share their work with their classmates, creating lively and productive discussions from week to week.

The Quests often contain side quests, which allow students to select an activity from a range of possible options, and these side quests provide students an opportunity to shape their own learning experience and, in many cases, ask them to explore their skills not only as students of the humanities but as content producers in their own right. Assignments and side quests allow students to craft videos, text and a variety of other media that encourage them to explore not only how the humanities reflect human experience, but provide them an opportunity to engage in the process of production and reflection necessary for cultural development and expression.

Throughout the course, students are asked to engage with, consider, reflect on and articulate how we define and interpret human experience and activity, as well produce their own contributions to the ongoing discussion of the humanities as individuals as well as members of a classroom community. Additionally, the reframing of modules/units as Quests and assignments as fantasy gaming structures creates the sense that students are engaged in a unique and creative learning experience, which establishes a tone of intellectual play that welcomes and elicits their participation.

10 May 2015

To: **VHC Committee of the Whole**

From: Cyd McMullen, Project Director

Re: HUM 111, the Humanities Gateway Course (online) – Correlation with Core Skills/Habits of Mind

For this evaluation I focused on seven of the Quests (Weeks) and the assignments given for the Forum (Discussion Board) in each Quest. The Quests center on these questions: What is “human”? How do we relate to one another? How do we express ourselves? What boxes are we in?

Students do several directed writing assignments every week, most of them based on the students’ choice of scholarly readings located online. They also read the posts of other students in the course and are encouraged to engage with the ideas expressed by others. The final assignment is a group project in which students choose an issue to study and collaborate in writing the final paper. They are required to evaluate their own work, the contributions of their colleagues, and the work of other groups. Rubrics are provided to guide their evaluations.

I found that the following Core Skills/Habits of Mind are **strongly emphasized**:

- the capacity to write intelligently, lucidly, and fluently
- the ability to absorb, analyze, and interpret complex artifacts or texts
- the ability to analyze and interpret abstract ideas
- the ability to understand the historical and cultural foundations of ethical behavior, and develop and apply a personal code of ethics based on that understanding
- the capacity to express an opinion that diverges from that of the majority; the ability to hold and defend a divergent point of view and allow others the same right
- the capacity to recognize the validity of alternate viewpoints or opinions

The following are less strongly emphasized, but are **significantly present**:

- the ability to analyze and interpret visual communication
- the ability to place data into a larger context
- the capacity for a critical understanding of fine arts expression
- the application of knowledge to real-world problems
- the ability to use technology to benefit humanistic inquiry, not to replace it
- the ability to capitalize on technology as a tool to enhance the experience of the humanities

In my opinion, this course fulfills the intentions of the committee when it envisioned a gateway humanities course centered on the core skills and habits of mind promoted by the humanities.



Virtual
Humanities
Center

Great Basin College

Humanities Core Skills/ Habits of Mind

At the heart of GBC's Virtual Humanities Center (VHC) is this list of core skills and habits of mind that the humanities encourage and promote. Every aspect of the VHC is centered on these skills. They are not only college learning skills, but life skills, and they are aligned with GBC's General Education Objectives.

General Education Objective: Critical [and Creative] Thinking

- › the ability to use facts: working from evidence to a conclusion (induction)
 - › gathering enough facts to warrant the conclusion
 - › making valid inferences based on facts
 - › using accurate observation to form a hypothesis and then test it (the scientific method)
- › the ability to use principles: working from principle(s) to a conclusion (deduction)
 - › avoiding prejudices, pressure from authority or peers
 - › avoiding flaws in thinking: personal attack, overgeneralization
- › the ability to absorb, analyze and interpret complex artifacts or texts
- › the ability to assess the reliability and validity of information, especially on the web
- › the ability to synthesize information from diverse sources
- › the ability to place data into a larger context
- › the ability to make decisions based on evidence
- › the ability to analyze and interpret abstract ideas
- › the ability to recognize and compensate for ambiguity
- › the ability to prioritize
- › the ability to innovate
- › the capacity for curiosity

General Education Objective: Communication Skills

- › the capacity to write intelligently, lucidly, and fluently
- › the capacity to speak intelligently, lucidly, and fluently
- › the capacity to communicate through a variety of media: visual, performance, design & composition
- › the ability to participate effectively in deliberative conversation
- › the ability to analyze and interpret visual communication

General Education Objective: Technological Understanding

- › the ability to utilize new technologies as they are developed
- › the ability to understand the ethical implications of technological advances
- › the ability to use technology to benefit humanistic inquiry, not to replace it
- › the ability to capitalize on technology as a tool to enhance the experience of the humanities
- › the ability to use technological tools to expand and extend our understanding of what it means to be human

General Education Objective: Personal/Cultural Awareness

- › the ability to understand the historical and cultural foundations of ethical behavior, and develop and apply a personal code of ethics based on that understanding
- › the maturity to take responsibility for one's thinking and actions
- › the capacity to express an opinion that diverges from that of the majority [OR the ability to hold and defend a divergent point of view and to allow others the same right]
- › the capacity to recognize the validity of alternate viewpoints or opinions
- › the capacity to recognize multiple perspectives, from local to global
- › the capacity to accept diversity of people and ideas
- › the capacity for a critical understanding of fine arts expressions
- › an awareness of the past and its application to the present
- › the application of knowledge to real-world problems

Visit our website at
humanities.gbcnv.edu