

Liberal Studies Notes

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I spoke with Dr. Guss about the LS program structure and demographics in February 2016. She went over existing recruitment materials, informational materials, program structure, and history, including the history of the portfolio completion option in lieu of the internship for students with extensive real-world job experience. This conversation convinced me that there is a lot more data that we need to have about the LS program as we consider changes.

Most importantly, it would be helpful to have data on the following:

- Number of students currently in the program
- Retention rates and data; student demographics (first generation, students of color, non-traditional-aged students)
- Graduate rates
- Time to completion
- Feeder institutions
- Feeder programs
- Current MU students directed into LS
- New students choosing LS

I was tasked with moving LS300, a gateway course for LS students, online. While this course initially seems like it may be a good option for moving online (or partially online as a hybrid course), I am increasingly doubtful because of its function as a gateway for a vulnerable population of students. The English department piloted EN102 online, which serves a similar curricular function to LS300 by providing important college-level writing skills in a real-world context (Notably, transfer LS300 students do not go through our composition sequence). This pilot program failed because students who are struggling with writing skills benefit greatly from one-on-one in person instruction. The mission of the University is clearly supported in face-to-face courses that serve as gateway requirements. We should consult with the current teacher of LS300, Professor Indigo Erikson about her experience with the course, her sense of its strengths, weaknesses, and possible avenues for online components.

Currently, the program has low visibility on campus and suffers from a lack of institutional support, and it is not a widely advertised major for attracting new enrollment. The LS program is central to the University's mission, and it is in a unique position to attract new degree-completion students. We need a website update, an advertisement/recruitment insert, and talking points for Admissions and other faculty and administrators.

We are in a moment of academic administrative instability. Whatever happens with the program would have implications for university retention, and thus should be decided as a larger plan for the university with the incoming Provost and Dean of Arts & Sciences, as well as the new director of the LS program. As a result, I recommend we make no major shifts in the program as it currently stands, outside of the marketing materials noted above. In addition, we should tap a current and committed member of the faculty to take over the LS directorship for an interim period of 1 year, while a new full-time director is sought.