

**Report from the Inquiry & Analysis
Professional Learning Community (PLC)**

2017-18

PLC Members:

Elizabeth Brookbank, LIB

Dr. Patricia Flatt, CLAS, Division of Natural Sciences and Mathematics (NSM)

Dr. Breeann Flesch, CLAS, Division of Computer Science

Dr. Katrina Hovey, COE, Division of Education Leadership (DEL)

Dr. Shaun Huston, CLAS, Division of Social Sciences

Dr. Ethan McMahan, CLAS, Division of Behavioral Science

Dr. Susanne Monahan, Associate Provost for Academic Effectiveness

PLC Chair Dr. Melinda Shimizu, CLAS, NSM

Dr. Garima Thakur, CLAS, Division of Creative Arts

Dr. Gregory Zobel, COE, DEL

Greg Zobel, Kristin Latham-Scott, Shaun Huston, Elizabeth Brookbank, Ethan

McMahan, Breeann Flesch, Katrina Hovey, Garima Thakur

What is Inquiry and Analysis?

Defining Inquiry & Analysis (IA) for WOU became one of the goals for the 2017-18 I&A PLC. We start with the definition from the LEAP outcome adopted by WOU as one of our five Undergraduate Learning Outcomes (ULO): “Inquiry is a systematic process of exploring issues/objects/works through the collection and analysis of evidence that result in informed conclusions/judgments. Analysis is the process of breaking complex topics or issues into parts to gain a better understanding of them.” (Association of American Colleges and Universities)

This definition comes with a rubric that guided our evaluation of WOU curriculum with regards to IA. Through our process we updated language in the rubric to better reflect IA at WOU, but started with the language provided by the Association of American Colleges and Universities, which identifies 6 *features* or elements of IA:

→ **Topic Selection**

Ability to choose a topic that is manageable and relevant

→ **Existing Knowledge, Research, and/or Views**

Presenting information from relevant sources

→ **Design Process**

Application of a theoretical framework and/or designing how to solve a problem

→ **Analysis (changed to Analysis of Evidence or Use of Evidence)**

Organization and use of evidence to reveal patterns, differences, and/or similarities

→ **Conclusions**

Extrapolating a logical conclusion from an inquiry

→ **Limitations and Implications**

Discussing relevant and supported limitations and implications of an investigation or project

Each of these elements is divided into 4 levels, or stages of student development of the particular skill on the rubric.

What is a PLC?

A professional learning community (PLC) is an interdisciplinary group of educators who come together around a common interest in strengthening teaching and learning for a particular area or focus. WOU's university-wide assessment strategy is organized around PLC's that focus on each ULO.

2017-18 IA PLC members:

Table 1: IA PLC Members

Educator	Department	Role on PLC
Melinda Shimizu	Earth Science	Chair
Greg Zobel	Education	Member
Patricia Flatt	Chemistry	Member
Kristin Latham-Scott	Biology	Member
Shaun Huston	Geography	Member
Elizabeth Brookbank	Library	Member
Ethan McMahan	Psychology	Member
Breeann Flesch	Computer Science	Member
Katrina Hovey	Education	Member
Garima Thakur	Art	Member
Bev West	Center for Academic Innovation	Contributing Supporter
Sue Monahan	Provost's Office	Contributing Supporter

What are the goals of the 2017-18 I&A PLC?

The IA PLC identified three primary goals:

- To initiate the IA 3-year cycle: Assess - Disseminate - Workshop (repeat)
- Assess curriculum (not students) alignment with IA
 - Snapshot of what IA looks like at WOU
 - What opportunities do we provide WOU students to demonstrate each of the elements of IA?
 - How do students perform these opportunities?
 - Define IA
- Continue Campus Conversation around assessment and how this process works
 - Faculty are experts in their field, being asked to articulate how we also teach the general skills identified as ULOs (in this case IA)
 - The unit of measurement is the assignment/curriculum
 - We are interested in the opportunities provided in the curriculum and how those opportunities align to elements of IA

What process did the 2017-18 IA PLC use to achieve its goals?

The PLC met as a group for 2 hours approximately every month from October 2017 - June 2018.

- The first goal was pursued by assessing work and regular conversations about how to give feedback, and to continue and improve the PLC assessment process
- The second goal was pursued by using TK20 to evaluate assignment instructions and student work submissions provided by instructors whose courses aligned with IA. This evaluation was a group effort: at least 3 different PLC members evaluated each piece of curriculum or student work individually, followed by group discussions about what IA means for WOU as evidenced by these pieces of curriculum or student work.

The evaluation process begins with the assignment instructions, and asks members to identify which elements of IA students were given the opportunity to demonstrate in each assignment, and at what stage of student development for the particular element. A typical assignment should only address 2-3 elements of IA; we expect that over a typical course and entire student career all elements will eventually be addressed. The stage is expected to be a 1 or 2 for a student's first experience with the element (so particularly common for 100 and 200 level courses) and expected to be a 3 or 4 as a student nears the end of their curriculum experience at WOU (so 300 and 400 level courses).

To be clear: the stages and assessment process is entirely removed from student grades and overall achievement in the course. We are looking at how students were given the opportunity to perform elements of IA and at what stage the opportunity was given. For examples where student work was submitted, we also looked at what stage the student demonstrated.

This process allows the PLC to develop a snapshot of what IA currently looks like in WOU's 2017-18 curriculum.

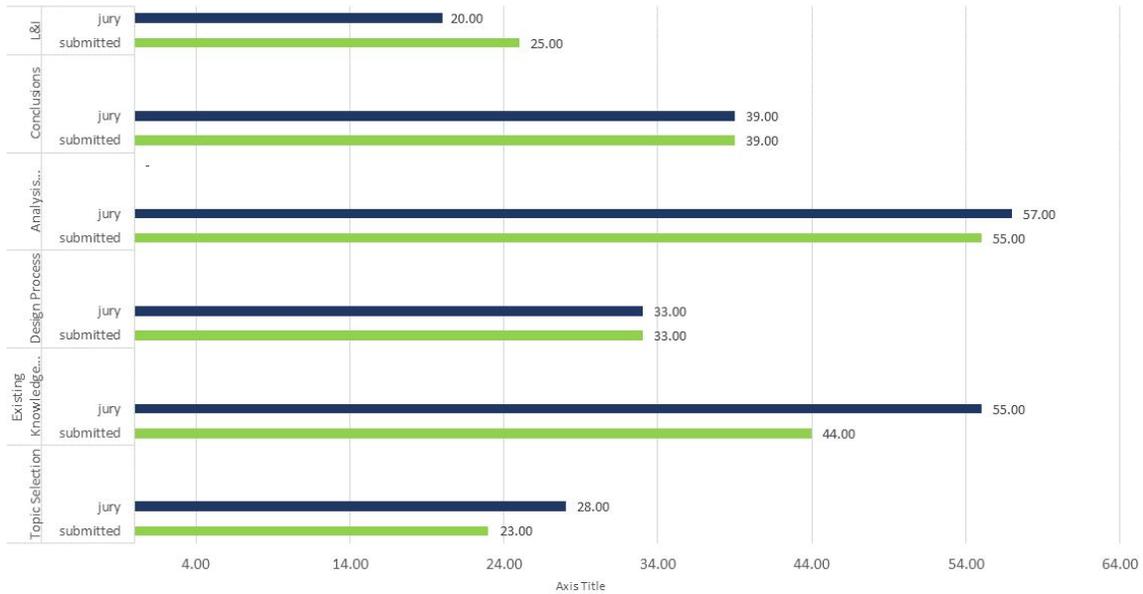
Part of the process is developing common language to clarify how we articulate and discuss what each of the elements of IA mean in practice as we assess the curriculum. This sub-goal is achieved iteratively through regular conversations throughout the year and included a mid-year revision to the IA rubric provided by the AACU (revised rubric in the findings section of this document) to better reflect what IA means at WOU.

- The third goal was pursued by holding open houses, regular email communication, and discussions of how to improve the process and communication with the broader campus community.

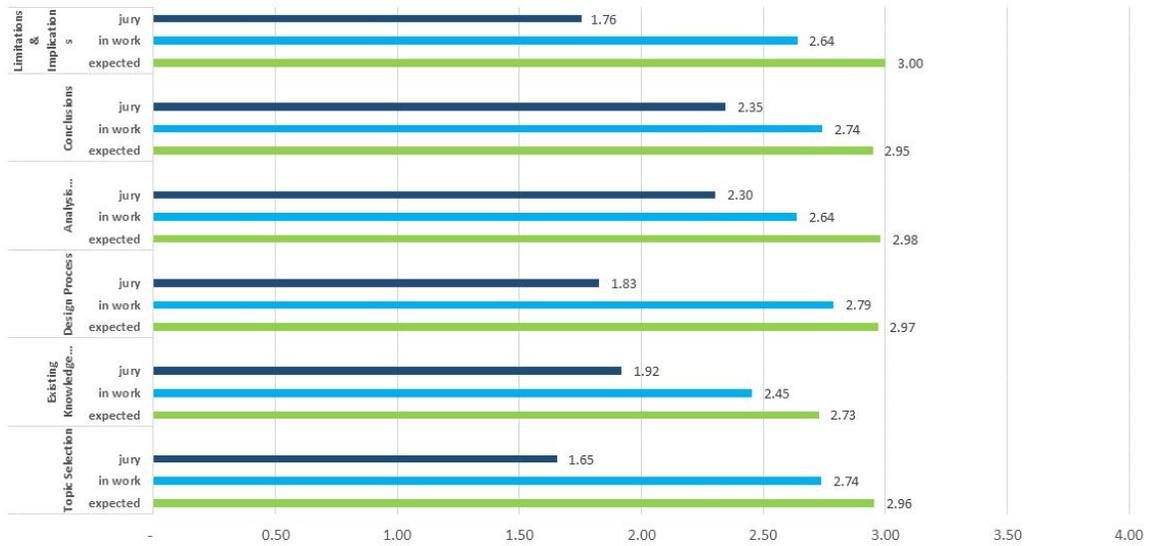
Findings regarding Inquiry & Analysis

- Faculty understanding of IA does not seem to match PLC understanding of IA. We need more campus discussions to improve broad faculty understanding of this ULO. Perhaps we need something besides the rubric to communicate what these features are.
- Faculty understanding of levels is different too; evidence suggests levels may still be conflated with grades. Maybe we stop using numbers for levels, and instead use words like “novice” or “expert” and call it “stages” instead of levels.
- It could be that many folks were trying to make things fit I&A, when truly Critical Thinking is the better fit. We recommend campus discuss the possibility of adding Critical Thinking as a 6th ULO.
- Most of what we saw aligned with *Existing Knowledge* and *Analysis of Evidence*. This could be because 10 week courses can limit ability to provide authentic opportunities for *Topic Selection* and more nuanced discussions about implications and limitations or that a lot of the assignments seem to be end-of-term assignments, so sampling assignments from earlier in the term might yield more *Topic Selection* opportunities. This could also be because we mostly considered lower-level general education courses. We recommend a campus-wide conversation about developing assignments that align to the other features in the IA rubric.
- Many of the assignments seemed to focus on having students show knowledge of content in a specific area and not necessarily demonstrate general IA skills that are transferable to other areas. We recommend a campus discussion over the purpose of General Education courses: content or skills.

Prevalence of Inquiry & Analysis features (n=64 sections, Fall 2017 & Winter 2018)



Student achievement on Inquiry & Analysis features (mean, n=64 courses, Fall 2017 & Winter 2018)



Broader findings regarding assessment at WOU

- PLCs should consider collecting Spring work the Spring term before the PLCs start, so that they can review Spring work Fall term. Start this process when QL comes back up.
- Rubric currently assumes linear educational path - campus should discuss if this is what we want. This may limit our students by limiting their opportunities.
- Having continuity between PLCs will help stability and progress with this process
 - Continuing members
 - Report with section specific to future PLCs
- We need more avenues for feedback on assignment design and pedagogy, but that is not the charge of this group
 - We need broader integration with campus community
 - Outside person to lead workshops
 - We need a central place to get Professional Development/Pedagogy
 - We need infrastructure, funding, for Center for Teaching Innovation - this means stipends for participants, which shows university invests in this and our faculty
 - Start with QL workshops next year
- With General Education becoming its own program, future PLCs can focus more on whole university and leave General Education assessment to the General Education program.
- To address the desire for feedback, we recommend campus develop a Collection in the University Repository of sample assignments. This collection could grow over the years and be of use to all faculty.

Findings for future PLCs

- PLCs should consider collecting Spring work the Spring term before the PLCs start, so that they can review Spring work Fall term. Start this process when QL comes back up.
- With General Education becoming its own program, future PLCs can focus more on whole university and not focus on General Education.