

Otis Assessment, Research and Scholarship Grant Narrative

Dr. Parme Giuntini

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The purpose of my OARS grant was to review and assess the Senior Educational Reflection, a new requirement that was incorporated into the Capstone courses beginning fall 2015. There were three key goals for the review: determine an initial relationship between student reflections and the Institutional and Programmatic Learning Outcomes; identify the key elements that demonstrated the value of this assignment for studio majors; suggest revisions for the assignment prompt for use with the 2016 Capstone courses.

Why Reflection?

Reflective writing has been a requirement in LAS courses for the past five years with students posting end of the semester reflections in their eportfolios. Written in response to faculty generated prompts, reflections offered students the opportunity to make connections between content specific to one course and broader issues of their education—to move from isolated content to content in a variety of contexts and applications. These assignments aligned with “landmark scholarship [that] has positioned reflection as the core of enriched learning.”¹ Encouraging students to consciously and systematically engage in reflective writing was intended to hone their metacognitive skills, deepen their understanding of academic content and concepts, help them identify connections between their LAS and studio courses, and better evaluate their own progress toward understanding.² These are arguably important concerns in an art and design college where a third of all units toward graduation are courses in the

¹ “Reflection, Integration, and ePortfolio Pedagogy”, Bret Eynon, Laura M. Gambino and Judit Török. Catalyst for Learning: ePortfolio Resources and Research, <http://www.c2l.mcnrc.org>, p1.

² “Reflection, Integration, and ePortfolio Pedagogy”, Eynon, Gambino, and Török, p.1.

liberal arts and sciences and a cliché, but all too often heard comment, is that students liked their LAS courses, but they came to college to focus on their studio majors.

The widespread and varied use of eportfolios was another key advantage. While students were required to post signature LAS assignments in their eportfolios, many of them took courses in which weekly homework, paper drafts, and journal entries were also housed in their eportfolios. Additionally, they were encouraged to customize their portfolios and include co-curricular content.³ The integration of reflective writing into a digital repository of students' work over two to four years time meant that the eportfolios radically shifted from the collection of a body of work (a practice that studio majors are familiar with) to a process that demonstrated their progress at Otis.⁴ Without belaboring the issue (since that was not the focus of my grant), there is a substantial body of scholarly work on the value of using eportfolios from the beginning of an educational experience so that students can gain a better sense of their learning and development.⁵

Senior Educational Reflection

LAS initiated the Senior Educational Reflection (SER) in fall 2015, making it a requirement worth 20% of the Capstone course⁶. Although the idea of an

³ Although encouragement to customize the eportfolios was dramatically increased beginning fall 2015 with the addition of badges and prizes, the majority of student eportfolios demonstrated some evidence of customizing which included the use of colors, background designs, different fonts, and images.

⁴ "The Use of ePortfolios In Evaluating The Curriculum And Student Learning", Dale Fitch, Melissa Peet, Beth Glover Reed, and Richard Tolman. *Journal of Social Work Education*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (Fall 2008), p. 37.

⁵ "The Use of ePortfolios In Evaluating The Curriculum And Student Learning", Fitch, Peet, Reed, and Tolman, p. 40.

⁶ As a common senior requirement, Capstone functions as the signature assignment for seniors to demonstrate their ability in the core competencies of Written Communication, Critical Thinking,

'educational capstone' had been an ongoing topic of discussion among ~~Debra Ballard, Sue Maberry~~ the department chair, the director of the library and myself for several years, it had become increasingly clear that the college lacked a body of student generated, critical, documentation on the value of an Otis education.⁷ There were institutional and programmatic learning objectives, but no sustained body of evidence about those learning outcomes from the students' perspectives beyond the anecdotal. What were the courses/instructors/practices that most influenced them? How did they see their skills and competencies changing from foundation through senior year? What kinds of connections did they make between studio and LAS courses? How did their approach toward learning change during their college career?

The SER was the LAS response to this situation. Situating it within the capstone course was the most viable option, although introducing a new assignment in a course that was already research and writing intensive did create some anticipated dissension among the capstone faculty. During the summer, I drafted the guidelines for the prompts and they were embedded in the capstone template along with a grading rubric for the reflections.⁸ Links to the Institutional Learning Outcomes and individual Program Learning Outcomes were also embedded in the capstone template. Capstone faculty were tasked with presenting and explaining the SER assignment the first week, which included going over the ILO

and Information Literacy. Because the course is so research and writing intensive, there is very little deviation regardless of major or topic. Both the faculty of record and another capstone faculty grade the Capstone papers/projects using a common rubric. The SER was graded by the faculty of record using a common rubric. See appendage for Reflection.

⁷ Arguably, this discussion was influenced by Debra Ballard's growing expertise in institutional assessment and her ability to identify a missing and crucial body of documentation about student learning.

⁸ All faculty teaching Capstone use a common syllabus for assignments (SER, capstone, annotations, oral presentations, rubrics, submissions dates) housed in an eportfolio. Because the capstone course is a blended class (face-to-face meetings combined with individual/instructor meetings) with the bulk of the work devoted to individual research

and PLOs and discussing the importance of reflection and the rationale for the assignment. Students were expected to write and submit the reflection (1000-1200 words) by week 3 of the semester. Because of the importance that the department placed on the SER, the capstone paper requirement was reduced in length from 3700 words to 3500 words.

Prompt:

https://ospace.otis.edu/capstone_2015_template/Reflection_questions1121

1. **Go through your entire eportfolio** and look at your LAS and studio courses, look at the assignments you completed, the work that represents what you were thinking and able to accomplish at the various stages of your education at Otis. You have an archive of your education, so make notes of what you think now about what you were thinking then. This is your first overview. **Make notes** on what you want to revisit more thoroughly, what you forgot that was so important. Notes are the first body of evidence you will be compiling for your Senior Educational Reflection.
2. **Identify the courses** that influenced you the most, caused you to think differently or change your mind about issues or ideas. What were the LAS courses that were most influential in relation to your studio courses or your chosen field? Were there courses that you took simply because you were interested in the subject? What were the courses that challenged you the most? Consider study abroad courses, Creative Action courses where you worked with agencies and students from different majors? How did those educational experiences influence you? Read some of your homework or signature assignments and make notes about what you thought then, how critical you were, what your conclusions were. Look at the [LAS Learning Outcomes again](#) and make notes. **Identify the studio courses** that were most helpful or influential or most challenging. Consider

internships or courses where you engaged with professionals outside of the Otis campus. Look at your specific [department Learning Outcomes](#).

3. Consider your co-curricular activities--the clubs or groups that you joined, the Otis events that you participated in. Were you a tutor? A peer mentor? A work-study on campus? Were you involved with competitions? How did these experiences shape or influence you? These are all a part of your education as well.
4. Now you are ready to write your critical reflection about your education. You should write this in first person, include links to courses or assignments or activities in your eportfolio. Include images to help demonstrate the most meaningful learning. Remember to keep in mind the Institutional Learning Outcomes and your department Learning Outcomes. These are the touch points for your reflection.
5. Due, published and submitted week 3 by the start of class.⁹

If anyone asks you, "Why spend so much time and so much money on a college education?" writing this reflection will be the answer.

OARS Grant Requirements

Review appropriate articles on e-portfolios and assessment and identify key elements that clearly demonstrate why this is an effective assessment methodology for studio majors.

⁹ This was the expected submission date for an assignment that involved no research and was going to be personal and individual to each student. The first three weeks of Capstone were generally dedicated to helping students identify and finalize their thesis statements for the Capstone paper and being their initial research. Faculty were given some discretion in due dates with a couple of us opting for an additional week for the SER and one who required the SER finished and submitted by week 2.

I read four articles specifically relating to e-portfolios and assessment that are listed below. Rather than summarize the material, I have referenced it within the body of the grant summary where it makes more sense and provides support.

Eynon, B., Gambino, L. M., & Török, J. (2014). "Reflection, Integration, and ePortfolio Pedagogy"

Retrieved from

<http://c2l.mcnrc.org/pedagogy/ped-analysis>

Fitch, Dale, Melissa Peet, Beth Glover Reed, and Richard Tolman, "The Use of Student ePortfolios in Evaluating The Curriculum and Student Learning", *Journal of Social Work Education*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (Fall 2008)

Jones, Steven, "Using Reflection for Assessment", Division of Student Life, University of Iowa

Kehily, Dermot, "Knowledge Development Through Reflective Practice", Proceedings of ICERI2012 Conference, Madrid, Spain.

Develop a set of questions/terms and a rubric to use as the measurement for identifying and categorizing student responses to the Otis ILOs.

In late December 2015 I collaborated with ~~Jean-Marie Venturini~~ the instructional designer to create a ~~f~~Formstack survey for assessing the SER in relation to the ILOs and PLOs.¹⁰ I disaggregated the prompt into a set of specific questions that could cover all majors, Foundation, LAS, co-curricular, links to work, and text boxes for capturing key terms and specific student narratives because I needed both quantitative and qualitative information. After revising and beta testing a

¹⁰ The OARS grant was specific to identifying and assessing the SER with Otis ILOs, but since the reflection prompt had included the PLOs for all departments, including LAS, I wanted data on that as well.

few senior reflections, Jean-Marie gave me access to all the capstone courses as well as the SER submissions.

In retrospect, I would have designed the survey to have more questions initially answered by yes/no with drop down comment boxes. Formstack can easily translate yes/no questions into graphs and charts and that is easier for quantitative analysis.

(https://otiscollege.formstack.com/forms/cap_il0) (*link to formstack survey*)

Read all the archived Senior Educational Reflections and score them in relation to the rubric.

Between late January and the end of March, I read 260 Senior Capstone Reflections, filling out a ~~f~~Formstack survey for each one, a process that could take up to 20 minutes depending on the amount of information that had to be cut and pasted from the ILO/PLO websites and almost always required some reformatting. This was a purely technical aspect, totally unanticipated, somewhat annoying, but nonetheless, necessary. After I completed reading and scoring the SERs, I was able to access the raw data and the analytics to evaluate the results and make suggestions for improvement for next year. The remainder of this document addresses the quantitative results and my qualitative evaluations.

Evaluate the results in relation to the Otis ILOs and write an analysis of the results, which would be used to refine the Senior Educational Reflection for use in Fall 2016

There are ten Otis Institution Learning Outcomes (ILOs). Five are mandated by WASC Senior College ~~and designated~~ University Commission (WSCUC) and Otis determined an additional five. Graduating seniors should be able to

demonstrate competency in all these areas so I was looking for how seniors reflected on their education in relation to these learning outcomes.

Otis' choice of categories; Otis' descriptions

Creativity & Innovation: Otis graduates will be able to approach their work in imaginative ways characterized by a high degree of experimentation, risk-taking, and divergent thinking, and be able to produce work that challenges convention.

Skill & Technique: Otis graduates will be able to produce works of art or design that demonstrate comprehensive knowledge of their particular area of study and indicate their capacity to succeed as creative professionals.

Visual Literacy: Otis graduates will be able to analyze, interpret, evaluate, and create visual materials in both physical and digital formats.

Collaboration: Otis graduates will be able to constructively share ideas, work effectively in teams, and collectively create with others.

Social Responsibility: Otis graduates will be able to demonstrate an awareness of the social and environmental impacts of art and design, produce creative, sustainable, and ethical solutions in their work, and bring positive change to their communities.

WSCUC's required categories; Otis' descriptions

Critical Thinking: Otis graduates will be able to identify issues clearly, synthesize and contextualize relevant sources, and make connections across experiences and disciplinary perspectives to create well-reasoned and imaginative approaches to issues, problems, and challenges.

Written & Oral Communication: Otis graduates will be able to express ideas in a coherent, logical, and compelling way, both orally and in writing.

Information Literacy: Otis graduates will be able to assemble, evaluate, and ethically use information from diverse sources to accomplish a specific purpose.

Quantitative Reasoning: Otis graduates will be able to analyze, interpret, and communicate quantitative information in a variety of formats, and solve relevant quantitative problems using appropriate methods.

See more at: <http://www.otis.edu/institutional-learning-outcomes#sthash.dMF7Bu0Z.dpuf>

The easiest way to evaluate the data is to deal with numbers first.

246¹¹ seniors wrote Senior Educational Reflections

- 69% of those seniors began Otis as Foundation students¹²
- 27% identified Foundation courses; 88% of that group wrote about the value of those courses; and 12% linked to work from those courses in their eportfolio
- 60% identified required LAS courses¹³; 93% of that group wrote about the value of the courses; and 29% linked to work from those courses in their eportfolio

¹¹ This number is slightly less than the total number of students taking Capstone. Accounting for the discrepancy is a group of 14 students who either did not do the assignment or submitted a different piece of writing for the assignment.

Additionally, 8 students submitted reflections that were 500 words or less.

¹² Only seniors who began as foundation student had three years worth of work in the electronic portfolios. Transfer students had between one and two years worth of work.

¹³ Required courses included first year Art History, English, Cultural Studies, major specific Art History, and Natural Science and Math courses. Although CAIIL courses are required, they are elective in choice of subject so I treated them as elective courses as well as Natural Science courses that were not linked with a specific major.

- 70% identified elective LAS courses; 91% of that group wrote about the value of the courses; and 24% linked to work from those courses in their eportfolio
- 73% identified studio courses; 94% of that group wrote about the value of the courses; and 16% linked to work from those courses in their eportfolio
- 35% wrote about one or more co-curricular activities (includes internships, TAships, student clubs, Otis activities)

The single most repeated comment that the seniors made about their education was “I learned a lot” and that phrase crossed department, gender, race and ethnicity. They wrote this in relation to their majors, to courses that were often identified by name, to particular years or semesters sometimes referencing individual assignments or software programs, and particular instructors. It was frequently the tag line following a description of sleep deprived weeks, overwhelming workloads, and harsh critiques. They often noted that ‘learning a lot’ was critical to their future employment or ability to be successful in their fields.

Aligning student perceptions of their education with the Otis Institutional Learning Outcomes was one of the key goals of the Senior Educational Reflection. While I knew from reading and scoring that the seniors ‘learned a lot’, correlating that learning to specific ILOs was not as clear and I was careful not to read into their narratives anymore than I could support with evidence.¹⁴ I looked for key words or phrases that could parallel the terminology of the Otis ILOs.

¹⁴ I noted in the Formstack survey that students described an ILO without using the specific language of the ILO. In some cases, I cut and pasted into the form their descriptions since numbers always have to be defended and explained.

Sometimes students did include the exact terms, such as Alex Perez (Fine Arts) even though there was little specific discussion.¹⁵

"Throughout my years at Otis College of Art and Design I've taken many LAS and studio courses. These~~s~~ courses helped me out a lot and gave me a better understanding of what I am interested in, in the fine arts field. In taking these classes, I was able to fulfill the Institutional Learning Outcomes of Creativity and Innovation, Skill and Technique, Visual Literacy, Collaboration, and Social Responsibility."

Although listing ILOs was helpful, that is a lower or technical level of reflection because it simply identifies a competency. The next level would be some discussion about the goals or assumptions of that competency and the optimum level would be to position that competency with its wider educational context.¹⁶

This more critical reflection can be seen in comments such as Sylvia Auh (Product Design) who addressed the ILOs without necessarily invoking the specific terms.

"Having a bigger understanding of what is happening around me, and keeping in touch with those like and different minded have allowed me to think outside of the box. It has allowed me to communicate efficiently, and have critical conversations on subjects I wouldn't have imagined to be aware of. I am able to approach problems differently, and without judgment. I am a problem solver, an innovator, and a product designer..."

These are both strong comments about their education and typical of most students who wrote some variation of general positive assessment of their

¹⁵ All italics in student reflections are mine in order to highlight the relevant parts of the reflections.

¹⁶ Kehily, "Knowledge Development Through Reflective Practice," p. 4297.

education. To identify the specific ILOs were mentioned meant keeping track of the frequency that students discussed them.

Again, it is easier to start with the raw data. The numbers below reflect the frequency that these specific ILOs appeared in the SERs. Keep in mind that some students mentioned just one while others discussed two or three. Some students wrote about them in relation to studio and LAS, some just in relation to studio or LAS.

ILO: ¹⁷ Creativity and Innovation: 51/20%

Skill and Technique: 101/43%

Visual Literacy: 13/5.5%¹⁸

Collaboration: 47/20%

Social Responsibility: 54/20%

WASC¹⁹: Critical Thinking: 40/17%

Written/Oral Communication: 37/16%

Information Literacy: 7/3%

Quantitative Reasoning 1/.42%

The clear front-runner was **Skill and Technique** and that aligns with the higher percentage (73%) of students writing about their studio courses. While students often wrote about specific skills and techniques that they learned, these descriptions often included **Critical Thinking**, **Creativity and Innovation**, and

¹⁷ These are the five Learning Outcomes that the Otis community determined and defined.

¹⁸ Visual Literacy as since been changed to Visual Fluency, but was not at the time of the assignment.

¹⁹ The Western Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC) mandates five Core Competencies: Critical Thinking, Written and Oral Communication, Information Literacy, and Quantitative Reasoning.

Written and Oral Communication even when those phrases were not explicitly used. Students also wrote about studio courses in relation to skills that they believed were important for employment and success in their fields. Time management was one accomplishment that surfaced frequently, especially among Fashion majors. Although rarely specifically identified, most of the students who did discuss their work were talking about visual materials so I would include Visual Literacy with the category of Skill and Technique.

Sharon Budiman (Communication Arts): [Studio and Typography] “I remember both these classes gave me *a new perspective of design and purpose. Besides those, the two classes also helped me improve my design skills and to understand the importance of hierarchy and readability.*”

Seorin Shin (Fashion): "First thing I want to make clear off before even listing all the things that Otis have given me is that *I came from zero. I didn't know how to sew, never learned how to draw properly, never even been close to making my own garment. Now I am able to do tech packs, which is 3D digitally designed flats using Illustrator and Photoshop. I've learned how to sew properly, and draw illustrations, some of the works I did I'm actually pretty proud off. I've learned to recreate my illustration to life form, and I have to say that being able to take a 2D drawing and recreate it in 3D form with all the fabrics and sewing is the proudest moment I've yet to encounter at Otis.*"

Alysha Aguilar (Fashion): “*...I've learned how to utilize my resources and how to work at it until I've reached my solution. I've learned the more I produce, the better the outcome; even if it means doing more than what is asked of me.*”

Austin Hyde (Digital Media): *I feel I owe everything to those classes and am absolutely certain I would not be where I am today without them. The first class was Bill Sneed's elective animation class. He taught me the fundamentals of*

after effects and showed me how to use those tools to their full potential. I spent so much time wondering why my animations weren't smooth or looking the way I wanted, and Bill finally made all that clear... The second, most influential studio class I was fortunate enough to take was Everett Campbell's Media In Motion course. He, along with Kory Jones, was the one who pushed me into learning Cinema4D. So far, every single motion graphics job I have gotten during and after Otis has been primarily for my skills in C4D. I cannot imagine where I'd be today without it. What I've gained through my time in Digital Media is invaluable to me. I've put a lot into everything I do and feel my department has held up its learning outcome goals. I have succeeded in each class in Digital Media regardless of skill, and they have given me a strong understanding of design principals, taught me great workflow process, helped me with my people skills, and has shown me I have to continuously be learning."

Aziza Jeghir (Communication Arts): *The opportunity to have a variety of teachers that specialized in different fields was beneficial in becoming a well-rounded designer. From the workload came better time-management skills and quicker work speed. The weekly critiques taught me how to speak about my work and the work of others. Having the experience now of working in the field, I can now see how these classes prepared me for what awaited me in a creative team."*

There is a fairly large differential (24%) between **Skill** and **Technique** and the next group of ILOs specifically identified. Listed in ranking order, they were: **Collaboration**, **Creativity and Innovation**, **Social Responsibility**, and **Critical Thinking**. Students discussed **Collaboration**, **Creativity and Innovation**, **Social Responsibility**, and **Critical Thinking** in relation to both studio and LAS.²⁰ 18% of the students identified the value of the CAIIL classes often specifically in relation to collaboration and social responsibility. That close correlation to the ILOs may

²⁰ Revising the formstack survey to include drop down menus for specific ILOs as well as comment boxes in relation to studio/LAS courses would result in more specific data.

very well be because they are so explicitly called out in the syllabi and in the class focus. A much smaller, but still significant, number of students (13/5%) wrote about their experiences with Travel/Study Abroad courses, which included Rome, Israel, Ecuador, Brazil, and Japan. These courses are relatively new to Otis and accommodate sophomores, juniors, and seniors. However, students who wrote about them did so in glowing terms.

Esther Kim (Toy): “*Throughout my Foundation, sophomore, and junior years at Otis, all of my LAS courses helped me improve my critical thinking, researching, and writing skills.* Before taking LAS courses at Otis, I had a very hard time in critical thinking and researching. From my Foundation year, Introduction to Visual Culture greatly helped me develop those skills... *Toy Design studio courses also helped me with critical thinking and concept sketching.*“

Katherine Strait (Fashion) “Throughout my time here at Otis College of Art & Design I have been exposed to classes that challenge and push my ideas in a multitude of subjects. While some college students just take a grade away from their college courses, I feel that the students of Otis, as well as myself, are truly *influenced by the information they absorb in their Liberal Arts classes, as well as studio. The required courses and the courses we get to pick based on personal interest, can all be applied to any of the majors my peers and I focus in.* These classes combine the creative mind of an art student with the *fundamentals of English, Math, and History for an educational process that I can apply to my career...*”

Youn Hong (Communication Arts) “Communication Arts focuses on the ability to communicate a purposeful message by illuminating the idea to the public using image making. *To help better achieve this, English 104 opened up the ideas of semiotics and symbolism we see every day to better understand the basic foundation of meaning and how the meaning is delivered.*”

Phil Lee (Digital Media): “The artist I am today is a product of the *culmination of classes here at Otis, with LAS classes having a very active role in it.* I still value the classes I took and I see the impact it has had on me daily. Classes that I hated taking at the time and thought would have no practical implications have been some of the most crucial classes for my personal growth. LAS classes were something new and fresh for me, as weird as that is to say. It was great to get out of the studio classes and study history, ergonomics, the sublime, and even math. Although I never thought I’d say this when I first began the classes, it’s been nothing but helpful, especially considering the fact that they aren’t even art classes per se. *They’ve taught me how to expand my way of thinking, and to scrutinize my creativity.*”

Sarah Zolner (Toy) [CAIL Comic Book Heroes] “Exchanging ideas, split workloads, meeting outside of the class went smoothly. For the final project, we came up with the chart game that kids can learn about bullying and how to avoid bullying. *I learned how to create a story but also how to communicate and collaborate with other people on the group project, which is very important for designers because that is how a designer works at the company. Collaborating with the own team, other department team to create the product.* ”

Nisha Patel (Fine Art): “*Overall, Otis I think the Liberal Art and Science classes have broadened my horizons and have exposed me to a whole new world. I will be leaving school with so much more knowledge than I came in with and will be able to apply it to my life after Otis.* What I liked about most of my Liberal Arts and Science classes is that they were all geared to my practice as an artist. I think that was extremely helpful.”

Nicole Auren (Digital Media): “With great talent comes great responsibility! What we do here will affect the world especially when random images suddenly become viral. Those images have a great impact and we want to make sure that we are sending out the right message. *Through taking Media Ethics,*

Composition and Critical Thought and Designing the Political I realized how much power we have...We can't let the media decide what information we get. If we all watch the same news every day we only get one truth (unless you are watching a Presidential recap on CNN or FOX). We need to travel and see the truth with our own eyes sometimes."

*Speaking of traveling! I happened to go to the *Israel Travel Study Abroad Program* which is an excellent example to support my point. What I saw on the news and experienced in person were almost opposites. I was feeling risky and applied for the Israel trip expecting to be bombed or abducted (exaggeration). Instead, I arrive at one of the most modern places I have ever been to and participated in the Tel Aviv Gay Pride Parade. So I literally don't even watch the news anymore and instead I go to Opposing Viewpoints through the Otis Library Database. There you can get the good, bad and the ugly."*

Information Literacy and Quantitative Reasoning were rarely specifically discussed. I took any mention of 'researching' to indicate Information Literacy and that occurred mostly in relation to discussions of LAS courses. Again, students discussed researching specifically far less than the subject of the paper or class. However, the scarcity of these ILOs being mentioned should not necessarily indicate a lack of student learning or recognition of that learning and I suspect that redesigning the formstack survey to give students an opportunity to identify these competencies would change the results positively. If students did link to courses that included Signature Assignments requiring research, it would be possible to assess Information Literacy competency by accessing the assessment module (at least for LAS classes), but again, that would not demonstrate student perception of Information Literacy.

Twelve seniors minored in Sustainability and were enrolled in a special Sustainability Capstone.²¹ These students wrote Senior Educational Reflections that focused almost exclusively on three sustainability courses: Human Ecology, Science and Sustainable Design, and Ethics and Sustainability, although they were supposed to follow the same SER prompt as the rest of the seniors. As a group, they wrote well and critically about what they learned, projects they undertook, and to some extent how they thought their minor would influence their fields or their particular future employment. Because the focus was on their Sustainability minor, they wrote very little about any other studio or LAS work. Very few mentioned the CAI courses or foundation courses, and none of them wrote about co-curricular activities. Since they were all going to write their formal Capstone papers on an issue in sustainability, they could easily have addressed the SER more holistically and that could be the focus in the future.²²

Conduct a focus group with students from fall and spring capstone courses to gain their insights into this process.

This never happened. I had planned to conduct the survey week five of spring semester when the Toy seniors had submitted their SER. Unfortunately, I was away at College Art Association conference that week and involved in too many other departmental priorities. I don't think that the lack of a senior focus group negatively impacted the results.

Develop a formstack survey for all Capstone faculty who taught the course to better determine how the assignment was presented, how faculty felt about the assignment, and what suggestions they had for improvement.

²¹ One student was a Fine Art major and she did the Senior Thesis Capstone and wrote a shorter reflection in the Sustainability Capstone.

²² The focus on sustainability courses rather than the SER prompt may have been the result of instructor direction.

Again in collaboration with Jean-Marie, I designed a formstack survey for the capstone faculty to evaluate how they introduced the assignment, what they thought of the assignment, and what their suggestions were for improvement of the prompt. Link to formstack survey:

https://otiscollege.formstack.com/forms/cap_ser

Again, let's start with the numbers:²³

- 89% introduced the Assignment week 1 as requested.
- 60% said they reviewed the assignment/discussed the prompt in the weeks prior to the due date
- 45% said they thought their SERs were acceptable in terms of Written Communication (one of the ILOs)
- 55% said they thought their SERs were acceptable in terms Critical Thinking (one of the ILOs)
- 90% said that the Reflection rubric used to score the SER was acceptable
- Due dates for the SER varied with 50% of the faculty having students submit week 3, and 25% week 4. The remaining faculty split with 1 making the SER due week 2, one week 10, and 1 week 15.²⁴ There is clearly some misunderstanding about due dates although the faculty did vote to have the assignment due week 3-4, leaving the remainder of the semester for capstone research and writing.
- 100% said that the prompt needed some kind of revision.

There were discrepancies among the faculty regarding the value of the SER. One saw no reason for the assignment and wrote that it should be revised

²³ Results based on 16 out of 20 faculty who responded to the formstack survey.

²⁴ There were some discrepancies among the formstack survey responses, the individual instructors' syllabi regarding when the SER was introduced, due dates for the SER, requirements for that assignment and submitted SERs. In one case an instructor posted two syllabi with conflicting assignments, which may account for some students not writing the SER.

to be “*limited to one short paragraph.*” Another wanted it renamed because “*I think “reflection” tends to communicate to students that this is a more narrative/stream-of-consciousness style assignment.*” A third thought that reflection was important, but thought that the wording of the assignment defeated its purpose and “*My students mostly saw the assignment as busy work. It was very difficult to get them excited about it.*”

Given that the focus of the Capstone course has always been its intensive research and writing, it is understandable that there were mixed reviews of an assignment that was somewhat new and took time away from what was seen as the real work of the course. Perhaps better explanation to the faculty about the value of reflection (on which there is much scholarly work) and student educational evaluation is necessary.

Also interesting were the faculty assessments of Critical Thinking and Written Communication in relation to the SER. I did not score for either ILO in the survey, but this was an assessed assignment so faculty not only graded it, but they scored it against a reflection assessment rubric. The one recurring observation that I had from reading the SERs was that they were not as competent in relation to grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

Co-Curricular: This was not a part of the OARs proposal, but co-curricular activities have become increasingly important and developed at Otis because they help enrich student life and lead to better retention. I did include a section for Co-curricular (yes/no/not discussed) and a noted the activities that students discussed.

31% of the seniors identified one or more co-curricular activity that ranged from internships to clubs. Every major was represented in some way. Remarkably none of them mentioned any activity associated with student government or the

lack of. There were the anticipated comments that there was no time for anything co-curricular, but there were also students who wrote about having jobs, joining or starting clubs, and participating in activities.

Those students who wrote at any length about co-curricular activities were extremely positive:

Esther Kim (Toy) listed elementary art tutor, VBS (Vacation Bible School) leader and Awana leader at her church. She wrote that her *"My passion and experience with art and elementary children influenced me to become a toy designer... My volunteer experience as an art teacher and a VBS leader also influenced me to become a toy designer. Looking back, I am very proud of my accomplishments and experience at Otis. In the future, I want to become a toy designer and create toys that will make children smile and be joyful!"*

Nicole Abea (Communication Arts) "I don't really know how I had time for clubs at school with my commute, my job, and my homework, but I was in a club every year I was at Otis: Cultural Studies Club president Foundation year, Rotoract and Identity (GSA) Sophomore year, Identity and Illustration Club Junior year, and now in my Senior year I'm media manager for Identity. Every single one of those clubs I joined because I had friends in the club, so really it started out as my way of maintaining relationships with my classmates in a way I couldn't otherwise, since I lived so far away. Later on, the clubs became a way for me to practice my design skills in an arena that wasn't for presenting for criticism, and that was really gratifying. (I made zines and posters for both Identity and Illustration club.) I learned about myself in the clubs I was in too, from ways I could engage the community through my work and certain community issues that were important to me such as gender identity and raising awareness about its many nuances."

Raymond Choi (Fine Arts) wrote about his “*opportunity to work with United Cerebral Palsy Organization as a videographer and also as a student teacher at the AVPA program at Culver City High School. These were rewarding experiences in a different way where I engaged with people and organizations outside of the Otis campus setting. Definitely experiences that made me grow as an individual and an artist.*”

Not all students wrote at such length, but they often identified ILOs as part of their co-curricular experiences. Students talked about their internships. Jujing Ma (Fashion) wrote about her internship at Mattel where she was able to design digitally and collaborate with professionals. Olivia Torres (Toy) and Sean McGuiness (Toy) both discussed how their internships led to full and part-time paid jobs. Sharron Kellerman wrote about doing design work for Pottery Barn while Olivia Obrecht (Fine Arts) wrote about working as the studio assistant for the artist Kenneth Ober.

Many students volunteered. Wenxi Zhu (Fashion) tutored students in Chinese, Bernardo Montiero (Product Design) was a peer mentor, and Joann Sun (Digital Media) talked about her participation in the Christian Club and her poster designs for the Student Affairs office.

Several fashion majors noted that they wanted to participate in co-curricular activities, but could not because they were on a different campus—an issue that the joined campuses will no longer face in fall 2016.

Evaluation/Suggestions for Revisions of the Senior Educational Reflection

- The Senior Educational Reflection should be retained as an instrument of institutional assessment. Despite the flaws with the initial prompt, it was clear that Otis seniors valued their education, believed that their tuition

dollars had been well spent, and thought they were extremely well prepared for their fields. Several wrote that it was only in going back through their eportfolios that they were aware of how much they had learned, grown, and developed. Several also noted that it was easier to review their LAS work because they had postings for those courses in the eportfolio.

- The prompt needs revision. It is too long, too complicated, asked for too much. Some suggestions which could be brought to the capstone faculty because they must support this:
 1. Revise prompt to include just the ILOs. It was too much to expect students to address PLOs and LAS. That was one of the drawbacks. The ILOs offer them key competencies and students would demonstrate both their choice and critical thinking by writing in relation to them. The Senior Show really addresses programmatic learning outcomes and the Capstone paper/project address department outcomes.
 2. Revise the organization of the SER to include an introduction on student perceptions of the ILOs. This could be a critical evaluation of which were most important or valuable. I think it would give students an opportunity to identify the connections among the ILOs more holistically and then act as the springboard to writing about specific courses/assignments/experiences in relation to them. Students could consider addressing each year at Otis and what their biggest take-aways from those years were in relation to the ILOs (This would eliminate long discussions of the reasons/problems/issues before they entered the college, eliminate focusing just on studio or LAS course, and help them realize that what they learned actually fits into a larger scheme.) This would also give them the opportunity to address Foundation individually if

they were here for that as well as their majors.

3. Stress linking to courses or including images. These SERs exist in a digital environment and many students did not exploit that so there were lots of word docs with no images. Given that one of their ILOs is Visual Fluency, this seems like a no-brainer.
4. Students need to have three weeks to complete the assignment and faculty must be supportive about it given. Having it due weeks 10 and 15 seems counter-productive since 1) students are too focused on finishing the capstone paper and final work/projects related to other courses 2) instructors who used the later due date had far fewer students complete the SER.
5. Better faculty preparation is needed about the value of the SER in relation to critical thinking and institutional assessment. Granted, the LAS faculty has had the opportunity for learning about reflective writing, but there still seems to be confusion about its value, especially in relation to metacognition and assessment.
6. Follow-up conversations with Faculty who did not have students submit the SER or did not assess the SER. This is an ongoing issue. LAS faculty have about 80% compliance in this area. Given that we are increasingly concerned about assessment and accreditation deadlines, the capstone faculty really needs to make this a priority.
7. There was a small contingent of students who whined, complained, and discussed far too many personal issues that had nothing to do with the college. That probably is to be expected and it did not reflect the overwhelming majority, but students should be encouraged to assess what they learned, not rant. This is part of critical thinking. As one faculty said, “It’s college, not a resort.”
8. Encourage studio faculty to have students post their signature assignment and a critical reflection about that. This probably

means more faculty education on critical reflections and eportfolios, but it is that kind of reinforcement that nurtures reflective skills, which have to be developed over time.

As with all research projects, I have learned a lot and hope that my assessments and suggestions will benefit the Capstone faculty and the college. Although it turned out to be more work than I initially envisioned, it was really gratifying to read what the students wrote. Despite the omissions and flaws, the students did perceive the value of four years, arduous classes, homework that seemed unending. They learned and they know that. All that remains is for us to help future seniors make that knowing more articulate and transparent.

Parme Giuntini, Ph.D.
Assistant Chair, Liberal Arts and Sciences

