

Cultural Studies Annual Assessment Report AY17-18

Summary

Cultural Studies capstone essays from 2017 and 2018, assessed by a faculty panel, were described as particularly strong in discourse analysis and consideration of structural diversity, equity, and inclusion issues. The areas for improvement, the panel noted, stemmed from a need for additional methodology course options, such as Ethnography, to adequately cover the diverse approaches and content that students are interested in.

Reviewers noted the reoccurring focus in the essays on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion, and the opportunity that the Cultural Studies program has to train students across the College in vocabularies and frameworks for studying such issues in a variety of programs.

I. Major Degree Programs

Cultural Studies BA

- Literary Studies
- Media and Popular Culture Studies
- Urban Studies

II. Degree Programs and Learning Outcomes Assessed AY17-18

Literary Studies

1. Students will be able to understand and use conceptual vocabularies and methods central to the analysis of the intersection of culture with other social and material practices.
2. Students will be able to comprehend and apply a wide range of theories and terms to the analysis of culturally contested texts, contexts, discourses, practices, and institutions.

Media and Popular Culture Studies

1. Students will be able to examine the complex interconnections among discourses, social structures, relations of power, and subjectivities in multiple contexts.
2. Students will be able to apply a range of theories and methodologies to cultural texts and practices, including media, popular culture, art, creative industries, everyday life, and politics.
3. Students will be able to produce useful knowledge of social and political significance that intervenes in the arenas of media, popular culture, and everyday life.

Urban Studies

1. Students will be able to identify major themes and events in the history of urbanization and respond to current issues in the urban environment.
2. Students will be able apply a range of theoretical and methodological approaches to the production, experience, and representation of the urban environment.
3. Students will be able to produce a substantive research project that analyzes an urban issue, theme, or object.

III. Assessment: Cultural Capstone Essays from Spring 2017 and Spring 2018

Method

Similar to previous years, a panel of three faculty associated with Cultural Studies assessed the senior capstone essays from Cultural Studies majors. The same rubric (see Appendix A), consisting of six criteria derived from the program outcomes and utilizing a scale of one to four (1= Poor, 2= Fair, 3= Well, 4= Excellent), from previous year's assessments was used. A norming session was held to discuss criteria and set standards. Following scoring, the panelists met to discuss overall trends, their interpretation of the results, and how they reflect on the program.

9 essays from 2017 were assessed, and 11 essays from 2018 were assessed.

Prior to reading the essays, at the norming session, the panel voiced that it would be important to see that students had considered a broad range of theories to determine what would be most important. Additionally, the panel expressed that instructors need to encourage students to draw on things from previous seminars, that early on it should be put into the heads of students that their early work and reading will lead to their capstone papers. Finally, it was noted that students doing projects in Black Studies lack the course materials to give comparable foundations to students in other areas.

Results

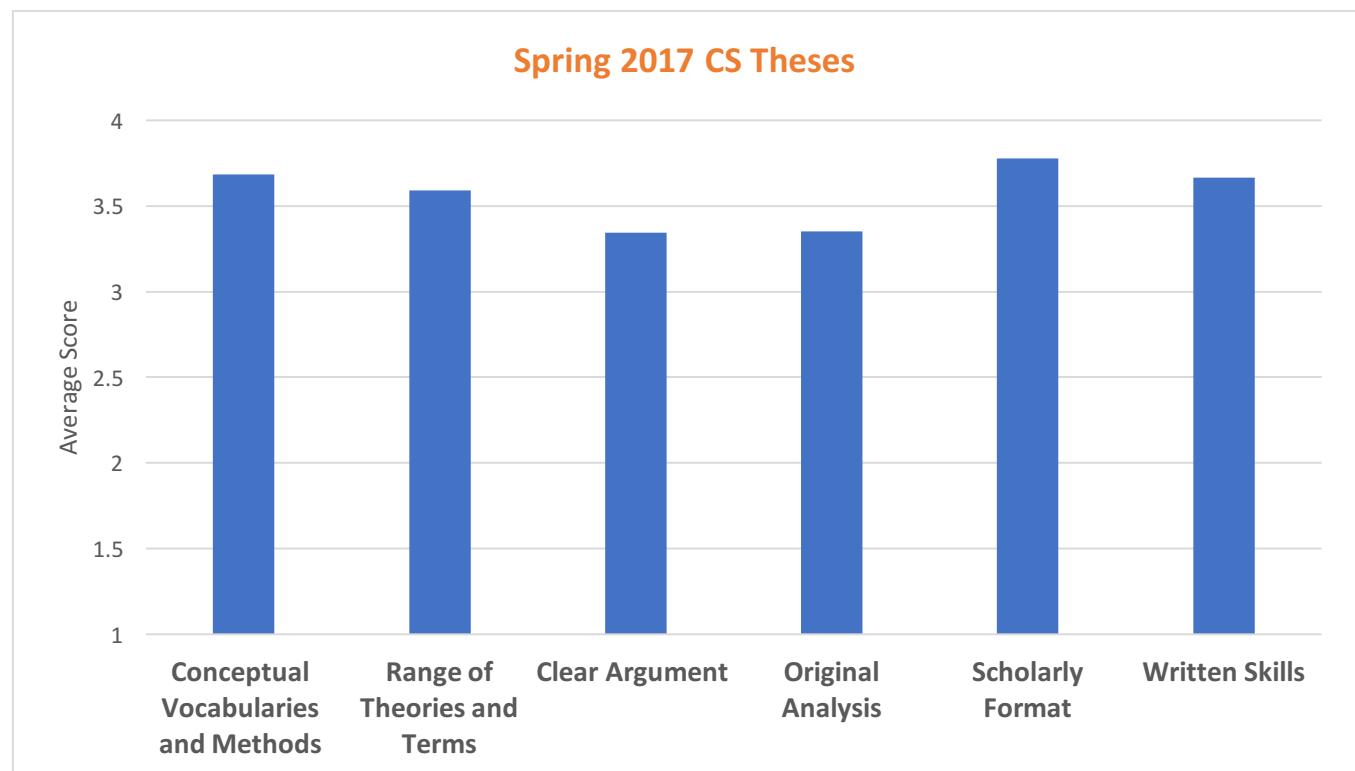


Figure 1. Spring 2017 Cultural Studies Capstone Essays. N= 9

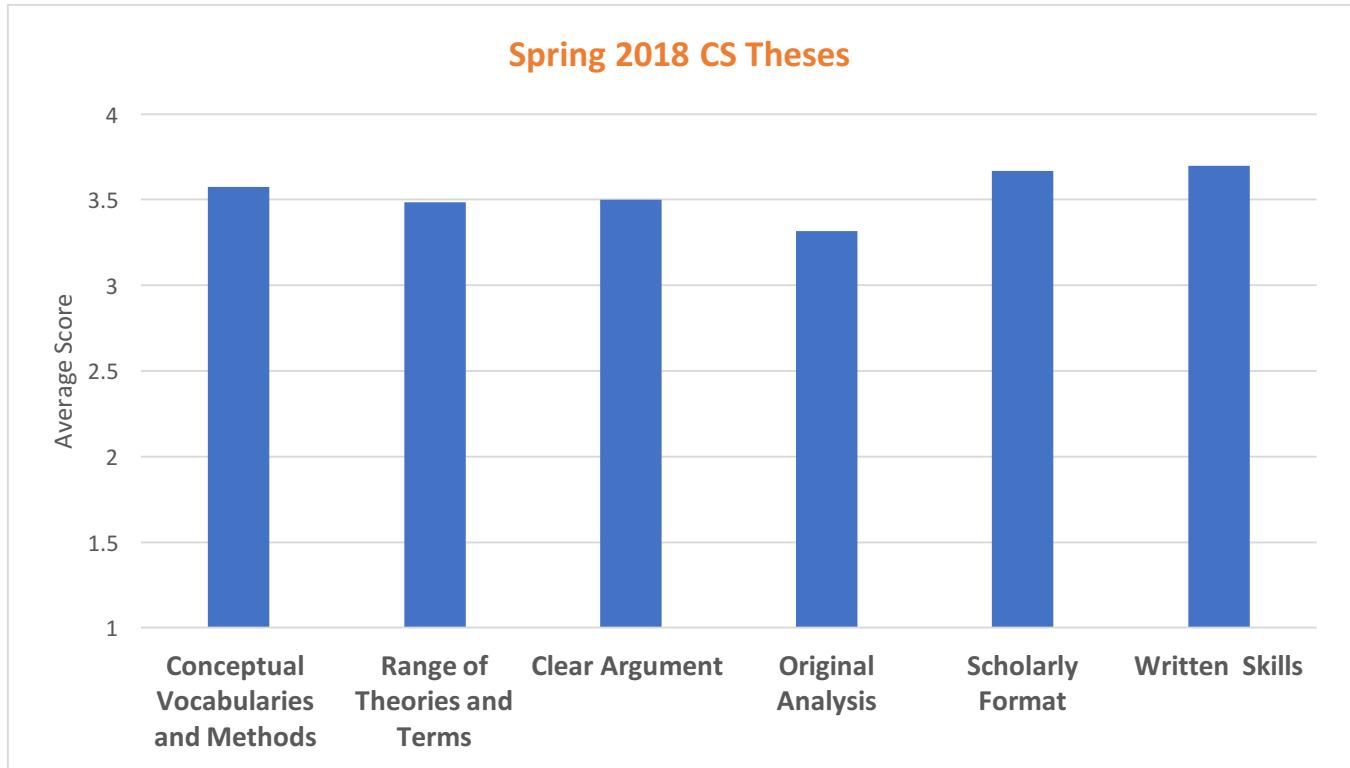


Figure 2. Spring 2017 Cultural Studies Capstone Essays. N= 11

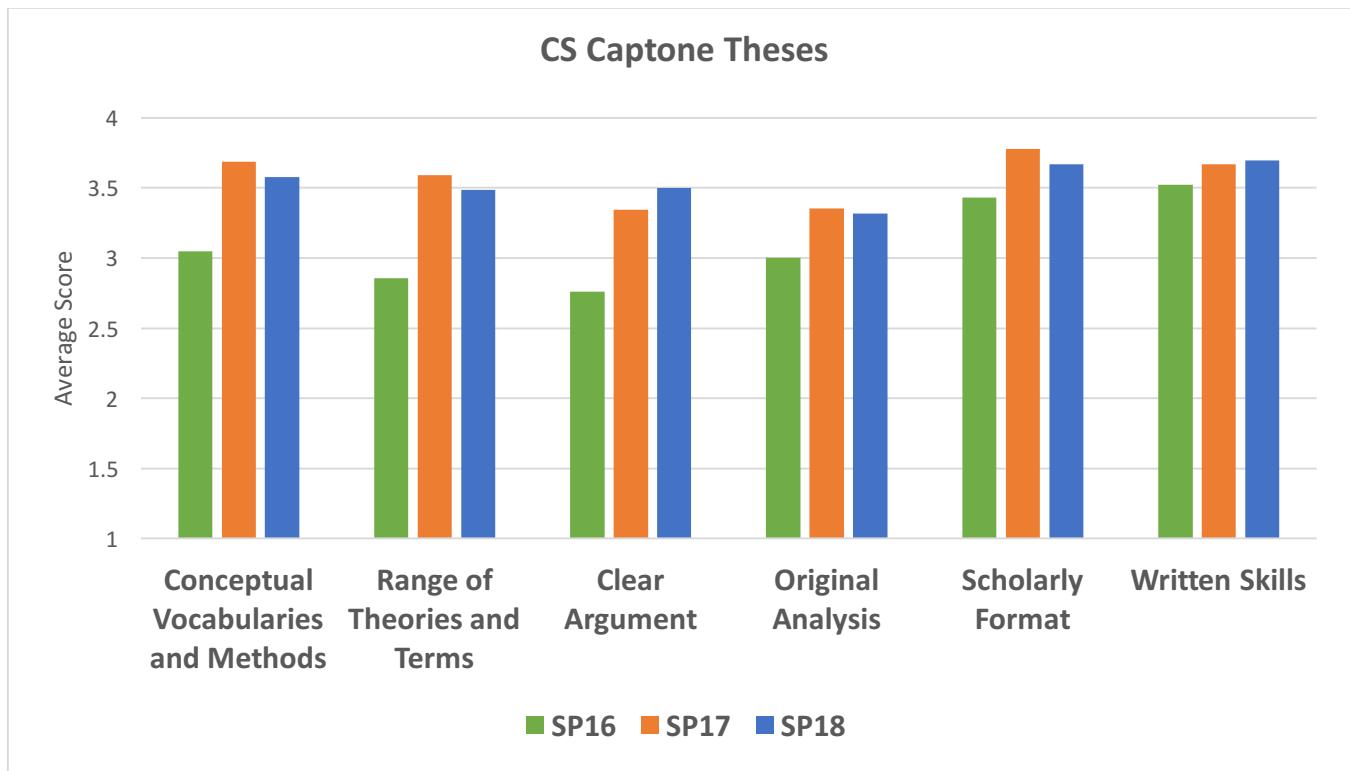


Figure 3. Cultural Studies Capstone Essays. SP16, N= 7; SP17, N= 9, SP18, N= 11

2016- 2018 Scores Averaged and Ranked by Criteria

1. Employ strong written communication skills (sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, other)	3.629
2. Use an acceptable scholarly format (e.g., APA or MLA)	3.625
3. Demonstrate understanding of conceptual vocabularies and methods central to the analysis of the intersection of culture with other social and material practices	3.436
4. Apply a range of theories and terms in its analysis	3.311
5. Present an original argument/analysis	3.223
6. Present and support a clear argument using appropriate methods and scholarly sources	3.201

Select Comments from 5/29/18 Panel Follow-up Conversation

Strengths

- The strongest essays were very self-reflexive and were interested in structural DEI issues.
- The literature reviews were very well done.
- This past year, students were encouraged and taught to work together much more, “and that was a great process.”
- “You can see Post-Colonial Theory, Whiteness Studies, Queer Theory, all of these classes very clearly in the papers.”
- “I liked that students were taking practical routes, influenced by their internships.”

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Connections

- Panelists noted that all of the papers deal with DEI issues. Additionally, they voiced that the program doesn’t currently have enough courses to support the types of work that students are interested in doing.
- The DEI interests of the Cultural Studies students and program could be utilized across the College and would benefit others across programs.
- “This program could be a source of critical energy for students in other programs. It has everything to do with students’ ability to merge the technical with the critical.”
- “The program could really answer some of these larger questions across the College; students need to learn particular interventions.”
 - “What these [CS] courses do is to provide the vocabularies and frameworks”

Connections to Other Programs

- Dance and Cinema Studies are two programs with similar goals.
- “I think we should be gearing our students towards courses that are not necessarily CS seminars but that support CS, like Literature courses.”

Reconsidering Reader and Advisor Roles

- “When I’m an external reader, I feel more like an advisor because I put considerable work into them.”
- “I think we need to reconsider how we do the second reader” and the role of the Thesis course instructor to avoid the instructor serving as an advisor for 10 students. An individual thesis advisor might be a better system, allowing for the Thesis course instructor to function more as a Project Manager, teaching students how to interact with their individual advisors. Faculty should then not be allowed to advise more than two students and function on a first-come first-served basis. Having a maximum of two students to advise would be a more sustainable workload than being an external reader for several more.
- It was suggested that CS faculty meet near the end of the first semester to discuss what projects are upcoming in order that they might consider potential advisors.

Critical Issues Course and Course Sequencing

- It’s disappointing that so few faculty attend the Critical Issues talks; there is a huge need for faculty to attend.
- “I think we need to put the Critical Issues course in the fall. It needs to be done earlier and treated like a 2000-level course.”
- One suggestion was to sequence the program as Intro Courses, Methods Courses, Seminars, Capstone work so that students get practice with methodologies before their Capstone.

Need for Ethnography Coursework/Training

- One essay was described as having a somewhat ethically questionable methodology and failing to include the necessary body of work on the topic. Panelists agreed, however, that this was due to the program lacking adequate coursework in ethnography and teaching students how to talk with people for research. Additionally, one panelists voiced appreciated for the ambition of the project and methodology compared with more traditional, semiotic analysis.

Faculty Culture

- Panelists voiced the need for CS faculty to meet.
- “To serve as coordinator and not receive a course release makes it very difficult to keep up with the administrative tasks.”

Appendix. Cultural Studies Capstone Essay Assessment Rubric

	Poor (1)	Fair (2)	Well (3)	Excellent (4)
Demonstrate understanding of conceptual vocabularies and methods central to the analysis of the intersection of culture with other social and material practices?				
Apply a range of theories and terms in its analysis?				
Present and support a clear argument using appropriate methods and scholarly sources?				
Present an original argument/analysis?				
Use an acceptable scholarly format (e.g., APA or MLA)?				
Employ strong written communication skills (sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, other)?				

Additional Comments: