

2021 ASSESSMENT REPORT

TAS315119 - FIRST NATIONS STUDIES

The external assessment of First Nations Studies consists of an Inquiry. The Inquiry must include two pieces of work:

1. A context statement in support of the inquiry, and
2. An extended research inquiry.

The 2021 External Assessment Specification is located in the course documentation in the TASC website at:

<https://cma.education.tas.gov.au/api/Document/2282/TAS315119%20External%20Assessment%20Specifications.pdf>

The Specification provides specific guidance on the minimum and maximum word limits for both parts of the Inquiry. Students were required to submit a context statement not longer than 500 words. The length of the Inquiry, inclusive of the context statement is required to be between 4000-6000 words in length, excluding references and bibliography. Any appendices or addendum submitted, as specified in the course external assessment specifications, count towards the total word count.

The Criteria assessed in the marking of the Inquiry were:

- Criterion 1:** Create texts using historical, anthropological and sociological ideas.
- Criterion 2:** Use evidence and historical, anthropological and sociological terms, concepts and ideas to support interpretations.
- Criterion 3:** Apply research and analytical skills to complete First Nations inquiry
- Criterion 8:** Analyse contemporary First Nations experiences of political advocacy, self-determination, global indigenous politics and truth-telling.
- Criterion 9:** Explain the contemporary resurgence and significance of First Nations identity, community, culture and connection to place in a comparative context.

Presentation and Features of the Inquiry

The external Assessment Specifications are specific in terms of how the inquiry must be submitted. The structure of the inquiry must take the following form:

- Cover
- Context statement
- Introduction
- Body of work
- Conclusion
- Bibliography

Additionally, when presenting an inquiry, students were required to observe all the following requirements:

Format:

- use one and a half line spacing
- have a title, headings and sub-headings
- use dot points and paragraphs where appropriate. When dot points are used, they must provide clear information, not an over simplistic summary or a single word
- use a numbering system for sections/sub-sections
- include page numbering and include a cumulative word count at the bottom of each page

Content:

- sequence the text to produce a cohesive report
- recognise different perspectives presented in a variety of different sources/texts
- integrate new ideas and information with existing understanding
- separate fact from opinion
- draw conclusions and develop explanations based on research findings and supported by relevant argument and evidence
- have a bibliography.

Sections of the Inquiry

Cover

Students were required to state their research question and include a total word count for their Inquiry. All students included their research question but not all included their total word count.

Context Statement

The context statement required students to provide a statement which provides context, rationale and justification for the selection of their inquiry question as well as summarising the key findings of the Inquiry. The examiners noted that the quality of context statements was significantly variable.

Successful context statements provided a statement that clearly outlined the context and reasoning behind the choice and the significance of the question.

It was noted that some students used the context statement as an opportunity to engage with their own feelings and predispositions towards Reconciliation by relating the question to their own experiences and insights as a result of undertaking the course.

This approach should not be discouraged. The stronger context statements included the general findings of their inquiry. It is important to note that in 2021 the stipulated length of the context statement (500 words) was not uniformly adopted with a number of statements being either longer or more commonly shorter than the length set in the External Assessment Specifications.

Introduction

Students were required to restate their Inquiry question in their introduction, establish the research hypothesis and briefly introduce the main arguments of their work. Very few Inquiry introductions did this. The better introductions clearly stated the nature of the hypothesis and offered a question which was testable in the context of the overall requirements of the folio. More successful introductions clearly stated both the importance of the research as well as the explicit importance of the comparative context of the work across and between different First Nations. The examiners were pleased to note that in 2021, when compared to both 2020 and 2019, the questions developed by students were highly original. However, it is important to note that, as in previous years, the more successful Inquiries are precise in the framing of and the practical scope of the question, and as such, are generally more successful in addressing them within the confines of the Inquiry.

Body of Work

Students who were more successful in the completion of the body of work shared many elements that were addressed in the External Assessment Specifications, as detailed below:

More successful students were clear in the practical execution of their research question and made repeated and conscious attempts to align the evidence brought forward in their Inquiry with the research question. These students also ensured the required comparative nature of the inquiry and contributed to a balanced weighting of evidence and argument from at least two First Nation settings. Less successful students used materials which did not directly align to their question and/or were insufficiently comparative between First Nations.

More successful students uniformly utilised APA referencing conventions and this made a noticeable and positive contribution to their meeting the requirement to provide evidence-based arguments. Weaker Folios paid less attention to the referencing conventions and it was noted that a considerable number of folios provided very sparse in-text referencing. Importantly some students seemed unsure as to how to provide cumulative word counts on every page and to ensure that this was applicable to their Context statement too. Several students did not meet the requirement to include a total word count on the cover of their Folio.

Many students adopted a heavily weighted historical approach to their work, particularly in the early parts of their Inquiry. While this added context, the Examiners found that an overly historical analysis unbalanced the overall Folio and its ability to address its research question. In addition, the actual quantity of historical material had the effect of 'crowding out' the available word count leaving little available to address the research question in detail. It was noted that in some cases the historical analysis made up to half of the candidate's words count. More successful students were able to readily contextualise historical occurrences and events and apply them to contemporary real-world contexts and challenges facing First Nations and their peoples.

It was noteworthy that those students who adopted a transdisciplinary approach to their work and included materials, ideas and evidence from and across the disciplines of history, sociology, and anthropology were more successful in answering their research question.

The markers noted that a significant percentage of students did not meet the formatting requirements including headings and sub-headings, cumulative word counts and spacing as set out in the External Assessment Specifications.

The less successful students produced work which only partially addressed their specific research question. The research designs of some students did not result in questions which were free of bias, or which were sufficiently clear or manageable in the context of the requirements of the course. Others did not sufficiently and rigorously refer to their research question and context statement in their work. In a few cases it was not clear that students had sufficiently differentiated between fact and opinion.

One area for students to keep in mind is the importance of defining key terms used. In this way terms such as (but not limited to) Indigeneity, (Cultural Identity) Genocide, Worldview and Assimilation should not be used without providing the reader with definitional clarity in the context of the Folio's intent.

An area of weakness was the evaluative section of Folios. Many were simply too short and too descriptive. Stronger folios were able to explicitly link their evaluation to the research question, whereas weaker folios did not. Stronger folios clearly and methodically assessed and evaluated contesting sources of evidence as well as identifying and discussing differing interpretations of First Nations experience. The more successful students were able to develop convincing and original arguments by synthesising relevant and topical evidence from a wide variety of sources. It was evident in many Folios, that very limited, if any attempt, had been made to explain or analyse or even acknowledge the contestable nature of different interpretations and representations related to First Nations and/or to explain the usefulness of such different interpretations in explaining historical and contemporary First Nations experiences. This had an impact on the grades awarded to students by examiners.

As was noted in last year's Examiners Report, the examiners strongly advise that in future, students are encouraged to develop an annotated bibliography related to the course as part of their internal Work Requirements. This encourages the development of a more evaluative and critical understanding of source materials as well as the contestability and limitations of such materials. Such work would better prepare students for the requirements of the Folio.

Conclusion

Conclusions were less convincing than the bodies of the Folios. The examiners found that many students wrote very brief conclusions which did not meet the assessment specification. Students were required to write a conclusion which reiterated the Inquiry question, provided confirmation of the hypothesis as evidenced in the body of the work and to make a final summation. A significant majority of students did not re-state the research question nor draw conclusions regarding the extent to which their question had been successfully answered or otherwise. Most students did not offer comment on the significance of their work, nor did they attempt to address questions of research validity or reliability in their work. As was found in 2020, the examiners felt that many conclusions were not comprehensive and appeared rushed.

Bibliography

Given the size and significance of the Inquiry, as well as the extensive and growing range of materials available to students in print and digital form, including the Canvas materials and the Teaching and Learning Supplement for this course, markers were looking for bibliographies which were comprehensive and transdisciplinary in nature with an explicit link to both primary and secondary source materials. More successful students produced bibliographies which were appropriately formatted, and which clearly demonstrated a breadth and depth of research within and between academic disciplines including Anthropology, History and Sociology.

Criterion 1

Create texts using historical, anthropological and sociological ideas

The more successful Inquiries developed and sustained a logical argument, were clearly and accurately formatted, used more sophisticated vocabulary and adopted a consistent and appropriate academic register in their text. Importantly students who were able to compose a cohesive and coherent response, in accordance with Elements 1 and 3 of Criterion 1, were more successful. Examiners noted that in the less successful Inquiries, students were not able to differentiate the information, images, ideas and words taken from sources. The weaker Folios were characterised by partial adoption of APA referencing conventions and narrow and limited bibliographies. Note that a considerable number of students wrote substantially fewer words than the stipulated word range so were less successful on this criterion.

Criterion 2

Use evidence and historical, anthropological and sociological terms, concepts and ideas to support interpretations.

The examiners observed that quality of the submitted work against Criterion 2 was variable. Criterion 2 requires students to use appropriate terminology, to analyse differing historical, anthropological and sociological interpretations from a range of sources, to develop argument based on evidence and differing interpretations and to present interpretations of their research findings.

In the more successful Inquiries, students were able to consistently use appropriate terms and use them well in support of their discussion. In the less successful Inquiries, students did not critically analyse or evaluate possible alternative interpretations and representations of source materials, nor were they able to recognise or acknowledge alternative interpretations or perspectives of evidence in a comparative context. Examiners found some students less confident in contesting or offering differing interpretations of ideas and concepts from diverse sources and perspectives. Examiners also noted that in some cases candidate personal bias and personal perspective was too pronounced in the work, and this detracted from their ability to use and apply evidence in a fair and balanced way. In a few cases, this made the process of providing a clear, coherent and reliable interpretation more limited than that stipulated for this Criterion.

Criterion 3

Apply research and analytical skills to complete First Nations inquiry

Examiners found that more successful students had created Inquiry questions which were highly topical and achievable. Examiners noted that students who created open-ended inquiry questions or ones which attempted to include too many sub-parts, were less successful in both framing a cohesive question and in turn, being able to successfully answer all parts of their question with a sufficient degree of rigour and clarity.

One common weakness across many Inquiries was the inability to describe, explain or analyse the contestable nature of different interpretations of First Nations history and lived experiences. Most students approached and incorporated primary and secondary sources in their folios without explicitly offering any comment on the reliability, contestability or alternative points of view to that expressed in the sources. The examiners recommend that this be addressed explicitly by teachers in their classes in future years.

Consistent with comments made above, examiners noted that the more successful Inquiries were highly selective in their source materials and evidence with which to substantiate their research and included analysis of the context and nature of much of the primary and secondary source materials in a truly comparative context. Weaker Inquiries revealed that skill development is required for students to meet the requirements of this criterion: creating and managing their research questions, critically reflecting and weighing the balance of differing interpretations and representation of First Nations experiences, and critically targeting and explaining source materials.

The examiners noted that, given the intrinsic comparative nature of the course and the inquiry, some Folios did not provide evidence of a balanced approach to the research, in some cases favouring First Nations content to the exclusion of detailed analysis of others.

Criterion 8

Analyse contemporary First Nations experiences of political advocacy, self-determination, global indigenous politics and truth-telling.

Successful students on this criterion took a clear and deliberate comparative approach to their Inquiry. Examiners noted that more successful folios considered and evaluated the experiences of First Nations using an integrated and woven approach in their research. The more successful folios did not isolate particular experiences of individual First Nations but analysed and compared them both in specific historical and contemporary contexts. These folios clearly identified and explained common patterns of movements, events and developments of and between different First Nations. Weaker folios did not provide an integrated and effective comparative analysis of contemporary First Nations issues.

Criterion 9

Explain the contemporary resurgence and significance of First Nations identity, community, culture and connection to place in a comparative context.

Markers were looking for responses which were both comparative and contemporary. The stronger folios had the contemporary nature of First Nations identity, community, culture and connection to place as an integral part of their work and made considerable effort to balance the historical experiences of these elements with a clear expression of their contemporary manifestations. The examiners found that the weaker folios had a less balanced or opportunistic approach by virtue of having an overly historical approach to First Nations identity, community, culture and connection to place in their Inquiry, at the expense of a more contemporary examination.