

Annual Assessment Report:

Academic Year: 2015-2016

Department: English

Program(s): English major, all options (Writing, English Education, Literature)

1. What Was Done

For FY 2015-16 we evaluated Learning Outcomes #1 and #4 from our Assessment Plan for Literature and Education majors. The outcomes are as follows:

#1 Reading: Students read and understand complex literary, theoretical, and expository texts accurately and sensitively

#4 Research: Students demonstrate proficiency with current research technologies and resources and with integrating sources in their writing.

For Education majors we evaluated the Teaching specific outcomes # 1 and #2

#1 Language Arts: Students understand the central concepts and structures of English Language Arts as an academic discipline, including literature, writing, and language usage.

#2 Instructional Planning: Students understand how to plan instruction based upon knowledge of the English Language Arts and curriculum goals.

2. What Data Were Collected

A random sample was selected of three final papers from each of the option-specific capstone courses: LIT 494RH for Literature, WRIT 494RH for Writing (2 courses), and ENGL 461RH for English Education. Three faculty members were assigned to perform the evaluations, one faculty for each option.

3. What Was Learned

Once again, the papers collected from all four capstone courses (literature, education and 2 writing courses) demonstrated proficiency in all assessment categories. Taken collectively, they show that graduating seniors have learned and internalized the core skills taught in the English curriculum. What is becoming increasingly evident, however, is that the three divisions of the English Department curriculum—literature, education, and writing—continue to diverge. This increasingly puts pressure on the assessment process as capstone projects in these distinct sub-disciplines become increasingly specialized and hence share less and less common ground. Consequently, the assessment process will report on each disciplinary area separately as each is increasingly found to have its own unique areas of expertise and potential challenges.

3A. Writing

The **Writing** capstone papers continued to show strong overall skills, particularly in the areas of reading and research which are to be assessed this year. In many ways, these two criteria of reading and research substantially overlap, and students demonstrated that they were, in fact, incorporating and expanding their “accurate and sensitive” reading of texts into larger research methodologies. All of the papers—with the exception of creative writing pieces noted below—included an appropriate number of resources gathered from a wide range of sources.

Collectively, this range—from academic journal articles to personal correspondence—shows that writing majors are mastering both a traditional and an expanded sense of what is appropriate research material. The materials are all nicely incorporated with the students' own voices and arguments, astutely chosen to illustrate key points, and carefully analyzed in the context of each student's own writing. In short, the writing majors are not only good writers, they are writers who are first good readers and researchers who draw upon this previous reading experience as a platform upon which to construct their own writing. The most noticeable issue that arises from this year's assessment of the Writing capstone papers, however, is that the core learning outcome in the Writing option should probably be broadened from research to research and creative activity. Not only were some capstone projects outright creative writing pieces, but other students blended traditional research with creative writing and personal reflection in very sophisticated ways that blur the boundaries between research and creative activity.

Recommendation: as is appropriate given the growth of the Writing option, the parameters of current coursework—and hence learning outcomes—has shifted enough toward the direction of creative writing that the research assessment outcome should be broadened to reflect these changes.

3B. Education

In analyzing three papers from the Fall 2015 **English Education Capstone** (ENGL 461R) course, I focused on two areas: Teaching 1 (*Students understand the central concepts and structures of ELA as an academic discipline, including literature, writing, and language usage*, and Teaching 2 (*Students understand how to plan instruction based upon knowledge of the ELA and curriculum goals*). My analysis begins with some general comments on the papers and then focused narrative for the two specific areas of analysis.

The writing across the papers was solid: Students have a good handle on the English language, structures, and overall arc being told within their essays. It is clear that the students are well read and took care to make use of class concepts within their work. As a genre, the publications within English Education vacillate across high theory, mid theory, and pedagogical details and audiences range from career-long researchers to pre-service classroom teachers. These three papers take on these various rhetorical challenges in attempt to square themselves within the teacher researcher realm, taking on ethnographically informed research methods, albeit with novice “clunkiness.” I am impressed with the detailed, qualitative research done for each paper and appreciated the students attempts to situate their findings and questions within published, situated work. It is clear that these three student writers recognize their developing teacher researcher identities and are offering a thoughtful, research-based entry into their professional careers. The writers are thoughtful and pose questions that will benefit the field.

With specific nod to Teaching 1, I saw that the students are learning the genre of publication in English Education: Two writers made use of headings and offered signposting throughout, while one writer relied on her story-telling skills to share her research. All three narrativized their findings, aligned with research, and recognized the literature, writing, and language usage within the discipline. Each will benefit from continued practitioner-research and more mature ways to unpack data from interview participants. The findings were significant yet thin in explanation,

with gaps present indicating that these three writers have solid intuition and intelligence, yet explicitly detailing their methodological process of analysis was weak.

With regard to Teaching 2, I found that the papers reveal solid epistemological stances for various classroom pedagogy. The writers offer pedagogical ideas (influenced by research) through a social justice lens and took care to explain their recommendations. Across the three writers, I noted each trying on numerous ideas for curricular enhancement for their participants; in so doing, their pre-service identities were apparent, as there was not consistent depth or concrete ways to put their pedagogical ideas into action. I find this appropriate both for the timing of this course (occurring directly prior to their student teaching: their first sustained experiences as teachers) and for the requirements for assignment analyzed (the paper was not to include detailed curricular plans, yet instead, begin to move these writers across theory, action-research, and teaching). **It is my recommendation that future assessment of Teaching 2 be done at the junior level, with assignments from ENGL 339 and 445.**

3C. Literature

Core Outcome 1: Reading (“Students read and understand complex literary, theoretical, and expository texts accurately and sensitively.”)

All three of these papers amply meet the core reading outcome. Each writer shows him- or herself proficient in reading and comprehending complex poetry—by Marianne Moore, Dylan Thomas, and Sylvia Plath—with accuracy and sensitivity. The first two papers, in particular (on Moore and Thomas), show a strong ability to read poetry for form as well as content and to pay fruitful attention to the unstated associations of poems as well as to the explicit words on the page. Both of these writers very effectively read particular poems in the context of the literary traditions they arise from and speak back to and use this understanding of how poems enter into dialogue with the literary traditions underlying them to enrich their interpretation of the particular works. In addition to their skill in reading literary texts, all three papers—especially the third (on Plath)—demonstrate proficiency in reading and understanding the literary criticism they draw on.

Core Outcome 4: Research (“Students demonstrate proficiency with current research technologies and resources and with integrating sources in their writing.”)

All three papers show effective research abilities. The first and third papers, in particular, demonstrate strong and well-researched familiarity with the criticism on their respective authors. Both ably summarize broad trends and themes in the criticism. The first paper incorporates a wide range of researched sources when relevant, while the third paper skillfully surveys the major landmarks of the critical conversation on Sylvia Plath. These two papers also integrate sources into their writing well, although the third paper does tend to rely heavily on one particular source (Knickerbocker) that it introduces rather repetitively. The second paper evinces well-researched background knowledge of Dylan Thomas’s life and very skillfully uses this knowledge to enrich its reading of particular poems, drawing on its research to show how a poem

emerged. This paper's research into the relevant literary-critical conversation seems less methodical and more haphazard than that of the other two papers; several of the sources cited are non-scholarly or from reference works, and the body of the paper relies heavily on just a few sources. This paper also tends to integrate its sources into its writing less seamlessly than the Marianne Moore paper, in particular, and the sources it deploys sometimes seem extraneous to the argumentative or interpretive points being made. In terms of "current research technologies and resources," all three papers show a good command of the traditional technologies and resources of literary study—again, the first and third slightly more so than the second.

4. How We Responded

Based on our evaluations the assessment committee will make the following recommendations to the department.

Recommendation 1: As is appropriate given the growth of the Writing option, the parameters of current coursework—and hence learning outcomes—has shifted enough toward the direction of creative writing that the research assessment outcome should be broadened to reflect these changes.

Recommendation 2: It is my recommendation that future assessment of Teaching 2 be done at the junior level, with assignments from ENGL 339 and 445.