

# Annual Assessment Report

Academic Year: 2014-15

Department: English

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

## 1. What Was Done

For FY 2014-15 we evaluated Learning Outcome #2 from our Assessment Plan for all three of our major options. The outcome is as follows:

Outcome #2: Students will “be able to critically interpret, analyze, and synthesize texts, culture, and/or communication”

We also assessed Learning Outcomes #5 and #6 for the Literature option. These outcomes are:

LIT #5: Students will “demonstrate knowledge of English literature (e.g., its foundations, history, and relation to other literary traditions)”

LIT 6: Students will “demonstrate familiarity with literary theory and proficiency in applying theory to literary analysis”

## 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, and ENGL 461RH for English Education. Three faculty members were assigned to perform the evaluations, one faculty for each course.

## 3. What Was Learned

Strengths:

Evaluators found that the papers from all three capstones successfully met our learning outcomes, in all cases adequate, and at times even excelling in their mastery of the requisite skills. The literature papers were deemed to have strong critical ability, detailed analysis, rich and insightful interpretive creativity, breadth of knowledge, and sophisticated complexity and nuance. Meanwhile, the education papers were judged to have a careful analysis of data, clear understanding of the implications of that data, thoughtful observations, and a nice synthesis of data, analysis, and theory, making a “smart” synthesis of interpretation and analysis. In particular, the education papers “reached out to research texts well beyond their class readings.” Finally, the writing capstone papers showed excellent writing skills, an astute critical self-awareness of their goals and objectives as writers, an ability to synthesize diverse modalities of writing, innovative and creative approaches, and the ability to form and enact strong rhetorical positions. On the scale between adequate and excellent, the overall evaluation of all of the papers collectively leaned toward the excellent end of the scale.

The Literature outcomes #5-6 were also easily met. Student papers showed “clearly well-versed,” “good knowledge,” and “strong knowledge” of the foundations, history, and traditions of literature. Meanwhile, two of the three papers also demonstrated a “most impressive” and “deeply and precisely historicized” sense of literary theory with “consistent and coherent” theoretical approaches that produced “strong, convincing interpretations.” The third paper, however, was deemed “not very theoretically informed.” While admittedly theory is the most difficult aspect of training in literature, the department should strive to achieve a more uniform level of excellence in critical theory.

Areas needing attention:

There was no apparent pattern, across the samples, of a lack of writing proficiency generally or specifically. However, one literature paper was deemed only “adequate” and “solid,” but “not particularly strong” in its depth of critical analysis. The education papers were collectively “successful” with a “deep” understanding of their material and analysis, but showed some “room for improvement,” particularly in “writing intertextually.” Meanwhile, one writing paper, while excellent at achieving its own goals, perhaps leaned more toward mere description than analysis.

#### **4. How We Responded**

This assessment round revealed both an adequate, and even solid, level of work across all three subfields, but noted that in a minority of the papers (generally the bottom third) there was an occasional lack of “strength” or “excellence,” or some room for improvement. The committee recommendation is that while our assessment showed no deficiencies in meeting our departmental learning outcomes, the department should keep an ever-present vigilance to ensure that all students, or at least as many as possible, not only succeed but excel, with instruction in critical theory being perhaps one area where greater emphasis could be focused.