

Annual Assessment Report

Academic Year: 2016-17

Department: English

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

1. What Was Done

For FY 2016-17 all students were evaluated for Core Learning Outcome #2 from our Assessment Plan.

#2 Writing: Students are proficient in producing analyses, reflective writing, and research-based writing that is focused, well elaborated and supported, and well edited.

In addition, Education majors were also evaluated according to the Teaching Education specific outcome #2

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

Literature majors were also evaluated according to the Literature specific outcomes #2 and #3

Literature #2: Students demonstrate proficiency with analyzing and interpreting, through writing, a range of literary genres.

Literature #3: Students demonstrate familiarity with a range of literary and critical theories and proficiency in using such theories as analytical frameworks for literary analysis.

And Writing majors were evaluated according to the Writing specific outcomes #2 and #3

Writing #2: Students demonstrate knowledge of the role of textual genres and modalities, including reflective/personal, research/scholarly, imaginative/literary, and business/professional, in a writing portfolio that helps them apply for writing-centered careers and opportunities.

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 option.

3. What Was Learned

The papers collected from all three capstone courses (literature, education, and writing courses) again demonstrated proficiency across all assessment categories. Taken collectively, they show that graduating seniors are mastering the skills being assessed as the ultimate learning outcomes of the major taken as a whole. Much like last year, however, we continue to see increasing divergence between the three divisions of the English Department curriculum—literature, education, and writing. This divergence is particularly noticeable in the Writing major because writing courses continue to expand the range of diverse writing styles being taught and learned. Consequently, we will again follow the precedent set last year of reporting on each disciplinary area separately as each program is increasingly demonstrating its own unique areas of expertise and potential challenges.

3A. Writing

Representative samples of **Writing** papers in WRIT 494, the capstone course, demonstrated levels of proficiency ranging from 3 (developing proficiency/ acceptable) to 4 (fully proficient).

Research writing/analysis demonstrated competence in the acquisition, use, ascription, and citation of source materials. Knowledge of appropriate conventions in academic discourse structure ranged from adequate to competent. Areas needing attention included occasional overconfidence in inconclusive findings with resulting unjustified conclusions/assertions.

Essay/reflective writing demonstrated a fairly high degree of competence in usage, phrasing, transitions, paragraph structure, style, and lexis as well as knowledge of discursive differences between genres. Occasional examples of overwrought language and lack of balance in topic development were in evidence.

Imaginative writing demonstrated relatively strong skills in theme development, stylistic variation, depth and range of ideas, and awareness of audience. Vocabulary, phrasing, and style was generally rich and creative. Again, as with essay/reflective prose, writing contained examples of overwrought language with a tendency to opt for impact value rather than nuanced expression.

RECOMMENDATIONS: General recommendations across such a wide range of genres are not feasible in this case—except to say that more attention could be paid to students “reining in” their assertions and language to reflect more precise and elegant approaches to argumentation, reflection, and expression.

3B. Education

The **Education** papers are fundamentally well-written, nicely balancing critical “analysis,” “reflective writing,” and “research.” Each of the papers clearly “focuses” specifically on analyzing a particular critical issue, and all three papers explore their central issues with sufficient analysis to both “elaborate” and “support” their central thesis arguments. The ideas presented are thoughtful, nuanced, and relevant. The writing is clear, concise, and even compelling. Moreover, these analyses are further supported by research, ranging from 10 to 20 sources in each paper, with a nice mix of scholarly books and journal articles. Finally, while the papers are not entirely free of errors, they clearly reach the threshold of being sufficiently “well edited” even for a senior capstone course.

In addition to being well-written, the Education papers also demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of how to develop course materials “based upon knowledge of the English Language Arts and curriculum goals.” Each of the three papers explored and analyzed a specific issue related to curriculum design: one discussed the relationship between fiction and non-fiction texts, another explored a broader multimedia sense of popular culture, and the third discussed the role of place, specifically rurality, in the English curriculum. In addition to raising these larger curricular issues, the papers also discussed very concrete, specific curricular issues related to text selection, specific writing assignments, and unit goals— together with how these decisions are related to common core state standards. In fact, what stands out most about these papers is their ability to connect large curricular issues to very specific details of unit design and text selection. The students clearly demonstrate that they are

very capable of “translating” their thinking about larger critical issues into a detailed analysis of the concrete specifics of curriculum design.

C. Literature

The **Literature** papers admirably illustrate the core assessment criteria #2 (Writing). In particular, each paper demonstrated an exceptional ability to write a clear, focused central thesis argument—a skill that is not always learned before the senior capstone level. In fact, I had to fail half of my Introduction to Literature (LIT 201) papers precisely because they failed to articulate any clear focused central thesis argument. (I did allow students to revise their papers, and most at least began to make progress toward learning this skill.) The papers for this year’s Literature Capstone indeed stood out for the students’ ability to write a “focused” paper. In addition, these papers were also “well elaborated and supported.” The papers’ research ranged from 25 citations from 10 sources (more than adequate) to 65 citations from more than 20 sources (truly exceptional). Moreover, the students’ ideas were both “analytical” and “reflective,” probing both the material covered in the class itself and the larger meaning of that material with respect to social and political crises faced by contemporary society—mostly related to climate change. No mere summaries of plots or secondary critical material, these papers interwove primary/literary and secondary/critical sources into complex analyses of how works of literature engage larger political and critical issues. I would personally be proud to have my students’ write papers like these; they were exceptionally well written.

Moreover, the papers demonstrated not just proficiency but mastery of the two Literature specific assessment criteria of both #2 “analyzing and interpreting” literary genres and #3 applying a “range of literary and critical theories” as “analytical frameworks for literary analysis.” In short, what these two criteria ask is that students demonstrate an ability to analyze literature in a way that interweaves literary and critical texts. All three of the papers illustrated this ability remarkably, simultaneously “analyzing” literature through a close reading of specific quotes and details from the literary texts themselves and by illustrating, developing, and expanding their analysis through deft and incisive applications of critical “theories.” All three papers were exemplary in their demonstration of how our students can best develop their analytical skills by integrating literary and critical analysis. Ultimately, the quality of these Senior Capstone papers demonstrates how the core and the literature specific assessment criteria are themselves interrelated because these papers’ integration of literature and criticism led directly to the superior quality of their writing in general.

4. How We Responded

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

Recommendation #1: Given that both last year and this year questions were raised about how to properly assess the wide range of genres being explored, especially by Writing option students, we recommend that the department entirely revise the assessment process for the Writing option, rewriting the assessment criteria to better fit and assess the practices currently being used in the Writing option.

Recommendation #2: Given the increasing divergence of the three major options in general, we recommend that the assessment procedure for all three options be entirely redone to make three distinct assessment processes specific to each option. We recommend that each option develop a three-year cycle with two criteria analyzed each year for each option.