Narrative Submission

Introduction:

Prior to fall 2007, each semester the Assessment Committee scored essays from 198T: Senior Seminar and 120A: Advanced Composition, using a rubric based on the English Department Writing Standards. The purpose was to focus on the two courses required of all English majors in order to get a sense of our students’ writing abilities, with the goal that what we found could help inform the way we teach. These assessments of 198T and 120A led to a number of fruitful activities: assessment retreats where 198T and 120A instructors met to discuss learning outcomes and assignments; a draft of learning outcomes for 198T that will be completed in fall 2008 (see Appendix I for draft of 198T outcomes); a statement of course goals for 120A that instructors agreed to include on their course information sheets and that are disseminated to each instructor teaching 120A; a revised 120A course description to match the statement of course goals; and a 120A instructor resource Web site linked to the English Department Web site that includes the new 120A course description, the new statement of course goals, example syllabi, and example assignments and activities.

In the spring 2007 program review report for the English Department, the review team members state, “...the Department’s assessment plan is, in many ways, a model for the campus...”(8).” However, the review team suggested being less “mechanical” in the way we are doing assessment and also focusing more on learning outcomes for the English major. Both the review team and the external consultant urged the Department to “focus on its plan for portfolio review.” According to the review team, one value of portfolio assessment would be its ability to measure “individual students’ growth.” The Assessment Committee felt there were many other advantages to portfolio assessment: the ability to look at a variety of genres from across sub-disciplines, the ability to get information directly from the students and give them a more significant role as stakeholders in the assessment process, the likelihood that the information we gathered could help us in developing learning outcomes for both the Department and sub-disciplines within the major (which was another recommendation of the program review team), and the alignment of portfolio assessment with best practices as recommended by the literature on assessment (White, Huot, Haswell, Yancey, Condon, Banta, Elbow, Hillocks) and the National Council of English Teachers and the Conference on College Composition and Communication.

1. What goals or learning objectives/outcomes were assessed in the AY ending June 30?

Our goal in moving to a portfolio pilot project was not to assess individual students or faculty members, but to build a “criteria map” (Broad) of what we as English Studies teachers assign, what we value, and how students respond to and value our assignments. We felt that this criteria map would both help the Department shape undergraduate learning outcomes and help faculty gauge which assignments are most useful to students and whether students are responding to our assignments in ways we deem effective and appropriate. We see this as a first step in refining and refocusing our programs’ learning objectives/outcomes and assessment plan.
Also in an effort to move beyond undergraduate assessment and in anticipating some of the Program Review Recommendations, we have articulated learning outcomes for our MA in English (see Appendix II) which were passed at our April department meeting.

2. How did you assess these learning outcomes?

In early spring 2008, the Committee sent out a request to English majors to participate in a new portfolio assessment project. Eight English majors responded. We asked each participant to collect four writing assignments of any genre, formal or informal, from a cross-section of the courses they were taking in spring 2008 or had taken in fall 2007. We also asked participants to reflect on the assignments in a cover letter, answering questions about the audiences and purposes of the assignments, their writing and researching processes, and what kinds of assignments they found most valuable (see Appendix III for a copy of the cover letter information sheet).

The Assessment Committee spent the fall of 2007 and the spring of 2008 designing the new portfolio assessment, working with the portfolio assessment student participants, and collecting the portfolios.

The Assessment Committee met to draft some preliminary observations about the learning outcomes reflected in the portfolios; to reiterate, the goal was not to assess learning outcomes but to begin mapping those criteria implicit in these portfolios. We examined assignments to identify the various genres, modes, and goals of reading and writing tasks, as well as the processes (both those imposed by the instructor and those adopted by the students) by which students accomplished these tasks. We also examined the students’ self-reflective statements to gather information about how they perceive these assignments and what they value about them.

3. As a result of faculty reflection on these results, are there any program changes anticipated?

Since we only received the results of our Program Review in late Spring 2008 and have just begun to respond to it and our own assessment initiatives, we have not yet made any program changes at this point. We are, however, likely to do so after the department comes to consensus on revised learning outcomes for its undergraduate program. We are also planning to re-examine our major which we instituted in 2004 based on evidence generated through assessment.

4. Did your department engage in any other assessment activities such as the development of rubrics, course alignment?

With the exception of last year when we were in the midst of our Program Review, each semester we have done a senior survey on student perceptions of our programs. This year, the Undergraduate Program Committee raised some specific questions regarding
our “new” (2004) major and other recent changes or concerns (e.g. large lecture formats for lower division required courses; senior seminar requirement; Shakespeare requirement; Areas of Interest; mandatory advising, etc.). We also shifted from in-class paper surveys to an online format using “Survey Monkey” and made the survey accessible through our department website. Fifty-nine students responded to the survey, and the data will provide an additional context for addressing our discussions of programmatic change (PDF and/or Excel summary results available on request) beginning at the Department Retreat. An Executive Summary of the survey will be provided to the faculty at the retreat.

5. **What assessment activities are planned for the upcoming year?**
   Both the portfolio pilot project and the English Department Survey will be at the core of our Department retreat in August as we begin the process of articulating learning outcomes for the major, assessing the current major, and revising our assessment plan (as well as formulating our response to the recent Program Review).

   The 2007-2008 Assessment Committee has organized a workshop for the Department Retreat (August).

   1. Introduction:
      Why we decided on portfolio assessment, how we went about doing it (and the prompts we gave to students),
      and what we liked about it once we'd done it

   2. Have them get into small groups and have each group look at a portfolio and answer following prompt
      How does the portfolio reflect...
      What we value
      How we get across to students what we value
      What students value
      Any surprises or discoveries?

   3. We each share snippets of assignments, student comments, and student writing and talk about what is working
      (and what isn't working)

   The 2008-2009 Assessment Committee will continue work on the following:
   - A new five-year assessment plan
   - Portfolio Project
   - Engl 198T mini-conference
Appendix I
198T Outcomes Statement (Draft)

By the completion of 198T, students will be able to:

- Engage in extensive research and writing processes (from invention through drafting to publication) focused on sustained academic inquiry into the study of texts.

- Demonstrate imaginative engagement, expertise, and depth of thought in an area of academic inquiry.

- Demonstrate a variety of research methods and rhetorical strategies appropriate to the academic discourse communities of English Studies.

- Locate, analyze, and integrate a variety of primary and secondary sources.

- Integrate primary and secondary sources into their own analysis.

- Participate in the scholarly conversations of English Studies.

- Demonstrate critical self reflection about their own reading, writing, and researching processes.

- Respond productively to feedback from peers and others.
Appendix II
MA in English Learning Outcomes

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GRADUATE PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOMES (ALL CONCENTRATIONS)

Students will demonstrate:

- An ability to critically analyze and question knowledge claims in the specialized discipline

- An ability to write clearly, effectively, and imaginatively, and to adjust writing style appropriately to the content and nature of the subject.

- An ability to conduct research projects and to articulate them within appropriate conceptual and methodological frameworks, and to locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively.

- An ability to conduct advanced research and documentation in the discipline, including print and electronic forms of information retrieval.

- An ability to engage in the oral exchange of ideas with faculty and fellow students.

GRADUATE PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOMES: LITERATURE

Culminating Experience: Comprehensive Exam

- A sophisticated knowledge of a wide range of American, British and World literary works.

- A familiarity with a variety of literary traditions, periods, and genres

- An understanding of diverse critical perspectives available in the field of literary studies.
• An interpretive engagement with the complexities of literary texts as well as a variety of secondary materials.

**Learning Outcomes for the Composition Emphasis**

**Culminating Experience: Thesis**

• A working knowledge of praxis—the ways Rhetoric and Composition theory and practice inform one another

• An ability to theorize and practice a variety of writing classroom pedagogies

• An ability to engage in writing as a process, which includes critical self-reflection

• An ethically-driven understanding of the ways in which all language is meaning making, especially within the contexts of academic discourse communities

• An understanding of appropriate teaching strategies for students who speak and write a variety of English languages and dialects

• An ability to conduct research in Rhetoric and Composition using appropriate methods and methodological frameworks

**Learning Outcomes for the Creative Writing Emphasis**

**Culminating Experience: Project**

• Clarity of imaginative expression.

• An ability to understand and express ideas through or in dialogue with literary forms.

• A tone of authority, a voice that invites the reader to listen and attend respectfully.

• An ability to critique their own or each other's works using the fundamental terminology of the craft appropriate to the genre.
Appendix III

Portfolio Cover Letter

Dear English Major:

We appreciate the hard work you’ve been doing throughout the semester to collect and select items for your English Portfolio. Now we ask that you compose a semi-formal Cover Letter for the Portfolio in which you introduce those items to your readers. While the main purpose of the Cover Letter is to let your readers know exactly what they’ll be seeing in your Portfolio, we’d like you to use this as an opportunity to do some self-reflection, too: reflection about the reading, thinking, and writing processes that your selected Portfolio texts represent in your journey towards the BA in English.

As such, please write a 1-2 page letter to the Portfolio Committee in which you explain not only your understanding of what was required for each of the assignments you've selected, but also the process you went through in order to meet those expectations. Be sure to use plenty of specific details and examples as you write your explanation; as you compose your letter, consider answering some of the following questions:

**Assignment**

Who is the audience for the assignment?

What is the purpose of the assignment?

What is the genre of the assignment (e.g. journal, essay, response, freewrite, magazine article, letter, poem)?

What were the evaluation criteria for the assignment?

**Process**

How did you select the topic?

How did you consider your audience expectations?

Did you get any feedback on your drafts? From whom?

What was your revision process?

Did you do any outside research? Where did you look for sources?
As you reflect on your portfolio as a whole, we’d like to know what you think it tells you about the skills and knowledge you’ve acquired as an English major and what kinds of writing assignments you found most engaging, or most valuable, and why.

Again, we intend these questions simply as a guide; you’re certainly not required to respond to all of them. Remember: the purpose of the English Portfolio Project is most decidedly not to evaluate your writing; rather, it’s for the Assessment Committee to get an idea of the range of writing assignments that English majors encounter.

Thank you again for your participation in this important project.

Sincerely,

Meyer/Melzer/Glade