IPP Learning Outcomes Report

Program: MA in English/Composition Emphasis

Department: English

Number of students enrolled in the program in Fall, 2011: 16

Faculty member completing template: Dan Melzer  (Jan 23, 2012)

Period of reference in the template: 2006-07 to present

1. Please describe your program’s learning-outcomes trajectory since 2006-07: Has there been a transformation of organizational culture regarding the establishment of learning outcomes and the capacity to assess progress toward their achievement? If so, during which academic year would you say the transformation became noticeable? What lies ahead; what is the next likely step in developing a learning-outcomes organizational culture within the program?

[Please limit your response to 200 words or less]

In the Spring of 2010 the Rhetoric and Composition faculty created six learning outcomes for the Composition Emphasis. These learning outcomes helped us make explicit connections among courses in the Emphasis and revise the thesis (the culminating assessment moment for the Emphasis). With the new thesis portfolio requirement we have further developed an already strong learning outcomes culture. The new thesis portfolio includes a significant student self-assessment component; an explicit statement of our Emphasis learning outcomes in the thesis portfolio guidelines that every advisor will use; and multiple student performances to achieve the outcomes, including a self-reflective cover essay, a teaching philosophy, an annotated bibliography, a publishable article, and an oral presentation of research. The next step in the thesis portfolio process is assessing how well the first group of students performed under the new requirement and making any needed changes. This can be done by focusing on the thesis portfolio cover essay, which asks students to discuss how they have met the learning outcomes of the thesis portfolio (which mirror the learning outcomes of the Emphasis). In addition to evaluating the new thesis portfolio requirement, we have created a survey for graduating students and we plan to give the survey to our ENGL500 students before they graduate.
2. Please list in prioritized order (or indicate no prioritization regarding) up to four desired learning outcomes (“takeaways” concerning such elements of curriculum as perspectives, specific content knowledge, skill sets, confidence levels) for students completing the program. For each stated outcome, please provide the reason that it was designated as desired by the faculty associated with the program.

Please note that these learning outcomes are not prioritized; they each represent something unique and valuable for our students to take away from the MA in English with a Composition Emphasis.

a) Students will demonstrate a working knowledge of praxis—the ways Rhetoric and Composition theory and practice inform one another

The reason this outcome was designated is that the scholarship of composition is closely connected to the teaching of composition. In Rhetoric and Composition, theory always informs practice, and in turn practice causes us to rethink our theoretical approaches. This valuing of the connections of theory and practice is reflected in the required courses in the Emphasis and in the culminating thesis portfolio. In 220A: Teaching Composition in College, students study the major theoretical approaches to the teaching of writing and also reflect on how those approaches might play out in the classroom. The final portfolio for 220A asks students to both critically reflect on their own developing teaching philosophy and discuss how that philosophy informs classroom practices in the form of a syllabus, writing assignments, responses to student writing, etc. In 410E: Internship in Teaching Composition, students intern in a community college composition course and get a concrete sense of how the theories they discuss in the course meetings play out in real composition courses. In 410A: Writing Center Theory and Practice, students read tutoring theory books while also interning as tutors in the University Reading and Writing Center. In reading response journals students are asked to talk about their praxis as tutors. In the culminating thesis portfolio, students discuss their teaching philosophy and write an article that must include both a theoretical framework and classroom application.

b) Students will engage in writing as a process, which includes critical self-reflection

Students preparing to teach writing must be writers themselves, and engage in the processes of revision they are asking of their future composition students. Research shows that writers who are self-aware of their composing processes are more successful writers and more understanding of their students’ needs when teaching composition. The two assessment moments in the program where
students engage most deeply with writing as a process include the 220A portfolio and the thesis portfolio. In the 220A portfolio, students engage in extensive revision of materials that include their teaching philosophy, a syllabus for a composition course, and writing assignments. Students receive feedback from peers and the instructor and revise based on this feedback. Critical self-reflection is an important component of the portfolio, since students are asked to provide a theoretical rationale for their course materials. Students further revise the teaching philosophy they created in 220A in the culminating experience of the Emphasis, the thesis portfolio. The thesis portfolio involves a truly extensive drafting and researching process, especially in terms of the publishable article. As the first part of this process students create an annotated bibliography. Because they are writing a publishable article, students are asked to engage in extensive revision and editing based on feedback from the advisor and a second reader. The final stage of the process happens when students present their work publicly and receive another round of feedback from their committee. The self-reflection component of the thesis portfolio occurs primarily in the cover essay, where students contextualize their work and connect it the learning outcomes of the thesis portfolio.

c) Students will conduct research in Rhetoric and Composition using appropriate methods and methodological frameworks.

Students in the Emphasis in Composition learn to become teacher/researchers, practicing research methods common to the field of Rhetoric and Composition. Students are required to take one of at least two courses that emphasize research: 220C: Topics in Composition or 220D: Teaching and Composition Research. In 220C, students explore a topic in detail and compose an extended research project. In 220D, students create a prospectus for their thesis portfolio. Students then conduct further research for the publishable article in their thesis portfolio. Research methods in Rhetoric and Composition could include archival research, case study, ethnography, discourse analysis, action research, and so on.

3. For undergraduate programs only, in what ways are the set of desired learning outcomes described above aligned with the University’s Baccalaureate Learning Goals? Please be as specific as possible. [Please limit your response to 400 words or less]

N/A

4. For each desired outcome indicated in item 2 above, please:
a) Describe the method(s) by which its ongoing pursuit is monitored and measured.
b) Include a description of the sample of students (e.g., random sample of transfer students declaring the major; graduating seniors) from whom data were/will be collected and the frequency and schedule with which the data in question were/will be collected.
c) Describe and append a sample (or samples) of the “instrument” (e.g., survey or test), “artifact” (e.g., writing sample and evaluative protocol, performance review sheet), or other device used to assess the status of the learning outcomes desired by the program.
d) Explain how the program faculty analyzed and evaluated (will analyze and evaluate) the data to reach conclusions about each desired student learning outcome.

a) The primary assessments of our learning outcomes occur in the 220A teaching portfolio and the culminating thesis portfolio. Both of these assessments are assigned and evaluated based on a shared set of expectations. We will also administer a survey to students enrolled in ENGL500.

b) All Emphasis students take 220D and complete a teaching portfolio and all Emphasis students complete a culminating thesis portfolio. We will administer the survey to all Emphasis students.

c) The assignment for the teaching portfolio in 220A is similar across instructors (see Appendix A of the Composition Certificate program template for sample 220A portfolio assignments). All Composition instructors use the same guidelines for the culminating thesis portfolio (see Appendix A for the thesis portfolio guidelines).

d) The Composition instructors will meet to discuss the results of the change to a thesis portfolio and report our results to the English Department Writing Programs Committee. We will also report the results of our survey of ENGL500 students to the Writing Programs Committee. The Committee will then decide what further steps need to be taken.

[Please limit your response to 200 words or less per learning outcome] (If the requested data and/or analysis are not yet available for any of the learning outcomes, please explain why and describe the plan by which these will occur. Please limit your response to 500 words or less.)

As indicated above, the thesis portfolio and the survey are new for Fall 2011. See
5. Regarding each outcome and method discussed in items 2 and 4 above, please provide examples of how findings from the learning outcomes process have been utilized to address decisions to revise or maintain elements of the curriculum (including decisions to alter the program’s desired outcomes). If such decision-making has not yet occurred, please describe the plan by which it will occur. [Please limit your response to 200 words or less per item]

As indicated above, the thesis portfolio and the survey are new for Fall 2011. See item “d” above for our assessment plan.

6. Has the program systematically sought data from alumni to measure the long-term effects of accomplishment of the program’s learning outcomes? If so, please describe the approach to this information-gathering and the ways in which the information will be applied to the program’s curriculum. If such activity has not yet occurred, please describe the plan by which it will occur. [Please limit your response to 300 words or less]

We plan to include questions regarding the Composition Emphasis in the Department’s alumni survey.

7. Does the program pursue learning outcomes identified by an accrediting or other professional discipline-related organization as important? Does the set of outcomes pursued by your program exceed those identified as important by your accrediting or other professional discipline-related organization? [Please limit your response to 300 words or less]

The MA in English with a Composition Emphasis is not governed by an accrediting body.

8. Finally, what additional information would you like to share with the Senate Committee on Instructional Program Priorities regarding the program’s desired learning outcomes and assessment of their accomplishment? [Please limit your response to 200 words or less]

The Composition faculty have a long history of shared learning outcomes. In most of our required courses (220A, 410A, 410E, 220D) we use similar learning outcomes on our course descriptions, and in some courses (220A, 220D) we all use the same assignment. We also have a long history of using writing assignments to assess students’ achievement of learning outcomes. In 220A, we
all assign an extensive teaching portfolio. In 220D, we all require a research prospectus or article. In 220C, we all ask students to complete an extended research project investigating the topic of the course. Since all of the Composition faculty are members of the Writing Programs Committee, we have a regular forum for discussing our assessment of student learning outcomes and making changes accordingly. For example, the creation of the composition research methods course 220D and the creation of the thesis portfolio both emerged from discussion on the Committee regarding problems with students struggling to meet the learning outcomes of our former thesis requirement.
Appendix A: Thesis Portfolio Guidelines

Master of Arts in English: Composition Emphasis
Culminating Experience Requirements and Evaluation

For students in the Composition Emphasis of the Master of Arts Degree in English, English 500: Culminating Experience will consist of a thesis-formatted portfolio in which students include the following revised, polished work:

1) Cover Essay—This essay contextualizes the portfolio documents, introduces the writer’s professional goals and interests, and describes how the portfolio documents demonstrate that the writer has met the program learning outcomes. This document should be approximately 8-12 pages long. This will become Chapter 1 of your thesis.

2) Annotated Bibliography—This collection of sources will demonstrate a depth of reading in one or more areas within Composition and Rhetoric pursuant to the writer’s professional goals and interests and will include a minimum of 15 sources. This will become Chapter 2 of your thesis.

3) Publishable Paper—This paper or project will be created for a specific publication such as a scholarly journal in the field. The writer will write a one-page rhetorical analysis of the publication and then at least a 15-page publishable paper. This will become Chapter 3 of your thesis.

4) Statement of Teaching Philosophy—The writer will select a specific, published exigency, such as a job advertisement or Ph.D. application, for which to develop an appropriate statement on their approach to teaching. The writer will include a paragraph articulating the exigency and the teaching philosophy which should be approximately 2-4 pages long. This will become Chapter 4 of your thesis.

5) Oral Presentation—This presentation might take place at an academic conference or department-sponsored talk, for example, and provide a 10- to 15-minute performance based on the Publishable Paper. The writer will provide an abstract of and handout(s) from the presentation. This will become Appendix A of your thesis.

The thesis-formatted portfolio will be evaluated by at least two Composition Faculty based on the degree to which it demonstrates that the writer has achieved the following outcomes:

- 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