

Appendix B
Assessment Plan for
the M.A. Program in English

I. English MA Program's Educational Goals

Students completing the Master's Degree in English must demonstrate the following skills:

A. In literature papers:

1. Analytical depth and complexity
2. Clarity and precision in language
3. Advanced understanding and use of disciplinary knowledge and terms
4. The ability to define an area of inquiry in a project and its relation to the field at large
5. Awareness of current state and relevant issues of a defined body of scholarship
6. Originality, creativity, and/or independence in the area of concentration
7. The ability to conduct research effectively and document sources
8. The ability to engage productively with theory
9. The ability to situate the literary work in its cultural context

B. In creative writing papers:

1. The ability to place their creative work in the context of relevant literary movements and traditions
2. Clear engagement with genre and form
3. Facility with language
4. Style and voice
5. Creativity and imagination
6. Originality [and insight] *
7. The ability to establish and develop a substantive lyric meditation or narrative

C. In classroom discussion:

1. Analytical depth and complexity
2. Disciplinary knowledge and terms
3. Ability in varied forms of discourse (e.g., discussion; the formal presentation of ideas, written and oral, to a small group; collaborative projects)

II. Methods for Measuring the Attainment of Educational Goals

A. Annual Review of Calendar-Year Student Writing: Each member of the faculty reads three papers chosen by the Director, which collectively represent the range of course offered that year. One of these papers is common to all faculty while the other two come from different course and, if possible, different concentrations.

Each paper is scored according to the educational goals on a scale of “Weak,” “Competent,” and “Strong.” During our annual assessment meeting, we first discuss the common paper to clarify our understanding of the course goals and to detect areas of ambiguity or confusion. The Director then collects the Portfolio Review Checklists and tabulates the data, which is discussed at a subsequent meeting. In the future, we plan to hold the initial calibration session separately, before faculty read the individual papers assigned to them.

B. Progress Report Checklist: Professors for each course evaluate each student according to the Educational goals on a scale of “Weak,” “Competent,” and “Strong.” He or she then submits the forms to the Director, who tabulates the results for discussion at the second assessment meeting.

C. Annual Student Survey: The survey asks the following questions:

1. What do you see as the strengths of the English MA program?
2. How would you like to see the program develop (course offerings, teaching methods, departmental community, professional or creative opportunities beyond courses, advising, anything else)?
3. What kinds of assignments and/or class formats (particular writing assignments, including the final project, certain required lengths for papers, research, discussion, exams, collaborative work, other) were most helpful in supporting your learning process and allowing you to demonstrate your skill and knowledge?
4. In what ways have you developed strength in interpreting literature and in writing about it? Do you have suggestions for different kinds of coverage or different approaches to teaching literature?
5. In what ways have you developed strength in creative writing (poetry, fiction, nonfiction)? Do you have suggestions for different kinds of coverage or different approaches to teaching creative writing?
6. Would you be interested in taking other courses in composition studies? Would you take a practicum in teaching composition if we could offer it?
7. Other comments or suggestions?

D. Exit Review: At their thesis defense, students would complete a survey about their experience in the program. Under consideration.

E. Self-Study and External Review (conducted 2009-10): Every five years, the department holds a retreat early in the fall semester to develop a schema for a self-study document and to plan the procedure for writing it. At this meeting, too, the departmental mission statement is reconsidered and revised if deemed appropriate. The self-study document is usually completed by January, and copies are distributed to the Dean and the VCAA. Candidates for the external reviewer are presented to the Dean, and a visit for the chosen candidate is scheduled (usually for late spring). The

external reviewer's report is delivered a few months after the visit, usually before the beginning of the next fall semester. [Note: because the Undergraduate and Graduate programs both undergo the same process, this description appears in both assessment reports]

III. Process for Using Assessment Information to Improve the Program

As described under II.A, faculty meet twice every Spring to assess student writing and discuss the results of that assessment.

Before the first meeting, faculty read a common paper and fill out an evaluation sheet for it, which asks them to rate how effectively the paper accomplishes each course goal. They submit this sheet to the Director, who then tabulates the results of all evaluation sheets. At the meeting, faculty:

- Examine goals where there was most divergence in the scoring
- Calibrate our definition of the course goals
- Discuss whether specific goals require any adjustment

Before the second meeting, each faculty member submits evaluation sheets for two papers that he or she reads individually. The Director tabulates the results, as well as the results of the Progress Report Checklists, and produces a summary of those results, which are posted on the Department H drive.

For the second meeting, faculty read the summary and discuss:

- How well students are meeting the educational goals
- How completely faculty assignments cover the goals
- Whether emphasis on particular goals needs to be increased and how to do so.
- Suggestions to improve the assessment process.

The Director then meets with the graduate committee about to address implications of the assessment data, including but not limited to:

- Curriculum
- Staffing
- Pedagogy
- Assessment procedure

The Director summarizes the results of this meeting at the next department meeting, where all faculty have the opportunity to discuss the graduate committee's suggestions to address the assessment findings. Once the department approves program changes, the Director is responsible for overseeing their implementation.

For the student survey, the Director reviews the results with the Chair, and then has the results compiled electronically and made available to all English department faculty on the H: drive. Time is allotted in both Graduate Committee full department meetings to discuss the results and how we can better meet the needs that students

have identified.

For the external review, the external reviewer's report is distributed to all department faculty. Initial responses from the faculty are discussed at a department meeting, at which the various sections of the report are assigned to the appropriate department committees for more detailed consideration. Each of these committees then meets and creates a written response to their assigned sections, which are collected by the Chair. Subsequently, a special department meeting is devoted to presenting and discussing these responses, with the aim of creating a single overall response to the report, which is written up by the Chair with input from the Steering Committee. This overall response is then distributed to the department faculty, the Dean of CLAS, and the VCAA. Changes to department programs, practices, or organization may be suggested by any of the parties reviewing the report, and they will be considered through the normal channels.