

**Department of English Undergraduate Assessment Plan
March 2011**

I. Educational Goals for Undergraduate English Majors

Students completing the English major must demonstrate the following:

A. In papers for literature courses:

1. The ability to analyze and interpret texts
2. The ability to apply literary and rhetorical theories
3. The ability to apply established methodologies of literary criticism
4. A sense of social and literary history as context
5. A knowledge of the concept of genre
6. The general skills of college-level exposition
7. The ability to establish and develop a sound argument
8. The ability to use relevant sources
9. The ability to conduct relevant literary and cultural research
10. The ability to document resources accurately
11. Originality and insight

B. In papers for creative writing courses:

1. Facility with language
2. Style and voice
3. A sense of genre and tradition
4. Creativity and originality
5. Thematic insight
6. The ability to establish and develop a substantive lyric meditation or narrative
7. The ability to reflect on craft decisions or one's relation to a genre or tradition

C. In papers for expository or professional writing courses:

1. Context-based problem solving
2. Skills associated with writing taking place in a technologically mediated context
3. The ability to use rhetoric to orient writing toward specific audiences
4. The general skills of college-level exposition
5. The ability to establish a sound, applicable argument
6. The ability to perform soundly reasoned analysis of evidence
7. The ability to use relevant sources
8. The ability to conduct relevant research
9. The ability to document resources accurately, consistently, and fully
10. Originality and insight
11. Facility with language and development of a style suited to the specific purposes of the writing

Notes on goals

- These goals are *threshold* goals rather than *aspirational* goals: they describe what we expect all English majors to achieve before they graduate, rather than the attributes of an ideal student.
- A.1: The ability to analyze and interpret texts: this goal pertains to the use of evidence from close reading to defend an interpretive thesis, including locating the significance of chosen passages in the context of a larger work.
- A.2: The ability to apply literary, critical, and rhetorical theories: this goal pertains to the *explicit* use of theory, as, for example, an explicitly formulated Marxist analysis of the representation of class in a novel. It does not pertain to general approaches that may have an unstated theoretical basis. For example, a focus on the passivity of female characters in a novel would not count for this goal, unless feminist theory is an explicit topic of the paper as well.
- A.3: The ability to apply established methodologies of literary criticism: this goal pertains to the use of the discourse of literary criticism at a complex level, in regard to either: (a) specific approaches to interpretation that have established currency in the discipline, such as feminism and new historicism, but which do not involve the explicit theorization of A.2; and (b) terminology and techniques of formal analysis wielded in a more systematic and knowledgeable manner than the more general close reading that is covered by A.1.
- A.4: A sense of social and literary history as context: while ideally we want students to have a sense of how social and literary history are reciprocal, the threshold for this goal may include papers that show *either* a sense of social history *or* a sense of literary history as context.
- A.5: A knowledge of the concept of genre: this goal pertains both to explicit indications of knowledge of genre, as well as to implicit indications, such as the analysis of the significance of rhyme words in a sonnet, or the imitation of a mock epic.
- A.7: The ability to establish and develop a sound argument: this goal pertains to the soundness of the logic and organization of the paper's defense of a clearly articulated, substantive thesis.
- A.8: The ability to use relevant sources: this goal pertains to the use of any source beyond the one of primary focus; these may be sources assigned by an instructor specifically for an assignment, ones read earlier in the course, or ones the student knows from another course, in addition to those discovered through research.
- A.9: The ability to conduct relevant literary and cultural research: this goal pertains to student-directed research, usually for assignments which explicitly require such research.

- A.10: The ability to document resources accurately: this goal pertains to the documentation of any sources, in any paper that requires documentation (that is, in more than just research papers).
- B.1-B7: The first six creative writing goals pertain to creative work specifically, while B.7 pertains to the reflective component of a creative writing assignment, if present.
- B.4: Creativity and originality: This pertains to decisions of craft and form, as well as to ideas.
- B5: Thematic insight: This pertains to the profundity and complexity of themes, independent of creativity and originality.
- B.6: The ability to establish and develop a substantive lyric meditation or narrative: Our creative writing courses train students to write stories and poems that explore an idea through narrative structures and lyric meditations. This category measures the extent to which students apply and develop linear and nonlinear narrative structures, and/or students' ability to integrate ideas, images, language, and relevant poetic forms. This category not only reflects the ability of the student to apply structures, but also the depth and coherence of his/her exploration.
- C.1: The general skills of context-based problem solving: in assignments oriented toward a practical argument, this goal includes the feasibility of the problem solving.
- C.5: The ability to establish a sound, applicable argument: in assignments oriented toward a practical argument, this goal includes the feasibility of the argument.

II. Methodology for Measuring the Attainment of Educational Goals

A. Annual review of calendar-year student writing

Every year each tenure-line faculty member (and any other interested faculty) evaluates two sets of student papers, using a common instrument to rank the attainment of Educational Goals: first, all participants evaluate a common set of three papers (one paper for each of the categories of Educational Goals); second, each participant evaluates an individually determined set of five papers (for a total of some 60 papers or more). Papers in the common set of three are chosen to be representative of typical student performance; papers in the individual sets of five are chosen to be representative of a range of student ability and assignment types. Participants discuss the common set of three papers in an initial meeting to calibrate evaluation criteria and clarify the meaning of the Educational Goals in the context of actual student writing. In a later meeting, participants submit and discuss the data they collected in their evaluations of the individual sets of five papers. For more information on this review procedure, see the document *AssessmentProcedure11.docx*.

B. Student survey completed annually

A student survey administered in the senior seminar that asks the following questions:

1. What do you see as the strengths of the English major program?
2. How would you like to see the program develop (course offerings, teaching methods, departmental community, opportunities for creative work beyond courses and student publications, advising, anything else)?
3. Do you feel that you have been able to demonstrate your skill and knowledge? In what formats or mediums do you feel you are best able to demonstrate what you can do (writing, discussion, exams, other)?
4. Do you have an awareness of the concerns of 1) historical periods in American and British literature and 2) literary genres? Do you have suggestions for how to provide this knowledge better?
5. In what ways have you developed the ability to apply literary and rhetorical theories to reading and writing?
6. What strengths in particular have you developed in interpreting literature and in writing about it? Do you have suggestions for how to teach these skills better?
7. If you have taken film studies courses, what strengths have you developed in analyzing and writing about films and in screenwriting? How would you like to see this part of the program develop?
8. What strengths have you developed in creative writing (poetry, fiction, drama, nonfiction)? How would you like to see the creative writing program develop?

C. Alumni survey completed every 5 years

An alumni survey administered every five years to determine the career paths of our recent graduates and to receive feedback on their ability to transfer skills to the workplace.

Alumni Survey Questions:

1. When did you graduate with an English B.A. from IU South Bend?
2. Which concentration did you choose? Writing Literature
3. Have you obtained any additional graduate or professional degrees since your B.A.?
 Master's in English M.B.A. Master's in Library Science Master's in Secondary
 Education J.D. Ph.D. in _____ Other _____
4. How well did your undergraduate experience prepare you for graduate or professional school? Add an explanation if you wish.

Very well satisfactorily satisfactorily in some respects not at
all

5. What jobs have you held since graduation? What are or were your major responsibilities?
6. How did your English major help prepare you for the jobs you have had since graduation?
7. How has what you learned in the English program played a role in your life outside of work?
8. What could we have done to better prepare you for life after college?
9. As you reflect back on your experience in English, what was most positive about it?
10. Are there any courses not offered in our department when you were here that you would recommend we add to our curriculum? If so, which?
11. In the fall of 2004, the English Department began an M.A. and M.A.T. graduate program, which has continued to grow steadily. Would you personally be interested in pursuing one of these degrees? If so, would you like us to send you more information?
12. On a chattier note, let us know if you have any news you would like to share. Have you moved to a new neighborhood? Found a good restaurant? Bought a house? Had a baby? Are you interested in getting in touch with your former classmates?
13. Finally, we would like to put together a LISTSERV mailing list for department alums, to keep you updated on departmental news and upcoming events. If you would like to participate in such a list, please give us your e-mail address.

D. Comprehensive self-study and external review every five years

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.

III. Process for using assessment information to improve the program:

As described under II.A, faculty members meet twice to discuss program assessment in relation to the evaluation of student writing: first, to calibrate the assessment instrument, and, second, to discuss assessment results. At the second meeting, in late March, the participants discuss:

- a. How well students are meeting the Educational Goals
- b. How well faculty assignments are covering the Educational Goals
- c. Whether the Educational Goals require any adjustment
- d. Ideas for how the assessment procedure may be improved.

The Director of Assessment leads this meeting. Subsequently, the Director will:

- a. Tabulate all the results of the faculty evaluation of papers
- b. Create a report summarizing and interpreting those results
- c. Publish this report on the department's web page and H: drive.

The Director will first discuss the report with the Committee on the Major, who will consider the implications of the assessment results for the following:

- a. The major curriculum
- b. Pedagogical practices
- c. Advising
- d. The assessment procedure
- e. Staffing
- f. Other aspects of the major program.

The Committee will then bring its reflections and any proposals to the Chair and to the rest of the department at a follow-up department meeting. The faculty at large will also have the opportunity to raise issues in regard to assessment results at this department meeting. The Director of Assessment is responsible for overseeing the implementation of resulting program changes, including updating documents, publicizing changes, coordinating proposals for changes that require extra-departmental approval, and collecting and communicating feedback.

For the surveys of II.B and II.C, the Director of Assessment 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 a Committee on the Major meeting and a full department meeting to discuss the implications of the results for the major program.

For the external review of II.D, 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.

IV. Participation of constituencies

As described in section III, department faculty participate in virtually all aspects of assessment. Students provide formal input yearly in the annual survey of seniors, and alumni provide formal input in the five-year survey. Faculty, students, and administrators are all interviewed by the external reviewer.

The Director of Assessment makes all assessment reports, plans, instructions, data, and instruments available to the department on its web page and the H: drive. The Educational Goals and a description of the process for faculty review of student writing are listed on the flyer describing the major requirements that is distributed to all prospective and incoming English majors, and is available to the public in the Wiekamp third-floor hallway. Faculty also are asked to annotate their paper assignments with the Educational Goals that those assignments target, and faculty are encouraged to explicitly incorporate the Educational Goals into the language of their assignments.

We have created an assessment page on our website that makes key assessment documents available to our full constituency: instructors, students, alumni, administrators, faculty in other departments, prospective majors and IUSB students, and any other interested parties. These documents include the following:

- A list of the Educational Goals
- The most recent summary report of the results of faculty review of student writing
- This assessment plan
- The most recent annual assessment report
- The most recent third-year assessment report
- A description of the process for faculty review of student writing
- A description of the process for archiving student writing
- The rubrics faculty use for reviewing student writing

English department flyers and letters to alumni list the web address for the department.

V. Record Keeping

As described above, the Director of Assessment keeps current, organized, and available on the H: drive all assessment reports, plans, instructions, data, and instruments; and transmits selected assessment documents to the department webmaster for posting on the webpage. The Chair maintains files of the completed student and alumni surveys.

For the evaluation of student papers, the Director of Assessment oversees the process by which all papers written by English majors in all courses that count toward the major are archived electronically. This archive is organized in such a way that it provides an electronic portfolio of the full writing career of each individual English major, and a historical record of paper assignments for all courses that count toward the major. As the data in this archive accumulates, we hope to perform some longitudinal assessment analyses.