

Mission/Purpose:

The Bachelor of Arts in English degree program educates students in the history, linguistics, aesthetics, and analysis of literature in the English language.

The Department of English also offers a substantial program in writing, including creative writing, professional writing, and expository writing. The Department regularly offers courses in the full range of English and American literary studies, including the diverse groups that make up our literary culture.

Students are given a grounding in close critical reading, integrating such reading within an analytical essay. They are also exposed to the breadth of literary writing within the English language across diverse genres and periods.

Student learning outcomes:

1. Students will develop a wide knowledge of the history and traditions of literature written in the English language and an appreciation for the diverse cultures and backgrounds that contribute to the production of literature in English.
2. Students will learn critical and analytical thinking skills, especially close reading skills.
3. Students will learn how to comprehend and produce contextually informed arguments about literature.
4. Students will learn to write and communicate clearly and effectively.

Which goals did you assess goals this year?

We assessed goal 2, in keeping with our four-year continuous assessment cycle.

Assessment Summary

Outcomes/Objectives	Measure(s)	Findings	Actions Plans
Students will demonstrate close reading skills in a timed environment.	Course exams.	See Appendix A	See Appendix A
Students will integrate close reading skills within an extended writing assignment.	Quality of course papers.		
Students will exhibit critical thinking ability in analysis of a primary source.	Course assignments in L315 and L390.		

Appendix A:
An analysis of course examinations

Objective: To measure how students demonstrate close reading in a timed environment

Measures: Mid-term and final exam essays for L211 (*English Literature to 1700*), L305 (*Chaucer*), and L390 (*Children's Literature*).

Background Information About Courses:

- L211: This is an introductory course required of all students majoring in English and it fulfills several G.E. requirements for other units, such as Nursing. Approximately 2/3 of students are English and English Education majors and 1/3 are non-English and non-English Education majors.
- L305: This is an upper-level English course. The majority of students are English majors. A handful of students are General Education majors (i.e. they are majoring in a field other than English and/or English Education).
- L390: This is an upper-level English course that is taken by Education students to fulfill their degree requirements. Approximately 2/3 of students are Education majors and 1/3 of students are majoring in English or other subjects.

Findings:

A-level:

Overall, exams in this category demonstrate mastery of the rhetorical tools of close reading. Students whose exam essays fall in this category can clearly use any tool in the analytical toolbox. More specifically, exams in this group demonstrate the following characteristics:

- The essays apply key concepts from the course within their analysis even when not explicitly directed to do so by the exam's instructions.
- The essays identify key concepts and rhetorical features and then utilize them in the service of their argument.
- The essays examine the relationship between a part and its whole by analyzing a given passage in relation to the work from which it is derived. The student will identify what the author is trying to do not only in the passage given, but also in the work as a whole. They will then demonstrate their idea through rhetorical analysis.
- The student engages in pre-writing and/or marginal/in-text commentary on the exam itself, outside of the blue book. This type of writing demonstrates a deep engagement with the text—an internalization of the tasks of close reading—rather than merely a repetition of ideas from class.
- Structurally, such essays often begin analyzing at a logical point for their argument rather than simply at the beginning of a passage. In other words, these essays suggest that the student makes an argument based on the best evidence available

rather than the first evidence they find in the passage: they are not limited by the passage's natural sequence but are willing to break up and analyze text to their purposes.

- Essays use quotations in order to contextualize readers to the analysis they then perform.

B-level:

Overall, essays in this category can utilize the rhetorical tools of close reading but in a more limited way than those in the top level. These essays illustrate that the student is aware of and understands various rhetorical tools but lacks the breadth and depth of rhetorical and conceptual understanding seen in A-level work. More specifically, exams in this group demonstrate the following characteristics:

- These essays tend to engage the passage in a chronological sequence that often resembles plot summary.
- While the A-level essay analyzes the rhetorical and/or conceptual features of a quotation, the B-level essay may quote a passage but then fails to engage with the rhetorical and/or conceptual features of the passage. Instead, they often restate what the passage means in their own words.
- The essays in this category often restate conceptual ideas presented in class and are less willing to present conceptual and/or interpretive ideas not explicitly mentioned in but still related to class.
- These essays may also show one of two related deficits. They will clearly demonstrate how the text represents a concept from class but will have difficulty working with the analytical tools of close reading (e.g. one student's essay analyzes the irony of a passage without identifying the term irony). Alternatively, the essay may use rhetorical vocabulary correctly but will not be able to show how rhetorical features contribute to the passage's overall meaning.
- Such essays will typically make one link or gesture to the passage's importance to the work as a whole whereas A's continuously shows how passage relates to various themes of the larger work

C-level:

Exams in these categories indicate that the writer is "getting by:" they struggle to utilize key rhetorical tools and/or conceptual ideas. In some cases, they fail to show an awareness of the course's concepts or rhetorical tools. Typically, they can only demonstrate that the student comprehends a passage or text at the level of plot.

Percentage Breakdown of A, B, C-level grades per course:

L390

A-level: 37/60

B-level: 16/60

C-level: 7/60

L211

A-level:

B-level:

C-level:

D-level:

F-level:

Action Plans:

Teachers of English literature at IUN will strive to:

- Help students develop from recognition to utility, teaching them not only to identifying a rhetorical tool and/or concept but also to use it in the service of analysis.
- Teach students to be more aware of and able to engage in the process of close reading through note taking and/or pre-writing as necessary precursors to essay writing.
- Encourage students to perform rhetorical analysis rather than plot summary.
- Encourage students to make informed choices in analyses rather than allowing plot sequencing to dictate their argument.

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Students will demonstrate close reading skills in a timed environment.	Course exams.	See Appendix A	See Appendix A
Students will integrate close reading skills within an extended writing assignment.	Quality of course papers.		
Students will exhibit critical thinking ability	Course assignments in L315 and L390.	See Appendix B	See Appendix B

Outcomes/Objectives	Measure(s)	Findings	Actions Plans
in the analysis of a primary source.			

Appendix B:
An analysis of Course Assignments in L315 and L390

Objective: To measure how students demonstrate critical thinking ability in the analysis of a primary source.

Measures: We examined essays that are second in a sequence of three formal writing assignments for L315 and L390 respectively; in both courses students were asked to write a four-to six-page paper that performed critical analysis of a passage from an assigned text in the course.

Background Information About Courses:

- L315: This is a required course for English majors: 18 of the 26 students enrolled were English majors, with 4 English Education majors (including one graduate student).
- L390: This is an upper-level English course with 36 students consisting of 35 undergraduate students and 1 graduate student. Approximately 2/3 of students are Education majors and 1/3 of students are majoring in English or other subjects.

Background Information about Critical Skills Measured:

Formal written assignments in literature courses require a slightly different critical skill set than those assessed on exams. In formal writing assignments, literature professors are not looking for evidence of mastery of textual content but rather for a process of thinking, one defined by asking and cogitating questions that a given text (i.e. poem, play, film, or novel) generates. At the undergraduate level, we teach close reading as the primary means of this analytic process. In its most basic form, close reading requires an attention to the formal details of a text, an understanding that these details generate interpretive possibilities, and an ability to ask and possibly answer questions about how formal qualities impact the potential meaning of a text.

In the context of a written assignment, literature professors assess close reading for the following characteristics:

- First and foremost, the student demonstrates an understanding that a text is made of formal choices in terms of diction, syntax, imagery, narrative, voice, and structure (dramatic, poetic, film, or prose), and he or she can describe how these formal choices matter in terms of the text’s larger meaning or implications.
- The student notices a wide range of formal details that are important to the text and thus require comment and interpretation.
- The student notices patterns in language, form, or imagery and can posit a theory about why they may be important to the work—either to a part of the work or to the work in its entirety.
- The student can sustain an analysis in such a way that it either proves a thesis or would lead to a thesis.

- The student demonstrates that there is a range of interpretive possibilities in the text based on its language and formal qualities but that he or she is choosing a selective set to discuss.
- The student deliberately chooses appropriate, rich quotations and provides them in his or her paper as a starting point to analyzing what the quotation may mean.

With such criteria in mind, we have divided our findings into four types: Students who display High Proficiency, Proficiency, Partial Proficiency, and No Proficiency in their papers. They can be understood thus:

- **High Proficiency:** Students who achieve high proficiency consistently demonstrate nearly all the above qualities in their written assignments. (The papers we assessed in this range demonstrated 5-6 of the skills listed above).
- **Proficiency:** Students who are proficient are clearly developing their close reading abilities, but have not mastered them. Therefore, they may demonstrate many of the above qualities, but not as many as a highly proficient student. Similarly, their work may exhibit many of the above qualities, but with neither consistency nor with the depth and detail of highly proficient student work. (The papers we assessed in this range demonstrated 3.5-5 of the skills listed above).
- **Partial Proficiency:** Students who are partially proficient are beginning to develop their close reading skills but have not yet reached the level of proficiency or high proficiency. While they can demonstrate some of the qualities of the highly proficient or proficient student and may illustrate a sense that language matters in how texts make meaning, they tend to pay insufficient attention to textual details and struggle to understand that what details they do see actually matter in terms of textual meaning. (The papers we assessed in this range demonstrated 2-3 of the skills listed above).
- **Not proficient:** Students who are not proficient do not demonstrate an understanding of close reading. Specifically, they tend to read a text at face value and summarize texts as though the textual meaning is obvious or simple. (The papers we assessed in this range demonstrated 0-2 of the skills listed above).

Findings:

L390: 10 papers examined

- *High Proficiency:* 3/10 with average score of 5.167
- *Proficiency:* 2/10 with average score of 4.25
- *Partial Proficiency:* 2/10 with average score of 3
- *No Proficiency:* 3/10 with average score of 1.34

L315: 10 Papers examined

- *High Proficiency:* 3/10 with an average score of 5.25
- *Proficiency:* 4/10 with an average score of 3.37
- *Partially Proficient:* 3/10 with an average score of 2.67

When the findings from L390 and L315 were aggregated:

- 30 percent demonstrated high proficiency.
- 30 percent demonstrated proficiency.
- 25 percent demonstrated partial proficiency.
- 15 percent demonstrated no proficiency.

Such findings suggest, on the one hand, that 85 percent of the paper examined showed some signs that the student was developing the close reading skills being taught in the course, with more than half of those papers surveyed (60 percent) showing strong skill development for the point in the semester when the papers were written. On the other hand, it also suggests that 40 percent of students struggle with close reading during the second formal assignment.

Action Plans:

Faculty in the Department of English at IUN will discuss the following recommended action plans to enhance how we currently teach close reading:

- When we explain close reading, we will be sure to do so in simple language that is accessible to majors and non-majors.
- We should consider creating sample definitions and examples of close reading that can be offered to students across English courses, as well as potentially devising a handout about how to engage in the process of close reading for students who are unfamiliar with or new to the process. These samples could be made accessible to all students on our departmental website or individual Canvas sites, or given out in class.
- Professors should devise **more frequent** informal assignments throughout the semester (forums, journals, e.g.) that allow students to practice close reading.
- Professors should continue to design formal assignments sequentially across the semester to encourage close reading skills and to provide continuous feedback to students.