

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
ASSESSMENT REPORT 2012
Scholarship & Diversity in the Undergraduate English Major

CONTEXT

The English Department developed a new plan for assessing scholarship outcomes in spring 2009 and carried out the assessment the in 2009-10. A second set of outcomes focused on diversity was added to the plan in spring 2010. In 2010-11 and 2011-12, we assessed for both broad outcomes (scholarship and diversity) but not for the specific outcome that required students to identify the three fields of English Studies. Exit interview and survey results were very poor on this outcome, and, through discussion, the Department faculty recognized that students could not be expected to achieve this outcome unless we built into current curriculum at one or more specific points. Because we have not decided to use a related outcome for the new major (see below), we decided it was not worth revising our current curriculum to address the outcome. With the University Assessment Committee’s concurrence, *via* Elise Bernal, we therefore dropped that outcome from our assessment plan in 2010.

In AY 2010-11, we began working on a complete revision of the English major curriculum, beginning with the development of 5 new key learning outcomes that will across all three tracks (Literature, Writing, and Teaching) in the new major. These new outcomes, formally approved by the Department in December 2010, share some commonalities with the existing assessment plan, but there are also some significant revisions. We recognize that some of the existing outcomes in the current plan are especially weak (e.g. #3: “recognize”); however, rather than revise the plan/and or curriculum in the short-term to address this, we have focused our energies on building a much more robust set of outcomes for the new major-in-process.

Outcomes for the new Major:

<i>ENGLISH MAJORS EXCEL IN...</i>	Students graduating with the English major will have demonstrated the ability to:
READING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • apply close, critical, and contextual reading skills to texts representing a variety of forms, genres, and national and cultural traditions;
WRITING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • produce rhetorically effective texts in a variety of academic, creative, and/or professional genres;
HISTORY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • engage critically with some of the larger historical conversations, debates, and/or traditions in one or more of the fields that constitute the discipline;
RESEARCH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • employ a scholarly, multi-stage process of inquiry and research to develop and strengthen their own written arguments engaging larger conversations in the discipline;
DIVERSITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify and critique the ways social and cultural differences are constructed and contested by texts representing multiple cultures and traditions.

These five new outcomes will not be assessed until the new major is fully implemented, and, at that time, we will need to identify multiple measures for each and a schedule for how often each outcome will be assessed. We hope to be able to launch the new major in 2013-14 or, possibly, 2014-15.

2012 ASSESSMENT IMPLEMENTATION

As explained above, we again applied a modified version of the existing plan this year, omitting the outcome related to diversity of fields in the discipline (formerly outcome 3: “Students will recognize that English is a multi-faceted discipline including rhetoric and composition, creative writing, and literary studies”).

The three learning outcomes assessed for graduating English majors are that they will:

1. be able to produce their own scholarly arguments appropriate to the discipline;
2. understand and be able to apply multiple critical and/or theoretical approaches to their analysis of texts;
3. recognize that the study of texts representative of cultural and social diversity is central to the discipline of English.

The four tools used to measure achievement of these learning outcomes were:

1. an anonymous on-line survey of graduating English majors. Our response rate declined significantly this year, with only 8 graduates completing the survey (about 30%; down from 18 surveys or 69% of all English major graduates in 2011).
2. a random sample of papers from the 2011-12 capstone seminars (ENG 490). Total enrollment in the 4 sections offered (2 in fall and 2 in spring semester) was 39 students. The papers were again not randomly selected across all sections because of difficulties collecting samples (faculty teaching the two ENG 490 sections in the fall did not collect or submit samples for assessment); rather, we reviewed a sample of 10 papers collected from the two spring sections of ENG 490, representing about 26% of total enrollment in all sections of the course. These papers were reviewed by the Director of Undergraduate Studies, the Department’s Program Coordinator (an instructional staff member), and one other faculty member, with the aid of a rubric.
3. a random sample of papers from the theory courses offered in 2011-12: ENG 488 (Literary Theory) and ENG 489 (Rhetorical Criticism) were offered in fall 2011; ENG 476 (Composition Theory) was offered in spring 2012. Only one student enrolled in ENG 489 (it was double-numbered as a graduate course) and no papers were submitted for assessment from the ENG 488 course. Thus, while only papers from ENG 488 were reviewed last year, only papers from ENG 476 (7 papers) and ENG 489 (1 paper) were reviewed this year. A total of 8 samples, representing 53% of the total 2011-12 enrollment in theory courses, were reviewed in the same manner as the 490 papers.

4. exit interviews with graduating seniors. Graduating seniors were invited to schedule exit interviews with the Director of Undergraduate Studies during April. Nine students participated in interviews in mid-April, representing about 35% of the graduating class. This was more than twice as many interviews as were conducted in 2011. We were able to increase our yield by contacting students earlier in the term.

RESULTS

Outcome 1: Graduating English majors will be able to produce their own scholarly arguments appropriate to the discipline.

Measures:

- A. In an anonymous survey of graduating English majors, 90% of respondents will agree that they wrote papers for the English major in which they presented their own argument or interpretation about a topic, issue, or text and supported it with scholarly sources from their research. **RESULT = 100%**

All but one respondent “strongly agreed.” The other “agreed.”

- B. 90% of the ENG 490 papers analyzed will present scholarly arguments appropriate to the discipline. **RESULT =80 %**

All 10 papers (100%) scored “adequate” on most criteria. A strong majority (80%) used up-to-date scholarly sources that were also relevant to the topic. The most encouraging criterion related to Outcome 1 is that 100% of the papers analyzed used an identifiable documentation style, albeit with occasional errors. This year’s reviews demonstrate significant improvement in this aspect of scholarly writing. Overall, however, we are still a little below our goal here.

Outcome 2: Graduating English majors will understand and be able to apply multiple critical and/or theoretical approaches to their analysis of texts.

Measures:

- A. In an anonymous survey of graduating English majors, 90% of respondents will indicate that they understand 3 or more theoretical or critical approaches from a list of options. **RESULT = 100%.**

All 8 respondents identified at least three theories or critical approaches that they “would feel prepared to explain or discuss.” Half identified either 4 or 5 approaches. The other half identified at least 8 approaches. The three most commonly identified theories (each identified by 5 respondents, or 62.5%) were deconstruction, feminist

theory, and indigenous or tribal-based theory. Two of these did not rank among the four most widely identified theories in last year's survey.

In addition, 80% will be able to identify 2 or more approaches from the list that they employed in their own analysis of texts. **RESULT = 25%**. Only 2 respondents were able to identify at least two theoretical or critical approaches that they had employed in their own writing for English courses. The low response rate may be in part because, once again, the short-answer question was left optional. We had meant to require it, with an "n/a" response option. Nevertheless, the low rate merits some concern.

- B. In a random sample of papers from ENG 476, 488, and 489, 90% of students will employ two or more identifiable critical and/or theoretical approaches (note: two papers from the same student which each employ a different approach will meet this measure). **RESULT = 87%**.

Only one student essay was reviewed from an English 489 class. However, 7 essays were reviewed that had been submitted in ENG 476. Because one of the 8 total essays failed to employ two or more identifiable critical and/or theoretical approaches, the data fell just short of Department goals

- C. In a random sample of papers from ENG 490, 90% of students will employ one or more identifiable critical and/or theoretical approaches. **RESULT = 80%**. We again fall slightly below the Department goal here (by a single sample paper).

In reviewing essays from ENG 490, only 80% used a recognizable theoretical or critical approach. Although the two "inadequate" papers did typically present a reasonable clear thesis, in many of these cases, the discussion of the texts in question was not framed clearly enough within a recognizable critical perspective.

Outcome 3: Graduating English majors will recognize that the study of texts representative of cultural and social diversity is central to the discipline of English.

Measures:

- A. In an anonymous survey of graduating English majors,
- i. at least 80% of respondents will "strongly agree" that at least two listed aspects of diversity are "central" to their study in English courses at UD. **RESULT= 100%**.

All 8 respondents selected at least two aspects of diversity as central to the study of English. (One student selected 3 aspects; one selected 4; one selected 6; 3 selected 7; and 2 selected all 9 aspects listed). Two students specifically stated that all aspects listed were central, with one commenting, "anything that pertains to humans" and another writing, "these are all significant in studying English and Literature." Gender was selected as central by every respondent; socio-economic class was the next most common, selected by 87.5 respondents; sexuality, religion, nation, and ethnicity were each selected as central by 75%.

Age was identified as central by 50% of respondents, and dis/ability, by just 37.5% (or 3 respondents, 2 of whom had selected every aspect).

- ii. at least 80% of respondents will “agree” or “strongly agree” that at least three listed aspects of diversity are “central” to their study in English courses at UD. **RESULT=100%.**

All 8 respondents selected at least three aspects of diversity as central to the study of English (see 3.A.ii, above).

In response to a similarly constructed list of non-dominant groups of writers (such as “Irish writers,” “African American writers” and “female writers,” 7 out of 8 respondents identified 3 or more groups as “central” to the study of English. The eighth respondent identified just 2 groups. The average number of groups identified as “central to the study of English” was 6.4 out of a total of 13 listed. Two students identified all 13 groups. The groups most commonly identified as central were African American and female writers (87.5%), which mirrors last year’s results.

In addition, 62.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that “issues of social justice are central to the study of English.” The remaining 37.5 of respondents chose “neither agree nor disagree.”

- iii. at least 80% of respondents will provide short answers responses indicating that they see diversity as very important to the discipline. **RESULT= n/a**

This question was inadvertently deleted from this year’s survey when additional questions were added for alumni/ae record-keeping purposes.

- B. In exit interviews, 80% of graduating English majors will be able to identify an aspect of diversity that has helped shape the way they think about literature, writing, and/or rhetoric and explain how this is so. **RESULT = n/a**

Eight of the 9 students interviewed identified at least one course in which one or more specific aspects of diversity had been addressed. Courses identified included ENG 114 (200 pilot), 300, 305, 333, 345, 407, and 490. Three of these (300, 305, and 490) are required of all English majors, but 490 is a topical seminar that varies widely. The other courses are elective options (333, 345, 407) except for ENG 114, which is the required composition course for ENG majors who place out of or have prior credit for ENG 101. In addition, the specific ENG 114 section described was a variable topic ENG 200 pilot. Thus, among all common courses required of all English majors, only ENG 300 and 305 were identified by the exiting majors as addressing diversity. Three students identified ENG 305 (two named one instructor and another named a different instructor) and one identified ENG 300. These results suggest that students are not encountering a great deal of diversity in the required English courses. One student specifically stated that diversity not emphasized in the required courses and that the electives s/he chose didn’t really focus on it. Another student reported that diversity wasn’t presented as important in the required courses

("Most classes didn't mention it"), and explained that s/he took ENG 490 twice in order to address this lack.

Although most students commented briefly on the kind(s) of diversity included in the identified course, they did not elaborate. It appears that the amount of time scheduled for the survey did not allow all questions to be answered fully. This will need to be addressed in future exit interviews, or we will need to find another way to get at students' specific learning with regard to our diversity outcome.

Both the survey results and the exit interviews suggest that students recognize diversity as important to the study of English; however, they do not necessarily believe that diversity is being addressed substantially in their courses. In addition, we do not have direct evidence from this assessment that our graduates are, in fact, able to articulate or demonstrate their understanding of the relevance of human diversity for the study of English.

PROPOSED ACTIONS

CURRICULUM & PEDAGOGY

1. Continue to make the use of a recognizable critical and/or theoretical approach a more formal expectation for all ENG 490 major assignments.
2. Map the teaching of relevant documentation styles onto the new curriculum at multiple points. Encourage faculty to hold students accountable for adequate use of such a style in all formal papers.
3. Continue to revise the curriculum for the major with the goals of increasing the representation of various elements of social and cultural diversity and fostering deeper engagement with critical, theoretical, and pedagogical approaches attuned to diversity issues.
4. Invite faculty whose courses have been identified as especially successful with regard to our diversity goals to share syllabi, assignments, etc. in workshops and make the materials accessible on the shared server.

ADVISING

Encourage advisors to suggest that English majors choose electives that will expose them to a diversity of authors and contexts.

ASSESSMENT PLANNING & IMPLEMENTATION

1. Improve methods for collecting a representative and relevant sampling of student writing.
 - a. Explore whether and how to collect student writing samples that address diverse texts, so as to facilitate measuring a more active outcome than “recognizing” diversity as central to the discipline. ENG 305 might be one source for such samples.
 - b. Prior to the beginning and end of each semester, remind faculty teaching relevant courses to collect samples electronically and to submit them to the assessment folder on the common server.
 - c. Explore the use of an Isidore e-portfolio for all ENG majors as we move to the new major curriculum.
2. Continue to conduct exit interviews and the on-line survey between mid-March and early April, and allow 45 minutes for the interviews so as to address all questions adequately.
3. Require a response to the short-answer survey questions re: use of critical and theoretical approaches.
4. Revise the short-answer survey question re: diversity in order to elicit clear and thoughtful responses (as the exit interviews did in 2011).