

**Outcomes Assessment
English Major
2014-2015 Academic Year**

Rationale

For the first year of our current five-year OA plan, we have been assessing the ability of students to meet the first two of our Learning Objectives:

1. Student reads a text closely, paying attention to the significance of words, syntax, and their contribution to the meaning of the text as a whole.
2. Student identifies the key elements and terms of literature, such as tone, form, point of view, figurative language, and plot structure in their analysis of literature.

In addition, we tailored our OA to address a concern expressed by many faculty that students were not getting sufficient training in basic skills at the introductory level. Students need to take one General Education Lit course plus Lit 260 to progress on to the 300-level courses, so we were looking to see how well that two-course sequence prepared students in skills of close reading and the correct use of literary terminology. Several members of the department have expressed a belief that we need to add a third introductory course (Lit 261) to give students more time to develop their skills, and we have been using this year's assessment to provide data towards weighing the proposal.

Part I: Syllabus Analysis, completed Fall 2014

Scoring Methodology

The Assessment Committee read and reviewed all LIT syllabi offered in the English Department during the Fall of 2014. The following questions were asked for each:

- A. Syllabus:
 - a. Includes all model-syllabus information?
 - b. Includes all official departmental learning objectives, appropriately tailored to course and level?
 - c. Includes course-specific learning objectives?
 - d. Includes Gen Ed LOs, if pertinent?
 - e. Assignments clearly reflect/practice LOs?
- B. We collected data on amount of reading and writing assigned
- C. Assignments:
 - a. Demand Close Reading?
 - b. Demand use of Literary Terms?
- D. We collected lists of all the literary terms used on the syllabi

Questions under Section A were scored: 2 (exceeds expectations), 1 (meets expectations), 0 (does not meet expectations). Questions under C were scored: Explicitly, Implicitly, Not Required, Unable to Determine.

Results

All the syllabi for Lit 260 and at the 300 and 400 level explicitly or implicitly address close reading and literary terminology. The results for the 200-level General Education courses showed more erratic results, particularly among adjunct faculty. Significant numbers of adjuncts also failed to adhere to other departmental requirements for syllabi, including the inclusion of Learning Objectives.

Analysis of Results

Most of our syllabi show attention to close reading and literary terminology, and clearly the full-time members of the department show general understanding of the scaffolding of the major. The exceptions are primarily in the general education courses, where the thematic content often seems to overwhelm the attention to required skills. This problem seems most acute in the syllabi of adjunct faculty, suggesting that they are not getting enough clear instruction in the department's expectations for these courses. Some of our students' problems in mastering basic skills thus may be attributable to the variety of experiences they get in different sections of those courses, and more consistency may help improve their basic skills.

Actions

Because of our concern that the syllabi of the prerequisite courses (Lit 230, 231, 232, 233, 237) do not always show sufficient attention to the skills of the major, we formulated a version of the major's Learning Objectives tailored to those general education courses. The Major Advising Committee and Curriculum Committee jointly produced and approved these new LOs, which we presented to the Department at the May faculty meeting. Those LOs will be required for inclusion in all the LIT General Education courses that count as prerequisites for the major. (See appended documents.)

To communicate the goals of these prerequisite general education courses to the many adjuncts who teach them, we plan the following:

- Coordinate with the Deputy Chair to assure that adjuncts understand the nature of these General Education courses and their roles as gateways to the major.
- Expect all full-time faculty members who are observing adjuncts to communicate the goals of these courses and to draw attention to failures to direct sufficient attention to the essential skills identified in the LOs.
- Work on creating databases of model syllabi and assignments. Model syllabi were identified.

Part II: Review of selected papers from Spring 2015 courses, Lit 260 (Introduction to Literary Study) and Lit 400 (Senior Seminar), completed June 2015.

Scoring Methodology

Each essay was read and scored on these two Learning Objectives:

1. Student reads a text closely, paying attention to the significance of words, syntax, and their contribution to the meaning of the text as a whole.

Scoring Rubric:

0 No quotations and analysis

1 Quotes text, little analysis, mostly plot summary

2 Quotes text, gives some analysis

3 Quotes text, gives analysis in support of a thesis statement

4 Quotes text, gives analysis in support of a strong thesis statement

5 Quotes text, gives analysis that successfully develops a strong thesis statement

6 Quotes text with a clear theoretical viewpoint in support of a strong thesis statement

7 Sophisticated analysis of the text with a clear theoretical viewpoint in support of a strong thesis statement

2. Student identifies the key elements and terms of literature, such as tone, form, point of view, figurative language, and plot structure in their analysis of literature.

Scoring Rubric:

0 No familiarity with literary terms

1 At least one literary term employed, but some not employed with accuracy

2 Shows awareness of the correct usage of basic literary terminology

3 Shows awareness of basic literary terminology and employs at least one analytical term appropriately in the development of a thesis statement

4 Employs multiple terms appropriately to develop a thesis statement

5 Employs appropriate literary terminology in development of a strong analytical thesis

6 Employs advanced literary terminology to develop a clear theoretical viewpoint in support of a strong thesis

7 Demonstrates fluent use of advanced literary terminology to develop a clear theoretical viewpoint in support of a strong thesis statement

Those scores translate to our understanding of a student's level of preparation thus:

Skill Levels:

0-1= no or limited skills

3= prepared for Lit 300 and above

5= meets goals for the major and successful completion of Lit 400

6-7= prepared for advanced graduate study

Ideally, we would want a student leaving Lit 260 to score a 3 and one leaving Lit 400 to score a 5.

Results (see Appendix for raw data).

A. On Skill 1, "Close Reading":

Lit 260 papers averaged 2.7, with a median score of 2.5. Nine out of 15 papers met the standard we had set (rounded to 3).

Lit 400 papers averaged 3.6, with a median score of 4.0. Three out of 7 papers met the standards we had set (rounded to 5).

B. On Skill 2, "Literary Terminology":

Lit 260 papers averaged 2.1, with a median score of 1.7. Six out of 15 met the standard we had set (rounded to 3).

Lit 400 papers averaged 3.3, with a median score of 3.0. Three out of 7 met the standard we had set (rounded to 5).

Analysis of Results

After discussing the papers and the numerical results, the committee came up with the following observations:

1. In Lit 260, students are learning close reading skills and how to use those skills to back up a thesis statement. They are less successful at employing correct literary terminology in their evidence. As a whole, though, they seem prepared to move on to Lit 300.
2. Although students do improve in both skills by the end of Lit 400, and they make distinctive improvements in the sophistication of the literary terms they employ, we would like to see them improve more. Less than half of the students can consistently use close reading and proper literary terminology to develop a sophisticated analysis of a text.
3. We did see that some assignments brought out the students' skills better, and some of the weaknesses in the papers can be attributed to assignments that don't clearly

demand the use of these skills. We encourage faculty to remind students of the need to use close reading and literary terminology in their analysis of texts and to construct assignments that help them develop those skills. We need to remind faculty that the 300-level courses are the middle rungs of a scaffold, not the end points. We will create a database of effective assignments for the 300-level.

4. The results did not support the argument that we need to add a second semester of Lit 260. Students seem largely ready to begin the next course in the sequence. Rather, we conclude that more attention to these skills needs to be paid during 300-level courses, reinforcing skills introduced at Lit 260.

Actions to take:

1. Complete the list of “Essential Literary Terms for English Majors.” We will circulate this for comment during the fall semester.
2. Build a database of assignments that successfully reinforce these skills.
3. Focus next year’s assessment on how well the 300-level courses are reinforcing the skills introduced in Lit 260.