



ENGLISH (BA)

Program Learning Assessment

2011-2014 Assessment Planning Cycle Key Findings and Proposed Actions

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**John Jay College of Criminal Justice
The City University of New York**

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English (BA)

Mission

The mission of John Jay College's B.A. in English is to acquaint students with a diverse range of literary texts and their historical, cultural, and aesthetic contexts; to introduce students to some of the principal critical and scholarly approaches to the study of texts; to establish a foundation for thinking about literature and law as text-based narratives subject to interpretation; and to help students develop the ability to read perceptively, think critically, and write effectively.

Learning Goals

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.
3. Student shows awareness of a given genre and its conventions within a historical context.
4. Student appropriately uses secondary and theoretical sources in support of literary analysis.
5. Student writes critically on literature, including setting up a thesis, incorporating textual evidence, writing a coherent argument, and citing sources correctly according to a standardized format.
6. Student produces a paper that is edited for clarity and grammatical correctness.

Guiding Principles for Assessment

- o The Department of English is committed to assessment and to development of a coherent program to ensure and advance its educational activities.
- o The department values the involvement of all students and faculty in the assessment process.
- o The faculty of the English department, given its accountability for the curriculum of the English major, has primary responsibility for the development and implementation of assessment activities.
- o Statements of learning goals of the major shall originate with, and be approved by, the faculty of the program.
- o Student learning will be assessed using both direct and indirect methods and quantitative and qualitative data.
- o The non-aggregated data gathered for assessment purposes shall remain confidential and shall be used only for the purposes of assessment.
- o Assessment of student learning outcomes will be used to improving learning, not evaluate faculty.
- o Assessment is systematic, ongoing, and cyclic.
- o Assessment will be simple, doable, and consistent with the program's mission.
- o The assessment program is dynamic and will evolve over time.

How Results Will Be Used for Student Learning

- o The faculty will meet at least once a year to review the outcomes of assessment, to compare outcomes to pre-established standards, and to decide on action to be taken.
- o Possible actions as a result of an assessment report are:
 - No action is required; students are meeting the standard.
 - No action is required at this time; explore more fully the reasons why the students did not meet the standard.
 - Identify areas in the curriculum where the learning goal should be enforced but is not.
 - Identify areas in the curriculum where the learning goal can be reinforced, and in what ways.
 - Introduce new requirements in specific areas of the curriculum.
 - Redesign the rubric/assessment tool; it does not measure what we are looking for.
 - Alter the sequence of courses or prerequisites for students.
- o This information will be contained in an annual assessment report to be distributed to the faculty and housed on the department's Blackboard organizational site. A copy of the assessment report will also be shared with the Dean for Undergraduate Studies and the Director of Assessment.

Assessment Cycle Review

The English Major is a new course of study at John Jay, graduating its first students in spring 2010. This four-year outcomes assessment plan has thus tested completely new Learning Objectives that were developed alongside a set of new courses. In our Senior Survey and in our assessments of outcomes at different levels of courses, both our majors and faculty have identified a need for us to concentrate on helping students develop their writing skills. Our surveys of graduates have consistently shown that students become majors to become better writers, which perhaps shows them to be different from traditional English majors, who tend to choose English out of a passion for reading literature. Given the challenges many incoming John Jay students face in writing—namely, inadequate high school preparation and their experience as ESL/ELL students—we have worked to develop programs to meet their particular needs. Indeed, if we have found anything surprising about the students who choose English, it is the range of abilities and aptitudes among them. The department has worked collectively to develop assignments at all levels to help all students meet and exceed our expectations in reading and writing.

This inaugural four-year assessment plan was devised to assess each of the major's required courses in turn, beginning with the Senior Seminars (Lit 400 and Lit 405) and working down to conclude with the gateway course, Introduction to Literary Study (Lit 260). As we assessed outcomes, we came to recognize the importance of emphasizing strong foundational skills in reading and writing at every stage of the major.

Following the graduation in May 2010 of the first class of John Jay English majors in over thirty years, the department assessed the experiences of students at the end of their program. A Senior Survey was piloted in fall 2010 to assess the views of our first graduates, with questions revised for a full assessment in the spring. We also reviewed the final research projects from our Senior Seminars. That first round of assessment gave us a sense of our

students' strengths (close reading) and their weaknesses (argumentation, editing/grammar, awareness of genre and historical period).

In 2011-12, we built off those initial impressions by assessing the upper-level courses, the Senior Seminars (Lit 400, 405) and the Historical Perspectives courses (Lit 37x). Reviews of student essays found that most were meeting or exceeding goals, but also detected a gap between their ability to read closely and their ability to develop strong literary arguments. As a result, we planned to look at the writing instruction at the earlier stages of the major, including creating a diagnostic to be administered in Lit 260 and implementing more basic skills instruction (including grammar) at all stages of the major. Faculty members led by Professor Les Hanson also developed a new course focused on the grammar and rhetoric of sentences (Eng 260). We employed a Writing Fellow to develop programs with the Writing Center on researching literary argumentation.

In 2012-13, we focused our efforts on the middle levels of the major, Text and Context (Lit 300) and Foundations of Literature and Law (Lit 305). By this year, we had trained and certified enough of our faculty as Writing Intensive instructors to schedule all our sections of Lit 300, 305, and 37x as Writing Intensive courses. All these instructors are structuring their courses around developing strong literary arguments. We then held several workshops with faculty to discuss best classroom practices for the teaching of writing. This year also saw the launch of our extensive Careers for English Majors website, which responds to requests in Senior Surveys for more career guidance.

As the assessment cycle came to a close, we focused attention on assessing and developing the curriculum in the gateway course, Lit 260. Because professors create their own syllabi for the course, assessments of the syllabi showed a need to ensure greater commonalities in assignments, with strong communication among faculty selected to teach it and the Major Advisor overseeing the curriculum. We have been considering extending the course to two semesters, but in the interim, we have developed diagnostic assignments for the beginning of the course to identify students who are behind on basic reading and writing skills. Coordinating with the Writing Center, we have developed a program for those students, LitStart, a sequence of workshops focusing on close reading and argumentation. Our recent assessments have shown our students making progress in their reading and writing skills as they leave that course and move on to the 300-level.

Our next four-year plan will assess each of the learning goals in turn. Now that we have an established program, we want to chart student progress through the major and consider whether the revisions we have made thus far to our assignments and courses are continuing to help our students develop their reading and writing abilities. Although we have not yet seen reason to alter our learning goals significantly, we will also check to ensure that that continue to describe what we expect of our graduates.

English (BA)

Program Learning Assessment. Key findings and proposed actions (2010-2014)

Program Learning Goals

1. 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. 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.
3. Shows awareness of a given genre and its conventions within a historical context.
4. Uses secondary and theoretical sources in support of literary analysis.
5. Writes critically on literature, including setting up a thesis, incorporating textual evidence, a coherent argument, and citing sources correctly.
6. Produces a paper that is edited for clarity and grammatical correctness.

Outcomes Assessment

Program Learning Goal #	% Meet / Exceed ¹	Key Findings	Proposed Actions (Semester Implemented)	Was action effective? ⁴		
				Follow-up assessment Sem. Year	% Meet / Exceed	
2010						
Assessment Context² : Capstone (n=15), Tool³ : Student Survey						
1	87	Survey helps us understand students perceptions about learning, but does not provide a clear assessment of student learning in the major. One of the most interesting findings is the disparity between students perceptions that their writing is excellent versus the professional assessment that this is the weakest aspect of the curriculum.		2012	97	↑
2	80			2012	95	↑
3	93			2012	93	=
4	87			2012	98	↑
5	94			2012	97	↑
2011						
Assessment Context : Capstone - Pilot Study (n=8), Tool : Paper						
1	2.0 of 3	Essays are extended opinion papers rather than arguments based on evidence. Essays lack organizing structure and tend to follow plot, not own argument. Essays not edited for clarity and grammar. Strongest areas: building close-reading skills and using secondary theoretical texts in support of readings. Low awareness of genre and historical context.	Share findings widely with faculty and solicit ideas for how to strengthen argumentation and grammar.	2012	91	
2	1.6 of 3			2012	88	
3	1.2 of 3			2012	91	
4	1.9 of 3			2012	97	
5	1.7 of 3			2012	89	
6	1.5 of 3			2012	85	

- (1) Percent represents ratio of students who met or exceeded expectations. Where scores represent mean performance, the mean score and highest scale value are indicated (e.g., 3.3 of 4). (2) Assessment context may relate to comprehensive program review, specific academic setting (e.g., course #, capstone, internship), class standing (e.g., seniors, transfers, alumni), post-graduation outcomes (e.g., placement, further education, employers ratings of employee skills), or indicators of learning progress. (3) Examples of tools include exams, portfolios, research projects, lab reports, papers, essays, surveys, licensure tests, performances, presentations. (4) Re-assessment of learning follows the implementation of actions to determine their effectiveness in improving learning outcomes.

Outcomes Assessment

Program Goal #	% Meet / Exceed	Key Findings	Proposed Actions (Semester Implemented)	Was action effective?		
				Follow-up assessment Sem. Year	% Meet / Exceed	
2012						
Assessment Context : Capstone (n=35), Tool : Student Survey						
1	97	Students want more consistency in basic skills instruction and earlier introduction of these skills in gen ed courses. This is a concern as changes planned for gen ed classes will likely limit students' literary training as requirements can be filled by non-English courses. Responses reflected a sense that such skills were secured in their 300-level classes.	Revise survey to make answering all the questions about learning goals less cumbersome for student responses.	2013	95	↓
2	95			2013	93	↓
3	93			2013	78	↓
4	98			2013	87	↓
5	97			2013	92	↓
Assessment Context : Capstone Courses LIT 400, 405 (n=34), Tool : Paper						
1	91	Large majority of students are meeting or exceeding expectations. Department-wide commitment to becoming writing-intensive certified and to writing instruction in upper-level literature courses shows in these numbers. Additionally, this process of group reading, scoring and discussing offers assurance that faculty are unified in our expectations.	Share findings with department and offer workshops on "OA takeaways" - a way of sharing our successes with and concerns about our students' journeys through the major. Revisit the description of our learning goals, in particular about "genre."			
2	88					
3	91					
4	97					
5	89					
6	85					
Assessment Context : LIT 371, 373, 375 (n=45), Tool : Paper						
1	91	As with the capstone papers, faculty were pleased overall with the papers and particularly happy that in goals five and six - weaknesses noticed last year - there seemed to be strength. The committee generally felt that more specific assignments yielded stronger, tighter papers.				
2	97					
3	97					
5	98					
6	84					
Assessment Context : LIT 260, Tool : Review of Assessment Tools						
		While assessing papers is consistent with our tools for other courses, LIT260 could be a place where other tools might be considered. Faculty looked at a range of syllabi and discussed diagnostics administered throughout the course. The committee found approaches and nature of questions to be diverse. Yet clear underlying continuities emerged. Every class emphasized close reading, essay form and structure, put a premium on skills such as grammar, and asked larger theoretical questions.	Discuss the possibility of having a diagnostic exercise that would be administered in 260 and again in capstones.			

Outcomes Assessment

Program Goal #	% Meet / Exceed	Key Findings	Proposed Actions (Semester Implemented)	Was action effective? Follow-up assessment Sem. Year % Meet / Exceed
2013				
Assessment Context : LIT 300/305 (n=49), Tool : Paper		Overall 80% met or exceeding our learning objectives. Students are largely able to use literary terms to understand and make arguments about the texts; and it is more challenging to master secondary or theoretical material and to develop their own critical voices.		
Assessment Context : Capstone (n=21), Tool : Paper		Overall 90% of students met or exceeded expectations. Students had solid close reading skills and could use literary terms to understand and make arguments about the material. They were weaker in their ability to use secondary material.		
Assessment Context : Capstone 400, 405, Tool : Student Survey				
1	95	Surveys reflect our understanding of student achievement as it is measured in our other assessment activities. For example, our work assessing LIT 300/305 indicated that our students were weakest at using critical and theoretical material. This is also the area in which they perceive their own greatest weakness.		
2	93			
3	78			
4	87			
5	92			
2014				
Assessment Context : LIT 260, Tool : Syllabus review		The course attempts to do many - perhaps too many - things. It covers a wide variety of literary genres and periods, while also attempting to provide the most basic introduction to literary terms. There is also a serious need for writing instruction at this level.	Ongoing conversation about adding a second 200-level course to the English Major to address some of the overspill issues from this very crowded course.	
Assessment Context : LIT 260, Tool : Diagnostic Exercise		A challenge in assessing student performance was the different amount of time given by faculty in their classes for completion of the test; the shorter the time, the more sketchy the responses. Since a list of terms was given on the diagnostic, we now see that we were testing application of terms rather than an ability to spot them independently.	Use the first written assignment in LIT 260 as our mechanism for identifying struggling students (F14). Create a workshop series with the Writing Center ("LitStart") to help those struggling students meet the LOs for the major (F14).	

Outcomes Assessment

Program Goal #	% Meet / Exceed	Key Findings	Proposed Actions (Semester Implemented)	Was action effective? Follow-up assessment Sem. Year % Meet / Exceed
2014 cont.				
		<p>Assessment Context : Capstone 400, 405 (n=46), Tool : Student Survey 93% of graduating majors rate their experience "excellent" or "good"; 89% planning on graduate school, but 92% not applied yet; and 76% of graduating majors saw a faculty advisor in the Department, up from 68% in 2012-13.</p>		