

English Department Assessment

When we revised our curriculum in 2005-06, our previous assessment plan became obsolete. Since that time, we've lacked a systematic plan for assessing our major, even as we've continued yearly assessment practices tailored to particular moments and needs. We've learned, in this period, the value of flexibility—the value of assessment as an improvisatory and evolving series of questions and practices. Our goal in this document is to join that flexibility to a multi-year vision, bringing more shape and intentionality to our assessment procedures. Our goal isn't to create a plan that will simply repeat every four years, but to conduct a sequenced assessment of our entire major that will show us the kinds of questions to ask in the future, and the procedures that will best help us answer them.

2008-09: Senior Capstone

We began with the capstone experience, as reported last spring. Through a direct assessment of our majors' capstone projects in the spring of 2009, we hoped to provide a baseline for future assessments. If we noted weaknesses, we could let this awareness shape our assessment of the courses that ultimately feed into the capstone experience. This assessment focused on the revised final product of the Senior Capstone in Literary Studies, Poetry, and Fiction. Faculty who taught these courses evaluated the final pieces (e.g. a long research paper of 20-30 pages in the Senior Seminar in Literary Studies, a collection of poems in the Advanced Projects in Poetry, a series of stories in Advanced Projects in Fiction) according to a rubric that was derived from our goals for students' learning at the 300 level; attached are four versions of the 5-question questionnaire, tailored for each type of capstone, as well as the final report (nonfiction capstone projects were not assessed, and will be folded into the 2011-2012 300-level assessment). Prior to this assessment, faculty of these courses met to discuss strengths and common concerns. We plan to utilize this information in our assessment of EN110 in May 2010.

2009-10: EN 110

In the spring semester of 2010, the Curriculum Committee has asked the five EN 110 instructors to collect a sample of student papers. For each section, the instructor will collect final papers by three different students (for a total of 15 students for all five sections). The students will be randomly selected; in the case of assignments that ask for both a draft and a revised version of the paper, the instructor will collect the revised version. At the end of the semester, the instructors will assess the student papers from their own sections against the department's writing goals for the 100 level, as set out in the attached questionnaire, and will meet to evaluate the results of the assessment, consider the effectiveness of the course, and recommend any changes to the course or our pedagogies as a consequence of the results.

2010-11: 200-level courses

In the spring semester of 2011, our assessment proceedings will involve collection and evaluation of papers from a variety of courses—specifically, four courses fulfilling the “Forms of Language and Literature” requirement, and four courses fulfilling the “Language and Literature in Context” requirement. For each of these courses, we will request final papers from five randomly selected students. At the end of the semester, the instructors will assess the student papers from their own courses against a rubric drawn from our “Canon of Methods” and influenced by the results of the previous year’s assessment of EN 110. In addition, the instructors will meet to evaluate the effectiveness of the courses and to consider any issues that might suggest potential changes to other courses or to our pedagogies overall.

2011-2012: 300-level courses

In the 2011-2012 academic year, we will undertake a direct assessment of student writing in 300-level classes (excluding all of the capstones except the nonfiction capstones, which were not assessed in 2008-09)). Both the questions we’ll be asking and the process for asking them will be shaped by the prior assessments of EN 110 (Spring 2010) and our 200-level courses (2010-2011) and thus will be determined in the spring of 2011.