

Department of English and Composition Program Assessment Plan

Assessing the English Major

Overview of the Major

The English Major allows students to access and learn from the richest resources of our language and culture. Students receive extensive training in critical reading, writing and thinking, as they explore the traditions of British, American, and Global Anglophone literary expression. In addition to supporting the values of a traditional liberal arts education, the skills gained in the English Major provide vital preparation for business and professional careers, as well as for further academic work or artistic endeavors. The experience of our graduates has proven that English is an excellent background for law, government, journalism, medicine, teaching, management, publishing, advertising, cinematic production, and advanced technology fields.

English Major requirements are listed in Appendix A, along with lists of courses that satisfy those requirements. The Major is designed to offer students a blend of historical familiarity with traditional British, American, and Anglophone literary studies and intensive coursework in interdisciplinary studies, emerging media, and current critical methodologies. Lower-division requirements include the three-term Introduction to the English Major, ENG 220, 221, 222, which provides students with a broad background in literary history, critical methods, and textual analysis, a course in Shakespeare (ENG 207 or 208), and two lower-division electives. The program consists of 36 hours of coursework at the upper division, 28 of which must be taken at the University of Oregon. A loose structure of distribution requirements encourages students to design a curriculum that offers both coverage of historical periods and an appreciation for the breadth of literary and cultural studies in English. All majors take one upper-division course in the period prior to 1500, two in the period 1500-1789, two in literature since 1789, one in literary theory or criticism, one in the category Folklore, Ethnic, or Women's Literature, and two upper-division electives. In addition to regular courses that satisfy each of these distribution areas, the English Department curriculum regularly includes a wide range of special-topics courses and several capstone seminars. All course work for the major must be completed with a grade of C or better, and majors must fulfill the university's foreign language requirement for the Bachelor of Arts degree.

Assessment of Student Learning in the English Major

The Department's assessment procedure is built around seven Desired Learning Outcomes. Students who complete the UO English Major should possess the ability to:

1. think creatively and independently;
2. write focused, analytical essays in clear, grammatical prose;

3. employ logic and interpretive skills to produce original, persuasive arguments;
4. perform formal analysis of literary, cinematic, or other “texts”;
5. employ primary and/or secondary sources, with proper acknowledgment and citation, as they contribute to a critical essay’s thesis;
6. draw on relevant cultural and/or historical information to situate texts within their cultural, political, and historical contexts;
7. demonstrate broad familiarity with literary traditions in English through informed reference to prominent authors, genres, literary and cultural movements, and styles.

The Department employs a three-part procedure to assess student progress toward the Desired Learning Outcomes. Part 1 entails collection and analysis of data on student learning in two areas: a) skills and b) content; Part 2 involves an exit survey of student satisfaction with the Major; and Part 3 is a report on educational and career paths followed by English alumni five years after graduation.

Part 1. Data on Student Learning in the Major

To measure student success at achieving Desired Learning Outcomes 1-5, the Department evaluates a random sample of 50 essays submitted by freshman English majors in 100- and 200-level courses and 50 essays submitted by senior English majors in 400-level courses, also randomly selected. The following rubrics are used to evaluate essays on a scale of 1-5, where 5=Excellent, 4= Very Good, 3=Adequate, 2=Weak, 1=Insufficient.

- Does the essay contain evidence of creative and independent thinking?
- Is the essay written in clear, grammatical prose?
- Does the essay contain a focused analysis of its subject?
- Has the author employed logic and interpretive skills to create a persuasive argument?
- Does the author employ primary and/or secondary sources effectively?
- Are sources properly documented?

Scores on individual questions and a “holistic score” for each essay are included in the Department’s report on student leaning in the Major at the first Department Meeting of the academic year.

To measure student success at achieving Desired Learning Outcomes 6-7, the Department administers an Assessment Survey to a randomly selected group of freshman English Majors at the beginning of ENG 220, the Introduction to the English Major. The same Assessment Survey is administered to a randomly selected group of senior English Majors.

The Assessment Survey is made up of multiple choice questions that measure students' familiarity with British, American, and Global English literary traditions, as well as the cultural, political, and historical contexts in which those traditions can be situated.

Following is a sample of survey questions:

____ A passing reference, without explicit identification, to a literary or historical person, place, or event, or to another literary work or passage.

- a. Allegory b. Negative capability c. Allusion
d. Simile e. Aestheticism

____ A formal and sustained lament in verse for the death of a particular person, usually ending in a consolation.

- a. Ballad b. Elegy c. Lyric d. Tragedy e. Drama

____ Eight lines of iambic pentameter rhymed *abababcc*.

- a. Spenserian stanza b. *Terza rima* c. Sonnet d. *Ottava rima* e. Free Verse

____ Which of the following poems was written by John Keats?

- a. "London" b. "Dover Beach" c. "Mont Blanc"
d. "Tintern Abbey" e. "On First Looking Into Chapman's Homer"

____ In what year did the French Revolution begin?

- a. 1789 b. 1998 c. 1798 d. 1922 e. 1845

____ In what verse form is "Song of Myself" written?

- a. *Terza rima* b. Blank verse c. Heroic couplets d. Free verse e. Sonnet

2. Exit Survey

Another measure of student learning is self-assessment. Each spring, the Department asks graduating seniors to fill out a voluntary exit survey based on the following questions. Students are asked to respond on a scale of 1-5, where 5=Excellent, 4= Very Good, 3=Adequate, 2=Weak, 1=Insufficient.

- What is your overall opinion of the educational experience you received as an English major?
- How would you assess the quality of instruction you received in the lower-division courses you took as part of the English Major?
- How would you assess the quality of instruction you received in the upper-division courses you took as part of the English Major?

- How effective was the three-term Introduction to the English Major at providing you with a useful background in literary history, critical methods, and textual analysis?
- To what extent has your work in the English Major prepared you to pursue your educational and career goals?

Scores on individual questions and a cumulative score are included in the Department's report on student satisfaction with the Major at the first Department Meeting of the academic year.

3. Post-Graduation Trends

To assess the long-term effectiveness of the Desired Student Outcomes as they relate to life after the BA, the Department contacts English major alumni and compiles a data-base on educational and career trends five years after graduation.

Use of Assessment Data

At the end of each academic year, the Department produces a three-part report with an analysis of 1) data on student leaning in the Major, 2) the exit survey, and 3) post-graduation trends. The report is discussed at the first Department meeting of the ensuing academic year, and significant findings initiate proposals from the appropriate standing committees.

Supplementary Procedures Related to Assessment and Evaluation

Grades are the principle tool used in assessment of student work. To combat "grade inflation," the department annually distributes a grading report in which faculty members can see how their own grades stand in relation to those of their colleagues. This process has been effective at controlling anomalies and fostering a sense of shared academic standards.

The Department uses the University's electronic course evaluations system, which provides numerical and written data on student satisfaction with all courses taught by English Department faculty and GTFs. Individual teachers carefully review their own course evaluations, and the data are used by the Department's personnel committees as they deliberate over merit compensation, contract renewals, and promotion decisions.

In accordance with University Senate rules, a comprehensive "peer evaluation" is conducted for all Associate Professors every other year. This evaluation of a colleague's teaching entails a classroom visit and a review of course materials. A written report is submitted to the Department Head, and, when appropriate, teachers are advised to seek pedagogic training from the university's Teaching Effectiveness Program.

The Department's Curriculum Committee monitors the undergraduate curriculum, proposing changes to the structure of the Major as needed. As part of the committee's oversight function, the Director of Undergraduate Studies periodically reviews syllabi and course content for all courses in the curriculum.

Comprehensive Program Review is another important element of the Department's ongoing assessment procedure. An external committee conducted such a review of the Department's graduate and undergraduate programs in 2008.

Assessing the Composition Program

Overview of the Program

One of the English Department's primary service functions is to staff and administer the University's nationally recognized Composition Program, which offers the only courses required of all UO graduates. The Department Head appoints a Director and Associate Director of Composition from among the department's rhetoric faculty, and the Director names two experienced GTFs to serve as Assistant Directors of Composition. The Program trains 35-40 new GTFs each year and employs approximately 100 teachers, including English Instructors and GTFs from English, Creative Writing, Philosophy, Folklore, and Comparative Literature, who serve between 6,500 and 7,000 students annually.

Students satisfy the university writing requirement by completing WR 121 and either WR 122 or WR 123 with the grade of C- or better. In the two-course sequence focusing on the argumentative essay, students develop writing skills that prepare them to participate actively in academic and civic discourse. Students complete three essay cycles in each course. These begin with an introduction to a substantive issue through reading and discussion. Students then develop essays whose line of reasoning participates in the existing ideas and discourse on the subject.

Assessment of Student Learning in the Composition Program

Upon completion of either WR 122 or WR 123, students should be able to achieve the following outcomes:

1. Write essays that develop and respond to a significant question that is relevant to the context in which it is written and appropriate for the audience to which it is addressed.
2. Provide logical answers to questions at issue and develop lines of reasoning in support of those answers, while taking into account and responding to objections or competing answers and lines of reasoning.

3. Write an essay that is unified around a main claim, proceeds in a logical way, and consists of cohesive paragraphs that separate and connect ideas effectively.
4. Produce written work that displays adherence to the conventions of academic writing, including control of grammar, spelling, word usage, syntax, and punctuation; appropriate tone, style, diction, and register; proper formatting, use, and documentation of sources.
5. Create and refine written arguments by following a writing process: on the basis of reading and discussion, invent a question to which the essay will respond; generate and test a thesis that answers that question; apply and develop the thesis in a first version of the essay; and improve the content and organization of the essay draft in a revision process, both by reevaluating the logical and rhetorical core of the essay and by responding to critiques from peers and instructors.

Student Portfolios and Self-Assessment

In a written reflection at the end of each essay cycle, students assess their essays and their writing process with respect to the course goals and identify areas to work on in the next essay cycle. At the end of each course, students submit a portfolio of all their written work for the quarter to their teacher. This portfolio is prefaced by a reflective essay in which the student introduces the writing from the quarter, identifying the ways in which their writing has or has not improved and noting their strengths and areas still needing improvement. Reflective writing increases students' knowledge about writing and helps them translate their writing skills to settings outside the writing classroom.

Program Assessment

The Composition Program uses these student portfolios for program assessment because they provide the most complete perspective on student writing. The process for collecting and reviewing the portfolios has several steps:

Selection and Preparation. A randomly-generated sample of portfolios are collected from WR 121, WR 122, and WR 123 each quarter. Teachers submit the required portfolio with identifying student information removed or effaced. Staff remove teacher information and organize a labeling system that identifies only the course and quarter for each portfolio.

Scoring Portfolios. The WR 122 and WR123 portfolios are scored on the five outcomes above using this scale: 5=Excellent, 4=Very Good, 3= Satisfactory, 2= Weak, 1= Unsatisfactory.

Reporting and Using Results. Assessment results of the WR 122 and WR 123 portfolios are reported to the Composition Committee each year and are analyzed by the Director of Composition for program development and teacher training. The sample of portfolios collected from WR 121 courses will be considered for

the implementation of any program changes, but are not be a part of the assessment scoring.