

California State University, Stanislaus

**Department of English**

Assessment Report

2006-07

**MISSION**

The Department of English supports the university's mission by providing opportunities for our students to develop literacy, critical thinking, and communication skills, as well as the knowledge of literature and aesthetic appreciation expected of culturally literate citizens and future teachers in our public schools.

**PROGRAM GOALS**

- Provide all Stanislaus students the opportunity to achieve appropriate levels of proficiency in written communication.
- Share with our students a rich variety of American, British, and World texts.
- Guide our students to develop a broad range of interpretive abilities and analytical skills.
- Present the historical, cultural, and technical information necessary for students to become competent readers and scholars.
- Assist our students in the continual process of improving formal writing skills.
- Provide opportunities for students to practice their oral communication skills.
- Support our students as they prepare for and enter into professional life.
- Engage prospective teachers in the philosophy and practice of teaching language arts in secondary schools.

**STUDENT LEARNING GOALS/ OBJECTIVES**

Successful English Majors Will . . .

- Master various analytical and critical reading skills, demonstrating the ability to read closely and to comprehend and interpret a variety of culturally diverse literary, non-literary, visual, and multi-media texts.
- Gain broad knowledge of literature, achieving
  - Familiarity with the development and significant periods and movements of American, British, and World literatures.
  - Knowledge of literary, critical, and theoretical terminology.
  - Understanding of background and contextual knowledge necessary for the well-informed consideration of various texts.
- Demonstrate formal writing skills by composing essays and other documents that
  - Make clear, organized, and well-reasoned arguments.
  - Analyze, develop, and synthesize concepts.
  - Reveal the ability to evaluate, incorporate, and document information.
  - Exhibit a sense of audience and occasion.
  - Display a mastery of grammar and language.

- Develop competent oral communication skills through class discussions and formal presentations.
- Gain understanding of intellectual and professional issues of the academy, including diversity, academic ethics, and canonicity.

Successful MA Students with a Concentration in Literature Will . . .

- Master the techniques and practices of literary analysis.
- Become familiar with the history and current theories of literary interpretation.
- Acquire the abilities necessary to become professionals in the field of literature, whether as teachers or as other professionals.

Successful MA Students with a Concentration in Rhetoric and Teaching Writing Will . . .

- Understand the historical development and major theories of rhetoric and composition.
- Master and apply the techniques and practices of rhetorical analysis.
- Acquire the abilities necessary to become professionals in the field of composition and rhetoric, whether as teachers or as other professionals.

Successful MA Students with a Concentration in TESOL Will . . .

- Gain knowledge and understanding of relevant concepts from the areas of linguistics, applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and language teaching methodology.
- Acquire in-depth knowledge and understanding of the interaction between second language acquisition theory and second language teaching and learning.
- Demonstrate expertise in curriculum design, assessment, teaching methods, and classroom management in various TESOL settings.

### **HOW WILL DATA BE COLLECTED?**

Oral Communication: We are in the first stages of developing a process to assess our students' development of oral communication skills. In the English Department, we have a graduate seminar, ENGL 5020: Assessment of English, that we have used in the past to generate ideas and processes for both classroom and program assessment. This semester the professor of the course, who has a background in assessment, will be organizing group projects in which students will research and pilot plans for evaluating oral presentations. The final reports from these groups will be submitted to the department for discussion. The department will also be allocating time in each department meeting this term to consider all the elements involved in assessing this learning goal. We will consider existing rubrics (both those currently used by faculty members and others from outside sources, such as assessment websites, etc.) for evaluating presentations, and from these we will develop our own rubric that reflects what we agree to be the essential elements in good oral presentations. We will also have to consider which classes will be used in this assessment process, where the assessment of oral communication will fit in our assessment cycle, who will be involved in the evaluation of presentations, etc.

GE Area A-2: The GE Area A-2 assessment plan is to utilize current requirements to track the success of the first-year writing courses. All students (except for transfer students who met this requirement at other institutions) must complete a First-Year Composition course (ENGL 1001 or 1002) or the Honors Composition course (ENGL 1005) before their junior year. All students are also required to take and pass the WPST (the Writing Proficiency Screening Test) and an upper-division WP (Writing Proficiency)

course. With the help of Institutional Research, we would like to chart the progress of students through these requirements. An initial inquiry has revealed that this information, beginning from the year 2003, may already be available.

Senior Exit Survey: We will conduct our annual survey by distributing the departmental survey form to all seniors in ENGL 4990: Senior Seminar throughout the year. The forms are then collected by the Program Assessment Coordinator, who correlates the data and transcribes the student comments in a report for the year.

### **HOW WILL DATA BE EVALUATED AND RECOMMENDATIONS MADE?**

Oral Communication: We have not yet determined how data will be evaluated. When the assessment process is finished, the Program Assessment Coordinator will compile the data into a report and present it to the English Department. The faculty as a collective will consider the data and its implications, and as a group we will determine what changes need to be made to improve the quality of our instruction in the area of oral communication.

GE Area A-2: The collection of this data should yield important and useful information. For example, how many students who pass through these Composition courses pass the WPST the first time? How successful are these students in WP courses? Etc. Also, if we collect the grades they receive in their Composition and WP courses, we will be able to do a more nuanced analysis. For example, does a high grade in First-Year Composition correlate to a high grade in an upper-division WP course? Are students who pass with a low grade in First-Year Composition less likely to pass the WPST? Etc. This data would be evaluated by the Director of the Composition Program, the Coordinator of Assessment of the English Department, and the Director of the Honors Program. The numbers and scores will help us determine if the courses in GE Area A-2 are successfully serving their purpose, which is to prepare students for college-level academic writing.

Senior Survey: Every fall the department considers the Senior Exit Survey Report from the previous school year. Recommendations are made by faculty members based on the data and the comments from students.

### **WHAT DATA WERE COLLECTED AND HOW? WHEN DID FACULTY DISCUSS THE FINDINGS?**

As we are just beginning the process of evaluating Oral Communication and GE Area A-2, no changes have been made.

Last year we completed the process of conducting and evaluating assessment of Academic Writing Skills in the Major:

To assess student writing, we collected 1/3 of the final essays from each section of ENGL 4990: Senior Seminar (our capstone course) that were taught that year. Four faculty members met to assess the essays. The papers were divided into two stacks, and then two readers were assigned to independently assess each paper using the departmental writing rubric. Readers gave identical ratings 88 times, deviated by 1 point 32 times, and deviated by 2 points 0 times. Overall, readers were in agreement 73% of the time.

The data showed that, overall, students are already meeting our writing goals by graduation. The most significant finding was that student performance in the first three categories on the rubric—Introduction, Argument, and Conclusion—was skewed to the lower end of the scale, while performance in the last three categories—Organization, Style, and Grammar/Punctuation/Mechanics—was skewed to the higher end of the scale. We can group these categories into broader sets of writing skills, where Introduction, Argument and Conclusion can be considered elements of Rhetoric; and Organization, Style, and Grammar/Punctuation/ Mechanics can be seen as elements of Formal Writing.

The good news is that we are doing a very respectable job of helping students achieve our formal writing goals. For the most part they are skilled at organizing their writing, constructing paragraphs and sentences, selecting diction, using punctuation, and documenting in MLA style.

It is evident, however, that we should provide more guidance to ensure that our students acquire the rhetorical skills necessary to be successful writers. While we can be confident that our student writing tends to be structurally and mechanically sound, a percentage of the essays did not contain the depth of analysis or the kind of sustained and supported argument expected of graduating seniors.

The final draft of the "Assessment of Writing in the Major Report 2005-2006" was distributed to English faculty in October 2006. In both the October and November faculty meetings we discussed the results and agreed that we needed to strengthen the rhetorical skills of our students.

Senior Exit Survey: The "Senior Exit Survey Report 2005-2006" was distributed to English faculty in October 2006. The data showed that, in the opinion of our students, the department is doing a good to excellent job of providing them with solid courses and sound instruction. Students seemed somewhat dissatisfied with the lack of variety in courses offered, and there were some students who were dissatisfied with their advising. Despite these very specific concerns, the students overall gave very positive feedback in their written comments.

This initial assessment process gave us a starting point and uncovered some areas that merit discussion and action. Once the assessment results helped us identify specific areas in need of improvement, the discussion of how to make these improvements became part of our monthly faculty meetings and a session topic at our all-day English Department Faculty Retreat, which took place April 27, 2007.

### **WHAT CHANGES WERE MADE AS A RESULT OF THE FINDINGS?**

As we are just beginning the process of evaluating Oral Communication and GE Area A-2, no changes have been made.

We have made changes based on our last round of assessment of Academic Writing Skills in the Major:

As the English department developed this assessment plan, it made some curriculum changes in the major to ensure a more systematic concentration on specific learning goals and to assess student development in the major, especially in formal writing skills. To that end, the department designated ENGL 4990: Senior Seminar as a capstone or exit course, and created ENGL 3150: Approaches to Literary Study as a junior-level gateway course. The two courses work as a pair. 3150 provides an intense introduction to writing goals, which are developed and enhanced throughout the major. 4990 allows

students to synthesize what they have learned in a final research paper that should represent their best writing skills.

In our discussion of the assessment results, the English faculty agreed that we must approach writing in these and other upper-division courses with an awareness that students need more instruction in rhetorical writing. Our informal discussions on the best way to teach argument resulted in an internal publication titled "Best Practices for Teaching Argument." This document was distributed to everyone who teaches in the English department, including part-time instructors and graduate TAs. Nine faculty members participated in the project, sharing their best tips, lectures, activities, information, writing assignments, and handouts related to teaching argument. At our department retreat, we also decided to start a project called "Argument Camp," where we will meet once a semester to discuss these and other methods of improving writing. We have discussed encouraging or even requiring graduate TAs and new instructors to attend these meetings in hopes that by sharing our best practices we can improve student writing at all levels.

Changes made after consideration of 2005-2006 Senior Exit Survey:

Students indicated that they would like to see more variety in our course offerings, especially in the areas of Creative Writing and Multicultural Literature. To that end, we have a new course in the catalog, ENGL 3945: Multicultural California Literature. We are also considering a new undergraduate concentration in Creative Writing. Some students expressed a need for better advising. We have now made yearly advising mandatory for all English majors.

## Appendix One Student Learning Goals in the Major

Course:	Lexical Skills		Knowledges				Communication Skills			
	close reading skills	breadth of reference	literary history	critical and technical vocabulary	background and context	intellectual and professional issues	essay composition	research & bibliography	grammar and language	oral communication
2100/10	+	+	+	√	+	√	√	√	√	√
2200/10	+	+	+	√	+	√	√	√	√	√
3007	+	√		+	√	+	+	+	+	+
3009	√	√	--	--	√	+	+	√	+	+
3150	+	√	--	+	√	+	+	+	√	--
3210	+	√	+	--	+	--	√	√	--	--
3220	+	+	+	+	+	--	√	√	√	/
3225	+	√	+	--	+	--	√	√	--	--
3235	+		+		+	--				
3420	+	+	+		+	√	√	+		
3750	+	+	--	+	--	√	--	--	+	--
3920	√	+	+	√	+	√	√	--	√	√
3940	√	√	+	+	+	+	√	--	√	√
3950	+	+	--		+					
4011	√	√	--	√	√	+	√	--	--	√
4012	√	√	--	√	--	+	√	--	--	--
4105	--		+	--	--			--		
4107	+	+	+	+	+	--	+	+	+	--
4108	+	--	+	--	+	--	+	--	--	--
4109	+	--	--	--	+	--	+	--	--	--
4110	+	--	--	+	+	--	+	+	+	--
4115	+		--		+					
4130	+	√	+	+	+	--	√	/	√	/
4300	+	+	+	--	√	--	+	√	--	--
4305	+	√	√	+	+	√	√	√	√	√
4310	+		+	--	--			--		
4510	+		+		+					
4520	+	--	+	--	+	--	+	--	--	--
4610	+	√		+	√	√		+	+	+
4620	+	√		+	√	√		+	+	+
4615	√	--		√		+	√	√	√	
4800	√	--		√	√	√	√	+	√	√
4850		--		√		√	+	√	+	√
4990	+	--	--	+	√	√	+	+	√	√

Table:

focus      -- minor focus      + significant focus