

Department of English
Assessment Report 2008-2009
California State University, Stanislaus

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, and visual texts.
- Gain broad knowledge of literature, achieving
 - o Familiarity with the development and significant periods and movements of American, British, and World literatures.
 - o Knowledge of literary, critical, and theoretical terminology.
 - o 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
 - o Make clear, organized, and well-reasoned arguments.
 - o Analyze, develop, and synthesize concepts.
 - o Reveal the ability to evaluate, incorporate, and document information.
 - o Exhibit a sense of audience and occasion.
 - o 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 RTW 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.

Assessment Activities During AY 2008-2009

1. Continued discussions and activities from AY 2007-2008 involving the assessment of oral communication in the major.
 - an ad hoc team of 6-7 members met and asked, "how does oral communication fit into our program, and how can we measure it?"
 - Ad hoc team developed a rubric to assess student delivery of oral reports
 - Rubric was approved
 - Rubric was tested in ENGL 4990
2. GE Area A-2 Assessment Plan submitted by the GE Committee.
3. Several pieces of data collected from sections of 4990 (Senior Survey) in the spring and fall of 2008 and the spring of 2009. Senior exit surveys were administered and collected; senior reflective essays were collected; senior seminar papers were collected. Some of these were evaluated and discussed in the Department's Academic Program Review; the 2009 documents are currently under evaluation.
4. Reviewed course offerings. Ad hoc committee appointed to review upper-division courses within the major.

5. Implemented *mandatory* advising of our majors in the fall of 2006 (enforced by registration holds), and began review of perceived improvements to our advising process because of this; still under evaluation.
6. Discussed strategies to further enhance SSMPP advising to make students aware of the various paths to teaching. Implemented CSET workshops and advising sessions at orientation for students who want to teach but who don't want to do the SSMPP.
7. English Department asked to participate in the assessment of GE area A-3 (ENGL 2000—*Critical Inquiry* is the English course in this area) along with representatives from Communications and Philosophy. Department discussed appropriate learning goals, and the department PAC participated in the summer of 2008.
8. Assistant Professor John Wittman authors draft of the Department's Academic Program Review. Members of the Department meet, discuss the APR document, and offer feedback. Professor Wittman finishes APR document.
9. Assessment of Student Engagement is discussed within the Department. English PAC solicits past results from the NESSE and FESSE from the Office of Institutional Research. PAC writes grant to fund focus groups to explore the issue of student engagement, but grant application is denied.
10. The Valley Voices Visiting Writers Committee discusses the Departmental goal to increase the number and frequency of contacts and partnerships between the Department and the community. Committee seeks to invite and fund visits from writers who have a connection to the region and the University.
11. Department PAC attends WASC Workshop in Long Beach on Assessment in the English Major. Seeks information on assessing student engagement and on implementing and using electronic portfolios.
12. Discussions of Program Assessment a regular part of the agenda at all English Department meetings.

When did the faculty meet to discuss the findings? What was the process? How did faculty use the data collected?

Assessment is a priority in the English Department, and is invariably on the agenda at every Department meeting. English faculty also met separately to review and discuss assessment findings. For example, after reviewing data from AY 2006-2007, studying senior exit surveys, and discussing the results in both the February and March Department meetings, the Department agreed that we needed to assess and strengthen the oral communication skills of our students. We developed a rubric and tested it in a section of ENGL 4990. Some of the in-class assessment was done by the Department PAC and some by a graduate student who was enrolled in ENGL 5020: *Assessment in English*. Content analysis was done by several students in that Seminar. Data collected from 4990 in AY 2008-2009 was used as a starting point in a discussion of exiting students' content area knowledge. Our review of course offerings—especially upper division course offerings—took place among both an ad hoc committee and the larger Department. Different models for change were put forward and weighed, but we could find no consensus for change. We concluded that any changes in our major must be driven by assessment and the needs and desires of our majors. We resolved to make assessment of content area knowledge a

priority and plan a Department retreat in the next academic year. Our last English Department Faculty Retreat was on April 27th, 2007.

We in the English Department sense that we are in a transitional phase. We have many new faculty, many new people serving as directors or coordinators, and our initial assessment process suggested the need for change. Not only have we laid the foundations for a Creative Writing track (driven by student surveys and Departmental discussion), but we all agree that change is warranted in the structure of our major and in the types and varieties of courses that we offer. Using the Academic Program Review, data culled from ongoing assessment efforts, and faculty discussions at meetings and the retreat, we hope to make informed and efficacious decisions.

What changes for improving student learning were made as a result of the findings? If no changes were necessary, what was confirmed?

In the last Assessment Report the English Program Assessment Coordinator expressed the centrality of 3150 and 4990 to our assessment efforts; these classes—the former a gateway to the major, the latter, its capstone—are, in part, laboratories for our assessment efforts. Through student surveys, reflective essays, the coding and interpretation of data done by graduate students in ENGL 5020: *Assessment in English*, evaluation of senior essays, and our Department's discussions over our major, several notions were confirmed, changes were implemented, and several more changes are under consideration and awaiting further deliberation.

Confirmed

Course availability vexes a majority of students. Students are disappointed by the scarcity of offerings, and would like to see expanded offerings. This situation has only gotten worse recently as the University budget has resulted in reduced course offerings.

Students desire concentrations within the major that reflect current landscapes in the job market. Sure, SSMPP prepares teachers, but students want more options—especially in fields like creative writing and editing/publishing. Students recognize that more can be done with an expertise in English than teaching K-12, and they want the freedom to explore options. When it comes to creative writing, students want to see a program concentration.

Students want more Literary Theory in their classes. Since knowledge of Literary Theory is part of the Department's learning goals, we must perforce take this seriously. A few years ago, the Department combined ENGL 3100 (*Literary Genres*) and ENGL 3101 (*Critical Approaches to Literature*) into one course, and that is our current ENGL 3150 (*Approaches to Literary Study*). ENGL 3150 is seen as a course that is perhaps “too crowded”; there is too much to cover in one semester. Students—and increasingly, professors—want to see this issue addressed.

Several of the courses that we regularly teach—ENGL 3940 (*Multicultural American Literature*) and ENGL 4300 (*Shakespeare*) stand-out prominently here—are appreciated by students as rigorous, eye-opening, and valuable courses that they may not have taken had they not have had to fulfill a requirement in the major.

The following conclusion speaks to student engagement. The types of instructor characteristics that students value and that students feel help them thrive are 1) teachers show enthusiasm and excitement about the topic they are teaching; 2) teachers are knowledgeable about their topics but are able to communicate that knowledge effectively and not condescendingly; and 3) students appreciate professors that expect a lot from them and push them to work hard for a superior grade.

Changes Made

In response to student outcries for a programmatic emphasis in creative and professional writing, we added two courses to our program: ENGL 2010 (*Introduction to Creative Writing*) and ENGL 4014 (*Creative Nonfiction*).

Last year we wrote a position description and conducted a national search for someone to teach creative and professional writing. This enterprise was guided by our assessment efforts. In order to realize our programmatic goals, we felt we needed a colleague with expertise and practical experience in these areas.

Valley Voices visiting writers series invited Los Banos poet Sam Pereira and Fresno Poet and Stanislaus alumnus Lee Herrick to give readings on campus (free and open to the public). The former poet's visit was funded by the Great Valley Writing Project; the latter's was funded by a grant written by members of Sigma Tau Delta, the national English Honors Society.

Under Consideration

We are considering a Literary Theory Course.

We are considering changing ENGL 1010 (*Introduction to Literature*) so that it will function as a course that takes some of the pressure off of ENGL 3150 (*Approaches to Literary Study*), perhaps by grounding students in fundamental literary terminology and in the study of literary genres.

These two items, though, are connected to what we envision as a complete overhaul and streamlining of our major, the details of which will be hammered out over the next year at Departmental meetings and, most importantly, at an English Department faculty retreat.

If changes for improving student learning were recommended, what resources will be needed to effectively implement those changes? What challenges, if any, will impact the program's ability to effectively implement those changes?

Resources

- The ability to hire faculty able to offer courses that our students want and need and to replace professors who have retired or otherwise left the Department. This is critical to our maintenance and growth. For instance, last year we had an ideal candidate to fill the position we created for a creative and professional writer. Due to funding problems,

though, we could not offer him the job. We lost an established poet and professional writer who could have taught the new courses in our curriculum, helped build those programs, and would have certainly energized our students and faculty.

- Continued support for faculty to travel and accompany students to professional meetings.
- Continued support for vital departmental activities, such as visiting writers, publication and support of student research and creative activity, assessment activities, and departmental retreats.

Plan Overview AY 2009-2010

- In the coming Academic Year, we aim to assess content area knowledge within the English Major. The English Department's Strategic Plan for 2007-2009 states that, "For the foreseeable future, assessment in the major will then focus on a recurring cycle of writing skills, oral communication, and content knowledge with a new focus in a given area each time it becomes the focus of assessment." In the past two assessment cycles, the English PAC, with the help of several members of the Department, has assessed writing skills (focusing on argumentation) and oral communication. Given the Department's topical rotation, assessment of content knowledge should be next. A group of 7 interested Department members has already met and started this discussion, laying out some of the difficulties and challenges of the task at hand. The Department PAC has created a rubric converting Student Learning Goals to measurable Student Learning Outcomes.
- Certain Department members, including the Department PAC, are looking for funding for, and trying to develop a prototype of, an Electronic Portfolio System to one day be implemented in our Department. This will not only allow us to do a longitudinal study of our major, but will provide a treasure trove of information about our majors' abilities and development as writers and critical thinkers, as well as our own effectiveness as teachers.
- The Department will continue its discussions and deliberations over changes to our major.
- We are set to begin a review of our RPT elaborations in August.

Attachments

- Assessment Rubric for Oral Communication
- Student Learning Outcomes for the Assessment of Content Area Knowledge