



September 10, 2017

TO: Ron Bramhall, Associate Vice Provost for Academic Excellence

FROM: Bill Rossi, Director of Undergraduate Studies and Curriculum Committee chair

RE: English Department Assessment Report, 2016-17

Having recently spent two years reevaluating and revising its major, examining a national variety of models, consulting current students as well as the full faculty, and developing three new courses, including a three-term Foundations of the English Major sequence (ENG 301-2-3), the department Curriculum Committee decided to use this course to assess the first and third of the department's Learning Outcomes: our students' ability to "read literary and/or cultural texts with discernment and comprehension and with an understanding of their conventions" and to "perform critical, formal analyses of literary, cinematic, and other cultural texts." We chose this course because in several ways it epitomizes the redesigned English Major. Being, for instance, representative in content, assignment design, scope, and variety of media studied (visual and print), it seemed uniquely suited for assessing the selected learning outcomes. As a year-long sequence taught by the same team of instructors (who serve for two years), the course also represents an exciting pedagogical experiment and a substantial department investment in its new major, one we would want to assess in any case. Finally, because the course enables the Curriculum Committee to sample the same students' work in sequential courses taught by the same instructor team, the assessment promised to provide a unique temporal snapshot of outcome performance.

Accordingly, we gathered final essays produced by a randomly selected group of students who were enrolled in two consecutive terms of the Foundations sequence during Winter and Spring terms (ENG 302 and 303), adapting the rubrics the instructors had posted and had used to evaluate their work. Of fifty students enrolled in both terms, twenty-seven were randomly selected by the Curriculum

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Committee for evaluation. Their essays were evaluated by three two-person teams, with two readers independently scoring two sets of nine papers each, using the adapted rubrics in connection with the respective assignment descriptions and prompts. The committee chair then analyzed the results, distributing along with this report to the committee and to the instructor team.

The final essay assignment for ENG 302 required students to choose a selection by one of the literary theorists studied in the course and use that theoretical framework to examine Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Jekyll and Hyde*, focusing on Stevenson's use of the "double" and illustrating the argument with specific examples from the novel. The final essay assignment for ENG 303 asked for a reflective essay exploring a particular "connection" or similarity--either historical, social, cultural, or formal--between two or three primary texts studied in the course.

Once the chair resolved a few discrepancies in scoring, the results tallied as follows, judging by the scores papers received from two different evaluators: six out of twenty-seven students performed less well on the second of two the essays (22.2%); seven performed about the same (25.9%); and fourteen improved (51.8%). No student either improved or slipped dramatically from one final course assignment to the other; movement in either direction amounted only to a few percentage points in most cases, as might be expected for a representative group of majors in a required 300-level sequence. Overall, the scores ranged from 68/100 to 96/100 with the majority averaging around 85.

Looking back on the process, the Foundations of the English Major sequence still seems the best choice for initial evaluation of the department's learning outcomes; and we expect to use it as our "go to" for at least a couple of rounds. At the same time, most of the committee felt that, beyond the generally positive results gleaned in assessment this year, in future the methodology should be refined to draw more detailed and more valid conclusions. Not surprisingly, perhaps, assessment this first year was something of a "work in progress," particularly because the two assignments upon which our analysis was based turned out not to be as closely comparable as we expected in terms of critical tasks and length requirements, even though there was significant overlap in the assignments. This was largely because ENG 301-2-3 is a newly designed course sequence, taught

(and team-taught) this year for the first time; so that, as the course evolved, the final 303 assignment ended up being slightly different than originally planned. Fortunately, the same instructor team will teach the course again next academic year. Since course assignments will have been refined and set farther in advance, the committee will be able to work closely and with the instructor team from the beginning of the year to choose those assignments best likely to yield valid information relative to the particular outcomes being assessed. To this end, in Fall term the committee will meet to review this year's results further, consulting with the department head and ENG 301-2-3 instructor team, and deciding whether to assess the same learning outcomes again or choose different ones to assess for 2017-18.