



July 20, 2018

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, 2017-18

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 first and third term of the Foundations sequence (ENG 301 and 303), adapting the rubrics the instructors had posted and used to evaluate their work. Of fifty-seven students enrolled in both terms, thirty were randomly selected by the Curriculum Committee for evaluation. Their essays

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were evaluated by three two-person teams, with two readers independently scoring two sets of ten papers each, using the adapted rubrics in connection with the respective assignment descriptions and prompts. In addition to my role as a team, I resolved the few discrepancies in scoring, analyzed the results, and distributed them to the committee and the instructor team, along with this report.

The essay assignment for ENG 301 required students to choose one of two characters in Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* and examine the extent to which he or she reinforces or challenges Victorian views of poverty and morality, as these were presented in lecture, using specific examples from the novel to support a clearly presented thesis. The essay assignment for ENG 303 focused on Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*. Building on a previous close reading exercise in which students analyzed a particular passage from the novel, the essay required students to construct a larger argument regarding character and the important Victorian idea of "the monster."

Once the chair resolved a few discrepancies in scoring, the results tallied as follows, judging by the scores papers received from two different evaluators: five out of thirty students performed less well on the second of two the essays (16.6%) thirteen performed about the same (43.3%) and twelve improved (40%). No student either improved or slipped dramatically from one 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 65/100 to 98/100 with the majority averaging around 85.

In comparison to the process we used last year, the committee found results from this year's assessment more valid. While the incoming Director of Undergraduate Studies, who heads the Curriculum Committee, may wish to take another tack, I will recommend that next year, if feasible, the committee use the same methodology to assess a different recently developed required course for majors, ENG 205 Genre, focusing on the same two Learning Outcomes