



TO: Ron Bramhall, Associate Vice Provost for Academic Excellence

FROM: Prof. Gordon Sayre, Director of Undergraduate Studies and Curriculum Committee chair, English department

RE: English Assessment Report, 2018-19

Assessment report 2019:

the English department Curriculum Committee decided to repeat the methodology it chose 2017-18, by using Foundations of the English Major series courses, ENG 301, 302, 303 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 it because as a year-long series taught by the same team of instructors (who serve as a team for two academic years) it enables the Curriculum Committee to sample the same students' work across three terms of courses taught by the same instructor team. We collected thirty essays written in the first term, ENG 301 in Fall 2018, and thirty more from the same students enrolled in the third term, ENG 303 in Spring 2019. This subgroup of thirty was randomly selected from roughly fifty-five who were enrolled in both courses.

As director of Undergraduate Studies and therefore chair of the curriculum committee, I divided the committee into three two-person teams, with each of the two readers independently scoring two sets of ten papers each, using the rubrics drawn up by the course faculty in connection with the respective assignment descriptions and prompts. The process was less straightforward than it was in 2017-18 because for the final paper in 303 in Spring 2019, students had the option to write about any of three different authors studied during the term, John Milton, William Faulkner, or Jaime Hernandez, author

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of the *Love and Rockets* series of graphic novels. Few chose Milton, and Faulkner's novel *As I Lay Dying* posed very different challenges from the graphic novel form. The mixed group of 303 essays was compared to the same students' essays for 301: Context, where the assignment also gave them a choice, between writing on songs by the modernist poet Myrna Loy, or on key essays from Harlem Renaissance by Alain Locke and Langston Hughes. This was an unexpected problem for the assessment design, but we do not wish to constrain the course design of our faculty colleagues simply to streamline the assessment exercise.

Three of the thirty students (10%) performed less well on the essay for 303 than on their essay for 301. Twenty one, or (70%) showed improvement in the 303 essay, and six, or 20%, wrote two essays of equal quality. The team members chose not to award point value scores for each of the essays (which faculty and GEs in the classes had already done) but simple to focus on comparative improvement at the end of the three-course series.

For this year, 2019-20, the Foundations sequence has been revised. Rather than beginning with 301: Context and ending with 303: Text, this year it begins with 303: Text, and will end in Spring 2020 with 305: Theory. The middle term this year will be 304: Context. Therefore I suggest that we use a similar design when we do assessment for 2019-20, and try to discern if changing the sequence of courses results in more robust improvement among our English majors. We have about 70 students enrolled in the course this year, a small increase.

Respectfully Submitted,

Gordon Sayre
Professor of English