**2009 English Report**

**Step 1: Department/Program Mission (Any updates due September 15, 2009)**

The study of literature and writing cultivates the qualities of mind—imagination, empathy, social awareness, curiosity, and critical-mindedness—that equip all students to discern and address themselves to the challenges of their personal, professional, and civic lives and to face, with honesty and humility, the great and ordinary dilemma of being human. We teach students the most basic and most essential skills required to live and thrive in any modern society—to read, to write, and to think.

Our curriculum encompasses the study of British and American literary traditions, expository and argumentative writing, creative writing, and journalism. In the study of literature, we teach students both the long narrative of literary history and the careful scrutiny of particular genres, periods, authors, and ideas. In the study of writing, we cultivate students’ mastery of language, including their ability to read critically and to evaluate information and their capacity for rigorous analysis, the creation of art, and the ethical and responsible contributions to public discourse.

**Step 2: List goals/outcomes (Any updates due September 15, 2009)**

Student learning outcomes
Students of English and American literature should be able to…

READING
1. analyze literary texts: identify the meaning(s) of a text and the strategies by which the text achieves that/those meaning(s)
a. at the basic level (ability to articulate a cogent and logical interpretation of literary works)
b. at a more advanced level (the ability to do the above while taking into account an increasing number of variables, both internal and external to the text, in their interpretation)

2. define and employ appropriate literary terminology (i.e. metaphor, symbol, plot, allegory, enjambment, etc.)

3. demonstrate knowledge of the long history of either English and/or U.S. literary traditions
a. recognize, identify, and analyze major writers (Chaucer, Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Franklin, Whitman, Dickinson, Faulkner, Morrison, etc.)
b. recognize, identify, and analyze major periods of literary history (the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, Romanticism, American Renaissance, Modernism, Black Arts Movement, etc.)
c. recognize, identify, and analyze genres (poetry, drama, fiction, nonfiction prose) and subgenres (lyric, epic, tragedy, comedy, autobiography, slave narrative, etc.)
d. understand historical and cultural context of the literature
e. integrate historical and cultural context into an interpretation of the literature

4. engage in sustained and in-depth study of particular authors, genres, periods, and/or ideas, situating them within the larger literary history
a. recognize the degree to which the larger narrative, though integral to the study of literature, necessarily obscures significant particularities
b. develop an increasingly specific and sophisticated understanding of the complicated relationship between history and literature
c. scrutinize the complex exchange between major figures and their contemporary culture
d. explore certain theoretical considerations implicit in literary study (i.e. the question of canon formation and the impact of gender, race and ethnicity, and class on the creation and reception of literary work)

5. demonstrate knowledge of some emergent fields in the discipline (i.e. ecocriticism, gender studies, race theory, study of print culture, etc.)

WRITING:
6. understand the difference between fact, opinion, and idea

7. understand the difference between drafting and proofreading

8. express ideas with clarity and grace
a. develop their ideas logically, using appropriate modes of organization and exemplification
b. engage in appropriate forms of analysis
c. understand and be able to abide by the conventions of English grammar
d. close edit their own and others’ writing
9. be familiar with and able to write effectively in a variety of rhetorical modes and genres

10. research effectively
a. identify appropriate sources
b. evaluate information
c. recognize the difference between research and plagiarism

THINKING:
11. discern the assumptions that undergird arguments and ideas
12. scrutinize the logic of their own and others’ thinking
13. identify appropriate evidence for their propositions
14. recognize the limitations of their thinking and seek ways to redress it

**Step 3: Identify program components (Any updates due September 15, 2009)**

*Required courses, elective courses,out-of-classroom or other experiences that are designed to achieve each educational objective. NOTE: Every class will not, nor is it expected to,achieve each outcome. The goal is to get an even distribution of experiences that achieve the outcomes.*

*100 8a-c, 11-14
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353 1b, 4a, 4b, 4d, 11-14
354 1b, 4a, 4e, 5, 11-14
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401/02 1b, 4a-e, 5, 11-14

411/12 1b, 4a-e, 5, 11-14

Thesis 1b, 4a-e, 5, 11-14
388 Capstone Pilot 2010 1b, 4a-e, 5, 11-14*

**Step 4: Select methods/data sources and instruments (Any updates due September 15, 2009)**

*...that you will use to gather information about whether expected outcomes and learning objective are being achieved. NOTE: You do not need to collect data from the same sources every year. Rather, some kind of assessment rotation will be sufficient (e.g., Years1 & 3, collect data from graduating seniors, Years 2 & 4 collect data from employers and alumni, etc.).*

ASSESSMENT TOOLS IN THE WORLD:
English Literature Assessment Exam: This exam is administered to seniors at the end of the spring semester. Created by the teachers of the survey courses and composed of 100 questions, the exam itself is divided into five sections, one for each of the survey classes. Each of the five sections contains twenty questions: ten questions that assess students’ ability to analyze literary texts; five questions that assess their ability to identify major authors and movements; and five questions that assess their understanding of the historical and cultural context out of which literature is born. (These correlate with the Student Learning Outcomes 1-3 listed above). Students take each of the five sections (including those that test courses the student have not taken) so that we might gauge the degree to which our students are able to apply their literary analytical and reasoning skills to texts they may not have encountered in class. This test was piloted in the spring of 2008, revised, and implemented in the spring of 2009. We plan on administering it every spring and on requiring that both English majors and English majors with an emphasis in Creative Writing take the exam.

The MTA Assessment Tool: Each of our survey courses as well as English 151 satisfies the textual analysis mode—and for good reason: at the very foundation of the study of literature is the act of textual analysis. We will, therefore, employ the recently piloted and soon to be implemented MTA assessment tool every semester. We will then be able to assemble not only general data on Albion students’ skill levels with regards to textual analysis but also specific data about the development of our majors’ skill levels over the course of their three survey courses. We will make use of this tool every semester.

ASSESSMENT TOOLS IN THE WORKS:
300-level Literature Tool: As indicated in the above student learning outcomes (1b and 4a-e), the Department intends for students to be able to perform advanced textual analysis—that is, to take into account an increasing number of variables, both internal and external to the text, in their interpretations of literature. We are currently developing a rubric that would be used to assess the degree to which our students are achieving the desirable complexity in both their reading and their writing at the 300-level. We hope to pilot that tool in 300-level courses being offered Fall 2010.

Grammar Tool: In both our introductory and our advanced writing courses, we hope to teach students how to produce writing that deliberately abides by (or deliberately defies) the conventions of English grammar (see learning outcome 8c). We are currently debating the possibility of developing either a shared diagnostic grammar test or a set of guidelines for composing individual diagnostic grammar tests that would be based on a set of specific shared learning outcomes. If, as a department, we decide that such a test is both viable and desirable, we would administer it as a pre- and post-test in our fall sections of English 101. We might also then consider re-administering this test at the 200-level in order to assess the degree to which our students’ retain their grammatical skills. We might pilot such a tool in Spring 2010.

ASSESSMENT TOOLS IN OUR MINDS:
Capstone Assessment: We would like to develop a tool that would enable us to assess our students’ senior theses in order to ascertain the degree to which those students have achieved the outcomes of our major as a whole. We imagine that this tool might also be used to assess both the 402 and the 388-capstone course we may pilot in the spring of 2010.

The most substantial gap in our assessment plan pertains to our writing curriculum. We have yet to design tools for two enormously important (and popular) components of our curriculum: the English major with an emphasis in creative writing and the minor in journalism. Developing an assessment plan for the major with an emphasis in creative writing is the primary goal for this fall, and we feel confident that we will have composed a plan by the end of the fall, components of which we will pilot in spring 2010. Once we have that plan in the place, we will focus our energies on articulating specific outcomes for our journalism minor and composing an assessment plan for it. In both the creative writing major and journalism minor, students produce significant documents (portfolios in their senior workshop, the *Pleiad*, and this year’s magazine *Spent*, to name a few) that will enable us to assess the degree to which the students have achieved the outcomes specific to these programs.

**Step 5: Analyze and interpret the data (Due October 1, 2009 with preliminary data; Due November 2, 2009 with final data for this assessment cycle)**

The following report discusses data that the English department has gathered by way of the English Literature Assessment Exam. A product of the collective effort of the entire department, this 100-question multiple-choice exam is administered to English literature majors during the spring of their senior year. (Though we anticipate requiring those students who major in English with an emphasis in creative writing to take them exam in the future, we did not do so in 2007 or 2008). Based on the content and learning outcomes of the my survey courses (253, 255, 257, 258, 261), the exam questions assess students’ ability to analyze literary texts, their ability to identify major authors and movements, and their understanding of the historical and cultural context out of which that literature is born. (These objectives correlate with the Student Learning Outcomes #1-3 listed in section 2 of our assessment plan). The authors of the exam carefully constructed questions and answers so that the results would teach us not only about what the students know and can do but also about the thought patterns that may lead students to answer questions incorrectly. That is, the wrong answers were designed to teach us about the types of mistakes students consistently make so that we might anticipate and address the source of those mistakes in our teaching.

Thus far, we have administered the exam only twice. We piloted it in the spring of 2008 and administered a revised version of the exam to seniors graduating in 2009. As a result, we currently do not have a large enough sample size to perform statistical analysis. In the next five years, we will continue to collect data, administering this exam every semester with any significant emendations to the exam itself; but we will delay further attempts at interpretation until we have accrued a more significant sample size. The department assessment committee will analyze the cumulative data in 2011 and 2013.

Though we cannot yet analyze our data quantitatively, the assessment committee has spent a considerable amount of time analyzing the data qualitatively. We have noticed the following trends: 1) there are a certain number of questions that a strikingly high or strikingly low percentage of students get right, 2) students are not spending very time taking the exam, and 3) we need a larger context in which to understand the data the exam generates.

1) We noticed that there is a subset of questions that either over 89% or under 33% of the students answered incorrectly. These percentages seem significant, though at this point it is unclear what, exactly, they signify.

2) In comparing the data from 2007 and 2008, we noticed a striking change in the percentage of majors who took the exam and the amount of time they took to complete the exam. Table 1 represents the percentage of students who took the exam in each year and the average time students took on the exam as a whole.

Table 1
Year exam was taken    % of English majors who took the exam    Average time students took to complete the exam
2007                                            62%                                                    22.5
2008                                            96%                                                    42.5

As you can see, the percentage of students who took the exam and the time they spent on it increased dramatically. Last year, almost every Albion graduate who majored in English (with an emphasis on literature) completed the exam, and those students took just shy of twice the amount of time to take the exam that their 2007 counterparts did. We attribute these changes to deliberate efforts on the part of English faculty members to cultivate a culture of assessment. We now introduce the fact of the exam to our students early in the year and in their career here; we have begun talking about the exam as an important part of finishing the major; and we have put a system in place whereby students who couldn’t take the exam on the designated day were still able to take the exam. Additionally, the department instituted a departmental award, administered at the discretion of the department’s award committee, to recognize exemplary performance on the exam.

Although these numbers represent considerable improvements, we remain concerned that the students still are not spending enough time on the exam. It stands to reason that only if the students to take the exam seriously will the results tell us very much about how much our students are retaining. So, while it might make sense to conclude that last year’s majors took the exam for seriously than the 2007 majors, the fact that they spent an average of only 42.5 second per question suggests to us that they are not taking it seriously enough. We, therefore, need to devise additional strategies to encourage students to spend a significant enough amount of time on the exam to give us as a good a sense as possible of what they have retained.

3) As we reviewed the information the exam provided us with, we realized the limitations of considering it in isolation. We currently do not have any information about what our students know and the skills they have when they begin their major. As a result, the exam data cannot actually tell us how much our students have learned from the major; we know only what they know at the end of their major. Additionally, although this exam is based on what is taught in the survey courses, it is intended to assess the entire literature major. In order for it to do so, we need to have a better sense of the other English classes students took during their course of study.

**Step 6: How will the data collected be used for decision-making, strategic planning, etc. (Due October 1, 2009 with preliminary data; Due November 2, 2009 with final data for this assessment cycle)**

In order to address the conclusions we have come to as a result of our analysis of the data provided by the English Literature Assessment Exam, we will be taking the following steps.

1) In order to figure out what, if anything, is significant about those questions that students got right or wrong in high numbers, we need to figure out if these numbers are the beginning of a pattern or simply a fluke. We have, therefore, flagged them for particular consideration in 2011.

2) We must build on the progress we made last year in cultivating a culture of assessment among our students. To that end, this fall, we will be hosting two different informational meetings for students, one for senior English majors, the other for underclass prospective and declared majors. We envision these meetings as a form of group advising (in addition, of course, to the individual advising that we all do) in which we can help students understand the logic of our major; figure out strategies for composing a meaningful course of study; be sure that they have, in fact, completed all of the requirements; and teach them about the coming assessment exam. By discussing the exam at this type of meeting, we hope to encourage students to think about it as an integral and important part of their major. Furthermore, by creating a forum in which we can talk to our underclass majors early in their college career, we can plant the thought of the exam and its importance in their heads even as they are taking the courses (our 200-level surveys) on which the exam is based.

We will also continue to cultivate a culture of assessment among our faculty. The exam has already played a significant role in achieving this end. The decidedly collaborative process of composing and revising it required that the department as a whole engage in meaningful dialogue about the role of our survey classes within the major and within the college. That dialogue has continued even as we have shifted from making the exam to figuring out what exactly we can learn about our students’ learning and about our own teaching from this exam. For instance, a recent discussion facilitated by the assessment committee in a department meeting helped clarify issues that the curriculum committee will now take up and help the department consider and address.

3) In order to create a larger context in which to understand the data generated by the exam, we are currently exploring the possibility of administering a pretest to first or second year students. Doing so would enable us to learn not simply what our seniors know but how much they learned. While we would like to see our students scoring well above, say, 60% on the exam, a score of 60% would look a lot different to us if students, on average, had scored 11% on the pretest. Additionally, we will be including questions on the exam that will ask students to identify the courses they took as a part of their major in addition to the surveys (253, 255, 257, 258, and 261). That information will help us figure out to what extent students’ course work reinforced (or not) particular methods or materials which might, in turn, help us account for certain kinds of trends in the data.