



Department of English and Literature
Report of the Assessment Committee
Utah Valley State College
October 2005

The assessment committee of the English department identified three areas of concentration: assessment of graduating seniors and ongoing majors within the department, assessment of the writing program focused on the required General Education early writing courses, and programs and processes of improving the department's level of instruction. Therefore the subcommittees are as follows:

1. The Senior Assessment Subcommittee
2. The Writing Program Assessment Subcommittee
3. The Implementation Subcommittee

A separate report for each subcommittee follows this introduction.

The Writing Program Assessment and the Implementation subcommittees have a rather straightforward challenge and equally direct methods of completing their tasks as demonstrated in their reports. The Senior Assessment subcommittee, however, has a far more complicated task. Although seeking to acquire data and feedback sooner rather than later, the subcommittee has recognized the need for well thought out and well supported methods of assessment. Their determination is to implement a program that does not only meet the needs of outside assessors, but directly addresses the needs of a particularly diverse group of students and faculty. With nine degrees possible from the English and Literature department, it will take at least two years to set up and apply all methods of assessment. One year has passed and by Spring of 2006 the system will be in place to produce more complete data. The partial data to date is helpful, but the normal cautions applicable to early data merit strong consideration.

Senior Assessment Subcommittee Progress Report

Fall 2005

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Summary

The English Department, with the guidance of the Senior Assessment committee, is implementing a sophisticated and complex system to assess its new outcomes for graduating majors. Both the outcomes and the assessment plan are absolutely cutting edge, putting our department at the forefront of national thinking about what an English major should be and how to assess its outcomes. We have made significant progress in designing and implementing this system and have much work left to do. However, our initial assessments appear to validate the parts of the system we have thus far piloted, and already they are giving us a sense of our students' strengths and weaknesses with regard to the outcomes. As we work to use the data we have already developed to improve our program design, we are also continuing the design and piloting work which will have our assessment plan ready for its first full implementation in Spring 2006.

Progress to date:

- We have piloted the two major instruments in this assessment plan, the senior survey and a multi-part portfolio of student writing and learning reflections.
- We are in various stages of establishing other mechanisms for assessment such as systems for external review of student writing by peer institutions, exit interviews with students, alumni surveys and placement tracking, and faculty reflective assessment on student performance.

The committee's goal is to finalize the infrastructure for the entire assessment system by the beginning of the Spring 2006 semester and run the first full senior assessment that semester. To meet this goal, action items for Fall 2005 include (in order of priority, and with expected completion date):

- Establishing a peer institution partner for outside assessment of student writing and finalizing the rubric for that assessment. (Oct. 30)
- Finalizing student survey design based on analysis of pilot surveys. (Oct. 15)
- Administering the first full set of student surveys. (Dec. 8)
- Finalizing our system for student exit interviews and beginning to conduct them. (Dec. 1)
- Devising and piloting an alumni survey. (Nov. 1)
- Consulting with IT and other partners on GPA/transcript tracking and collecting placement data. (Ongoing)
- Negotiating a system for faculty reflective assessments within department in conjunction with the Implementation subcommittee. (Nov. 5)

Initial findings from assessments to date (see **Outcomes** section below for specific outcomes):

- Student portfolios, surveys, and feedback, as well as faculty feedback, suggest that not enough students are achieving goals related to research and writing (outcomes 5 and 6).
- The same measures suggest that most students are achieving outcomes relating to development in critical reading, thinking, and cultural awareness (outcomes 1 and 4).
- We lack sufficient data to assess outcomes related to student placement and

competitiveness (2), students' ability to articulate the cultural value of English Studies (3), students' broad familiarity with English Studies as a whole (7), and students' mastery of track-specific outcomes and competencies (8). Anecdotal evidence suggests many of our students are achieving these outcomes, but we must collect more data to be sure.

As we finalize measurements and begin full-scale assessment, the Senior Assessment committee is also strategizing ways of using assessment feedback to institute curricular and programmatic change, but the majority of our work on this issue to date has been planning and research—identifying structural elements that get in the way of such feedback. One of our tasks for Spring 2006, as the full assessment is running for the first time, will be deciding how to use the data it generates to improve our teaching.

Background

In Fall 2004 the Senior Assessment committee was established and charged with revising the existing assessment of the department's graduating majors. The committee studied and reported on strengths and shortcomings of the existing system and sought permission to revise the department's outcomes for its majors. It also researched current standards in assessment of English majors and senior assessment systems in peer institutions. During the Spring 2005 semester, the committee devised and attained departmental approval of an updated set of outcomes that reflect best practices in the field of English Studies. Simultaneously, the committee drafted a new and extremely comprehensive senior assessment plan which combined elements of the best assessment designs we had found in our research. Following best practices for assessment, we sought an assessment plan that would give us up to five separate measures of each outcome, providing triangulation and a wealth of data and feedback on student performance and preparation from a number of angles. By the end of the Spring 2005 semester we were able to begin piloting some aspects of the assessment system and establishing necessary infrastructure for other aspects. Some of our measures cannot be executed until further implementation of Banner functionalities to help with data capture and analysis.

Outcomes for English BA and BS Degrees

The basis of any assessment system is carefully designed and clearly stated outcomes. Following are the revised outcomes approved last spring. Students who have completed a B.A. or B.S. in English should be able to

1. Demonstrate, via portfolio, development in critical reading, critical thinking, cultural awareness, and multimodal written and verbal communication.
2. Apply competitively for positions in graduate and other professional schools, teaching, or English professions associated with various fields of English Studies.
3. Articulate the nature and cultural value of English Studies, such as expertise in interpreting, critiquing, and appreciating literary and non-literary texts, contributing to civic discourse, and fostering adept communication and critical thinking.
4. Develop habits of mind characteristic of English Studies professionals, including a critical stance toward texts, culture, and communication; rhetorical awareness regarding motivations, contexts, purpose, and audience; cultural and global awareness; and humanistic sensibilities,

values, and approaches to problems and issues.

5. Create multimodal documents which meet readers' needs and expectations and are critical, focused, well developed and supported, logical, and mechanically correct.
6. Demonstrate proficiency with current research technologies and resources and with using researched materials to contribute to conversations in English Studies.
7. Demonstrate familiarity with key literary periods, texts, authors, terminology, trends in literary criticism, and conversations and issues in English Studies. This familiarity should include detailed knowledge of at least one contemporary critical theory, demonstrated by its use to inform writing for literary, critical, cultural, or creative ends.
8. Demonstrate track-specific experience and competencies:
 - Literary Studies students have studied literature and critical thought extensively and demonstrated the ability to analyze and criticize literature in ways meaningful to the field.
 - Secondary Education English students have prepared to create effective lesson plans and instruct middle and high school students in areas of literature and writing.
 - Creative Writing students have studied, written, and workshopped poetry, fiction, drama, and creative nonfiction, studied theory that informs their work, and practiced preparing and submitting work for publication.
 - Integrated Studies English students have learned to harmonize and articulate the relationship of their English Studies knowledge and skills to the whole of their program of study.
 - Technical Communication minors have become proficient at analyzing technical and scientific communication needs and audiences, designing and producing documents that satisfy them, and keeping abreast of new communication technologies.

Overview of Assessment System (including status of measures)

Each outcome is assessed in the new system by between 2 and 5 separate measures. (This redundancy, in line with best practices in assessment design, allows us to hyper-triangulate findings to better explain the results of the assessment and target feedback to improve our curriculum and programs.) Those measures include the following:

- A **portfolio** containing three writing samples from a range of student coursework, a survey of students opinions of their preparedness, and number of reflective pieces which let students assess themselves as writers, members of English studies, and potential professionals (Outcomes 1-8). *We are currently adjusting the standard curriculum of the ENGL 4800 Senior Seminar to make collection of this portfolio material a standard element of the course. We are also establishing systems for internal review of the entire portfolio (the first full review to occur Summer 2006) and external review of writing samples from the portfolio (the first full review to occur Fall 2005).*
- A system for matching portfolios with **student gpas, transcripts, and placement data** (Outcome 2). *We are currently waiting for the enabling of Banner features that will facilitate collection of this data.*
- **Exit interviews** with students (Outcomes 3, 4, 7, 8). *We are currently finalizing our interview system, in coordination with the student advisor.*
- **Student-teaching and internship feedback** (Outcomes 2, 3, 4, 7, 8). *We have begun designing a system for collecting this feedback.*
- An **alumni survey** (Outcomes 2, 3, 4, 5, 8). *We will be designing this survey this fall.*
- **Faculty reflective assessment** on graduating seniors (Outcomes 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8). *We have begun gathering faculty impressions of student performance and will pilot a standard prompt for this assessment with part of the faculty this fall, in preparation for full implementation in*

Spring 2006.

Initial Assessment Data

A bare 6 months (including summer break) after the department approved our new outcomes, no element of the assessment system has moved beyond pilot stage, and several have not yet been piloted. Our earliest conclusions are thus, admittedly, hardly less impressionistic than they were before we began work on this system expressly intended to replace impressions with multiple hard data sources. But our first pilots have generated data which is helping us validate the system as a whole.

Limited feedback from students' reflective pieces in portfolios, portfolio papers, surveys, and faculty impressions suggest a trend of poor preparation for research and limited exposure to the wide varieties of multimodal written communication (in terms of genres, lengths, modalities, situations, and purposes) that the department envisions in outcomes 5 and 6. Our curriculum appears not to put students in enough different writing situations, nor demand enough research from them, to allow them to demonstrate the proficiency the department wishes to see. Additionally, student surveys and some faculty feedback are beginning to suggest somewhat weak coordination of the curriculum as a whole.

The same sources of data suggest that students are meeting the department's goals in relation to the qualities described in outcomes 1 and 4. Student papers show an impressive array of critical reading, interpretation, and analysis strategies, and student surveys and faculty feedback suggest that students both feel and appear well grounded in the "habits of mind" that characterize English Studies. Limited feedback from student-teaching supervisors suggests that English-Education majors also demonstrate this excellent preparation. Again, however, these impressions are based on partial and initial data.

We do not yet have measures in place to be able to systematically assess outcomes 2, 3, 7, and 8. With regard to outcome 2, the limited data we have suggest students are being competitively prepared for what they wish to do, but as yet we simply lack placement data and alumni surveys that will take us beyond impressions and the occasional positive report from a student or employer. Similarly, we need to finalize our paper data collection and we need greater functionality in Banner (promised but not yet operative) before we can reliably assess track-specific experiences and competencies as specified in outcome 8. Outcome 3, which gets at students' ability to *articulate* the value of an English degree in present American culture, is simply too new to have been assessed at all; we need more data from portfolios and exit interviews to know whether this new focus in our ENGL 4800 Senior Seminar is being effectively implemented. And we are still fine-tuning our student survey to best assess outcome 7, which addresses coverage and the breadth of students' knowledge. The survey is our principle measure of this outcome and pilots to date have indicated that some of the questions are too broad or general to reliably gather the kind of feedback we seek from students on their experiences in our courses. Our latest and hopefully final version of that survey is ready to be tested this fall.

Implementing Assessment Feedback

We are confident enough with our initial data regarding deficiencies in outcomes 5 and 6 that we are exploring curricular and departmental changes to improve students' exposure to varieties of research and multimodal writing. The need to examine our curricula in these respects provides us a good test case to learn how to feed assessment data back into curriculum and program design—a system that currently lacks necessary formality. At this point our clearest sense is of the need to create

a departmental forum for comparison and discussion of curricula that will help us understand what is happening in various courses and what needs to be happening in order to improve achievement with respect to these outcomes.

To be specific, on the problem of outcome 6, proficiency with research technologies and resources: we know we need a mechanism that lets us know what sorts of research are taught in our various courses and then allows us to create expectations for which courses should teach which kinds of research to what extent while preserving individual faculty autonomy in course design. Creating an effective forum for these kinds of discussions may be the hardest part of addressing this problem. In short, this is the challenge the committee faces in implementing feedback, and our approach to meeting that challenge is to find ways to enhance the reflective climate of the department to make sure faculty are thinking about how to make their courses better help students achieve the department's outcomes for its majors.

Conclusion

To date, our efforts to redesign the assessment program have been effective and successful. We have a plan and schedule in place for continuing to build the system; once it is ready for full assessment next spring, the department will be in an excellent position to know how well its seniors are achieving its desired outcomes for them, and we will have solid mechanisms in place for using knowledge developed through the assessment to positively alter curricula and student programs to further help our majors meet our outcomes.