

**English Department Assessment
Fall 2014-Spring 2016**

Approved by the Department on November 8, 2017

Revised November 3, 2017

Discussion

For 2014-2015 the English Department assessed literature foundation courses (LIT 200, 201, and 202) based on learning outcome 4, and capstones (LIT 499) based on learning outcome 5. For 2015-2016 the Department repeated these assessments, and also assessed literary history courses (a variety of different courses) based on learning outcome 3. Learning outcome 4 focuses on reading and writing, skills which are essential for success in the English Liberal Arts and English Secondary Education majors, as well as broadly transferable. Learning outcome 5 focuses on writing at a more advanced level, including use of research and engagement with appropriate criticism. Learning outcome 3 focuses on whether students recognize that texts arise from a historical context.

The Learning Outcomes for the English Liberal Arts and English Secondary Education Majors:

1. Students will be able to demonstrate familiarity with a range of critical, generic, and literary traditions (including recent theoretical approaches) that shape—and are shaped by—literary discourses and texts of particular periods or movements.
2. Students will be able to describe the effects of social constructions of identity on a particular literary text and on current debates over aesthetic value, universality, and canonicity.
3. Students will be able to identify historically specific elements relevant to a particular text.
4. Students will be able to read a literary work and characterize its main aesthetic, structural, and rhetorical strategies in an argumentative, thesis-driven essay.
5. Students will be able to write a substantial essay of literary scholarship that is theoretically informed and engages with current research and criticism in relevant fields of study, asserting their own critical voice in ongoing dialogues and debates.
6. Students will be able to analyze a written or spoken text linguistically and describe its use of language. [for education majors only]

In every section of these courses, the instructor was asked to rate each student on performance on a specific assignment (see below for the questions and data); the assignment differed by course, so that (for instance) students in LIT 200 were evaluated on an essay question on the final exam, students in LIT 201 were evaluated on the basis of their final essay, students in LIT 202 were evaluated on the basis of a final examination essay question common to all sections, while students in LIT 499 were evaluated on their final researched essay.

The majority of faculty members in the department participated in assessment efforts. In the 2014-2015 academic year, 2 adjunct faculty members who taught LIT 200 failed to respond to the request for assessment data, but we still had 33 sections of data, including 4 sections of LIT 200 data. In the 2015-2016 academic year, 1 staff member who taught LIT 201 failed to submit assessment data, but all 21 other faculty participated, for a total of 42 sections, including 4 sections of LIT 201.

The data submitted show that the majority of the students in our critical content courses successfully write argumentative, thesis-driven essays about literature, and in such essays characterize, as appropriate, the main aesthetic, structural, and rhetorical strategies of a literary work. Similarly, the majority of the students in our capstone courses successfully write substantially developed, theoretically informed essays which appropriately use and cite current research and criticism in relevant fields of study, and which assert the student's own critical voice in ongoing dialogues and debates. Finally, the

majority of the students in literary history courses demonstrate their ability to identify historically specific elements relevant to a particular text, with more high (3 and 4) scores in the 300- and 400-level than in the 200-level courses. The few students who do not succeed in one of these outcomes are nearly always rated as “in development” (2) rather than “not at all” (1).

The department does note some marked semester effects. Students taking LIT 200 in spring semesters seem to perform better on Learning Outcome 4 than their counterparts in the fall semester. Students taking the course in the second semester are likely transfer students, both from within the institution and from community colleges, so they may be more practiced or developmentally advanced writers. The same occurs for Learning Outcome 2 for LIT 202, probably for the same reason. For all other courses, we see tremendous consistency from semester to semester.

A group of faculty also read a random sampling of 40 final essays from LIT 499 sections for outcomes 1-6 (even though not all 80 students were education majors, and thus not all had taken a linguistics course, required for education majors but not liberal arts majors). The essays were taken from each of the sections taught in 2015-2016, 20 from fall 2015 and 20 from spring 2016. The essays were stripped of identifying factors, and read by two faculty each, with a third reader in the case of non-contiguous scores. Each of the 40 essays was assessed for each of the 6 Learning Outcomes on a scale of 0 (not applicable) to 4 (yes, very well).

The average score was 3 (adequately). Only 3 essays were scored 1 (totally wrong or not at all), each for a different learning outcome (Learning Outcomes 1-3). The score of 4 was more frequent, with 4 essays in the fall and 2 in the spring receiving no score lower than a 3.5 in any category.

The only average score that dipped under 3 was a 2.9 for Learning Outcome 2 for fall 2015, in contrast with an average of 3.3 in spring 2016 for that Learning Outcome. All but one of the students in the spring sample had already completed LIT 202 (the course designed to introduce students to the concepts of Learning Outcome 2), while in the fall sample 5 students had not completed LIT 202. However, the students who had not yet completed LIT 202 averaged 3.5 on Learning Outcome 2, so other factors must account for the lower average on this outcome in fall 2015 capstone assessment.

Each student is required to take two capstones, preferably one in the junior and the other in the senior year; in addition to the overall assessment, we disaggregated the data for first and second capstones to consider whether students demonstrate greater success in achieving the course goals in the second capstone. Student performance was comparable for both capstones except for Learning Outcomes 3 and 5, which averaged 2.9 for the first capstone and 3.2/3.3 for the second. Learning Outcome 3 concerns historicity, and each student is required to take three courses in literary history; presumably by the time they enroll in their second capstone, they have taken more literary history courses than they had when they enrolled in their first capstone. The improvement in this score demonstrates the necessity for taking three courses that ask students to “identify historically specific elements relevant to a particular text.” Learning Outcome 5 is specific to capstones, and that students were more successful in the second capstone affirms the department’s decision to require each student to try twice to “write a substantial essay of literary scholarship that is theoretically informed and engages with current research and criticism in relevant fields of study, asserting their own critical voice in ongoing dialogues and debates.”

Future Assessment

For 2017-2018 the English Department plans to collect the same data from faculty. The original plan called for a survey of students or a focus group regarding the previous questions, and for the addition of one or more questions for instructors concerning Learning Outcome 1, but we feel that 1) student feedback is unnecessary on Learning Outcomes 2-6, and that 2) feedback on individual courses (other

than capstone essays) regarding Learning Outcome 1 is less helpful. Rather, we plan to obtain student and/or alumni feedback on whether at the end of the English program students think they have achieved Learning Outcome 1: “familiarity with a range of critical, generic, and literary traditions (including recent theoretical approaches).”

Data Summary Tables

Learning Outcome 2. Students will be able to describe the effects of social constructions of identity on a particular literary text and on current debates over aesthetic value, universality, and canonicity.

LIT 202 Cultures and Canons

Question 1: Are students able to describe the effects of identity on a literary text?

	% Yes, exceptionally well	% Yes, to some extent	% Somewhat	% Not at all	Total	N=
Fall 2015	26%	54%	13%	7%	100%	85
Spring 2016	51%	41%	5%	2%	100%	41

Question 2: Are students able to describe the effects of social constructions of identity on current debates over aesthetic value, universality, and canonicity?

	% Yes, exceptionally well	% Yes, to some extent	% Somewhat	% Not at all	Total	N=
Fall 2015	25%	53%	15%	6%	99%	85
Spring 2016	24%	56%	15%	2%	100%	41

Learning Outcome 3. Students will be able to identify historically specific elements relevant to a particular text.

Literary History Courses

	% Yes, exceptionally well	% Yes, to some extent	% Somewhat	% Not at all	Total	N=
Fall 2015	56%	32%	8%	4%	100%	184
Spring 2016	51%	38%	11%	>1%	100%	249

Learning Outcome 4: Students will be able to read a literary work and characterize its main aesthetic, structural, and rhetorical strategies in an argumentative, thesis driven essay or in a writing workshop.

Critical Content Courses:

LIT 200

Question 1: The student has written an argumentative, thesis-driven essay about a literary work:

		% Yes, exceptionally well	% Yes, to some extent	% Somewhat	% Not at all	Total	N=
LIT 200	Fall 2014	38%	44%	19%	0%	100%	69
	Spring 2015	67%	11%	11%	6%	100%	18
	Fall 2015	53%	40%	6%	0%	100%	109
	Spring 2016	81%	19%	0%	0%	100%	37

Question 2: The essay characterizes, as appropriate, the main aesthetic, structural, and rhetorical strategies of a literary work.

		% Yes, exceptionally well	% Yes, to some extent	% Somewhat	% Not at all	Total	N=
LIT 200	Fall 2014	39%	42%	19%	0%	100%	69
	Spring 2015	41%	29%	24%	6%	94%	18
	Fall 2015	45%	43%	12%	0%	100%	109
	Spring 2016	58%	42%	0%	0%	97%	37

LIT 201

Question 1: The student has written an argumentative, thesis-driven essay about a literary work:

		% Yes, exceptionally well	% Yes, to some extent	% Somewhat	% Not at all	Total	N=
LIT 201	Fall 2014	35%	41%	24%	0%	100%	29
	Spring 2015	28%	54%	17%	2%	100%	65
	Fall 2015	42%	46%	13%	0%	100%	24
	Spring 2016	27%	47%	12%	2%	0%	98

Question 2: The essay characterizes, as appropriate, the main aesthetic, structural, and rhetorical strategies of a literary work.

		% Yes, exceptionally well	% Yes, to some extent	% Somewhat	% Not at all	Total	N=
--	--	---------------------------------	--------------------------	------------	--------------	-------	----

LIT 201	Fall 2014	28%	21%	41%	10%	100%	29
	Spring 2015	25%	63%	9%	2%	99%	65
	Fall 2015	29%	54%	17%	0%	100%	24
	Spring 2016	27%	42%	16%	2%	99%	98

LIT 202

Question 1: The student has written an argumentative, thesis-driven essay about a literary work:

		% Yes, exceptionally well	% Yes, to some extent	% Somewhat	% Not at all	Total	N=
LIT 202	Fall 2014	23%	63%	12%	2%	100%	49
	Spring 2015	15%	62%	17%	6%	100%	81
	Fall 2015	20%	55%	16%	8%	100%	85
	Spring 2016	24%	59%	17%	0%	100%	41

Question 2: The essay characterizes, as appropriate, the main aesthetic, structural, and rhetorical strategies of a literary work.

		% Yes, exceptionally well	% Yes, to some extent	% Somewhat	% Not at all	Total	N=
LIT 202	Fall 2014	35%	55%	8%	2%	100%	49
	Spring 2015	22%	56%	16%	6%	100%	81
	Fall 2015	24%	59%	17%	0%	100%	85
	Spring 2016	32%	51%	17%	0%	100%	41

Learning Outcome 5: Students will be able to write a substantial essay of literary scholarship that is theoretically informed and engages with current research and criticism in relevant fields of study, asserting their own critical voice in ongoing dialogues and debates.

Capstone Courses (LIT 499- Seminar in Research and Theory)

Question 1: The essay shows substantial development.

	% Yes, exceptionally well	% Yes, to some extent	% Somewhat	% Not at all	Total	N=
--	---------------------------	-----------------------	------------	--------------	-------	----

LIT 499	Fall 2015	55%	29%	12%	4%	100%	102
	Spring 2016	50%	39%	10%	1%	100%	111

Question 2: The essay appropriately uses and cites current research and criticism in relevant fields of study.

		% Yes, exceptionally well	% Yes, to some extent	% Somewhat	% Not at all	Total	N=
LIT 499	Fall 2015	44%	41%	9%	6%	100%	102
	Spring 2016	49%	44%	6%	1%	100%	111

Question 3: The essay is theoretically informed as appropriate to its thesis.

		% Yes, exceptionally well	% Yes, to some extent	% Somewhat	% Not at all	Total	N=
LIT 499	Fall 2015	41%	41%	13%	6%	100%	102
	Spring 2016	40%	51%	8%	1%	100%	111

Question 4: The essay asserts the student's own critical voice in ongoing dialogues and debates.

		% Yes, exceptionally well	% Yes, to some extent	% Somewhat	% Not at all	Total	N=
LIT 499	Fall 2015	40%	48%	8%	5%	99%	102
	Spring 2016	50%	37%	11%	2%	100%	111

Capstone Essay Assessment (LIT 499)

Each number represents the average across the sections for the specified Learning Outcome.

	LO 1	LO 2	LO 3	LO 4	LO 5	LO 6
Fall 2015	3.5	2.9	3.1	3.2	3.1	3.4
Spring 2016	3.2	3.3	3.1	3.1	3.1	3.2

	LO 1	LO 2	LO 3	LO 4	LO 5	LO 6
1st LIT 499	3.3	3.15	2.9	3.1	2.9	3.3
2nd LIT 499	3.3	3.0	3.2	3.1	3.3	3.2