Department: English

Assessment Coordinator: Marc Geisler

Departmental Mission: The mission of the English Department is to offer a rigorous and engaging learning experience in the study of English; to facilitate reflective reading informed by a variety of cultural contexts, genre conventions, scholarly inquiry, critical analysis, and creative thinking; to produce innovative scholarly and creative work in a variety of genres that advances our understanding of language, literature, writing and media; to support a collaborative and student-centered learning community that welcomes diverse backgrounds and perspectives, fosters social responsibility, and celebrates life-long learning; and to provide service to the university, state, and global community.

Departmental Student Learning Outcomes:

All English graduates should be able to:
1. Write effectively in a variety of genres using appropriate conventions.
2. Read accurately and critically in a variety of genres and media in relation to a variety of discourses, cultures and historical periods...
3. Understand similarities and differences of language systems and social discourses, the subfields of linguistics, and some tools and techniques in linguistic and rhetorical analysis.

Literature Emphasis Major Graduates should be able to:
4. Understand and apply a range of critical and cultural theories.

Student Learning Objective(s) Assessed:

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<tr>
<th>Assessment Measures</th>
<th>SLOs Assessed</th>
<th>Results</th>
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<tr>
<td>Direct Assessment of Writing Portfolios</td>
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Criterion #1:

- Excellent: 21 (28%)
- Good: 28 (37%)
- Fair: 23 (30%)
- Poor: 4 (5%)

Criterion #2:

- Excellent: 26 (34%)
- Good: 27 (36%)
- Fair: 15 (20%)
- Poor: 9 (10%)

Analysis of Results
Our scoring of the essays suggests a strong consensus about what constitutes a “good” understanding and application of theoretical principles. Notably, there was also strong consensus, numerically
Changes as a Result of Assessment: The following assessment recommendations were discussed and approved by the department in spring 13.

Recommendations to the Department

Though the cohort was encouraged by the results of the assessment, we believe that renewed emphasis should be placed on the practical and fundamental nature of the course experience. By this we mean the course should introduce students to the practices of critical readings of theoretical arguments and the application and assessment of those theories to literary and imaginative texts. Further, in order to clarify the aims and purposes of the course, we believe that the course should be conceived as an explicit foundation for the critical reading and writing demands of 400-level courses. For all these reasons, we suggest the revision of the catalog title and description of 313 to give students a clearer understanding of what to expect in the course and how the course prepares them for 400-level literary and cultural studies. We recommend 313 be revised to read:

313 Introduction to Critical and Cultural Theories and Practices

Introduction to a range of critical and cultural theories in a historical context. Emphasis on critical reading and writing in preparation for 400-level courses in literary and cultural studies.

The cohort recommends the following for 313 classes:

1) Faculty will include a minimum of five distinct critical traditions
2) Faculty will assign a minimum of twelve typed pages of writing (e.g. three four-page essays) in which students apply theories to literary or other artistic texts


Cohort

The cohort consisted of five faculty members who teach 313: Kaveh Askari, Mark Lester, Kathy Lundeen, Mary Janell Metzer, and Ning Yu.

Student Learning Outcome

The cohort selected SLO 4:

Understand and apply a range of critical and cultural theories.
Assessment Option

The cohort selected Option 1 of the English Department’s Assessment Plan:

A curriculum cohort consisting typically of three to five faculty members (from those who share instruction of a particular course) will examine student work from the selected course and begin the assessment process by compiling data and selecting samples of student work that range from “not meeting” to “meeting” to “exceeding” the applicable SLOs. If the course focuses primarily on SLO 1, selected student papers will serve as anchor sets, from which the cohort group can normalize their responses and examine a broader selection of papers. If the course focuses on one or more of SLOs 2-4, collected student work may include such things as quizzes, exercises, exams, and papers. The cohort will then present their findings and recommendation(s) to the entire faculty who will then make judgments about what curricular or program change(s) should be made.

Prompt for the Essay

313 students were given the following prompt as one of their assignments:

Write a 4-6 page essay in which you critically assess a novel, play, film, or poem. Your analysis should include a comparison and contrast of the kinds of readings that would be informed by the ideas associated with two theorists or critical traditions we have examined.

Criteria for Assessing the Essays

1) Assess student’s understanding of fundamental theoretical principles
2) Assess student’s ability to effectively apply and assess a principal theoretical claim to develop a reading of a literary or other imaginative work

Rubric for Evaluating the Essays

For each criterion the essay was assessed as Excellent, Good, Fair, or Poor.

Number of Essays

Three members of the cohort taught a section of 313 in Fall 2012. Those three members provided a range of essays with respect to their relative strengths for the assessment. The essays were printed anonymously, without the name of the student or instructor on the essay, and distributed to all five cohort members. (Those who provided essays did not assess their own students’ essays.) The cohort evaluated a total of 38 essays from those three sections. Each essay received two readings for a total of 76 readings.

Results

Criterion #1:

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<thead>
<tr>
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<td>Number</td>
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Analysis of Results

Our scoring of the essays suggests a strong consensus about what constitutes a “good” understanding and application of theoretical principles. Notably, there was also strong consensus, numerically speaking, on what constituted successful application and assessment of a theoretical principle to a literary text. Though cohort members all share the goal of enabling students to engage a theory in a critical and reflective way rather than superimposing a theory on a text, we take different pedagogical approaches to achieving that goal.

Recommendations to the Department

Though the cohort was encouraged by the results of the assessment, we believe that renewed emphasis should be placed on the practical and fundamental nature of the course experience. By this we mean the course should introduce students to the practices of critical readings of theoretical arguments and the application and assessment of those theories to literary and imaginative texts. Further, in order to clarify the aims and purposes of the course, we believe that the course should be conceived as an explicit foundation for the critical reading and
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A Final Word about the Assessment

The cohort agreed it was valuable to discuss the course informally with colleagues—to learn how other faculty members approach the course, how they respond to the challenges of teaching an introductory theory course, and what kind of writing they require of their students. Collaborative conversations about a particular course are instructive and energizing, and the cohort agreed it would be beneficial for colleagues to meet occasionally for informal conversations of this nature.

Chronology of the Assessment of English 313

Spring 2012: The cohort met and discussed at length what 313 students should acquire from the course. Members of the cohort described their approaches to teaching 313, their objectives for the course, and the types of writing they assign in the course. The cohort agreed that 313 students should acquire knowledge of a range of theoretical/philosophical traditions and have experience engaging various traditions in written analysis of literature or art.

The cohort selected a Student Learning Objective, one of the options of the English Department’s Assessment Plan, and an assessment tool (an essay prompt).

Following the meeting, the cohort chair circulated a draft of the essay prompt, which was refined by cohort members through email.

Fall 2012: Those members of the cohort who taught 313 in the fall included an assignment with the essay prompt in their syllabus. At the end of the term, cohort members gave the cohort chair essays generated by the prompt. They selected a range of essays with respect to critical and rhetorical strengths.

Winter 2013: The cohort met at the beginning of winter term. Before the meeting, the cohort chair distributed copies of a few essays that had been submitted for the assessment. At the meeting the cohort agreed on criteria for assessing the essays and then discussed the norming essays they had been given by the cohort chair. The cohort arrived at a consensus on the characteristics of an Excellent essay, a Good essay, etc. with respect to each of the two assessment criteria.

Following the meeting, the cohort chair distributed all of the essays collected for the assessment among all five cohort members. Cohort members submitted their rankings to the cohort chair, who circulated the results.

Spring 2013: The cohort met at the beginning of spring term and analyzed the results of the assessment. The cohort discussed recommendations to the department regarding 313, including the course title, the catalog definition, and reasonable expectations for what students should acquire in the way of knowledge, skills, and critical judgment.

Following the meeting the cohort chair drafted a final report for the department and emailed it to the cohort. After emending it according to feedback from cohort members, the cohort chair submitted the report to the department chair.

(Each of the three cohort meetings lasted around an hour. Reading and assessing the essays required care, but since we did not assign letter grades to the essays or write comments on them, it was not time-consuming in the way that essay-grading usually is.)