**Department:** English

**Assessment Coordinators:** Kristin Denham and Anne Lobeck

**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.

**Department Student Learning Outcomes**

Upon graduation, 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 Outcomes Assessed This Year**

**Student Learning Outcome Assessed This Year, 2014-15 - SLO 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.
Assessment Question: How can we better meet this Student Learning Outcome?

We want to assess how well are students are not only understanding “language systems and social discourses,” but how well they are able to convey that knowledge to others outside of the class or the discipline in order to truly demonstrate an understanding of the important ways in which this knowledge helps students navigate public attitudes and ideas about language (which have an impact on education, politics, culture, etc.). Being able to recognize myths and misperceptions about language is certainly important, but also being able to talk about them in the context of daily social discourse is equally important, and helps students internalize and practice what they learn.

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<th>Assessment Measures</th>
<th>Results</th>
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<td><strong>Fall 2014:</strong> We wanted to assess how well are students are not only understanding “language systems and social discourses,” but how well they are able to convey that knowledge to others outside of the class or the discipline in order to truly demonstrate an understanding of the important ways in which language intertwines with various facets of life.</td>
<td>Since not all students could lead the campus-wide discussion for the film, we had a variety of ways that students could participate in this Creole Project. Some were more successful than others.</td>
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In fall of 2014, we had students engage with linguistics more directly by participating in a class film project on linguistic diversity. Students not only practiced doing linguistic analysis and became more aware of linguistic diversity, but they helped to lead a campus-wide discussion on this topic, built upon their research, in conjunction with WWU’s Reel World film series (*Pidgin: The Voice of Hawaii*). Students had the added experience of sharing their knowledge of language with a general audience, and being the “experts” leading the discussion.

**Winter and spring quarters 2015:** We encouraged students to think about how they would draw on their knowledge of language to respond to myths and stereotypes about language. We had students take a language attitudes survey the first day of class, and then return to it the last day of class. Students discussed among themselves how their own attitudes about language had changed, and how they (now) respond when they encounter these myths and stereotypes in conversation with others.
Changes based on assessment findings:

After fall quarter, we discussed together whether this outreach approach had helped students get a better understanding of pidgins and creoles, and linguistic systems more generally, and how successful they were in conveying that information to others. This was certainly successful in the following ways:

- Encouraged students to actively participate in not just analyzing, but then talking about language systems.
- Involved the community beyond the classroom in the discussion of language and identity.
- Allowed students to pursue research on various subfields of linguistics, including grammar, acquisition, variation, change, language policy, language in education, language discrimination in a hands-on way.

Drawbacks of this approach were:

- It is unrealistic to rely on a campus-wide showing of a documentary about language, though we would certainly advocate for this.
- Scheduling and logistics prevented some students from participating
- Having students addressing such a large and diverse group of viewers was rather daunting for a number of reasons (crowd control, different view points and topics were raised beyond the expertise of the students, etc.)

Winter and spring we piloted a different approach, where students reevaluated their own responses on a language attitudes survey at the end of class. Another component of this exercise was to facilitate a discussion about how students would (now) respond to/engage in discussions with others when these myths and stereotypes emerge in conversations outside of class. We concluded that although the in-class discussion was a good start, more targeted ways of encouraging students to engage in productive discussions about these often controversial topics would probably be more useful.

Suggestions for next year:

This is the first of a two-year assessment, so next year, we will suggest that instructors of English 370 should continue to develop ways to not only meet the SLO (Understand similarities and differences of language systems and social discourses, the subfields of linguistics, and some tools and techniques in linguistic and rhetorical analysis.), but do go beyond “understanding” to “sharing” and “explaining.”
We suggest that 370 instructors:

1. Consider developing and assessing assignments and discussions that address ways for students to engage in conversations about language beyond the classroom.

2. Perhaps develop ways to practice (1) in the classroom. One option is to have students take a language attitudes survey at the beginning of class, and to discuss and/or write about their own changes in attitudes at the end of the term.

3. Another option is to have in-class mock conversations and debates about controversial topics that involve technical and/or complicated concepts.

4. Have students discuss/write about dispelling myths about language with mock role modeling. How would you change someone’s mind?

We also suggest revising the SLO itself to better reflect these efforts.

*Understand similarities and differences of language systems and how to use basic tools and techniques of linguistic analysis to analyze language and socially constructed attitudes about language.*