

2014-15 Literature Assessment

11 June 2015

In addition to the learning goals of the core curriculum requirements of all English majors, the English Literature major has the following specific four learning outcome goals.

Goals and Mission of the English Literature Major

Millikin's English Literature Major continues to prepare students for a host of career options, among them graduate studies in English literature, publishing and editing, and virtually any career that asks for clarity of thinking and expression. Through the core English department curriculum, students gain a solid foundation in the literary traditions, profiting from learning side-by-side with all English majors and the emphasis of disciplinary specialty each major brings to the study of literature. Beyond this solid foundation, English literature majors gain advanced skills in the literary traditions, practice with theoretical methods, and writing critical prose. With the addition of EN 202 Writing About Literature, our majors come together early in their degree pursuit to explore literary theory and habits of scholarship, using short assignments to familiarize themselves with the varieties of method and practice. The capstone course, EN420, integrates theory and practice by requiring a full research project: a bibliographic study to know the existing scholarship and a scholarly paper to integrate their own reading of literary text(s) with those already published.

Learning Outcome Goals

All English Literature major students will:

- L1. have advanced understanding of a variety of literary genres.
- L2. have advanced understanding of literatures' historical, intellectual, and cultural contexts.
- L3. be able to apply literary criticism and theory in the interpretation of texts.
- L4. write a near-professional, original work of literary research and scholarship.

Snapshot

The assessment report will provide a brief overview of our curricula, facilities, and faculty/staff.

The Learning Story

The English Literature major has four main phases of instruction and development, emphasizing through all the integration of theory and practice. English Literature majors practice theory throughout the major and so are, by definition, integrating theory and practice.

Majors begin with the EN 202 Writing About Literature course, in which they gain a broad and thorough introduction to the variety of genres, the foundational method of explication, and an overview of literary theories. Students typically learn in groups to tease out meanings and apply methodologies of literary analysis. The current configuration of the course has the students collaborate on a final research project, a substantial casebook. Students come to learn the fundamental methodologies of the discipline.

Literature majors fulfill all English core requirements in the traditions courses: Medieval/Classical Traditions, Major British Authors I & II, Shakespeare, American Literature to 1900, and 20th Century Literature. Beyond these core courses, Literature majors are required to take additional coursework in 300-level genre courses in which they augment their reading in the tradition. These courses begin the advanced practice of applying various methods of literary theory and interpretation. Among those critical theories routinely covered: deconstruction, psychoanalytic, gender/feminist, post-colonial, new historical, and the poetics/aesthetics of Romanticism, Victorianism, Modernism, many of which are either mentioned or directly implied in recent course titles.

The major culminates in the 420 Seminar in Literature, the capstone for Literature majors. Topics in this course are typically focused and prepare students for graduate level and graduate style seminars. The students, typically seniors, apply an in-depth knowledge of critical theory in producing an original work of literary research and scholarship. The Literature major at large, from its introduction (202), through its reading in and practice of literary theory (core and 300-level genre courses), requires the integration of theory and practice. The 420 Seminar asks the students to produce a scholarly essay that integrates existing scholarship and theoretical perspectives with the student's own reading or approach to an examined work(s). By asking the students to produce a near-professional, original work of literary research and scholarship, EN 420 concludes the student's development as a reader, researcher, thinking, and scholar in English literature.

Assessment Methods

The English Department uses the written portfolio method to assess its learning goals. Portfolios will begin in the freshman year with EN 105, continue with EN 202, and culminate with EN 420. Students will gather in one place work that represents the kind and quality of writing and research they're producing throughout the degree. By having the representative work in one place, student and faculty can gauge student learning in process. The portfolio will remain a touchstone through the degree, and the activity of maintaining and updating it (adding to and substituting new work for old) will encourage students to overtly reassess their old work in light of new learning. The portfolios and the rubrics for evaluating them allow for quantitative assessment of the major. At the end of the Spring semester, English faculty on the Literature Major Assessment Committee review the Senior Literature Portfolios, evaluating the quality of learning demonstrated for each learning goal, using the portfolio essays review rubric.

Portfolio Artifact 1: essay based on genre

Portfolio Artifact 2: essay on literature related to contexts

Portfolio Artifact 3: essay employing literary critical theory

Portfolio Artifact 4: scholarly essay

Students select the essays for inclusion in their portfolio, often as a professionalizing effort to prepare applications for graduate school and to have a portfolio of representative writing at hand. as the artifacts correspond with Literature major learning goals, these artifact essays will come out of the following coursework where faculty prioritize those goals.

Students need not submit artifacts for each goal; a single artifact can fulfill multiple goals. An artifact that fulfills L4, for instance, should also fulfill L2 and L3, as well.

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- L4. write a near-professional, original work of literary research and scholarship

Literature Major Requirements	Literature Major Learning Goals (EN202, EN420 & Three Advanced Genre Courses)			
	L1-understand a variety of literary genres	L2-understand literatures' historical, intellectual & cultural contexts	L3-apply literary criticism & theory in interpretation of texts	L4-write a near-professional work of literary research
English major traditions core	•	•		
EN202 Writing About Literature			•	
Genre Course: EN340 Poetry	•			
Genre Course: EN350 Fiction	•			
Genre Course: EN360 Drama	•			
Genre Option: EN366 Literary History		•		
EN420 Seminar in Literature			•	•

The English Major Committee will use the following rubric for assessing levels of achievement in the sampled portfolios and, by extension, in the English department's achieving its own goals of graduating profession-ready majors.

Senior Literature Portfolio Evaluation Rubric

The Assessment Committee opted to evaluate the portfolio on a 3-point scale to keep our assessment in line with the other majors in the department. Each evaluator will provide a numerical value for each goal, and then those numbers are averaged. Numerical values correspond to the traffic light system:

- 1: Red
- 2: Yellow
- 3: Green

Literature Major Portfolio Evaluation Rubric

	Green (3)	Yellow (2)	Red (1)
Artifact 1: genre essays Related goal: L1	Portfolio includes essays that clearly present knowledge of the inherent and established features of literary genres.	Portfolio includes some essays that present knowledge of genre features and methods of literary genres.	Portfolio includes essays that have difficulty discussing fundamental genre distinctions and their workings.
Artifact 2: essays related to contexts Related goals: L2	Portfolio includes essays that clearly present a range of contextual factors and contributors to text. Essays clearly articulate not only what those factors are, but how they affect authors and the works they produce.	Portfolio includes some essays that demonstrate a knowledge but not a full range of contextual factors and contributors to text. Essays attempt to articulate not only what those factors are, but how they affect authors and the works they produce.	Portfolio includes essays that discuss a limited range of contextual factors influencing authors and the works they produce.
Artifact 3: essays employ critical theory Related goals: L3	Portfolio includes essays that ably and aptly handle critical theory in the interpretation of text. The critical reading makes use of the critical method, more than simply restating the assessments of other scholars.	Portfolio includes essays that attempt to use a critical method in interpreting the text. Essays may make equal use of interpreting and restating the findings of other scholars.	Portfolio includes essays that demonstrate a limited understanding of theoretical application and the way theory can open up a text. Essays rely primarily on a restatement of other scholars' findings.
Artifact 4: Scholarly essay Related goals: L4	Portfolio includes an essay that includes a bibliographic history on the examined work(s) of literature. The essay will voice an approach or a reading of the work(s) that the bibliography doesn't already (in whole or collectively) articulate.	Portfolio includes an essay with a bibliographic history on the examined work(s) of literature. The essay will attempt to voice a new approach or reading.	Portfolio includes an essay with a partial bibliographic history on the examined work(s) of literature. The essay has difficulty voicing a new approach or reading.

Assessment Data

Portfolios of graduating seniors will be assessed each Spring semester. Both graduating literature majors submitted a portfolio. Students choose the artifacts that they deem best fit the learning goals, and one artifact can meet more than one goal.

Portfolio 1

Goal	Evaluator 1	Evaluator 2	Average
L1	2	3	2.5
L2	3	2	2.5
L3	2	3	2.5
L4	2	2	2

Portfolio 2

Goal	Evaluator 1	Evaluator 2	Average
L1	2	3	2.5
L2	1	3	2
L3	3	3	3
L4	2	3	2.5

Analysis of Assessment Results

The 2015 portfolio revealed a few strengths and some improvement over previous portfolios.

Strengths

L1 and L3 were the strongest of the literature program's goals. In previous years, L3 remained strongest. The 2015 portfolios definitely improved L1

Areas for Improvement

All areas are in need of improvement, although two portfolios are not statistically significant. The portfolios included some excellent papers; however, the two differed greatly in their strengths, indicating that students are not internalizing all of the goals to the same degree.

Previous Years' Assessments

Goal	2009	2010 ¹	2013	2014	2015
L1	2.25	2.5	1.25	1.38	2.5
L2	1.75	2	1.75	2.5	2.25
L3	2	4	2.5	2.5	2.75
L4	2	3.5	1.5	1.5	2.25

Compared with previous years, it is clear that the literature program is making significant strides in meeting the existing goals. The program has seen significant improvement in L1, L4, and especially L3. The 2015 score for L2 was higher than all previous scores save 2014.

Improvement Strategies

1. Discussion and Revision of Learning Goals

The English Department as a whole and the Literature Program need to revisit the established goals. Our course offerings and Core Requirements for the major work at cross purposes. Advanced literature courses are ostensibly genre-based. The core is history-based, and the advanced literature courses fulfill areas of the core requirements. Millikin's adoption of a performance learning curriculum can serve as a guide to revising our goals and strategies in the upcoming semesters.

The Department needs to determine the validity of genre studies, particularly in light of the state of the profession. Additionally, each of the learning goals needs to have its rubric revised to reflect what the profession expects. L4, for instance, needs to include much beyond a literature review. The emphasis on scholarly sources for L4 is merited; the 2008 committee questioned how a literature review (the basic form of the green rating) could relate to the official wording of the goal: "write a near-professional, original work of literary research and scholarship," since many professional literary articles do not include a formal literature review (rather, they do this as a statement of lack of scholarship, to situate themselves within a community of specific ideas, present scholarship as further-reading footnotes, or use scholarly comments throughout their own

¹ Note that this year used a 5-point scale rather than the typical 3-point scale.

analysis). Moreover, far more goes into a “near-professional” piece of literary criticism than scholarship—methodology, preciseness of language, argumentation, use of evidence, etc. While a thorough knowledge of scholarship is essential for a scholarly essay, the rubric should include other criteria as well.

2. Portfolio Assembly/Collection

Portfolios generally indicate that perhaps literature students are unaware of the learning goals as they move through the program. Reinforcement of the literature learning goals in syllabi and class discussion would be a way to keep the goals fresh.

To remedy this situation and collection difficulties (50% collection rate for 2013), the English Department passed a revision to the Literature Major. Students majoring in literature, beginning with the incoming 2014 freshmen, will be required to take EN 410: Senior Writing Portfolio, where portfolios will be assembled and collected. Our hopes with this is that we get a greater breadth of student artifacts to assess, allowing us to see, across multiple works, that students understand genres; appreciate historical, literary, and cultural contexts; can apply literary theory in their own original analyses; and can produce a near-professional work of literary research.