

Central Washington University
Assessment of Student Learning
Department and Program Report

Academic Year of Report: 2012

College: Arts and Humanities

Department: English

Program: M.A. Literature

I. What student learning outcomes were addressed?

Department Outcome 14. *Students will demonstrate their knowledge of scholarly research practices appropriate to the discipline of English literary studies.*

This goal is related to CWU Goal 1, which is to “maintain and strengthen an outstanding academic and student life on the Ellensburg campus.” It is related to two CAH goals: “Ensure that students develop disciplinary specific competencies for success in their field” and “Develop students' intellectual and practical skills for lifelong learning.” It is related to Department Goal 10: “Our graduate programs will provide opportunities for students to extend and enrich their exploration of the disciplines of literature and language, specifically to strengthen their preparation for doctoral study, for careers in teaching writing and literature, and for teaching English to speakers of other languages.” We chose Outcome 14 in order to assess our Thesis option for the Literature program.

Department Outcome 15. *Students will demonstrate their commitment to professional development.* This goal is related to CWU Goal 1, which is to “maintain and strengthen an outstanding academic and student life on the Ellensburg campus.” It is related to two CAH goals: “Ensure that students develop disciplinary specific competencies for success in their field” and “Develop students' intellectual and practical skills for lifelong learning.” It is related to Department Goal 10: “Our graduate programs will provide opportunities for students to extend and enrich their exploration of the disciplines of literature and language, specifically to strengthen their preparation for doctoral study, for careers in teaching writing and literature, and for teaching English to speakers of other languages.” We chose Outcome 15 because it is our primary attitudinal outcome.

II. How were they assessed?

Department Outcome 14. *Students will demonstrate their knowledge of scholarly research practices appropriate to the discipline of English literary studies.*

Two theses submitted in Spring 2012 were assessed for the development of a significant research question, a sustained focus on this question, synthesis of research, and clarity of ideas. These were the only theses submitted in 2012. By coincidence, both were on topics relating to the teaching of composition, which allowed us to assess a thesis focused on pedagogy and to evaluate whether our present thesis process is appropriate for this kind of topic. As teaching college-level composition is the most common career for our graduates, it is an important question. Our criterion for achievement is that all graduating students choosing the Thesis option score at least a “Pass” on Thesis for the use of literary research techniques.

Department Outcome 15. *Students will demonstrate their commitment to professional development.* We assessed this outcome by measuring student participation in professional development activities such as SOURCE, academic conferences, publications, and awards. Active graduate students for were assessed in Winter 2012, Spring 2012, and Fall 2012. Our criterion for achievement is that a minimum of 30% of active students will present, publish, or receive awards.

III. What was learned?

Department Outcome 14. *Students will demonstrate their knowledge of scholarly research practices appropriate to the discipline of English literary studies.*

Both theses passed, but committees for both had some reservations about the development of a significant research question, a sustained focus on this question, synthesis of research, and clarity of ideas, and neither thesis received a Pass with Distinction. In both cases, students had promising research questions but struggled with a sustained focus, synthesis of research, and development of ideas. Both committees questioned whether the traditional thesis format was appropriate for this type of research question.

Conclusion: Criterion met, but with reservations.

Department Outcome 15. *Students will demonstrate their commitment to professional development.*

Seven out of twelve students (58%) made presentations at SOURCE or regional conferences or received awards. This included three regional conference presentations, five SOURCE presentations, and the CAH award for Outstanding Graduate Student Scholarship.

Conclusion: Criterion met. Students nearly doubled our criterion of 30% participation, indicating a strong commitment to professional development.

IV. What will the department or program do as a result of that information?

Department Outcome 14. *Students will demonstrate their knowledge of scholarly research practices appropriate to the discipline of English literary studies.*

Our graduate committee has discussed whether to allow a pedagogical project for the thesis or possibly to use the journal option in cases where a fully developed thesis may not be appropriate. No decision has yet been made but the committee will present a proposal to the department this year. These theses also suggest revisions to our M.A. Literature outcomes to allow for a focus on composition pedagogy.

V. What did the department or program do in response to last year's assessment information?

Last year's assessment data indicated that too many students were not passing their comprehensive exams on the first try. We have since made changes to the exam procedures, allowing students more time to write and also setting new limits on exam retakes. Since our last assessment, only one student has taken an exam, and she passed on the first try.