Central Washington University
Assessment of Student Learning
Department and Program Report

Academic Year of Report: 2009-2010
College: Arts and Humanities
Department: English
Program: English Language and Literature Major

1. What student learning outcomes were addressed?

Outcome 5. Students will demonstrate their writing competence by successfully meeting the rhetorical needs of situations requiring the application of a variety of genres and styles. This outcome 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 8, which is to offer “programs of study which incorporate a broad range of perspectives and thus prepare students to live and work creatively and compassionately in a global society” and Department Goal 9, which is to “provide learning opportunities in literary, linguistic, visual, and creative awareness requiring students to engage responsibly with and compose a wide range of texts while developing their repertoire of skills in interpreting, analyzing, writing, and evaluating texts and non-print media.”

This goal was chosen because student interest in writing is increasing.

Outcome 8. Students will demonstrate a functional knowledge of grammar and linguistics. This outcome 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 8, which is to offer “programs of study which incorporate a broad range of perspectives and thus prepare students to live and work creatively and compassionately in a global society” and Department Goal 9, which is to “provide learning opportunities in literary, linguistic, visual, and creative awareness requiring students to engage responsibly with and compose a wide range of texts while developing their repertoire of skills in interpreting, analyzing, writing, and evaluating texts and non-print media.”

This goal was included because previous assessments have indicated that students have not mastered editing skills at the level we would expect and because our criterion for achievement was not met in last year’s assessment.

2. How were they assessed?

Outcome 5. The outcome that “students will demonstrate their writing competence by successfully meeting the rhetorical needs of situations requiring the application of a variety of genres and styles” was assessed using our Senior Portfolio. The Senior Portfolio consist of three
course papers or creative works chosen by students that are revised extensively during the senior colloquium. Student portfolios were assessed using a rubric that evaluates eight criteria on a scale of 1 to 6. Our criterion of achievement is that 90% of portfolios will score at least "Meets Expectations" for specific writing competencies including development of ideas, style, and mastery of conventions. In addition, our Senior Survey asks students to rate on a scale of 1 to 5 whether they had sufficient opportunity to meet this outcome during the program. Our criterion for achievement was a minimum of 4.0.

**Outcome 8.** The outcome that “students will demonstrate a functional knowledge of grammar and linguistics” was evaluated using two indirect assessments and two direct assessments. First, a Senior Survey was distributed to students in our capstone course, ENG 489 (Fall, Winter, and Spring). They were asked to evaluate three course outcomes relating to grammar and linguistics on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 indicating no opportunity to meet the outcome and 5 indicating sufficient opportunity. Our criterion of achievement was to have an average of at least 4.0 on this five-point scale. Second, each student took an editing test in the Senior Colloquium. Our criterion of achievement was that 80% of students would score at least 80% on an editing diagnostic. Since some changes were made in the diagnostic, only the numbers for Spring Quarter were used for assessment (Spring enrollments were also substantially higher than for Fall and Winter Quarters). Third, Senior Portfolios are assessed for grammar and mechanics along with other criteria. Our criterion of achievement is that the final version of all portfolios will have no more than two or three minor errors. Finally, the Department Chair conducted an interview with each of the ENG 489 sections (Fall, Winter, Spring) in order to obtain qualitative information about student satisfaction with the program.

In addition, we tested a diagnostic for new majors in one of our gateway courses, ENG 303 in order to establish a baseline against which to measure performance on the final editing test.

3. **What was learned?**

**Outcome 5.** Students will demonstrate their writing competence by successfully meeting the rhetorical needs of situations requiring the application of a variety of genres and styles.

**Portfolio:** Out of 21 portfolios submitted for Spring 2010, 20 met expectations for all criteria (95%).

**Exit interview:** Students indicated that they would like to see more widespread use of rubrics and would like to better understand the criteria used in grading.

Conclusion: Criterion met. Our criterion for achievement is that 90% of all portfolios will meet expectations for all criteria.

**Outcome 8.** Students will demonstrate a functional knowledge of grammar and linguistics.

**Senior Survey:** Students were asked to rate their opportunity to master each outcome on a scale of 1 (insufficient opportunity) to 5 (sufficient opportunity). The numbers below represent averages from Spring 2009 through Winter 2010. Our criterion for achievement was 4 or above for each outcome.

| 25. Demonstrate an understanding of semantics, syntax, morphology, and phonology. | 3.73 |
| 26. Explain the processes underlying language acquisition and development. | 3.42 |
27. Recognize the impact of cultural, economic, political, and social environments upon language. | 3.88
28. Use your knowledge of grammar to revise and edit your own writing and to comment on the writing of others. | 4.46
29. Show an understanding of the evolution of the English language and the historical influences on its various forms. | 3.73
30. Describe the part of speech and function of every word in a complex or compound sentence. | 3.92

With one exception, the numbers are similar to those from previous years. The exception is number 29, which is substantially higher than last year’s number. That likely reflects changes to our Language curriculum to meet state competencies for our teaching majors. Except for number 28, each of these outcomes is addressed in only one course, which may account for the lower numbers. Furthermore, only students in our Literature specialization are required to take a linguistics course. Since we use the same Senior Survey for both Literature Specialization and Writing Specialization students, the increasing numbers of Writing Specialization students skew the results.

**Editing Test:** Out of 21 students, only 7 scored 80% or above (33%). This is far below our criterion of achievement, which is that 80% of students will score 80% or above. The entry-level diagnostic was not directly comparable to the test used in our colloquium. The diagnostic only requires students to identify the correct usage or punctuation in a multiple-choice format, whereas the editing test used in the colloquium requires editing a sentence and correctly naming the error. Only 26% of the incoming students scored 80% or above on the easier test, which suggests that students are entering the program with low grammar skills.

**Note:** The populations for the entry-level test and the exit test are substantially different because the entry-level test includes students in all of our major and minor programs as well as students who do not enroll in one of our programs.

**Portfolio review:** One of 21 students did not meet expectations for the portfolio. Student portfolios are scored with a rubric, and this particular student had difficulties meeting the standards for Expression and Correctness in academic writing. Since the student was able to meet those standards in two creative pieces, it suggests that the problem involves more than grammar skills.

**Exit interview:** Students were very positive about the grammar instruction that they received in ENG 320 (English Grammar) and in the grammar review in the senior colloquium, but they would like to see more grammar instruction throughout their program. They would like to see two or even three courses offered on grammar and editing skills, and they would like to see more reinforcement of their grammar and editing skills throughout the curriculum. Students indicated that they began the program with very different knowledge levels; some indicated that they knew little more than the difference between a noun and a verb because they had received little or no grammar instruction in K12. Students completing their general education at CWU will have received basic grammar instruction in ENG 101, but students transferring from other programs may not have focused as extensively on sentence-level skills. Students in the Literature program
have had difficulty connecting linguistics to the rest of their program because it is a more specialized area of knowledge.

**Conclusion:** Criterion not fully met. Although most students are able to produce virtually error-free portfolios, they still struggle with passing an editing test. Our portfolio measures students’ practical skill in applying their knowledge of grammar and conventions, and our editing test measures both that skill and their knowledge of grammatical terms. The differing results suggest that knowledge may be a more critical area for improvement than practical application. Data from the entry diagnostic are inconclusive, but along with comments from the exit interviews, they suggest that many students need grammar review when they start the program.

4. **What will the department or program do as a result of that information (feedback/program improvement)?**

As this was also the year for our program review, we will be making changes to our program based on the results of that review as well as this assessment report and previous assessment reports.

This assessment report will be distributed to department faculty and discussed at the first department meeting for Fall 2010. If an action plan is needed, it will be assigned to the appropriate committee. Department actions taken this year or planned for next year are described below.

**Outcome 5. Students will demonstrate their writing competence by successfully meeting the rhetorical needs of situations requiring the application of a variety of genres and styles.**

Since the only significant shortcoming was in the use of conventions, that is a primary area that needs to be addressed at this time. Conventions include grammar, formatting, and use of MLA style, and they can be addressed by the measures described below for Outcome 8.

However, we are also discussing changes to our outcomes and will recalibrate our assessment in order to identify more areas for improvement. In addition, we need to better communicate our expectations for writing. We will address that in part with changes to our gateway course, ENG 303.

**Outcome 8. Students will demonstrate a functional knowledge of grammar and linguistics.**

Based on assessment data from previous years that is confirmed by this year’s data, we have implemented some changes and will proceed with others:

- We will continue to develop a diagnostic test for students entering the program. This will give us a baseline against which to compare the editing test administered at the end of the program. Students will be informed of the level of proficiency that will be required by the end of the program. In our first trial, the test was administered to all students in a section of ENG 303, a gateway course. Since many of these students choose one of our minor programs, enter our teaching program, or do not continue with the program, the entry-level population differs significantly from our senior colloquium population. Our aim is to create a diagnostic that can be administered when students enroll in the major.
• We have provided links on our department website to credible online grammar and usage sites, and we are developing a practice test that students can use to measure their progress.

• If budgets permit, we will offer a two-credit, 200-level course in basic grammar for students who need more preparation for English 320. For the immediate future, students will take this course on a voluntary basis; in our revised curriculum, we may require students with a low score on the entry-level diagnostic to take this course before taking 320. Our diagnostic test as well as the students’ own self-reports in the exit surveys suggest that many students enter the program with minimal knowledge of grammar.

• We are incorporating more grammar and editing instruction courses other than ENG 320.

• We will continue to develop our editing test to give us more specific information about skills and knowledge.

5. **How did the department or program make use of the feedback from last year’s assessment?**

Last year’s assessment results informed curricular changes we made this year, including an increased focus on grammar in two courses beyond our grammar course.

As I noted above, this is our year for program review, and information from the assessment reports has been vital for that and for the curricular changes we have agreed on for our Literature program. The new curriculum will be completed Fall quarter. Qualitative and quantitative information from our assessments have shaped our discussion in two ways. First, it has helped us to better align our curriculum with our outcomes. Second, it has also helped us to refine and revise some of those outcomes in department-wide discussions. We will be creating a new assessment plan along with our new curriculum. The new assessment plan will also address what we haven’t learned: we need to recalibrate some assessment instruments in order to more readily identify areas for improvement, and revised outcomes will help us to identify more specifically what we are measuring.