Central Washington University
Assessment of Student Learning
Department and Program Report

Academic Year of Report: 2014  College:  Arts and Humanities
Department: English    Program: English Language and Literature Major

Note: Our Writing Specialization has been a part of the English Language and Literature Major until Fall 2014, when it became a separate Professional and Creative Writing Major. Since we do not yet have students graduating from the new program and since our Senior Colloquium, ENG 489, serves both programs, we will include the writing program in the English Language and Literature major this year. We will have students completing the new major this year and will issue a separate report.

1. What student learning outcomes were assessed this year, and why?

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

We have assessed this outcome in part in previous assessment reports by focusing on one shared genre that all students are required to include in their portfolio, which is the traditional analytical essay on literature. Since we expect students in our writing program to succeed in more than one genre, including professional and creative writing genres, and since many of our Language and Literature students also submit creative writing for their portfolios, we measured the number of students who met or exceeded expectations for more than one genre.

b. Students will acquire lifelong learning skills, a wide-ranging appreciation for literature, and the disposition to read and write critically.

This outcome has been measured through senior surveys in 2011 and 2013. This year, we are reporting on a more indirect, but highly insightful measure, the chair’s meeting with ENG 489 students each quarter. The chair interview is more open-ended and allows us to identify concerns and opportunities that may not be apparent from senior surveys.

2. How were they assessed?

a. Each student taking our Senior Colloquium course submits three papers that are revised extensively during the quarter, and students submit multiple drafts of each paper. To pass the course, students must participate in peer reviews and revision workshops, and the final products must attain at least a “Meets expectations” using either the department rubric for analytical essays or the rubric for creative writing for each submission. Since almost all students in the colloquium ultimately meet expectations, we also measured how many exceeded expectations.

b. Each quarter, the department chair meets with students in each ENG 489 section. Students are asked first to answer three questions in writing:
   
   What in the program has been most effective and fulfilling?
   What in the program is least effective?
   What specific recommendations would you make to improve the program?

The class then discusses their answers as a group, and the chair asks follow-up questions where appropriate.
3. What was learned?

a. Most students are able to produce work that meets expectations in more than one genre. Out of 43 students in four sections, 39 met expectations in more than one genre:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expectations in more than one genre</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exceeds expectations</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meets expectations</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not meet expectations</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total students</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three students who submitted only analytical papers produced portfolios that exceeded expectations for that genre.

b. Although no attempt was made to quantify student responses, some strengths, weaknesses, and suggestions for improvement come up repeatedly.

- One notable observation students made about what they found effective in the program is the opportunity to do peer reviews. Although there were some concerns that workshops and peer reviews do not always work well because other students do not respond productively, on the whole students found it very helpful in improving their writing. There was a suggestion that the department offer a one- or two-credit course similar to ENG 489 where students could have the opportunity to get feedback from other students on papers or work they are doing for classes during their program, and not just at the end. Students appreciated the peer reviews they did in some literature classes and in the workshops in writing classes, but they would also like feedback from outside of those classes. The fact that they want more feedback suggests that they are developing a professional attitude toward writing that will serve them in the future.
- Students frequently remark that they appreciate the variety of courses and reading in the program, and transfer students often find it more diverse than their previous programs. The fact that they appreciate the wide range suggests that we are meeting this outcome.
- Students were frustrated by their inability to get necessary courses at the time or quarter most convenient for them to take them, or to pursue particular topics they are interested in. This has been an ongoing complaint but was perhaps more frequent this year. Although these comments may address other strategic goals more than learning outcomes, we do want students to be able to pursue particular interests.
- Some students were concerned about the timing of the Lion Rock readings. Since attending the readings is mandatory for some classes, the evening readings sometimes interfere with work schedules or cause hardships for students who commute by bus from Yakima. We do not want to create barriers since the readings help develop their approach to reading, writing, and literature outside of the classroom.
- A new concern from writing students is that too much reading is required for literature courses. Some students do not feel that the expectation of two hours of homework for each classroom hour, plus an additional three hours outside class for five-credit courses that meet four times a week, is reasonable.

4. What will the department or program do as a result of that information?
Results for both outcomes will be presented to the Undergraduate and Writing Specialization committees for discussion, and they will make recommendations to the department for curricular changes. The results will also be presented to the department as a whole and to the Dean of Arts and Humanities.

a. A more specific assessment is needed to determine whether students can meet expectations in more than two genres. Since the Professional and Creative Writing program is now a major, it may be desirable to require a different kind of final portfolio for students in that program, or to use additional courses for assessment. Budget realities would make it difficult to offer a new capstone course dedicated to the writing program except for the online students, but it may be possible to continue to mix students from both programs. A rubric for professional and technical writing is also needed. If the writing portfolio is changed to require more variety in writing, we may want to consider requiring more analytical work for Language and Literature majors.

b. The exit meeting results suggest questions we should address more formally in next year’s senior survey. We are discussing creating a one-credit course that would allow for more peer editing and feedback. Although offering more sections is not an option in the current budget climate, we can address the students’ concerns about scheduling in part through advising, careful scheduling, and more advance notice of the specific topics of our courses. Our current program relies on umbrella courses with special topics, and we will try to give students more advance notice of the topics.

While we are not likely to want to reduce reading loads simply because students do not want to spend enough time on reading outside of class, we can perhaps do more to help writing students understand how that reading helps them develop their writing.

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

Assessment data has regularly indicated that some students need more instruction and practice in mastering grammar and writing conventions, and some students felt unprepared for ENG 320, English Grammar. Last year, we created a two-credit ENG 220, Grammar for Writers, which would provide necessary review for students who are less prepared. Budget concerns make it difficult to offer the course since it is not required, but it was offered during the Summer 2014 session. In response to concerns about the students’ ability to write thesis-driven arguments, more emphasis has been put on writing instruction in some of our literature courses. Although students get substantial instruction in writing analytical arguments in our gateway courses, ENG 302 and ENG 303, regular review should help improve writing skills.

6. Questions or suggestions concerning Assessment of Student Learning at Central Washington University: