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

Students in our M.A. Literature program have three options for final assessments: an exam, a thesis, or a creative project. We have assessed student writing in exams in past years, but not yet theses or creative projects. We assessed two outcomes related to writing and the application of theory:

General Graduate Outcome 1: Graduate students will synthesize and apply concepts from multiple theoretical approaches and perspectives.

General Graduate Outcome 2: Graduate students will demonstrate their mastery of academic writing and the discourse of English Studies or TESOL.

Assessing these outcomes will help us identify areas where students may need more instruction.

2. **How were they assessed?**

Since we did not have a completed thesis during the review period, we assessed students in ENG 588, Thesis Colloquium. Students have typically taken this course in the fall of their second year in the program, and they complete a prospectus for their thesis. The assessment measures their skills and knowledge midway through the program. Six students, who were enrolled in ENG 588 for Fall 2014, were assessed using five criteria:

1. Understanding theoretical approaches to literature.
2. Making connections between things that they have been taught in different classes.
4. Ability to perceive weaknesses in their own writing and the writing of others.
5. Ability to offer critiques and feedback collaboratively and productively.

The first three criteria apply to Outcome 1 and partly two Outcome 2, and the final two apply to Outcome 2. Since the prospectus is an intermediate, rather than final sample of writing, we assessed their mastery of the academic writing process more than their mastery of an academic product.

3. **What was learned?**

This year’s cohort was very successful in the writing process, but some were less successful in synthesizing and applying theory.
Students were less strong in understanding theoretical approaches and in the synthesis of approaches and perspectives. The instructor felt that this particular cohort was weaker than past cohorts. They were stronger in making connections between classes, but two still did not meet expectations. Students will likely be more effective in these areas at the end of their programs, but the intermediate assessment raises some concerns for Outcome 1.

In terms of the writing process, students were very effective. These results may not be reliable predictors for success in their final writing projects, but they suggest that they have mastered a skill that will serve them well in the future. All six are teaching assistants, which means that they have both been trained in and have taught methods for effective feedback and collaboration.

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

Results for both outcomes will be presented to the Graduate Committee for discussion, and they will make recommendations to the department for any curricular changes. The results will also be presented to the department as a whole and to the Dean of Arts and Humanities.

The results for Outcome 1 suggest that students would benefit from more exposure to theory and more opportunities to synthesize concepts. Students take an introductory course that includes theoretical approaches, and they also take a course in criticism and theory (ENG 518). However, for budgetary reasons, ENG 518 is only offered every other year, which means that some students do not take it until their second year. Our graduate literature seminars should perhaps more on applying and synthesizing theoretical concepts.

The results for Outcome 2 do not suggest a need for curricular changes, and they underscore the value of teaching assistantships. However, we also need to assess final products for a full picture of student writing skills. Past experience suggests that some of the ENG 588 students will opt for exams rather than a thesis, and one is doing a creative project. The next assessment should be for theses, and we need to develop a way of assessing creative projects in terms of program outcomes.

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

The Graduate Committee is working on revised outcomes and on assessments. This year’s approach using ENG 588 as a site for assessment was prompted by past assessment information.

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