

Assessment Progress Report for 2008: English Department, Plans #14 and #14a

PROGRAM NAME: English. DEGREE: Bachelor of Arts. PLAN NUMBER: 14 (with 14a, BA English, Secondary Education Track, mostly at the end). DEPARTMENT: English. CONTACTS: Steve Anderson and Zabelle Stodola. E-MAIL ADDRESSES: [wsanderson@ualr.edu](mailto:wsanderson@ualr.edu) and [kzstodola@ualr.edu](mailto:kzstodola@ualr.edu)

1. Student learning goals addressed this year:

In revising for this year, the department identified 5 learning goals for all majors (a 6th goal applies only to students in the Secondary Education program).

**Goal #1.** Graduates from our program will read and be able to discuss major and exemplary literary works (which experts call a canon) that represent significant applications of literature in the English language. They should also understand the historical, psychological, cultural, and aesthetic background of the canon.

**Goal #2.** Graduates from our program will read and be able to discuss important works by writers that represent diversity, especially in British and American literature (women and writers of color, for example).

**Goal #3.** Graduates from our program will achieve and demonstrate a significant level of literacy, including interpreting and analyzing texts.

**Goal #4.** Graduates from our program will acquire sound written and oral communication skills through the practice of writing and revising, and through studying texts. Those students who take the creative writing track will develop strong creative writing skills and be able to produce good prose and poetry, and those who minor in linguistics will show appropriate knowledge of language use, history, and grammatical analysis

**Goal #5.** Graduates from our program will develop research skills so that they can retrieve, analyze, and present data from electronic databases, libraries, and other sources, including field work, and use information ethically.

**Goal #6,** focuses on pedagogy and pertains only to students completing the Secondary Education Minor. While the additional Goal #6 is included on the Portfolio Assessment Sheet (which we refer to later), we score it only for students in the Secondary Education program.

Given the depth and subcomponents of the goals, the department has established a three-year rotation in order to review each goal thoroughly. In this the first year of the rotation (assessment for 2007, the current year), we assess Goals #1 and #2. These goals are considered together as they represent the knowledge base of our field. In the second year (using data to be gathered in 2008), we will focus on Goals #3 and #4. As these goals

cover analysis and communication of results, they represent skills development. In the third year (using data to be gathered in 2009), we will focus on Goal #5, which is the research component of the program. As research in any field involves, more and more, computers and work on websites, we see it as continuing to grow and develop (at least more rapidly than the areas represented by the other goals); consequently, we leave it for last in the rotation cycle in order to have more time to establish clearer rubrics.

2. Learning outcomes/objects for those goals addressed this year:

Goal # 1: Knowledge of the Canon

**The student will achieve**

**Outcome #1** Knowledge of literary periods and movements

**Outcome #2** Knowledge of authors' backgrounds

**Outcome #3** Knowledge of developments in genres

**Outcome #4** Awareness of exemplary works

Goal # 2: Contextualizing Texts

**The student will achieve**

**Outcome #1** Awareness of cultural diversity

**Outcome #2** Awareness of historical developments

**Outcome #3** Awareness of social milieu

**Outcome #4** Awareness of aesthetic values

Goal # 3: Interpreting Texts

**The student will achieve**

**Outcome #1** An understanding of the range of critical approaches

**Outcome #2** An ability to read texts for meaning

**Outcome #3** Knowledge of terms and conventions

**Outcome #4** An ability to construct a critical argument

Goal # 4: Developing Communication Skills

The student will achieve

**Outcome #1** An ability to use the formats for writing about literature

**Outcome #2** Development of an effective writing style

**Outcome #3** An ability to complete effective oral presentations

Goal # 5: Information Technology

**The student will be able**

**Outcome #1** To use email and communicate via a listserv

**Outcome #2** To produce standard documents on a word processor

**Outcome #3** To navigate to and access web pages

**Outcome #4** To use library tech resources for literature research

Goal # 6: Pedagogy

**The student will achieve**

**Outcome #1** An ability to design appropriate lesson plans

**Outcome #2** An ability to implement a teaching performance

**Outcome #3** An ability to develop a sequence of writing assignments

**Outcome #4** An ability to present a critique of visual images

3. Courses and activities where assessed:

Because our assessment instrument is a student portfolio, all upper-level English courses, both those that are required as a part of the 16-hour major program core and those that are upper-level English electives, of which a typical major must take 17 hours, entail written assignments that address one or more of the program's stated learning goals. As a result, all writing assignments in upper-level English courses are subject to being scrutinized as fulfilling the standards dictated by the program's stated assessment goals and learning outcomes.

4. Methods used:

Since 1999, the department's major assessment tool has been the portfolio that students assemble while taking the one-credit capstone course English 4199 (Seminar in Career Perspectives). This is offered at least once a semester during the regular academic year. We adopted this course because we needed to communicate more effectively with students about assessment. English 4199 has been a required course for declared majors since 1999. During this course students (A.) prepare a representative portfolio of papers in keeping with guidelines for preparing the portfolio and (B.) fill out self-assessment forms concerning what they have learned and what suggestions they have for program improvements.

Step A., preparing a portfolio, ensures that all upper-level English course, both those that are required as a part of the 16-hour major program core and those that are upper-level ENGL electives, of which a typical major must take 17 hours, entail written assignments that address one or more of the program's stated learning goals. As a result, written assignments in all upper-level English courses are subject to being rigorously reviewed in accordance with the standards dictated by the program's stated assessment goals and learning objectives, since any such assignment may end up as an artifact in a student portfolio.

Step B., meanwhile, compels students to assess assessment, as if it were, by reflecting on their experiences in achieving or failing to achieve our stated goals. Specific, directed questions on the self-assessment form measure students' knowledge and understanding of key information and concepts. The learning objectives are detailed in the instructions provided to students as they begin preparing their portfolio. Specifically, they are presented with the guidelines for our determining how well a particular portfolio fulfills the stated outcomes for each goal. In essence, if we produce students who cannot produce the requisite artifacts indicating that they have achieved these outcomes, then there can be no more certain indicator that our program is failing to fulfill its own stated goals ---

thereby making certain that the portfolio serves the very purpose of the entire assessment process, that being to enable us as faculty to make course and curriculum corrections as the needs be. Furthermore, this process not only lets faculty assess themselves by overseeing the students' preparation of their portfolios and completion of the self-assessment form, but also encourages students to reflect on their course of study in English, allows students a formal feedback mechanism to suggest improvements in the major, and provides the opportunity to discuss other professional concerns as students approach graduation (e.g., applying to graduate school; taking the GRE, LSAT, and MCAT; searching for professional positions, especially on the internet; preparing a job letter and resume; and interviewing).

Our assessment cycle is an ongoing process of long-established procedure and both self- and external evaluation, implemented and practicably enforced in every upper-level English course by virtue of the portfolio culture that has been established, and one, too, that is reviewed on an annual basis in keeping with institutional guidelines and requirements. In specific terms, each semester, the instructor of the capstone course, ENGL 4199, collects the portfolios and gives them to the Assessment Committee. Advisers and faculty teaching upper-level English courses alert students to the portfolio assessment requirements by including a written reminder on syllabi and by reminding them verbally. Thus students know that they should save papers on disk so that they can use them later when assembling the portfolio. The portfolios themselves are put together during English 4199 after class discussion about how best the portfolios might reflect students' knowledge, critical thinking about and interpretation of literature, research, and communication skills. Preparing the portfolio also provides the students with a final product and a sense of closure as they approach graduation. Two Assessment Committee members then score each portfolio according to criteria on a standardized worksheet, and a third member settles discrepancies. For each item, readers enter a numerical rating as well as a brief verbal assessment. This accords with recommendations for scoring from outside consultants. Furthermore, the department possesses several procedures for maintaining reliability in assessing the portfolios. Since 1999, Assessment Committee members have been elected on one- and two-year staggered terms to provide continuity. The fact that half the department has served on the Assessment Committee and half has taught English 4199 reflects our commitment to assessment. For validity, the department relies on the substantial amount of literature citing the portfolio method as particularly appropriate for assessing English programs.

Our primary stakeholders are, of course, our students. In keeping with a culture of assessment's having taken deep root in our program and aware, too, of the critical place that clear course objectives have in relation to student writing assignments as the principal outcome for program assessment purposes, our individual courses have as a result become more and more organized with the students' needs for a viable portfolio in mind. Furthermore, now that the Secondary Education certification program in English Language Arts itself requires an elaborate assessment instrument to be in place in time for the upcoming NCATE accreditation review in the fall of 2009, faculty have become even more mindful of correlating learning objectives with student outcomes in all of our

program courses. Indeed, assessment issues have become a regular item on the agenda for department meetings for the past several years and more.

As a result of these further developments, we have now added Pedagogy as a new learning goal to our assessment process.

#### 5. What are the assessment findings? How did you analyze them?

Thirteen students completed portfolios in the Spring 2008 capstone course (English 4199), and another twelve completed portfolios in the Fall 2008 term.

In preparing portfolios, students use three forms. First, “Guidelines for Preparing the Portfolio” (Attachment #1) instructs students on what papers to include. In the “Self-Assessment Form” (Attachment #2), students identify the courses in which they developed their skills within the curriculum. This form also has questions in general, asking, for example, for comments on the quality of advising. In the third form (Attachment #3, newly added in this assessment cycle), students review their own portfolio for its completeness in fulfilling the portfolio requirement. The purpose of the required form is to involve students in the assessment of their own portfolios). With a fourth form (Attachment #4), simply identified as a “scoring sheet,” faculty review and rate the portfolios. This form is a revision from 2005, as the goals were revised in 2006.

Numerical scoring:

Student performance on the goals chosen (#3 and #4, as explained earlier) was scored on a three-point basis: 3—knowledge exceeds expectation; 2—knowledge meets expectation; 1—knowledge does not meet expectation.

For the Spring term of 2008 (and 13 portfolios), the average scoring on Goal #3 (Interpreting Texts) was 2.4 (on the three-point scale); the average for goal #4 (Developing Communication Skills) was 2.63. In the Fall term of 2008 (and 12 portfolios), the average scoring on Goal #3 was 2.30; the average on Goal #4 was 2.52. In both terms, only two students failed to score an average of at least 2.0 (or “knowledge meets expectation”).

The increase in average score from the Spring term to the Fall term is probably not statistically significant. On the other hand, 2008 was only the second year we used the enhanced self-assessment form. These new forms, by their nature, invite students to engage in more self-reflection than previously required. The higher scoring may grow out of the scorer’s perception that the papers, carefully organized by the student, are stronger—an individual bias that would be difficult to eliminate altogether but should disappear in subsequent semesters). This argument gains added credibility when we consider that the scoring of one of the goals assessed--#4, Developing Communication Skills—would be susceptible to rhetorical arrangement. That is, the scorer might see the individual pieces gaining effectiveness because of their placement in the portfolio. However, we did cross-check the averages on #1 and #2 this year against those for last

year (the committee gathered and analyzed data for all the five goals, even though we focused our comments this year on Goals #3 and #4). This year, we scored #1 and #2 at 2.44 and 2.5 (for the yearly average). Last year, we scored the same goals at 2.56 and 2.6. This suggests, perhaps overall, a slight upward movement in scoring from the Spring to the Fall that is across the board.

As always, we value the individual comments that students make in their portfolios, as they provide the kind of specificity that allows for change and correction. Verna Collins comments that “This department has the . . . most caring and dedicated professors I have encountered on this campus.” “My overall assessment of the effectiveness and usefulness of the education and training I received as a UALR English major is immeasurable.” Ashley Duncan observes that the English faculty are “very passionate, interesting professors, who genuinely love what they do.” Ashley Scott observes that “Aside from achieving the technical requirements, I believe my portfolio expresses the amazing impact the English staff have had on me.” On the Cooper Program, she notes “an enormously positive experience.” Rebecca Webb says that “Not only have I taken amazing courses during my time here at UALR, I have received the best guidance from the English Department.” Ciara Adams observes that “I am less impressed by the writing I have learned from the English program and more impressed by the critical thinking skills.” “The William G. Cooper Program has been my favorite part of being an English major at UALR.”

#### 6. Conclusions drawn, decisions made, and stakeholders involved:

We are especially pleased that the new self-evaluation form continues to prove its effectiveness. As we commented last year, students have been more than willing to review their portfolios carefully and critically in assessing their achievement in the program.

Placing more emphasis on enrolling students in the department’s gateway course—Approaches to Literature (English 3330)—earlier in their program continues to prove an effective strategy. For the Spring term of 2009 we scheduled Approaches to Literature in the evening, continuing a practice of rotating core major courses at times convenient for non-traditional students.

#### Stakeholders:

In his capstone course (English 4199), Dr. Minnick scheduled a variety of visitors, including grant writers, a public relations specialist, creative writers, and others. These are valuable interchanges, as current students are made aware of career and social opportunities after graduation.

The Cooper Honors program held an honors orientation and lunch for Cooper students early in the Fall term. At the end of each academic year, the Cooper program holds a picnic, open to all English majors and faculty, in which students and teachers can meet

informally. More generally, the department participated in several orientation meetings sponsored by the university.

The department held a retirement celebration for Dr. Russell Murphy, inviting all former and current English majors to participate.

The Shakespeare Scene Festival, held in March each year, continues to draw to campus many high school English teachers, many of them our graduates.

Comments:

Our assessment this year has alerted us to several developing issues. One student notes that “I have nothing bad to say about the English Department at UALR other than it seems to be shrinking.” Compared to “other colleges and universities in the area, UALR is beginning to fall behind in the amount of English courses being offered.” Another student has indicated a desire for more variety in course offerings. This situation has developed as we have faculty retiring or moving to administrative duties (which in both cases removes them from the classroom) who are not replaced. One solution is to develop on-line courses for the core curriculum, which opens up the possibility of moving experienced faculty from the lower-division core requirements to offering more courses in their specialty.

One student has asked for more on-campus creative writing, as the student didn’t feel that “that sort of class should be taught solely on-line.”

We have seen requests for better communication between the Department of English and the Department of Writing and Rhetoric. While we have made great strides to this end by co-offering the teaching of literature (English 4202) and the teaching of writing (Rhetoric 4202) as a unified course, we still have to consider continued interchange.

Other requests are more varied as well as more difficult to effectively meet. One student suggested more night courses (though we have a fairly varied offering) while another complained about conflicting information from advisors (which is always possible in any program and against which we must maintain vigilance).

### **B.A. in English, Secondary Education Track, Plan #14a**

In 2008, 25 students provided portfolios in Career Perspectives. Three of these students are English Education minors and one has continued in the M.Ed. program for English Language Arts at UALR. Thus, four students, in one capacity or another, enrolled in Career Perspectives have decided to become English teachers. One of these students has successfully passed Praxis I and will enroll in Block III in Fall '09, upon successful completion of Praxis II. Two of these students are yet to take Praxis I. The graduate student has passed Praxis I.

Each student (including the student who is now in graduate school) was scored holistically by two independent raters across five dimensions using a Likert-type scale (0-3). Additionally, four outcomes were scored under each dimension. The average total across dimension # 1 for the four students was 2.6; the average total across dimension #2 for the four students was 2.65; the average total across dimension #3 for the four students was 2.70; the average total across dimension #4 for the four students was 2.58; the average total across dimension #5 for four students was 2.49. The average total of the five dimensions for the four students was 2.59.

Taking only the three declared English Education minors enrolled in Career Perspectives into account, the average total across dimension # 1 for the three students was 2.62; the average total across dimension #2 for the three students was 2.62; the average total across dimension #3 for the three students was 2.73; the average total across dimension #4 for the three students was 2.58; the average total across dimension #5 for the three students was 2.49. The average total of the five dimensions for the three students was 2.6.

**Note:** None of these three students have completed enough of their Chalk & Wire portfolios to upload them; however, of the four students, two students have submitted materials for rating in another English course, Secondary English Methods (ENGL 4202/RHET 4202). Both candidates in that course **exceeded expectations** on each of the four outcomes in criteria six: Pedagogy: #1, an ability to design appropriate lesson plans; # 2, an ability to implement a teaching performance; #3, an ability to develop a sequence of writing assignments; #4, an ability to present a critique of visual images. One of the undergraduate English Education minor candidates is yet to enroll in ENGL 4202/RHET 4202, and, at the time of this assessment, has not been admitted to the COE Blocks. All English Education candidates will be reassessed in Chalk & Wire at the conclusion of his or her Block III experience, and each of these criteria (Pedagogy) will be reexamined at that time.

Finally, anecdotal comments suggest that English Education minors believe that they are being well advised. One student wrote, "I feel that the advising I received in the English department was very well done; I was able to plan the classes needed in the best way in order to graduate in a reasonable amount of time." This same student continued with the following: "Overall, I would say the education in the English department and the classes that are required for an English major are effective in providing a varied approach to the discipline, ensuring that English majors are well-rounded, even though their focus may be on a specific area such as poetry, etc." Another student wrote: "I think a good amount of my education from UALR is useful and effective. Overall, I learned many important and valuable things." A final student wrote: "My overall assessment of the effectiveness and usefulness of the education and training I received as a UALR English major is immeasurable. There is no way to sum up what this education has meant to me."



## [Attachment #1]

### UALR ENGLISH DEPARTMENT ASSESSMENT GUIDELINES FOR PREPARING THE PORTFOLIO

For your portfolio, you will be pulling together materials from your course of study in English.

You are not being graded for this exercise. Your record will reflect only the fact that you submitted a portfolio. The purpose of the portfolio is to illustrate for an audience outside UALR how well the English major is doing its job. The program is what is being graded.

If you are in the William G. Cooper, Jr, Honors Program in English, we encourage you to include your Honors project as one of your papers.

IN PREPARING THE PORTFOLIO FOR LITERARY STUDIES, you should observe the following requirements:

- Each portfolio should contain six papers from your previous course work
- At least one paper should come from a class in English Literature and at least one should come from a class in American Literature
- Two of the papers should be research papers of at least 10 pages, with documentation
- Two of the papers should be reading or position papers of 2-6 pages
- Two papers are your choice.

IN PREPARING THE PORTFOLIO FOR CREATIVE WRITING, you should observe the following requirements:

- NOTE: ONLY STUDENTS WHO ARE ON THE CREATIVE WRITING TRACK OR WHO ARE MINORING IN CREATIVE WRITING MAY CHOOSE THIS OPTION
- Section One (total of four papers): one paper from a class in English literature and one from a class in American Literature
- One research paper
- One position or reading paper
- Section Two: choose one of the following options:
  - two short stories or chapters of a book
  - 5 - 10 poems
  - one short story or chapter and 3 - 5 poems

NOTE: When possible, include a copy of the original assignment from each paper in the portfolio.

[Attachment #2]

**SELF-ASSESSMENT FORM**  
UALR Department of English

**SECTION A**

Specific Courses:

Please answer the following questions in assessing your development within the discipline. Please refer to specific courses and/or professors. Please mention specific topics or areas of study, and/or specific activities such as term paper or research project assignments.

1. Give examples from two different courses that led to knowledge of major movements, periods, and authors in British, American, and other literatures.
  
2. Give an example from a course that led to a general knowledge of the grammatical structure of English and/or the historical development of the language.
  
3. Give examples from two different courses that led to a working knowledge of literary terms, the major reference tools, and literary criticism and scholarship.
  
4. Give examples from two different courses that led to your ability to think, discuss, and write critically about literature.
  
5. Give examples from two different courses that led to a broadening or change in your intellectual interests.

**SECTION B**

General Comments:

1. Comment on the advising you received from administration, staff, and faculty.
  
2. Comment on the encouragement you received from teachers and administrators.
  
3. What is your overall assessment of the effectiveness and usefulness of the education and training you received as a UALR English major?
  
4. If you have participated in any aspect of the William G. Cooper, Jr, Honors Program in English (e.g. taking a Cooper seminar, working on a Cooper project), please comment on your experiences.
  
5. What would you change to make the experience of a UALR English major better?
  
6. To what degree does this portfolio of papers show that you have achieved the department's goals?

**[Attachment #3]****Portfolio Review**

1. Which papers demonstrate your knowledge of the canon and its historical continuity? Cite particular portions of your selected paper(s), making sure to provide appropriate support and explanation. Please describe the reasons for the selection of your papers in this category.
  
2. Which papers demonstrate an evidenced understanding of cultural, historical, psychological, political or aesthetic background and knowledge of literature? Cite particular portions of your selected paper(s), making sure to provide appropriate support and explanation. Please describe the reasons for the selection of your papers in this category.
  
3. Which papers demonstrate an evidenced ability to organize, analyze, and interpret texts in a competent written form? Cite particular portions of your selected paper(s), making sure to provide appropriate support and evidence. Please describe the reasons for the selection of papers in this category.
  
4. Which papers provide an awareness of the various critical approaches to literature and/or language study. Cite particular sections from your papers as support and evidence, indicating ways of working with, interpreting, and analyzing texts using specific critical lenses to do so. Please describe the reasons for the selections of papers in this category
  
5. Which papers show a distinct awareness and understanding of cultural diversity from authors in texts (for example, evidence of exposure to African American Literature, Native American Literature, Chicano/a Literature)? Cite particular examples from your papers that provide support and evidence indicating exposure and understanding particular to working with multi-cultural texts. Please describe how your work with multi-cultural forms of literature has contributed to your appreciation, knowledge, and understanding.
  
6. Creative writing skills (if applicable):
  
7. Understanding of linguistics or history of English (if applicable):

## [Attachment #4]

Semester \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**Goal # 1: Knowledge of the Canon****Outcome #1** Knowledge of literary periods and movements \_\_\_\_\_**Outcome #2** Knowledge of authors' backgrounds \_\_\_\_\_**Outcome #3** Knowledge of developments in genres \_\_\_\_\_**Outcome #4** Awareness of exemplary works \_\_\_\_\_**Subtotal**\_\_\_\_\_**Goal # 2: Contextualizing Texts****Outcome #1** Awareness of cultural diversity \_\_\_\_\_**Outcome #2** Awareness of historical developments \_\_\_\_\_**Outcome #3** Awareness of social milieu \_\_\_\_\_**Outcome #4** Awareness of aesthetic values \_\_\_\_\_**Subtotal**\_\_\_\_\_**Goal # 3: Interpreting Texts****Outcome #1** An understanding of the range of critical approaches \_\_\_\_\_**Outcome #2** An ability to read texts for meaning \_\_\_\_\_**Outcome #3** Knowledge of terms and conventions \_\_\_\_\_**Outcome #4** An ability to construct a critical argument \_\_\_\_\_**Subtotal**\_\_\_\_\_**Goal # 4: Developing Communication Skills****Outcome #1** An ability to use the formats for writing about literature \_\_\_\_\_**Outcome #2** Development of an effective writing style \_\_\_\_\_**Outcome #3** An ability to complete effective oral presentations \_\_\_\_\_**Outcome #4** An ability to observe correct conventions \_\_\_\_\_**Subtotal**\_\_\_\_\_**Goal # 5: Information Technology****Outcome #1** To use email and communicate via a listserv \_\_\_\_\_**Outcome #2** To produce standard documents on a word processor \_\_\_\_\_**Outcome #3** To navigate to and access web pages \_\_\_\_\_**Outcome #4** To use library tech resources for literature research \_\_\_\_\_**Subtotal**\_\_\_\_\_**Goal # 6: Pedagogy (ELA Candidates only)****Outcome #1** An ability to design appropriate lesson plans \_\_\_\_\_**Outcome #2** An ability to implement a teaching performance \_\_\_\_\_**Outcome #3** An ability to develop a sequence of writing assignments \_\_\_\_\_**Outcome #4** An ability to present a critique of visual images \_\_\_\_\_**Subtotal**\_\_\_\_\_**Total**\_\_\_\_\_

1- does not meet expectation; 2- meets expectation; 3-exceeds expectation

**Portfolio Average**\_\_\_\_\_

