

2016-17 Literature Assessment

1 July 2017

In addition to the learning goals of the core curriculum requirements of all English majors, the English Literature major has the following specific four learning outcome goals.

Goals and Mission of the English Literature Major

Millikin's English Literature Major continues to prepare students for a host of career options, among them graduate studies in English literature, publishing and editing, and virtually any career that asks for clarity of thinking and expression. Through the core English department curriculum, students gain a solid foundation in the literary traditions, profiting from learning side-by-side with all English majors and the emphasis of disciplinary specialty each major brings to the study of literature. Beyond this solid foundation, English literature majors gain advanced skills in the literary traditions, practice with theoretical methods, and writing critical prose. With the addition of EN 202 Writing About Literature, our majors come together early in their degree pursuit to explore literary theory and habits of scholarship, using short assignments to familiarize themselves with the varieties of method and practice. The capstone course, EN420, integrates theory and practice by requiring a full research project: a bibliographic study to know the existing scholarship and a scholarly paper to integrate their own reading of literary text(s) with those already published.

Learning Outcome Goals

All English Literature major students will:

- L1. have advanced understanding of a variety of literary genres.
- L2. have advanced understanding of literatures' historical, intellectual, and cultural contexts.
- L3. be able to apply literary criticism and theory in the interpretation of texts.
- L4. write a near-professional, original work of literary research and scholarship.

Snapshot

The assessment report will provide a brief overview of our curricula, facilities, and faculty/staff.

The Learning Story

The English Literature major has four main phases of instruction and development, emphasizing through all the integration of theory and practice. English Literature majors practice theory throughout the major and so are, by definition, integrating theory and practice.

Majors begin with the EN 202 Writing About Literature course, in which they gain a broad and thorough introduction to the variety of genres, the foundational method of explication, and an overview of literary theories. Students typically learn in groups to tease out meanings and apply methodologies of literary analysis. The current configuration of the course has the students collaborate on a final research project, a substantial casebook. Students come to learn the fundamental methodologies of the discipline.

Literature majors fulfill all English core requirements in the traditions courses: Medieval/Classical Traditions, Major British Authors I & II, Shakespeare, American Literature to 1900, and 20th Century Literature. Beyond these core courses, Literature majors are required to take additional coursework in 300-level genre courses in which they augment their reading in the tradition. These courses begin the advanced practice of applying various methods of literary theory and interpretation. Among those critical theories routinely covered: deconstruction, psychoanalytic, gender/feminist, post-colonial, new historical, and the poetics/aesthetics of Romanticism, Victorianism, Modernism, many of which are either mentioned or directly implied in recent course titles.

The major culminates in the 420 Seminar in Literature, the capstone for Literature majors. Topics in this course are typically focused and prepare students for graduate level and graduate style seminars. The students, typically seniors, apply an in-depth knowledge of critical theory in producing an original work of literary research and scholarship. The Literature major at large, from its introduction (202), through its reading in and practice of literary theory (core and 300-level genre courses), requires the integration of theory and practice. The 420 Seminar asks the students to produce a scholarly essay that integrates existing scholarship and theoretical perspectives with the student's own reading or approach to an examined work(s). By asking the students to produce a near-professional, original work of literary research and scholarship, EN 420 concludes the student's development as a reader, researcher, thinker, and scholar in English literature. In conjunction with EN 420, literature majors also take EN 410: Senior Writing Portfolio, where they compile a portfolio of their writing based on our learning goals.

Assessment Methods

The English Department uses the written portfolio method to assess its learning goals. Portfolios will begin in the freshman year with EN 105, continue with EN 202, and culminate with EN 420. Students will gather in one place work that represents the kind and quality of writing and research they're producing throughout the degree. By having the representative work in one place, student and faculty can gauge student learning in process. The portfolio will remain a touchstone through the degree, and the activity of maintaining and updating it (adding to and substituting new work for old) will encourage students to overtly reassess their old work in light of new learning. The portfolios and the rubrics for evaluating them allow for quantitative assessment of the major. At the end of the Spring semester, English faculty on the Literature Major Assessment Committee review the Senior Literature Portfolios, evaluating the quality of learning demonstrated for each learning goal, using the portfolio essays review rubric.

Portfolio Artifact 1: essay based on genre

Portfolio Artifact 2: essay on literature related to contexts

Portfolio Artifact 3: essay employing literary critical theory

Portfolio Artifact 4: scholarly essay

Students select the essays for inclusion in their portfolio, often as a professionalizing effort to prepare applications for graduate school and to have a portfolio of representative writing at hand. as the artifacts correspond with Literature major learning goals, these artifact essays will come out of the following coursework where faculty prioritize those goals.

Students need not submit artifacts for each goal; a single artifact can fulfill multiple goals. An artifact that fulfills L4, for instance, should also fulfill L2 and L3.

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- L4. write a near-professional, original work of literary research and scholarship

Literature Major Requirements	Literature Major Learning Goals (EN202, EN420 & Three Advanced Genre Courses)			
	L1-understand a variety of literary genres	L2-understand literatures' historical, intellectual & cultural contexts	L3-apply literary criticism & theory in interpretation of texts	L4-write a near-professional work of literary research
English major traditions core	•	•		
EN202 Writing About Literature			•	
Genre Course: EN340 Poetry	•			
Genre Course: EN350 Fiction	•			
Genre Course: EN360 Drama	•			
Genre Option: EN366 Literary History		•		
EN420 Seminar in Literature			•	•

The English Major Committee will use the following rubric for assessing levels of achievement in the sampled portfolios and, by extension, in the English department's achieving its own goals of graduating profession-ready majors.

Senior Literature Portfolio Evaluation Rubric

The Assessment Committee opted to evaluate the portfolio on a 3-point scale to keep our assessment in line with the other majors in the department. Each evaluator will provide a numerical value for each goal, and then those numbers are averaged. Numerical values correspond to the traffic light system:

- 1: Red
- 2: Yellow
- 3: Green

Literature Major Portfolio Evaluation Rubric

	Green (3)	Yellow (2)	Red (1)
Artifact 1: genre essays Related goal: L1	Portfolio includes essays that clearly present knowledge of the inherent and established features of literary genres.	Portfolio includes some essays that present knowledge of genre features and methods of literary genres.	Portfolio includes essays that have difficulty discussing fundamental genre distinctions and their workings.
Artifact 2: essays related to contexts Related goals: L2	Portfolio includes essays that clearly present a range of contextual factors and contributors to text. Essays clearly articulate not only what those factors are, but how they effect authors and the works they produce.	Portfolio includes some essays that demonstrate a knowledge but not a full range of contextual factors and contributors to text. Essays attempt to articulate not only what those factors are, but how they effect authors and the works they produce.	Portfolio includes essays that discuss a limited range of contextual factors influencing authors and the works they produce.
Artifact 3: essays employ critical theory Related goals: L3	Portfolio includes essays that ably and aptly handle critical theory in the interpretation of text. The critical reading makes use of the critical method, more than simply restating the assessments of other scholars.	Portfolio includes essays that attempt to use a critical method in interpreting the text. Essays may make equal use of interpreting and restating the findings of other scholars.	Portfolio includes essays that demonstrate a limited understanding of theoretical application and the way theory can open up a text. Essays rely primarily on a restatement of other scholars' findings.
Artifact 4: Scholarly essay Related goals: L4	Portfolio includes an essay that includes a bibliographic history on the examined work(s) of literature. The essay will voice an approach or a reading of the work(s) that the bibliography doesn't already (in whole or collectively) articulate.	Portfolio includes an essay with a bibliographic history on the examined work(s) of literature. The essay will attempt to voice a new approach or reading.	Portfolio includes an essay with a partial bibliographic history on the examined work(s) of literature. The essay has difficulty voicing a new approach or reading.

Assessment Data

Portfolios of graduating seniors will be assessed each spring semester. Only two of our six graduating literature majors submitted portfolios. Students choose the artifacts that they deem best fit the learning goals, and one artifact can meet more than one goal. As an assessment committee, we take a holistic approach to determining how best the learning goals are met across the whole of the portfolio; for example, if a student were to submit an artifact labeled as an "L1," but L1 were further (or better) demonstrated by another artifact in the portfolio, we take that into consideration.

Portfolio 1

	E1	E2	Avg
L1	3	3	3
L2	3	3	3
L3	3	3	3
L4	3	3	3
Avg	3	3	

Portfolio 2

	E1	E2	Avg
L1	3	2.75	2.88
L2	3	3	3
L3	3	2.75	2.88
L4	2.75	2.5	2.63
Avg	2.94	2.75	

Analysis of Assessment Results

Across the board, the 2017 portfolios were outstanding, demonstrating perhaps the overall strength of the graduating class of Literature majors (five of the six graduated with honors in English). The highest area, as in past years, remains L2, but each of these portfolios (as well as the EN420 essays discussed below), demonstrated a strong understanding and excellence in all categories.

Strengths

L2 remains the strongest of the literature program's goals, which is consistent with previous years. The 2017 portfolios demonstrated competence in multiple categories within each artifact, demonstrating the need/benefit of taking a holistic approach as a committee. This speaks well to our curriculum, which incorporates our learning outcome goals across our curriculum from 200-level courses through to the capstone EN420.

Areas for Improvement

The quality of this year's portfolios were outstanding (and perhaps outliers compared with previous years). The scores earned show little need or room for improvement with these students in particular. However, as discussed in more detail below, as a literature committee, we need to revisit the language of the rubric and goals themselves, to better correspond to the kinds of writing scholars in the field actually do and to what we teach (i.e. critical lenses, scholarship without a formal "bibliographic history," etc.).

Previous Years' Assessments

Goal	2009	2010	2013	2014	2016	2017
L1	2.25	2.5	1.25	1.38	2	2.94
L2	1.75	2	1.75	2.5	2.333	3
L3	2	4	2.5	2.5	1.833	2.94
L4	2	3.5	1.5	1.5	1.666	2.83

EN420 Final Projects:

As an assessment committee, we decided additionally to review the EN420 final projects for the four graduating Literature majors who did not submit a portfolio. We utilized the same rubric, but were only able to assess them as individual artifacts, rather than holistically as described

above. As reflected in the numbers below, the singular artifact presents problems in assessing a student’s command of the learning outcomes, as it relies solely on whether the student framed one particular essay in accordance with all outcomes. For instance, Brangenberg’s project was solid overall, but did not utilize critical theory to any considerable degree, scoring low in L3; similarly, a writer focused on a singular text may not emphasize historical/cultural context to the same degree that an entire portfolio would demonstrate. This shows that single artifacts are not sufficient to assess the overall grasp of the learning goals, and it is essential to continue to collect (and increase the collection of) full portfolios.

	L1*	L2*	L3*	L4*
Brangenberg	2.5/2.5/2.5	2/2/2	1/1/1	2/2/2
Larsen	3/3/3	3/3/3	2.5/2.5/2.5	3/3/3
Seitz	3/3/3	3/2.5/2.75	3/2.5/2.75	3/2/2.5
Walsh	2/2.5/2.25	2/2.5/2.25	1.5/2/1.75	1/1.5/1.25
Overall Avg.	2.69	2.5	2	2.19

*E1/E2/Avg.

Improvement Strategies

1. Discussion and Revision of Learning Goals

The English Department as a whole, and the Literature Program specifically, needs revisit the established goals. Our course offerings and Core Requirements for the major work at cross purposes. Advanced literature courses are ostensibly genre-based. The core is history-based, and the advanced literature courses fulfill areas of the core requirements.

The Department needs to determine the validity of genre studies, particularly in light of the state of the profession. Further, we need to be clearer about our definition of “genre,” particularly as we transition into teaching more “noncanonical” and “nontraditional” texts (film, digital literature, etc.). Additionally, each of the learning goals needs to have its rubric revised to reflect what the profession expects. L4, for instance, needs to include much beyond a “bibliographic history.” The emphasis on scholarly sources for L4 is merited; the 2017 committee continues to question how a literature review (the basic form of the green rating) relates to the official wording of the goal: “write a near-professional, original work of literary research and scholarship,” since many professional literary articles do not include a formal literature review (rather, they do this as a statement of lack of scholarship, to situate themselves within a community of specific ideas, present scholarship as further-reading footnotes, or use scholarly comments throughout their own analysis). Moreover, far more goes into a “near-professional” piece of literary criticism than scholarship—methodology, preciseness of language, argumentation, use of evidence, etc. While a thorough knowledge of scholarship is essential for a scholarly essay, the rubric should include other criteria as well.

2. Portfolio Assembly/Collection

The 2017 literature assessment continues to demonstrate the value and importance of collecting entire portfolios of student work. Further, while this year’s scores are unusually high, they only

reflect 1/3 of the graduating Literature majors (2 of 6). Students are showing a greater degree of awareness of the learning goals, perhaps seeing them emphasized throughout their coursework in course syllabi, assignments, and class discussions. However, we *must* improve the collection rates of these portfolios moving forward, in order to gain a full and accurate picture of the state of our program.

One mechanism for this might be requiring the portfolio – perhaps even with the addition of a reflective piece (an L5?) – to be the final, required outcome of the Literature majors enrolled in EN410: Senior Writing Portfolio, which we now require of all Literature majors. As with the IN series of classes, this could be submitted as a formal requirement for the course itself, and subsequently uploaded to an “artifact collection site” on Moodle or elsewhere for this committee. Not only would this greatly improve collection rates, but the course context surrounding the assignment could help clarify the motivations for the portfolio and the relationship of the artifacts to the learning outcome goals, as well as to the overall experience of the major, from freshman year to graduation.