

Millikin University
College of Arts & Sciences
English Literature Major Assessment Report

October 9, 2006

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. Fall 05 students created a casebook for Helena Viramontes' novel *Under the Feet of Jesus*. Students interviewed the author, wrote a contextual background, gathered a full bibliography of existing reviews and critical articles, and examined the novel through a number of critical lenses. Students come to learn the fundamental methodologies of the discipline.

Literature majors fulfill all English core requirements in the traditions courses: Classical Traditions, Major British Authors I & II, 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.

Assessment Methods

The English Department uses two methods for assessing the Literature Major, Exit Interviews and Portfolios. Each method samples different aspects of Literature Majors' experience.

1. Exit Interviews

The Exit Interviews are intended as a reflective exercise for the majors and a qualitative assessment method for the English Department, encouraging graduating literature majors to share with faculty their impressions of their own learning process. From these interviews, the Department can gauge the student expectations of the major weighed against their actual experience, detecting the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum.

The exit interviews focus on the following questions. These same questions are circulated to students in advance. *Instructions to students:* By conducting exit interviews, we hope to give graduating seniors in the literature major an opportunity to give us feedback on our program and their experiences in it. We will use your comments to help us continue to develop or revise our program so that it meets the needs of Millikin students. In order to use our time together most efficiently, we request that you come to your interview ready to discuss the following questions:

1. Why did you become an English major? What expectations did you bring to the major? Did your experience in the major fulfill those expectations? Explain.
2. How would you describe your growth as a reader since you have entered the program? If you can, give a specific example or two to clarify your description.
3. How would you describe your growth as a writer since you have entered the program? Give specific examples where possible. How has writing been addressed in your upper-level courses? Could the department better serve its majors as writers? How?
4. Think about the papers or projects you completed that best demonstrate the kinds of knowledge and abilities you have gained in the literature major. Briefly describe these and tell us what kinds of learning they represented.
5. Have you had any experiences outside of the classroom that you think may have contributed to your growth as a reader and writer? What were they? (Consider experiences with *Collage* or the *Dec*, internships, conferences, interaction with visiting speakers/writers, etc.)
6. How would you describe your facility with important critical theories informing our field? What experiences have you had with theory at Millikin?
7. Which core requirements in the major did you find most useful? Would you recommend any changes?
8. Are there any courses you wish had been offered or that you *could* have taken? If so, what are they?
9. Describe your facility in reading and writing about the different genres of poetry, fiction, nonfiction, and drama. Do you feel you've been given sufficient exposure to/instruction in each genre?
10. How would you feel about the addition of an international literature requirement to the major?
11. How do you think the literature major and the department's academic culture compare to other majors and programs at Millikin in terms of rigor and quality?
12. What are your plans post-graduation? How well has the major prepared you to meet your goals?

2. Literature Major Portfolios

Portfolios will begin in the sophomore year as part of the EN 202 Writing About Literature course. 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 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.

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

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

	Green	Yellow	Red
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. Spring 2007 will mark the first opportunity to assess graduating seniors who have progressed through the major under the current outcome goals and assessment methods.

In an effort to assess our early efforts and gather some field experience in artifact collection and assessment, the English department ran a pilot of the assessment methods in Spring 2006.

Literature Portfolios 2006

Four literature majors were asked to submit complete portfolios in this assessment method's first year. Three of those portfolios were evaluated.

	Student 1	Student 2 (Sophomore)	Student 3
Artifact 1: genre essays Related goal: L1	Low Yellow	High Yellow	Red
Artifact 2: essays related to contexts Related goals: L2	High Yellow	High Yellow (approaching Green)	High Yellow
Artifact 3: essays employ critical theory Related goals: L3	High Yellow (approaching Green)	Low Yellow	Yellow
Artifact 4: scholarly essay Related goals: L4	Yellow	Red	Yellow

Analysis of Assessment Results

The report will analyze the results from our assessment methods and rate the quality and effectiveness of Literature major student performance on each student learning outcome goal. The Literature Major Committee has established levels of performance on each learning goal, using the green, yellow and red light analogy.

Our piloting of the assessment process revealed the following findings:

1. Exit Interviews

There were six literature majors graduating this spring. Brian Mihm, Kim Poitevin, and Anne Matthews conducted exit interviews with four of them; documentation exists for three. These three seniors were virtually unanimous in their assessment of the literature major at Millikin University. They all agreed that the major was rigorous; at the same time they all enjoyed the program. They feel that they became better readers and writers, even though they felt more explicit writing instruction could be incorporated into literature classes. All three of these students said they would like to see International Literature become a required part of the literature major; they also supported the development of an upper-level theory course. Two of these students plan to pursue graduate study in English at some point in the future; a third will study theology. From the enthusiasm of these students about their experiences studying literature at Millikin, we can conclude that the major program, while small, is successfully educating its students and preparing them for the future.

2. Literature Portfolios

Strengths:

By far, the greatest strength of the portfolios was in the area of contexts, an understanding of literature's cultural time and place and the historical, cultural, and aesthetic environment that surrounds it. This understanding of literature was the focus of research projects or helped inform papers with another primary focus.

Weaknesses:

The portfolios seemed least effective in the area of theory and original research. The papers were limited in number of texts, current research, or a deliberate critical lens through which the work was being considered.

Most surprising of the portfolios' inconsistencies: Genre. The department's curriculum uses genre as its primary course design and curriculum requirement. Students majoring in English Literature should have a more clear sense of genres, their inherent and established features. Perhaps genre has been more a method of text selection and focusing of course material than an area of study or critical/formal inquiry.

Improvement Plans

The annual report will be created by the Literature Major Committee and shared with the English department faculty in order to suggest ways to improve the quality of student learning experiences in the literature major. Discussion and development of improvement plans and initiative will take place in a fall English departmental meeting focused on previous year's assessment results.

As a result of the findings in the piloting of the assessment methods, the English Literature Committee recommends the following:

Some of the weaknesses should improve as a result of actions already taken by the department. For example, the EN 202 Writing About Literature course introduces our majors earlier to various critical theories and to the research methods and habits of mind of those critical theories. That class should introduce majors to the various research methods and tools available through the library and databases that aid literary research.

We recommend further the following efforts on the part of the English Department and English Faculty:

1. More deliberately design the genre courses (340, 350, 360) to address aspects of genre, their distinct and shared features.
2. More overtly incorporate some critical theory practice in the 300-level courses, preparing students for the rigorous expectations of the 420 Seminar.
3. In the event of creative options in the 300-level literature courses, establish as a department the expectation of a short critical introduction that demonstrates scholarly research and the contextualizing of the creative work in the tradition researched.
4. Establish a method for housing/maintaining electronic portfolios that is both easy and accessible for the students.
5. Establish as a department a practice of Advising that addresses student progress, as demonstrated through the portfolio, prior to enrolling in the 420 Seminar.