

Millikin University
English Literature Major Assessment Report
Dr. Michael George, Chair of the Literature Committee
1 June 2007

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, thinking, 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. Although the 2006 report claims that "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," this is in fact not the case. The literature program graduated one major in Spring 2007. She entered Millikin in Fall 2003, slightly before the literature major outcome goals and assessment methods were in place. However, this year's senior did participate in EN 202, Writing about Literature, which is the course designated as the introduction to the major.

Literature Portfolio 2007

One literature major was asked to complete a portfolio for assessment. This was the portfolio that was evaluated.

Artifact	Ranking
Artifact 1: genre essays Related goal: L1	Yellow
Artifact 2: essays related to contexts Related goals: L2	Green
Artifact 3: essays employ critical theory Related goals: L3	Green
Artifact 4: scholarly essay Related goals: L4	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. Prof. Crowe and Dr. George conducted the assessment of this year's portfolio. Rather than conduct an interview, we opted instead to send the questions to our graduating senior; the answers to those questions have yet to be received at this writing.

The analysis of the portfolio revealed the following:

Strengths

The contexts and critical theory goals were met by this portfolio. The contexts essay not only included an historical examination of the topic but also a number of primary historical texts, which the writer then used as part of her analysis. Similarly, the use of critical theory was strong in this portfolio. Two essays reveal this, and although the use of theory in the capstone essay was at times on an introductory level, the writer fused concepts from two theories to inform her analysis of the literature. Combining concepts from different theories indicates an advanced understanding of the use of theory in analyzing literary texts. All of the essays in the portfolio were well written and argued.

Areas for Improvement

Surprisingly, genre is an area in need of improvement, even though our courses purport to be studies in genres. The genre essay in this portfolio, although taking into account free verse and the Whitman tradition, did so as a background task rather than showing how form relates to content. Another area for improvement is the scholarly essay. The EN420 essay was certainly original and included a theoretical lens. However, the essay did not display a sense of the critical atmosphere surrounding the work being studied, which it would need to do to advance from yellow to green.

Improvement Strategies

A comparison of the 2006 and 2007 assessments reveals some consistency. Students in both years scored well with contexts. Judging from two years of data, Millikin literature majors are able to understand and use contexts—that is literature's cultural time and place and the historical, cultural, and aesthetic environment that surrounds it—in their reading and analysis of literature. By contrast, the 2007 portfolio clearly scored green for the use of critical theory, an improvement over the yellow scores from a year ago. Where we have not improved is in the areas of genre and the scholarly essay. Although we had no red in these areas, this year's portfolio scored no higher than last year's artifacts.

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.

Although the sample from 2007 is too small to generalize (one portfolio), we can suggest some strategies for improving our literature curriculum. As a result of the findings in the piloting of the assessment methods (2006) and the first full year of assessment (2007), the English Literature Assessment Committee recommends the following:

1. Maintain the critical theory focus for EN202 (Writing About Literature). Although the 2007 sample is too small to generalize, that student did take EN202, and we saw a definite improvement in the use of literary theory.
2. Emphasize thorough research in the 300-level literature courses. This year's 420 artifact lacked thorough research on the primary text being examined, as well as more in-depth theoretical research. Ways of doing this might include the use of annotated bibliographies, literature surveys within 300-level projects, or research journals. The possibility exists that our majors are not as familiar with the MLA International Bibliography and strategies for using it, so some instruction in the studies courses might be in order. It is imperative that literature majors recognize the value and necessity of a thorough rather than cursory examination of scholarship on topics and literary works.

3. Continue incorporating literary theory in 300-level courses. While the theoretical introduction presented in EN202 is good, it needs to be reinforced in the 300-level courses in order for the student to have a working knowledge of major theories and theorists as well as an understanding of the theories for EN420.

4. Work with the library to order significant theoretical texts. Each literary theory contains a corpus of foundational texts. Staley Library already owns some of these (Edward W. Said's *Orientalism* and *Cultural and Imperialism*, Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex* for two examples), but we must continue to grow our library's collection of theory in order to promote student investigation of theory beyond the introductory level.

5. Reexamine the core curriculum and its relationship to our 300-level literature offerings. This work will be done ad hoc during Summer 2007, but it needs to continue during AY 2007-08. What do we value about the genre courses? About our curriculum? There is a disconnect between the core—which focuses on historical periods—and the literature offerings—which ostensibly focus on genre. One reason for the strong showing in the contexts artifact could be attention to contexts in the studies courses at the expense of genre. Moreover, if we believe that students need to have a strong awareness of genre and the structural elements that compose genres, we should consider offering and requiring a course on comparative genres, where the students would be exposed to the defining characteristics of poetry, fiction, drama, and essay through representative examples. Part of this could be handled in EN202, where students already are exposed to multiple genres. Such an approach would certainly benefit students and improve their awareness of genre, while relieving the 300-level studies courses from having to sacrifice genre for context, or context for genre. Another option would be to look closely at the field, particularly area graduate programs, to determine if our focus on genre is justified and to adjust our curriculum accordingly.

6. Establish a method for housing/maintaining electronic portfolios that is both easy and accessible for the students and assessment committee. It has been suggested that essays be collected from each 300-level course; however, such a process is tedious and labor-intensive, since only a fraction of the students in the 300-level literature courses are actually literature majors, and the default MUOnline class list does not list the students' majors. We need to find a better way of compiling the portfolio. One option would be to offer a zero-credit portfolio course during the senior's final year, in which the senior compiles the portfolio. Another would be to include a portfolio element in the capstone course, although because that course is also the primary location for the professional essay, this might detract from that process. Another would be to explore course management software to see what options are available. Literature students need to work toward their senior portfolio from the beginning of their curriculum. The process should begin in EN 202 and continue through all of the genre courses, with instructors reinforcing the introduction of the portfolio in all literature courses.