

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

22 June 2008

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 original assessment plan called for exit interviews. The data collected from those interviews proved to be limited in usefulness (it matters less what students think they can do and more what authorities—like graduate admissions committees—think they can do), and collecting the data proved to be nearly impossible; graduating seniors simply do not want to write more. Therefore, the committee did not conduct an exit interview.

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. The program collected portfolios from three students. Students choose the artifacts that they deem best fit the learning goals, and one artifact can meet more than one goal.

Literature Portfolio 2007

Goal	Portfolio 1	Portfolio 2	Portfolio 3
Goal 1: essays related to genre	Red	Red	Yellow
Goal 2: essays related to contexts	Yellow	Red	Yellow
Goal 3: essays employ critical theory	Green	Yellow	Red
Goal 4: scholarly essay	Green	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. Dr. George and Dr. O'Conner conducted the assessment of this year's portfolio. The analysis of the portfolio revealed the following:

Strengths

One of the portfolios fulfilled L3 and L4 at the green level. This particular student used theory well and developed a scholarly essay that could be presented as is, or published with some revision.

Areas for Improvement

This year's portfolios all demonstrated significant weaknesses. L1 (Genre) was nearly non-existent in two of the portfolios and slightly misunderstood in the third. None of the artifacts scored above yellow for genre. L2 (contexts) was another area of weakness, with all of the portfolios demonstrating superficial relationships between the literature and its context(s). None of the artifacts scored above yellow for contexts. Additionally, two of the three portfolios scored low on L3 (use of critical theory) and L4 (scholarly essay). Some of this may be due to the selection process, since some of the artifacts selected for certain goals may have better demonstrated other goals.

Three-Year Comparative Analysis

A comparison of three years of assessment data reveals that we need to improve student results for the goals or, perhaps, reconsider some of our goals.

3-Year Comparison

Goal	2006	2007	2008
L1	Yellow Yellow Red	Yellow	Red Red Yellow
L2	Yellow Yellow Yellow	Green	Yellow Red Yellow
L3	Yellow Yellow Yellow	Green	Green Yellow Red
L4	Yellow Red Yellow	Green	Green Red Yellow

The trend from 2006 to 2007 is promising. The 2006 portfolios had only two red scores. The 2007 portfolio had only one score that was not green. However, the progression to 2008 is troublesome, with five red scores and only two green scores (from the same portfolio). For this reason, we should consider the 2007 portfolio an outlier (one student, crossed in the table). The

one portfolio that scored green in 2008 might be considered an outlier, as well, since that reflects a single student (also crossed out in the table). What is left, then, is serious need for improvement. L2 (contexts) and L3 (theory) seem to be well on their way to success. L1 (genre) and L4 (scholarly essay) are in need of the most improvement, even when we include the outlying 2007 score.

Improvement Strategies

1. Portfolio Assembly/Collection

The 2008 committee discussed some trends that the student-selected portfolios revealed. Since one of the members was familiar with the students' work, he identified artifacts that may have worked better to demonstrate particular goals. Additionally, two students paired artifacts with what seemed to be the wrong goals. While this may reveal a lack of student understanding of the concepts related to the goals (or simply lack of understanding of the goals themselves), it also reveals that student selection of artifacts can be misleading. The committee came up with some options for artifact assembly and collection:

- A. Begin the process in the 1-credit required EN 105 (Introduction to Millikin English Studies). Dr. O'Conner will have students establish portfolios organized on Moodle and instruct them to post every paper that they write to that repository.
- B. Transform the selection process in one of the following ways:
 1. Transform EN 420 into a 1-hour capstone directed study. The course, as it stands, is simply another literature course, since it must be cross listed with one of our 300-level studies course. The 1-hour capstone would be a true capstone, which would fill in knowledge gaps, provide a forum for students to revise quality work already done, and allow them to judge their best work and assemble a portfolio.
 2. Have students choose their portfolio artifacts in consultation with their advisors. This would provide much-needed faculty input into which artifacts fulfill the particular goals, while still permitting students to select artifacts.
 3. Simply require students to submit the 3-4 artifacts that they believe best represent the quality of their work, without pairing the artifacts to goals. Then the assessment committee would rate the portfolio as a whole according to the goals.

Obviously, there are advantages and disadvantages to all of these recommendations. The committee firmly believes that recommendation A be adopted. It will provide students with an introduction to the portfolio concept and a place for them to keep their work, though faculty in other literature courses should continually remind students to post their work to their Moodle portfolio. While the committee believes that B1 would be a benefit to the student, it would require that literature majors take another 3-credit 300-level studies course. B2 would require some extra work for faculty advisors, though this, in the end, is work that should be done to help students prepare a writing sample for job and graduate school applications. B3 is perhaps the most problematic, since it does not guarantee that artifacts will meet any of the goals.

2. Discussion of L1 (genre)

Three years of assessment indicates that L1 (demonstrate knowledge of the inherent and established features of literary genres) needs to be reconsidered, either as a goal or as implemented. There are a number of problems with the goal. First, *genre* is not defined. Each literary era has different genres. While our 300-level courses *seem* to point to current genres, they omit the essay. Moreover, if we value original research and ideas, as the green rating for L4 indicates, then there's the possibility of a conflict with that goal, since genre studies only appear rarely in recent scholarly literature. Possibilities for reworking this goal include, but are not limited to:

1. Eliminating the goal in favor of another goal
2. Eliminating the goal and focusing on the other three
3. Establishing a specific course on genre studies
4. Targeting an existing course that will specifically cover genre

In deciding what to do about this goal, we must first consider the benefit that focusing on genre has for students.

3. Discussion and Revision of L4 (scholarly essay) Rubric

The emphasis on scholarly sources for L4 is merited, the 2008 committee questioned how a literature review (the basic form of the green rating) could relate to the official wording of the goal: "write a near-professional, original work of literary research and scholarship," since most 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, or present scholarship as further-reading footnotes). 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.

3. L2 Contexts

While students have demonstrated a familiarity with contexts, they have not demonstrated that they "have *advanced* understanding of literatures' historical, intellectual, and cultural contexts" (emphasis added). To improve this area, the literature committee should establish some guidelines for literature courses.

4. L3 Critical Theory

Millikin students still need work on understanding and using critical theory. EN 202 (Writing about Literature) will definitely help, but the introductory information presented in that course should be reinforced in 300-level studies courses. It is now too early to determine what impact EN 202 will have, since students have been taking that course at various points in their curricula. Once we have sets of students who take EN 202 in the Fall of their sophomore year, we will better be able to determine the impact of the course on this goal.

5. L4 Scholarly Essay

By the time literature students graduate, they should be able to construct a professional-quality essay. If they cannot, they will be unable to function in a graduate program. At the same time, students have limited opportunities to develop near-professional writing. The committee recommends:

1. Transform EN 420 into a 1-credit capstone course focused on revision of previous writing. This will provide students with the time needed to fill knowledge gaps, find more scholarly sources, and revise to professional standards.
2. Develop a set of criteria that defines “near-professional, original work of literary research and scholarship.” Some criteria might include:
 - A. Thorough familiarity with scholarship on the writer(s) or literary work(s)
 - B. Thorough familiarity with the context(s) of the writer(s) or literary work(s)
 - C. Language and mechanics appropriate for professional literary scholarship
 - D. Strict conformity to MLA style
 - E. Acknowledgment of methodology with appropriate research into that methodology

6. Evaluation Scoring

The committee determined that, although arbitrary and antithetical to education in the humanities, assigning a number to each of the colors would make multi-year comparisons easier and more meaningful. The Literature Team needs to determine how to proceed. The chair would like to move from a 3-point scale to a 5-point scale, since committee responses included ratings of “yellow approaching green,” which places the portfolio between the yellow and green rankings. This could be done by using decimal points, but moving to a 5-point scale might be less cumbersome. The Literature Team should discuss this early next term in preparation for the 2009 assessment.