

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

27 May 2010

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 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.

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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 rubric has changed slightly from 2009. The 3-point ranking system used in 2009 was moderately successful, but still imprecise. The 2010 report uses a 0-5-point scale. Each evaluator will provide a numerical value for each goal, and then those numbers are averaged. Numerical values correspond to the traffic light system:

- 0-1: Red
- 2-3: Yellow
- 4-5: Green

Literature Major Portfolio Evaluation Rubrid

	Green (4-5)	Yellow (2-3)	Red (0-1)
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. 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. The Literature Program had one senior graduate in Spring 2010.

Literature Portfolio 2010

Goal	Evaluator 1	Evaluator 2	Average
Goal 1: essays related to genre	1	4	2.5
Goal 2: essays related to contexts	1	3	2
Goal 3: essays employ critical theory	3	5	4
Goal 4: scholarly essay	3	4	3.5

Analysis of Assessment Results

The 2010 portfolio revealed strength in L3, with an average score in the green area. All other areas were in the yellow area, with L4 nearly in the green. However, the two evaluators' scores were widely divergent, with Evaluator 1 scoring L1 and L2 red and Evaluator 2 scoring those goals green and yellow respectively. L3 and L4 showed a narrower divergence, with Evaluator 1 scoring each yellow and Evaluator 2 scoring each green.

Strengths

L3 and L4 remain the strongest of the literature program's goals, and the lack of an overall red score is a definite strength.

Areas for Improvement

All areas are in need of improvement. Even with the divergence of scoring, L1 and L2 were the weakest areas in the 2010 portfolio, which reflects, at least for L1, a trend. The program still needs to improve genre studies or to drop that particular goal. Contexts would also seem to be in need of improvement.

Improvement Strategies

1. Discussion and Revision of Learning Goals

The English Department, but as a whole and the Literature Program, needs to have a frank discussion about 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 historically-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. 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 literature review. 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 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 2010 portfolio again illustrated that students seem to be confused by the learning goals, establishing a trend. The artifact submitted for L3/L4 would have easily been suited for L2, as it provided a wealth of research on the context for the literature. There was a similar issue with the portfolios submitted in 2009. 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. The 1-hour capstone would be part of the faculty member's regular teaching load and not an overload.

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; however, the student-selection process should be part of the assessment, since it will reveal the students' understanding of the learning goals as the goals relate to student writing.

3. Replace Portfolio with Capstone Project

The portfolio method of assessment works for some programs, such as CWRR. However, for other programs the portfolio method is overkill. A near-professional quality project will, by its nature, demonstrate mastery of the other goals. It will need to include critical theory (L3), present contexts (L2), include scholarship (L4), and--at times--present an awareness of genre (L1). The project produced in EN 420--the Literature Major capstone course--should provide the assessment committee with the data needed to assess adequately the progress of the program. The committee recommends that the assessment artifact become the EN 420 project. Such a change will eliminate the need for voluntary student submission, which has not always worked in

the past, since the EN 420 instructor can submit the artifact to the assessment committee at the end of the course.

4. 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 and clarify this in the rubric.

5. 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 still 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.

6. 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 that the program 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

Implementation of Strategies

The Literature Program has begun to implement some of the strategies mentioned in this and all previous reports. Because so few portfolios have been collected during the process, large-scale changes to the program are unwise. However, some have been implemented. EN 105 does, indeed, now begin the portfolio process.

The assessment committee has now moved to a numerical evaluation, from a 3-point to a 6-point system. The 6-point system will eliminate the need for decimals in the former 3-point system, thereby providing a system more accurate than the traffic-light system or a 3-point system.

Programmatic change must be delayed for a number of reasons. First, many of the suggestions made in this and previous reports will need to involve a discussion of the full English Department, not just the literature program, since changes to be made to the goals, and by extension, the program, will impact all three English majors. Second, we do not have enough data from which to generalize, so making large-scale changes would be misinformed. In the five years of collecting assessment data, we have only evaluated 11 portfolios. Finally, the financial

state of the University would make any programmatic changes dependent upon the financial health of the institution. At present, the turnover of faculty in the Department has placed several faculty lines in jeopardy. Because the Department must justify replacing faculty who have departed, we have no guarantee that any changes made to the program will be able to be implemented. The Literature Program desires to make meaningful changes to the curriculum, but if those changes cannot be implemented--as we are finding with the University-wide public speaking requirement--the quality of the changes would be compromised.