



## **DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH ACADEMIC YEAR 2022-23 ASSESSMENT REPORT**

### **MISSION STATEMENT**

The three interdependent programs at the heart of the English Department are Literature, Creative Writing, and English Teaching. The primary mission of the department at the undergraduate level is to provide students with an education in literature in all its dimensions: canonical traditions of the past, marginalized traditions of the past, contemporary literary movements, older as well as more recent theoretical frameworks, the practice of creative writing, and the practice of English teaching. We emphasize the way literature illuminates fundamental questions about human life and the power it has to change the way people think about themselves and others. In all our courses we emphasize perceptive reading, critical and imaginative thinking, and clear writing. We try to bring out in the classroom—in our teaching, shaping of assignments, and engagement with student work—the vitality of scholarly practice and creative expression in our fields. We want students to acquire skills that will prepare them for graduate education (if that is a step they wish to take); for a range of careers (including teaching) in an increasingly knowledge-based economy; for participation in a democratic society and a cosmopolitan world; and for a more reflective and articulate life. We hope that students will graduate from our programs with the knowledge, confidence, and open-mindedness they need in order to explore diverse cultural traditions for the rest of their lives.

### **DEPARTMENT OBJECTIVES and ALIGNMENT WITH PRIORITIES FOR ACTION**

1. Students should become acquainted with a broad and diverse range of literature in English, gaining basic knowledge of different periods, movements, genres, authors, and critical frameworks. (Place Student Success at the Center of All We Do. Drive Excellence and Innovation in Teaching, Learning, and Research. Embody the Principle of “Mission First, People Always.”)
2. Students should acquire the core skills of careful reading, critical thinking, imaginative thinking, and clear writing. (Place Student Success at the Center of All We Do. Drive Excellence and Innovation in Teaching, Learning, and Research. Embody the Principle of “Mission First, People Always.”)
3. Students in all our programs should be able to write clear, well-shaped, insightful essays about literary works; students in Creative Writing, further, should learn the essential craft techniques in one or more genres of creative writing (poetry, fiction, non-fiction) and be able to produce accomplished creative work of their own; students in English Teaching should understand teaching methods and the best ways to shape an inclusive community of learning in the classroom. (Place Student Success at the Center of All We Do. Drive Excellent and Innovation in Teaching, Learning, and Research. Embody the Principle of “Mission First, People Always.”)

4. Students should gain knowledge of some of the important debates in their fields of study: debates about literary interpretation, literary theory, the changing shape of the canon, the relationship between literature and society; debates about different techniques and movements in contemporary poetry, fiction, and nonfiction; and debates about effective approaches to the teaching of English. (Place Student Success at the Center of All We Do. Drive Excellence and Innovation in Teaching, Learning, and Research. Embody the Principle of “Mission First, People Always.”)

5. Students should become acquainted with possible vocations or career paths in their lives after graduation: in English Teaching a clear professional track is built into the program; in Literature and Creative Writing, fields without a clear professional track, the consideration of possible careers happens through internships and mentoring. (Place Student Success at the Center of All We Do. Embody the Principle of “Mission First, People Always.” Partner with Place.)

### STUDENT LEARNING GOALS and MEASUREMENT TOOLS

Student Learning Goals	LIT 494 Capstone paper norming	CRWR Portfolio	CRWR Survey of 200-level courses	ENT end of semester assessment
1. The ability to perform close readings of literary texts and to construct clear, nuanced, well-shaped arguments about them. (LIT, CRWR, ENT)	X			
2. The ability to communicate complex ideas in prose that is proficient, clear, persuasive, and formally consonant with the conventions of academic work. (LIT, CRWR, ENT)	X			
3. The ability to situate literary works within the historical and cultural contexts of their production and reception (including social histories, literary histories, larger cultural frameworks). (LIT, CRWR, ENT)	X			
4. The demonstration of an understanding of important terms and techniques in one or more genres of creative writing: poetry, fiction, and nonfiction. (CRWR)			X	

Student Learning Goals	LIT 494 Capstone paper norming	CRWR Portfolio	CRWR Survey of 200-level courses	ENT end of semester assessment
5. The ability to produce accomplished work of one's own in poetry, fiction, or nonfiction. (CRWR)		X		
6. The demonstration of an understanding of the effective methods and strategies—or the best practices—in the teaching of English. (ENT)				X
7. An ability to enact the skills and dispositions needed to create an effective, inclusive, supportive classroom environment in which all students engage in learning. (ENT)				X

## RESULTS and MODIFICATIONS

Learning Goal results	Modifications made to enhance learning
LIT faculty assessment of LIT 494 Capstone papers (05/2021) revealed strength in the quality of students' writing (clarity, voice) and relative weakness in the ability to develop sophisticated, sustained arguments. Rubrics assessing research depth and critical reflection scored papers solidly in the middle. Discussion revealed that genre variability among the papers (analytical argument, personal essay, video essay) accounted for assessment discrepancies between some of the faculty readers.	LIT faculty discussed the need to assign essays of greater length (8-12+ pages) in 300-level courses in order to provide students with more opportunities to develop sustained arguments. Future assessment should include tracking of such assignments. Faculty concluded that we should exclude the personal essay as an option for future Capstone projects, but that students should be able to work with professors on a range of possibilities beyond conventional literary analysis.

Learning Goal results	Modifications made to enhance learning
<p>Since 2017, the CRWR program has assessed student command of writing terms specific to fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. In the first weeks the instructor asks students to define 15 important literary terms as they understand them, and those papers are collected. In the course of the semester, instructors weave the terms into lesson plans that define their genre. At the end of the semester, the survey of terms is given again. In AY 2018-19, the Creative Writing program collected pre- and post-surveys from ten of the eleven 200-level intro courses offered. Comparison of the survey results shows a clear increase in comprehension of the craft of creative writing. The responses are more detailed and precise, and generally far more accurate. In the pre-survey, students often skipped terms they didn't know; it is rare to find a skipped answer in the post-survey.</p>	<p>By comparing the results of the pre- and post-surveys, we have found that our curricular logic and pedagogical approaches are working. Yet we will continue to make revisions where we find gaps in students' knowledge. A crucial idea is to make sure students are prepared for CRWR workshops and special topics courses at the 300- and 400-level. While our assessment practices have not been as formalized in recent years as we would like (owing to the pandemic and to major faculty transitions in the program), they will be renewed as we move forward. We plan to develop "portfolio assessment" as a part of the new BFA in Creative Writing.</p>
<p>For the ENT assessment, there was high correlation between students' final synthesis and reflection papers and their course grades. There was also high correlation between students' final synthesis and reflection papers and their performance in class.</p>	<p>The ENT program gathers information about students' knowledge and skills in light of the Conceptual Framework used in the UM College of Education: integration of ideas, cooperative endeavors, and respect for individual worth. The ENT program also embodies the College of Education's framework of Professional Behaviors and Dispositions: diversity, equity, fairness, and personal integrity. The ENT program is guided by Montana accreditation standards and the Council for the Accreditation Preparation (CAEP). In this program we do the larger part of our assessment through state and national accreditation processes. But ENT faculty invite student feedback on instructional effectiveness at both the mid-term and the end of the semester.</p>

## FUTURE PLANS FOR CONTINUED ASSESSMENT

The last several years at the university have been difficult years: years of financial crisis, requiring that we adapt to the realities of contraction, and years of the pandemic, requiring that we become a kind of online university for two years. During these years, further, our Creative Writing program lost nearly all its experienced TT faculty to

departures and retirements—we have spent the last four years rebuilding the program. On a bright note, we recently established a new BFA in Creative Writing, a major addition to undergraduate education in our department.

We intend to continue and, where necessary, renew or improve our assessment practices in the years ahead. In the Literature program, we plan next to assess the LIT 236 and LIT 246 courses, as well as one of the gateway 300-level courses, LIT 300 or LIT 327. In the Creative Writing program, we plan to continue the basic assessment of the 200-level CRWR courses and to expand our assessment of the final portfolio in 400-level CRWR courses (an important part of the new BFA in Creative Writing). We will also be asking our BFA students to fill out “exit surveys” at the time of their graduation. In the English Teaching program, we plan to continue the practices outlined above. Finally, in our three graduate programs (the MA, MFA, and MAT programs), we intend to renew our practice of distributing “exit surveys” to graduating students in order to learn about their experience in our programs.

We plan to work with the Office of Experiential Learning and Career Success, and with local businesses and non-profit organizations, to develop far more internship opportunities for our students (in line with Department Objective 5 above). We have begun this process in the new BFA program. But we have substantial work to do in this area.

## **APPENDICES**

- 1) LIT 494 Capstone: Assessment Rubric (Spring 2021)
- 2) LIT 494 Capstone: Assessment Report (Spring 2021)
- 3) LIT Curriculum Map (assessment stages)
- 4) CRWR Curriculum Maps (BA in English with Creative Writing Emphasis / BFA in Creative Writing)
- 5) CRWR Curriculum Map (assessment stages)
- 6) ENT Mid-Semester Assessment for ENT Courses
- 7) ENT End-of-Semester Assessment for ENT Courses

## LIT 494: Capstone Project Assessment

For this assessment, the papers are to be approached as the final product of a Capstone seminar. The papers should reflect a research and writing process that has stretched over a number of weeks, including opportunities for revision based on feedback of peers and the instructor. (1 = Excellent / 5 = Fails to meet the standard)

Does the paper have a clear structure or shape?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

NOTES:

Does the paper have an articulate prose voice, a fluent texture?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

NOTES:

Does the paper demonstrate nuance, sophistication, and flexibility in developing its argument about its literary text(s)?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

NOTES:

Does the paper engage critically with its primary sources, citing them judiciously and integrating them into a larger argument? Does it engage critically with its secondary sources, citing them judiciously and integrating them into a larger argument?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

NOTES:

On the whole, is this an accomplished, thoughtful, searching paper? If it is a work of literary criticism, does it reflect substantial and sustained critical reflection on literary texts commensurate with a semester-long project at the end of the English major? If it is a work of cultural criticism, does it reflect substantial and sustained critical reflection on cultural texts or practices commensurate with a semester-long project at the end of the English major?

1

2

3

4

5

NOTES:

## **LIT Capstone Assessment Report: AY 2021**

14 papers were scored by 8 different readers, with the result that every paper received 3 different readings. The papers were sample from Capstone courses in the Literature track of the English major from 2018-20. They represent roughly 1/3 of the graduates from that period of time.

6 papers averaged 2 (Good) or higher (Excellent) across all 4 criteria, meaning roughly 40% of the papers were judged to be strong pieces across the board, though in some cases those papers rated 3 on individual criteria. Another 4 papers had averages between “Good” and “Meets Expectations.” The other 4 averaged below 3, though in two cases (8/12) individual evaluators gave higher marks, and it likely reflects different expectations about “genre.” 2 papers were considered to be substantially below expectations.

Across the whole set of papers, the writing rubric (Q1) averaged the highest among the 4 rubrics, with the rubrics assessing research depth (Q2) and critical reflection (Q4) tied, and argumentation (Q3) lowest. Given discussion about the ability to sustain arguments and ideas across a longer paper (see below), this result reflects the concern faculty have about student “control” of material in these semester-length projects.

### **Discussion**

8 faculty met to discuss the results of the assessment for 90 minutes on 05-07-21.

The discussion focused on two things:

- 1) The adequacy of the rubric to assess the work we are assigning (i.e., reflecting on changes in the student cohorts, the curriculum, and make-up of the major)
- 2) The “outlier” scores on essays or assignments where one rater was far above or below the others.

Substantial discussions focused on Papers #1, #4, #10, and #12, all of which had either substantial gaps between high and low scores, or represented substantial departure from norms in assignment type, or both. Genre expectations formed a large part of this discrepancy, and as happens, some raters in discussion re-assessed how they might apply the rubric in future assessment. Discussion is, of course, the most important part of assessment, as faculty often voice important principles or values that need to be defined, and clarified, in the group as a whole.

A major point of discussion was identifying the two different attributes that make up the first rubric: essays could have one without the other, it was noted, but the rubric asks for a holistic assessment, and that will tend, for individual readers, to skew toward one pole of the other. Given that the score on this rubric was the best average of the 4 across the entire range of papers (2.167, closer to “Good” rather than “Meets”), this point is not essential in the broader assessment. We might address it in a revision of the rubrics by stressing the holistic assessment and identifying some aspects that should be judged).



Another major point of discussion was the genre of the final capstone projects. As the Capstone has evolved, instructors have tended to allow a range of possible outcomes for final projects, including multi-genre essays, personal essays, and (less commonly) video essays, in addition to the conventional 15-page argumentative essay. Especially with majors finishing in more than one track and/or students taking the course who are not in the literary track, this flexibility has seemed important to the need to continue to engage new modes of writing and give students preparation for different kinds of writing they might do post-graduation. But several faculty were adamant that they were not equipped to assess or evaluate the quality of certain kinds of work, the personal essay / memoir being the most salient.

Attention to the essays that were less successful focused on whether or not some students had progressed through the major in such a way to build the research, analysis, and writing skills sufficient to write a 15-page paper. This discussion revealed that several faculty members intentionally do not assign at the 300-level longer essays because they are not confident in their students' abilities to control their argument, evidence, and prose over longer stretches of writing. There is also the practical matter of grading longer essays in higher-enrolled courses.

### **Modifications Based on Assessment**

A clear consensus formed around the necessity of modifying the rubric better to reflect our fine-grained expectations of the product of the Capstone. A draft of that modification is included below [attached], and will be finalized by the literature faculty in Fall 21.

A general group consensus formed around the importance of taking the purely personal essay out of the list of possible final projects for the course, but to continue to allow professors to work with students on a range of possibilities. Literature students are to be expected to write a conventional literary analysis, with a focus on literary texts or on theories or ideas of literature, while students from other tracks might be offered more latitude.

Further attention is clearly needed to the progress of students through the major, from 200 to 300-level, and particularly from 300- to 400-level. If we are going to expect students to produce controlled and effective prose in the Capstone, we need to focus cross-curricularly on making sure students have opportunities consistently to write longer paper. Next year, in assessing the L-perspective courses, and in evaluating the 300-level, the department might compile results from a faculty survey on paper length, and try to "map" the number of classes in which a student might write an 8-10, 10-12, or 12+ page paper.

Some faculty focus, to greater and lesser degrees, on career avenues post-graduation, and that discussion seems more pertinent than ever given the campus-wide initiative on "career readiness." While this assessment did not focus on this aspect of the Capstone, future discussions need to clarify what the basic expectations for career and post-graduation outcomes of our students are, and some basic mechanisms to capture that in surveys or self-assessments would be beneficial.

**APPENDIX 3: LIT Curriculum Map**

Required Courses	Student Learning Goal #1	Student Learning Goal #2	Student Learning Goal #3
LIT 110	Introduced	Introduced	Introduced
LIT 202, LIT 236 or LIT 246	Introduced	Introduced	Introduced
LIT 300	Developed	Developed	Developed
LIT 327	Developed	Developed	Developed
LIT 494	Mastery; Assessed through paper norming	Mastery; Assessed through paper norming	Master; Assessed through paper norming

**APPENDIX 5: CRWR Curriculum Map II**

Required Courses	Student Learning Goal #1	Student Learning Goal #2
CRWR 210, CRWR 211, CRWR 212	Introduced	Introduced Survey Assessment
CRWR 310, CRWR 311, CRWR 312	Developed	Developed
BA: CRWR 410, CRWR 411, CRWR 412  BFA: CRWR 483 CRWR 481 CRWR 482	Mastery, Portfolio Assessment	Mastery

## **APPENDIX 6: ENT Mid-Semester Assessment for all ENT Courses**

At the midterm of each semester, all ENT courses ask students to respond to 3 questions. Students do not sign their names to their feedback. The ENT faculty member reads the feedback, discusses the summary of the feedback with students, and makes appropriate changes to the course.

1. Given the learning outcomes of this course, what aspects of the course are effective?
2. Given the learning outcomes of this course, what aspects of the course might be changed and/or improved?
3. What might you do to contribute to the improvement of the course?

## APPENDIX 7: ENT End of Semester Assessment for all ENT courses

All English Teaching courses address Montana and national accreditation standards. The ENT course syllabi include specific learning outcomes as well as this standard paragraph:

*This methods course embodies the UM College of Education's Conceptual Framework through 3 essential elements of learning communities: Integration of Ideas, Cooperative Endeavors, and Respect for Individual Worth. This course embodies the UM College of Education's Professional Behaviors and Dispositions of diversity, equity, fairness, and personal integrity.*

At the end of each English Teaching course, the instructor requires students to write a synthesis/reflection paper on their learning related to specific outcomes for that course. In addition, these papers ask students to respond to the following 2 questions that are related to the College of Education's Conceptual Framework and to its Professional Behaviors and Dispositions.

\* How would you describe the learning environment of this class? How did the instructor and students collaboratively create this environment? In what ways did the learning environment build upon individual strengths as well as encourage collaboration, risk taking, and reflection? In what ways did the learning environment support your growth as a teacher? How do these insights contribute to your ability to create positive, respectful learning environment for your own students?

\* In what ways did this course embody the UM College of Education Conceptual Framework through the 3 essential elements of learning communities: Integration of Ideas, Cooperative Endeavors, and Respect for Individual Worth?

The ENT faculty read the synthesis/reflection papers and discuss in particular students' responses to the above 2 items. The discussion reveals the ways in which our curriculum and pedagogy are successful in meeting learning outcomes and areas for change and/or improvement.