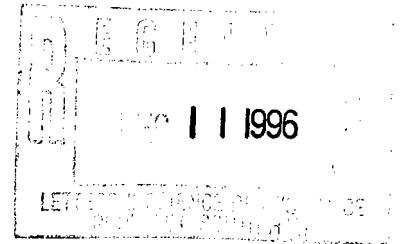


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MEMORANDUM

To: Alex Nagel
Associate Dean, College of Letters and Science

From: Donald Rowe, Chair

Handwritten signature of Donald Rowe.

Date: December 9, 1996

Re: English Department's Undergraduate Major Assessment

The English Department Assessment Committee and Departmental Committee met and reviewed these plans for assessing the Undergraduate Major in Literature and the major with a Creative Writing Emphasis. These plans are attached.

ASSESSING THE UNDERGRADUATE MAJOR IN LITERATURE

The Department of English offers a BA or BS degree with a major in literature in English, in English Language and Linguistics, and in Creative Writing; a BS degree with a joint major in English and Education; and MA and PhD degrees in literature in English, in English Language and Linguistics, and a PhD in Composition Theory. For this beginning of assessment, we limit our plan to the undergraduate majors in literature in English and in Creative Writing and will develop plans for the other programs as we gain experience.

This plan was drafted by Professors Standish Henning (CH), A. N. Doane, Charles Scott, Ronald Wallace, and Faculty Associate Joyce Melville. It was presented to the Departmental Committee at several meetings, and reflects revisions requested by that committee.

ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE

The Chair will appoint a standing Assessment Committee, made up of the Chair, Associate Chair, and the directors of the graduate, undergraduate, linguistics, composition, and creative writing programs.

GOALS These are program goals. It is understood that no individual course need address each goal.

The following areas of knowledge are central to the undergraduate degree in English literature:

- knowledge of works of literature in English.
- awareness of the general outlines of the history of literature in English.
- awareness of the social and historical contexts in which this literature developed.
- knowledge of important literary forms and techniques.

Students completing the degree in English literature are expected to acquire the following skills:

- the ability to analyze and interpret literary texts and
- communicate such interpretations competently in written form.

IMPLEMENTATION

Reading Committee

Three faculty members (including academic staff) will be appointed for each assessment exercise. This assignment will count as a major committee assignment. The committee will report to the Assessment Committee its conclusions about what the exams and papers tell about students' success in matching the goals.

Knowledge

Final exams and exam questions for all BA/BS4 students in upper division courses requiring such exams (300 and above) will be collected at the end of the first semester. Instructors will be responsible for collecting the exams and turning them in to the chair of the Reading Committee after they have been graded.

A random sample of five exams per course will be read against the knowledge goals. (See Technical Appendix.)

Skills

The major writing assignment for all BA/BS4 students in upper division courses (300 and

above) will be collected and xeroxed before they are evaluated (marked up). All directions for the assignment will also be collected. Instructors will be responsible for collecting the papers and turning them in to the chair of the Reading Committee. (See Technical Appendix.)

A random sample of five papers per course will be read against the skills goals. (See Technical Appendix.)

"Reflections"

All BA/BS4 students in these courses will be asked to write remarks on their experiences as English majors, not specifically as members of the course. They will be given, early in the semester, two or three prompts to help them focus their reflections (e.g. "How confident do you feel about your knowledge of literature in English? Give some examples." "How confident do you feel about your ability to write analytic essays about literature." "How do you think your experience as an English major will contribute towards your future plans?").

These reflections will be collected at or near the end of the semester by the instructors and turned in to the Reading Committee.

The Assessment Committee will encourage faculty members to participate, either by questionnaire or by interview, in articulating their own estimates about whether the current curriculum satisfactorily addresses the goals of the undergraduate program.

Frequency of assessment

Following the first assessment, the Assessment Committee will recommend to the department how often assessment should occur, the outer limit being once every five years.

The Assessment Committee will receive the reports from the Reading Committee, the reflections, and write a report on its activities for the year, evaluating the outcome. This report, forwarded to the departmental Chair, will be presented to the Departmental Committee to aid it in any changes it wishes to make in the curriculum or the assessment plan.

Technical Appendix

Sampling The Assessment Committee will determine how to get a random sample of exams and papers after the course rosters have been published.

Xeroxing papers The department, as part of this assessment plan, will request student hourly funds to collect the assignments and xerox them for the Reading Committee.

First Assessment Exercise will be semester 1, 1997-98. This provides the best opportunity to do the assessment and evaluate it while the faculty has it fresh in its mind.

Assessment Procedures for The English Major with a Creative Writing Emphasis

Preface: The English Major with a Creative Writing Emphasis was implemented in 1978 to provide an alternative to the standard English major for literature students with a special interest in creative writing. The required course of study is 27 semester hours in the major, including 15 hours of literature courses and 12 hours of 300-level writing courses. Of the 12 hours of writing, 9 are devoted to creative writing workshops, and 3 are devoted to a Directed Creative Writing Thesis (English 695). Majors, non-majors, graduate students and special students are eligible to apply for workshops. Majors only are eligible for Directed Creative Writing.

The creative writing workshops are designed to provide professional training in the writing of poetry, fiction, and creative non-fiction. Some time is spent on theory and technique, some time is spent reading the work of established writers as models, and some short writing exercises are assigned. But the major focus of the courses is the analysis of student writing in the classroom and in individual conferences.

Goals: Because Creative Writing Emphasis majors are also English majors, they are expected to acquire all of the skills and knowledge specified in the Department's English major Assessment plan. Knowledge of canonical and non-canonical works of literature, an awareness of the contexts of literary and social history, knowledge of important literary forms and techniques, and the ability to analyze and interpret texts and to communicate such interpretations competently in written form, are all essential goals of a good writer. In addition, Creative Writing Emphasis majors are expected to acquire the following specialized knowledge and skills:

The ability to create original literary work in at least one, and preferably two, of three genres: poetry, fiction, creative non-fiction.

A particular knowledge of the range of contemporary literature, with special emphasis on current modes and practice.

The ability to analyze and evaluate creative work-in-progress, both the student's own and that of other writers.

The ability to read as a writer; that is, to read literary works not only for their social, historical, intellectual, formal, and interpretive value, but for their capacity to inspire and generate new work.

Implementation: Since its inception in 1978 the English Major with a Creative Writing Emphasis has incorporated a "capstone" course, English 695 (Directed Creative Writing). After completing their 3 required workshops, and typically in the last Spring semester before their graduation, Senior majors work closely with a faculty writer to produce a book-length or chapbook-length manuscript of poetry, fiction, or

creative non-fiction. This manuscript usually combines work written in previous workshops (and revised for English 695) with new work. A poet, for example, might revise twenty old poems and write ten new ones; a fiction writer might revise three old stories and write two new ones. The final manuscript is expected to work as a whole, and be organized and typed as if it were being submitted for publication.

Typically, three faculty writers work individually with approximately fifteen Senior majors each on these projects which represent a culmination of the students' writing experience at Wisconsin. Because the instructors are reading work written over a several-year period, they can reach a fairly confident assessment of the students' training in creative writing. The bi-weekly individual conferences also serve to reflect the students' knowledge of contemporary literature, and ability to analyze and evaluate creative work.

In addition, each Spring semester, students are encouraged to submit their work-in-progress to the University Bookstore Academic Excellence Awards Competition (\$1,000 awards for independent projects completed under the supervision of a faculty member in a course like English 695). A majority of the Creative Writing Emphasis majors do submit their work which is then read by an independent University committee. Over the past five years our students have won more of these awards than those in any other discipline, and committee members have reported back to us informally on the quality of the submissions.

Further, each semester an English Department faculty member (not a member of the creative writing staff) is asked to read a portion of the book-length Creative Theses in order to determine winners of two Departmental Prizes: The \$500 Felix Pollak Poetry Thesis Prize and the \$500 Eudora Welty Fiction Thesis Prize. The faculty judge reports informally on the quality of the year's submissions to the members of the writing faculty.

Finally, as part of the regular course evaluation, English 695 students will be asked to include remarks on their experiences as Creative Writing Emphasis majors, with special attention to the four goals listed above.

The three English 695 instructors will serve as an ad hoc assessment committee, reporting back to the other creative writing teachers in late spring or early fall on the work produced by the graduating Senior majors, on the course and program evaluations, and on the feedback from the outside readers.

Addendum: This assessment plan focusses primarily on the the course work required for the English Major with a Creative Writing Emphasis. We believe that an important part of a student writer's education takes place outside the classroom as well. Thus the Creative Writing program sponsors periodic readings and residencies by distinguished writers who lecture, meet with students (both in class and out) and occasionally read student work. The Program also sponsors two magazines: *The Madison Review*, a national literary magazine, edited entirely by undergraduate students, that publishes the work of established writers from around the country; and *Canvas*, a campus magazine that publishes

the work of enrolled students. The program further sponsors seven creative writing contests (Hill, Muller, Pollak, Welty, Derleth, Hart, Howard) annually for currently enrolled students, as well as five national competitions (Halls, Brittingham, Pollak, Young, O'Malley). All of this activity enhances the students' writing experience at Wisconsin and should be taken into account in any overall assessment of the Creative Writing Program. We are, in fact, constantly reassessing these programs (through student response papers, audience attendance figures, quantity and quality of work submitted) and refining them better to meet student needs and desires.