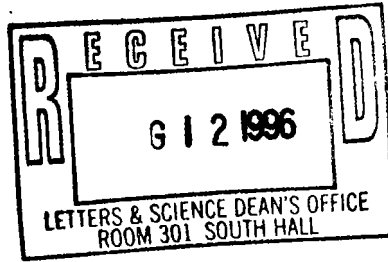


University of Wisconsin-Madison

MADISON, WISCONSIN 53706

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
HELEN C. WHITE HALL
600 NORTH PARK STREET



August 8, 1996

Alex Nagel
Associate Dean, L&S
CAMPUS

Dear Alex,

Here's my report on the pilot assessment of our undergraduate literature program.

We asked the instructors of 26 upper division courses to submit the "best" paper from a graduating senior and got 19; the difference comes from the fact that a certain number of faculty are unable to follow directions. We also asked for "reflections" from all the graduating seniors, and got 50 of these.

Joyce Melville and I read a sample of these best papers against a scoring grid (enclosed) to see whether it is possible to evaluate a range of papers using the grid, which was based on the program GOALS developed last fall by the faculty. We are pleased that it is not only possible, but highly instructive, to do that evaluating; I have distributed the papers to the rest of the committee for them to read between now and the beginning of the term.

We will also read the fifty reflections (sample enclosed). They are interesting when they point to problems in the curriculum, as well as when they--as most do--express satisfaction with it.

It is clear that this pilot which only looked at the single best paper in a set of courses is not a good assessment device, so the committee will review its findings with the departmental committee early in the fall and find a better method. We will also need to improve our way of soliciting the reflections; the original intention, of tying them to the regular course evaluation, was not a good plan and so we modified it by asking for them on a voluntary basis--with mixed results.

We have many programs in the department. Creative writing has a good assessment program in place: a capstone course (the writing of a suite of poems, short stories, or large parts of works-in-progress) which are then read by outside readers as part of the prize-giving we do at the end of the second semester each year. Ron Wallace will write an assessment plan based on these procedures. We think that the English-Education majors should be assessed as regular literature majors, since they take only two special courses, in writing and the history and structure of the language. Charles Scott will devise a plan for assessing the students--most of them special students--who take the certificate program in English as a Second Language, and he will also devise one for the (very few) students who are in the English Language and Linguistics program. Finally, we will try to figure out how to assess the graduate programs, but perhaps not this coming year unless we must.

A last remark: our experience in reading the "best" papers has been interesting, even exciting, for we see the process as a promising way of getting faculty to do what we pretty much don't do, look at the

whole program in terms of our goals.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Standish Henning', written in a cursive style.

Standish Henning

Associate Chair and Chair of the Departmental Assessment Committee

cc: Professor Rowe

Reflections on Your Experience as an English Major
Some Brief Thought Questions for Graduating Seniors

As part of the development of a process of our assessing the effectiveness of the English major, we are asking graduating seniors to reflect on their experience in the major. These questions are intended to help us understand the major and are not specifically directed at this course alone.

Do you feel you have gained significant knowledge of canonical and non-canonical English and American literature? Give some examples. How would you assess the breadth of that knowledge in each of those categories? the depth? I believe that there exists, within the department, a healthy tension among critical approaches by professors. Some stress depth while others present a breadth of ideas. Over all, I think my education has been well-balanced between these fields. As a double-major candidate, I must say that the (relatively speaking) more demanding governance of course-study within the English dept. has ensured an over-all strength in general knowledge while also allowing me to begin to specialize.

How confident do you feel about your ability to write analytic essays about literature? I feel extremely competent to perform in this regard. Prof. Begam's courses, which require analytic response to each reading, was most helpful in terms of forcing me to produce writing of this kind for any given text. I found this practice extremely helpful.

Have you gained an ability to interpret texts (and more broadly structures of language)? If you have, has this ability carried over into your activities in other classes or in situations outside the classroom? I absolutely have. The courses which have been of most value to me are precisely those which have stressed a theoretical approach to literature. Such courses both 1) produce a greater understanding of specific texts; and 2) provide a technique which helps interpreting other material, both textual and non-textual.

How do you expect to find your English major has helped you achieve your goals after your undergraduate degree? What are those goals?

Someday I hope to hold a university position teaching either philosophy or English Lit. Obviously the major has contributed to these goals. If I don't go on to teach, I will always value the ability to interpret symbolic communication my schooling has given me. The strengths I've gained that I've most valued are critical/analytic ability, the concise ~~and~~ exposition of ideas, and the general appreciation and love of the art of words.

If I may, I'd like to express a particular gratitude and appreciation for the work of Richard Begam and Cyrena Pondron. If I do teach at some point, I hope I may follow their example.

Course # and title

Reader:

Topic	Hi	Medium	Low	No Basis-comment
knowledge of canonical/non-canon lit				
awareness of gen. outlines of lit. hist.				
awareness of social and historical context				
knowledge of impt. lit forms and techniques				
ability to analyze lit texts				
ability to interpret texts				
ability to relate analyses and interps of diff. texts to one another				
ability to relate lit to social and historical contexts				
ability to communicate such interpretations competently in writing*				

*Consider such things as:

- Awareness of audience
- Spelling and punctuation
- MLA conventions (footnotes, punctuation of titles, etc.)
- Paragraph development, coherence, syntactic and lexical maturity

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 pilot program, we limit assessment to the undergraduate major in literature in English and will develop plans for the other programs as we gain experience.

Three major components must be present in every assessment plan. According to an L&S document on assessment:

1. Each unit should articulate clearly a set of educational goals.
2. Each unit should develop means of assessment that measure the extent to which it achieves these goals.
3. Each unit should use these measurements to monitor its program and make changes. These may be changes in the methods used to reach the goals, or may be changes in the goals themselves.

All departments and programs are to submit plans by December, 1996, to be reviewed by the College administration and the L&S Academic Planning Council. Certain departments, of which English is one, have been asked to prepare preliminary pilot statements by 1 November 1995.

It is our understanding that formal assessment is a relatively new activity with potential for misunderstanding or misuse. The College must view our plan as a true experiment, and we expect to learn both from successes and failures. We wish to emphasize that, much like the undergraduate major program under review, this plan may change in the future. It is not yet clear that this proposal will produce the benefits we expect, and we are not yet sure that we can accomplish all that we hope to do within our limited financial budget and our limited human resources.

Because this is a pilot program, we are taking advantage of the early development to, so to speak, plan a plan. Previous drafts, based on course portfolios, contained flaws and caused considerable resistance. From what we learn from this pilot, we will construct a more elaborate plan to begin in fall 1996. See Appendix.

This pilot plan was drafted by Professors Standish Henning (CH), Phillip Herring, Charles Scott, Ronald Wallace, and Faculty Associate Joyce Melville. It was presented to the Departmental Committee on October 10, and reflects revisions requested by that committee.

ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE

The Chair will annually appoint an Assessment Committee, provisionally made up of faculty representing the undergraduate and graduate programs, linguistics, composition, and creative writing. Members should probably serve for three years.

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:

- knowledge of canonical and non-canonical 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 are expected to acquire the following skills:

- the ability to analyze literary texts;
- the ability to interpret texts on the basis of such analysis;
- the ability to relate analyses and interpretations of different texts to one another;
- the ability to relate literature to its social and historical contexts; and
- the ability to communicate such interpretations competently in written form.

IMPLEMENTATION

1. Course instructors in the 24 upper division literature courses offered in semester 2, 1995-96, will select the best paper, or exam in any course that does not require papers, written by a graduating senior for what the instructor identifies as the major writing exercise in that course.

2. The Assessment Committee will read these papers according to the goals above. The purpose is to ascertain the extent to which the stated goals are being realized in student work. Since the work will be drawn from courses addressing different periods of literary history, with attendant differences in methodologies, we expect that that individual papers/exams will always manifest only some of our program goals. Thus, a major task of the Assessment Committee will be to determine if sampling is sufficient to draw confident conclusions about our overall undergraduate program.

3. The Assessment Committee will report its findings to the Departmental Committee in the fall, and proceed to design and implement program evaluations based on those findings. We anticipate that assessment might usefully take place once every three years.

4. As part of the regular course evaluation, graduating seniors in these courses will be asked to write, as a part of the regular course evaluation, 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 canonical and non-canonical English and American literature? Give some examples." "How confident do you feel about your ability to write analytic essays about literature." "Explain why you chose an English major in terms of your goals after college").

5. Every five years, the department will survey recent graduates to ascertain degree of satisfaction with the program.

6. 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.

APPENDIX The following shows a possible assessment plan based on the pilot.

Method of Assessment

1. In semester 2, 1996-1997, six to eight courses will participate in portfolio assessment. The

courses, enrolling chiefly seniors (BA4, BS4), will be chosen by the Assessment Committee to reflect chronological range and different teaching practices.

All written work for graduating seniors will be collected at the time of submission and xeroxed before it is evaluated (marked up). Names will be deleted and a random number assigned to each student (e.g. Sam Smith will be number 11, Ann Amundson will be number 17). Each assignment will be put into a folder (portfolio) and kept to the end of the semester.

This record keeping will be done by a student hourly worker funded by the Assessment Council.

2. After the semester ends a committee of three instructors, not those who taught the courses, will select a total of 40-50 portfolios of graduating seniors, and read them according the goals above. The committee will write a brief report to the Assessment Committee, assessing what these portfolios tell about students' success in matching those goals.

3. During the summer, an outside assessor, chosen from an English department at a comparable institution, will spend a day reading a smaller selection of portfolios, assessing them according to the same goals and writing a report. The stipend for this visitor will come from the Assessment Council.

5. The Assessment Committee will receive the reports from the faculty readers; the outside reader's report; the remarks, 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.