

**English Department
Assessment of Student Learning
May 2006**

Program Overview

The English Department offers a BA or BS degree with a major in English literature, English with an emphasis in English Language and Linguistics, and English with an emphasis in Creative Writing; a BS degree with a joint major in English Education; MA and PhD degrees in literature in English, in English Language and Linguistics, and a PhD in Composition Theory.

This report focuses on the undergraduate major in the Department.

Undergraduate Major

Major in English – At the baccalaureate level the major provides college students work at developing intellectual discipline, orderly reasoning, and accurate use of the English language. The study of literature adds example and elegance to these pursuits. Literature reflects the currents of political tensions, bases of criticism, and the growth of social consciousness.

Emphasis in English Language and Linguistics – At the baccalaureate level the major with emphasis in English Language and Linguistics is for undergraduates wishing to combine a background in literature with a concentration of courses in history and structure of the English language.

Emphasis in Creative Writing – Undergraduates with a particular interest in creative writing may combine a background in literature with a concentration of courses in fiction or poetry.

Program Data

The English Department typically has approximately 800 majors. In 2005-06 approximately 300 undergraduate degrees will be granted.

Summary of Program Learning Objectives

Following are areas of knowledge central to the undergraduate degree in English, including emphasis areas of English Language and Linguistics and Creative Writing. These are expected learning outcomes for undergraduates. Also included are the skills areas that students are expected to have acquired upon completion of the program.

English Major**Program Goals**

- Knowledge of works on literature in English
- Awareness of the general outlines of the history of literature in English
- Awareness of the social and historical contexts in which the literature developed

Skill Areas

- The ability to analyze and interpret literary texts
- Communicate interpretations of literary texts in written form

English Language and Linguistics Emphasis

Students in English Language and Linguistics emphasis are expected to acquire all the skills and knowledge outlined above for the Department's English Department in Literature English major. They are also expected to acquire the following knowledge and skill areas specific to the major.

A major emphasis on language and linguistics is available to students who wish to combine a background in literature with a concentration of courses in the history and structure of the English language. In this option students who seek to emphasize language and linguistics in their major curriculum take the core English major curriculum and then select additional courses from the language and linguistics offerings, including Old English, Middle English.

Note: Program Goals and Skill Areas to be developed

Creative Writing Emphasis

Because Creative Writing emphasis students are also English majors, they are expected to acquire all of the skills and knowledge outlined above for the Department's English major. In addition, Creative Writing emphasis majors are expected to acquire the following specialized knowledge and skills.

Program Goals

- The ability to create original literary work in at least one, and preferably two, of the three genres: poetry, fiction, creative non-fiction
- The ability to imagine broadly, with sensitivity to language and style 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; to see in a finished work its process of being made

Methods of Assessment

In 1998, the Department carried out the first assessment process. For the English major, the chair appointed an Assessment Committee and a Reading Committee. Assessment plans for English Majors and Creative Writing majors are outlined below.

English Major Assessment Plan

The English Department created a Reading Committee and an Assessment Committee to carry out the assessment process. The assessment process and responsibilities of the committees are outlined below.

Reading Committee

The committee consists of 3 faculty members and 1 academic staff person. The committee was assigned to report its conclusions to the Assessment Committee members on what the exams and papers reveal about student's success in matching the program goals—the knowledge and skill areas outlined earlier in the report.

In the first semester of 1997-98, instructors in the 19 upper division literature courses (360 and above) collected major writing assignments from all BA4/BS4 students. Graded final exams from eight courses were also collected. The readers scored each paper on a grid and keyed the scoring to the Goals of the English major and areas of emphasis. Packets containing 5 papers and/or exams were randomly selected from each course. Approximately 250 BA4/BS4 individuals were enrolled in the courses.

Two of the committee members read half of the packets and the third reader reads a total of seven packets drawn from the two groups. Each reader scores the papers as high, medium, low or no basis according to the program goals— knowledge and skills areas.

All BA4/BS4 students are asked to write remarks (Reflections on the Major) on their experiences as English majors and are asked to focus their remarks on several pointed questions that relate to program goals.

The Reading committee reports to the Assessment Committee, its conclusions about what exams and papers reveal about student success in matching the program goals.

Assessment Committee

The standing assessment committee members are the Chair, Associate Chair, and the directors of the graduate, undergraduate, linguistics, composition, and creative writing programs. The assessment committee reviews the report from the Reading Committee, and writes a report on the assessment activities for the year. Recommendations for changes to curriculum and the assessment process are included in the report.

Creative Writing Emphasis Assessment Plan

Creative Writing emphasis majors are expected to acquire all of the skills and knowledge specified in the program goals for English majors. The three or four English 695

instructors serve as ad hoc assessment committee, reporting back to the other creative writing teachers on the work produced by graduating senior majors, on the course and program evaluations and on the feedback from outside readers.

The Creative Writing emphasis assessment incorporates 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. The manuscript usually combines work written in previous workshops (and revised for English 695) with new work. The final manuscript is expected to work as a whole, and typed and organized as if it were being submitted for publication.

Typically, three or four faculty writers work individually with twelve to fifteen senior majors each on these projects which represent a culmination of the students’ writing experience at Wisconsin. The biweekly 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). Committee members report back to the members of the writing faculty on the quality of the submissions.

Also, each semester an English Department faculty member Institute fellow (not a member of the permanent 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 Felix Pollak Poetry Thesis Prize (\$500) and the Eudora Welty Fiction Prize (\$500). The faculty judge reports informally on the quality of the year’s submissions to members of the writing faculty.

Next Steps

The Chair presents the report from the Reading Committee to the Department Committee and this Committee recommends any changes to the curriculum or the assessment process.

The Department developed the current assessment plan eight years ago. Our plan is to review and refine the assessment plan.