

Assessment of Student Learning Plan (ASLP): English

2017-18 Academic Year

University of Southern Maine

A. College, Department, Date

College: College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

Department: English

Date: May 2018

B. Contact Person for the Assessment Plan

Name and title: Professor Gerald Peters, Chair

C. Degree Program

Name of Degree Program: B.A. in English

D. Assessment of Student Learning: Program Assessment

Step 1: Identify the Student Learning Outcomes (SLO's)

- a. Do you have your student learning outcomes published on your department's website? Yes <http://usm.maine.edu/eng/overview>

Student Learning Outcomes for the Program

- 1) Every major will produce a substantial body of analytical writing that uses evidence and employs formal standard written English to make a focused argument.
- 2) Every major will read a range of complex cultural texts and exhibit knowledge of different genres and literary history.
- 3) Every major will use advanced research tools and knowledge of basic literary terms to compile, evaluate, and document appropriate primary and secondary sources for a substantial capstone project.
- 4) Every major will critically examine and synthesize multiple, complex, often contradictory arguments and perspectives.

5) Every major will demonstrate knowledge and comprehension of texts and traditions of language and literature written in English as well as their social, cultural, theoretical, and historical contexts.

b. Please identify which of your student learning outcome(s) were assessed this past academic year

Writing

As a result of assessments of College Writing carried out in 2015-16, our writing program underwent significant developments over the past years. Because of the reduction in full-time tenured faculty, nearly all of the sections of English 100 (College Writing) are being taught by part timers. With the acquisition of a new Director of Writing, a number of new initiatives have been implemented to improve writing in general education and in the major. Discussions related to assessments done in 2015 measuring pass/fail rates, faculty comments about student performance and a sample of low and middle-level student papers several led to several recommendations. First, instructors should focus on sentence stylistics and address social/economic status in the course (e.g. in reading sequences and assignments). Courses should include peer-review and one-on-one conferences, and the program should find ways to integrate writing tutors from the Learning Commons. A Title 3 grant was obtained to bring in experts to discuss integrating more multi-modal and digital writing into writing classrooms. And a full-time faculty hire was obtained to help design and deliver a new “stretch-course” option in Fall/17 for a two-semester version of College writing. The implementation of a “stretch course” has been designed in such a way as to allow for a more rigorous comparative assessment of student learning outcomes in writing as well as a comparative analysis of student retention.

Departmental discussions about writing also resulted in the recommendation that more upper-level writing courses be offered. Over the last two years the department has developed two new writing courses concentrated solely on sentence-level writing, English 205 (Sentence Style) and English 305 (Rhetoric, Syntax and Style) which have become very popular among students. These courses are part of a new Professional Writing Minor that is attracting students from business and the sciences as well as the humanities. Other new courses in the Professional Writing Minor included ENG 204 (Professional Writing), ENG 399 (Digital Rhetoric and Web Design for Professional Writers), CMS 305 (Writing Opinion: Editorials and Columns), ESP 489 (Grant Writing Seminar), ITP 210 (Technical Writing), and ENG 409 (Internship in Professional Writing).

The English Major

As a result of assessments of student papers in English 140 Reading Literature (the Department’s introductory course) and English 245 Introduction to Literary Studies (the department’s “gateway” course to the major) during 2016-17, the department concluded that students were insufficiently prepared in Outcome #3 (development in close reading skills, use of advanced research tools, knowledge of basic literary terms, etc.). As a result, English 245 (the introductory course to the major) had become overloaded with unrealizable expectations. The department

decided to create a more strongly sequenced connection between the two courses by emphasizing initial skill development in ENG 140 to give students a stronger grounding in these initial skills before entering English 245. This would then allow students more time to learn various critical perspectives (Outcome #4) and to continue to utilize their skills in applying these new perspectives in their written assignments. Teachers of ENG 140 and 245 met in May 2017 to share syllabi and teaching experiences and then again before the Fall 2017 semester to develop common assignments, discuss these changes and integrate them into their syllabi. A set of texts was ordered to help faculty develop common strategies for teaching both courses. With the help of a Title 3 grant the department invited experts in animal studies and Native American studies, bringing the course up to date with current work in the field.

No other assessments (reviews of student papers) were carried out during Spring/Fall 2017 during which the English Department's Internal review was being conducted. As a result of the findings in this review, however, several important observations were made particularly with regard to Learning Objective #5 (knowledge and comprehension of texts and traditions of language and literature written in English as well as their social, cultural, theoretical and historical contexts). The retrenchment process and consequent downsizing of faculty over the previous five years had resulted in the loss of nearly half of the English department faculty. The department was forced to redesign the major, reducing it from a former 48 credit hours to 36 credit hours (a significant reduction but not out of line with majors across the country). Since the loss of faculty expertise was particularly significant in medieval and early modern studies, one of the weaknesses of the reduced major, however, was a diminishment of its former historical focus. Students were no longer required to take courses in four out of six periods, (ancient, medieval, Renaissance, 18th century, 19th century, modern and contemporary); now they were only required to take a 200-level survey course in ancient literature, and three upper-level historical periods (only one before 1800). It was concluded that this weakened students' understanding of historical context in literature so fundamental to the kind of critical judgement required in upper-level classes and especially in seminar level research and writing. The department has repeatedly attempted to redress this historical imbalance within the department by requesting a new position in medieval studies with strengths in Islamic studies that would not only give students the necessary grounding in the roots of English literature and the history of the English language, but also expand their understanding of European culture.

Despite the substantial reduction in faculty, the numbers of majors in the past three years has continued to increase, from 165 in 2015 to 230 in 2018. One of the benefits of the reduced number of credit hours for the major has been the development of a four-year Education track for K-8 and high school teachers. Today nearly half of our majors are Education-track students.

c. *Do you have a **matrix or curriculum map** showing when your student learning outcomes are assessed and in which courses? No*

Step 2: Assessment Methods Selected and Implemented

We have not conducted further assessments since Spring 2016. During 2017 the Department conducted an internal review in which these earlier assessments were taken into account. It was also determined that the Department really needed to turn its focus on how to effectively offer a strong English major to a growing number of students with a substantially reduced number of full-time tenured faculty. This has required the development of new courses, the creation of a more effective system of advising, and the creation of a more coordinated writing program the teaching responsibility for which has now been shifted almost entirely to part-time faculty. The growing number of Ed-track English majors has also demanded a more flexible approach to the English major than in the past, with plans for new more education-related courses like a newly proposed seminar on the teaching of literature.

Example: Outcome 1 was measured during the fall semester -- all majors completed a problem-solving case study during the ___ course. Case studies were graded on a rubric by two faculty members.

Example: Outcome 2 was measured during the spring semester -- all majors in the capstone course completed a research project. Research projects will be reviewed and graded by a group of faculty.

Step 3: Using the Assessment results to Improve Student Learning

- a. *Briefly describe your unit's process of reviewing the program assessment results (i.e. annual process by faculty committee, etc). Writing committee for writing related rubrics; Curriculum Committee for the Major; Full Department to discuss findings within the committees.*
- b. *What specific changes have been or will be made to improve student learning, as a result of using the program assessment results? See section 1b*
- c. *Date of most recent program review/self-study? Spring/Fall 2017*

E. Community Engagement Activities in your departmental curriculum:

Please indicate if any of the community engagement activities listed below are included in your program's curriculum, by noting which activities are required or optional for students in your major.

<u>Community Engagement Activity</u>	<u>Required/Optional</u>	
Student Research (related to a community-based problem)	R	
Student-Faculty Community Research Project		O
Internship, or a Field Experience	R	
Independent Study (community-related project)		O
Capstone Course (community-related project)		O
Service-Learning (course-based)	R	
Study Abroad, or an International Program		O
Interdisciplinary Collaborative Project (community related)		O
Student Leadership Activities (related to a team project)		O
Students/Faculty Community Leadership (advisory boards, committees, conference presentations)		O
Other activities:		

c. Please list any courses (i.e. EDU 400) that have a community engagement activity in your program.

Entry-level courses: EYE 110 Literature and Medicine

Mid-level courses: ENG 334 Literacy Studies - Students work with a range of community partners:

- . *Learning Works After School Programs* at Reiche Elementary and East End Elementary Schools
- . English Language Learning (Adult/Family Literacy)
- . *Opportunity Alliance*
- . Parkside Community Center
- . Portland Adult Education
- . ESOL Informal Conversation class at USM
- . Portland High School Mentoring Club