

## Annual Report Form

Please answer the following questions in the body of an e-mail and return to [rculbert@iusb.edu](mailto:rculbert@iusb.edu). CC a copy of the report to your department faculty and to your dean.

a. Program Name - Department of English (B.A.)

b. Report prepared by – Margaret Scanlan

c. Who is the current assessment contact for your program? After May 31, please contact Elaine Roth, Chair of the English Department. After August 15, please Robert Meyer-Lee.

d. Should assessment information be sent to anyone else in your department?

No.

**1. What are the program's educational goals? (Please take goals directly from your program's assessment plan, and highlight any changes made this year.)**

The department offers two concentrations, one in literature and one in writing. Writing students include both creative writers and students with interests in expository and professional writing. We have the following goals for all English majors as readers: 1) Ability to analyze and interpret literary texts 2) Ability to apply literary and rhetorical theories to reading and writing 3) A sense of social and literary history as context 4) An understanding of the concept of genre.

As writers, students completing the literature major must 1) Demonstrate the general skills of college-level exposition 2) Skills associated specifically with the analysis and interpretation of literary texts 3) Research and documentation skills 4) Ability to marshal an argument.

Students completing the major in creative writing must 1) Demonstrate facility with language 2) A sense of style and voice 3) A sense of genre and tradition 4) Creativity and imagination.

Students with an emphasis in professional writing need to have the technical facility to write for new electronic media, including the Internet.

The department is beginning a discussion of how to integrate professional writing courses, including courses in writing for the Web and writing for new media, into the major. The professional writing committee has actively been pursuing grants to assist faculty in incorporating visual media into text-based courses. The assessment process included materials written in professional writing courses for the first time, and served as a reminder that the whole faculty needs to be involved in a discussion of how expectations for these courses fit into the general departmental goals outlined above.

**2. What assessment techniques did the program use? (Please take assessment techniques directly from your program's assessment plan and highlight any changes made this year.)**

This year we used a new system designed to increase the number of papers available for assessment. Each instructor, including those who do not teach in the major, received an assessment folder at the beginning of the semester identifying the English majors in each of his or her classes. Each instructor asked English majors to submit two copies of each assignment, and promptly put one of those copies in the assessment folder. The result was a substantial increase in the number of papers available for assessment. For the first time, substantial numbers of papers written in courses largely taught by lecturers, such as W231, W232, and W315 (professional writing, business writing, writing for the Web) were included, raising the

questions noted above. In addition, we asked each faculty member to submit a copy of the topic and assignment sheet that he or she had given the students in preparation for the paper.

The associate Chair solicited all of these folders at the end of the semester and then, using a departmental advising list, sorted the papers so that each faculty member received all of the papers from his or her own advisees. One unintended result of this process was that we discovered that four of the faculty had at least three times as many papers as some of their colleagues did. We do not expect first-year faculty to advise majors, but we do ask everyone else at the rank of assistant professor or higher to advise majors; all full-time tenured and track faculty participate in assessment. We discovered that although advisees may be distributed equally, those students actively pursuing the major are not distributed evenly.

For purposes of assessment, then, the associate Chair re-distributed papers so that every person received at least a dozen papers. Each paper was accompanied with a description of the assignment. Participating faculty members evaluated each of the papers using the attached rubric. The tenured and tenure-track faculty turned these forms into the associate chair, who conducted the annual March assessment meeting.

During the meeting, the faculty discussed each of the criteria on the rubric; comments were not directed toward specific students, but toward an overall sense of whether assignments corresponded with departmental goals and an overall sense of whether students appeared to be meeting these goals. Most faculty commented very favorably upon the assignments they had read; many stated that they had seen topics that they planned to try themselves. A senior member of the faculty, for example, teaching an introductory course for the last time, substantially incorporated a research assignment constructed for the same course by a relatively new member of the department.

All of the specific goals that the department has identified for itself were reflected in several papers; no area seemed to have been neglected. "Social and literary history as context," and "knowledge of the concept of genre," two areas identified as problematic in an earlier assessment, seemed well-represented. While it is impossible for every paper to incorporate every goal, the question of how systematic we need to be (e.g., emphasize social and literary history in two of the British surveys and genre in the other two) about ensuring equal coverage of the goals is worth discussing further. Making these goals more visible to students, perhaps by including them on course syllabi, as some faculty do, is also desirable. A student assigned to write a parody of a medieval romance, for example, might not immediately recognize that she is learning a great deal of specific information about the technical requirements and conventions of the genre.

Several people commented that the papers they read seemed on the whole stronger than they had in the past. Most student papers fell into the "strong" or "competent" range for all categories. The department discussed a possible intervention for students receiving "weak," especially on categories addressing college-level writing skills. One suggestion was that the relatively new course in argumentative writing, W270, would be an excellent course to require struggling students to take, since it emphasizes critical thinking and could be used as an elective toward the major.

I note that last year's assessment plan called for us to survey students in the senior seminar. Unfortunately, I forgot about that requirement until it was too late for action.

**3. What has your program done with assessment information this year? (i.e. communicated results to faculty, staff, alumni and students, made changes in the curriculum, made changes in the budget, added new courses. . .)**

As noted above, the department is beginning to discuss the relationship of the professional writing courses to the major. The larger issue—that substantial numbers of students enroll in courses which count toward the major but are primarily taught by lecturers—requires further thought. L390, Children’s Literature; G205, Introduction to the English Language, along with the W231-W232-W234-W270-W315 writing classes are more often taught by lecturers than by tenured and tenure-track faculty; some have only been taught by lecturers. The department has requested a tenure-track position in professional writing in the past, but budget constraints have so far prevented that move.

Discussions about the impact of the new creative writing minor on the major drew on observations from the assessment process. The department voted in April to request that the CLAS curriculum committee approve a request to allow English majors with a concentration in literature to take a minor in creative writing.

The department recommended that language about creative writing used in the undergraduate assessment rubric be added to the graduate assessment rubric.

**4. After reflecting on assessment activities in your unit, as a result of assessment what are two issues you would like to address?**

It would be helpful to find ways to remind faculty and students of assessment practices, such as the need to survey students in the senior seminar, until they become second nature. We’ve already begun to do so by identifying the annual assessment meeting on the departmental calendar and providing folders to all faculty who teach our majors. We need to shift to an electronic portfolio process, and perhaps an improved web site could highlight such reminders.

The issue of distributing active majors among the tenured and tenure-track faculty emerged as a problem. It is probably not possible to ensure that everyone has exactly the same number of active students, but the disparity between tenured faculty whose folders contained fewer than a dozen papers and the junior faculty member whose folder contained upwards of forty cannot be justified. It might be desirable for the associate Chair to assume some of the responsibility for distributing advisees.