

**Assessment contact person:** Margaret Scanlan, Interim Chair

**Attach 2004, 2005 and 2006 annual reports:** New program

**Attach an updated departmental assessment plan:** See attached

**Describe any changes to the program's educational goals since the last Third Year Review, and the rationale for those changes.** We added a course in stylistics as preparation for the final writing project, or thesis.

**Describe any assessment techniques used for measuring the Educational Goals that have been added or discontinued since the last Third Year Review, and the rationale for those changes.** Does not apply.

**Attach any assessment instruments that have been used during the past three years, and the data collected, (or, summarized data, if that is more appropriate.)** The relatively small number of students enrolled in the program—roughly thirty—and the small number of graduate courses offered each semester (typically a core course, a writing class, and a literature class) allow the departmental Graduate Studies Committee to address perceived problems as they developed. This committee meets at least twice a semester, with discussion largely focused on program development and improvement. We have primarily addressed concerns with student writing, especially as these relate to the final thesis project.

At its June 17, 2007 meeting, the Graduate Studies committee met to discuss our experiences with thesis projects. At that point, six students had completed projects and two were nearing completion. The impetus for the meeting was an email to the director from a

faculty member who had served as director and reader for several projects. As the minutes taken by Karen Gindele note, his concerns “fell roughly in two groups: the purpose of the project and how (and to what extent) we can help students do satisfactory work.” The committee discussion included a proposed alternative to the thesis, in which a student would have the option of taking an exam based on a set list of texts. While the committee decided not to adopt the exam option, there was a consensus that students often were not well-prepared for the challenges of the thesis, even when they had completed the course work successfully. Committee members “noted the challenges for the student in trying to keep focused over the course of 40 or more pages and to relate parts to the whole; to sustain an argument; to carry out adequate and meaningful research; to use theory effectively; to situate his or her work in a tradition, a genre, and an analytical history.” Creative projects present similar difficulties, as students are asked to preface their creative work with an essay placing their work in a literary tradition.

**What analysis has been done with this data? What conclusions has your department drawn?**

The decisions and results of our discussion are as follows:

1. We will keep the current 40-page requirement for the project, analytical or creative, bearing in mind some alternatives such as a 25-page project (which already exists as the standard length of a scholarly article).
2. We will adopt a new procedure: as part of the evaluation of students semester by semester, the director will solicit a decision by the Graduate Studies Committee as to whether to encourage the student to proceed in the program or to discourage the student and advise

him or her to withdraw. The director of the program will discuss this decision with each student and will also gather the information by collecting from each graduate instructor for the semester a checklist indicating whether he or she believes the student is prepared to

- 1) Demonstrate intellectual engagements in writing
- 2) Demonstrate graduate-level writing skills
- 3) Conduct research.
- 4) Attend class, meet deadlines, perform consistently
- 5) Participate in discussions, present papers orally

3. We will try to develop other flags that should signal a student's ability to succeed in the program.

4. The committee will prepare detailed statements delineating options and models for the various kinds of projects.

5. The committee will continue considering a reading assignment or course (beyond the one course technically required) to provide context for the project and help prepare students to write it. The advisor could provide a reading list in the area in which the student will write the project, and we could make this work a credit-bearing introduction to the project that could also generate the project proposal. We also discussed redistributing the total credits for required core courses to provide some credit for such a reading course (and the production of the proposal), on the MLS model.

**What changes have been made to the program as a result? (Curriculum, classes offered, classes discontinued, scheduling, advising, faculty education etc. . .)** In fall 2007, the

committee added a third core course. G660, Stylistics, to the requirements. As originally conceived, the master's degree required two core courses and a writing workshop. The addition of regular offerings in creative non-fiction (one such course was offered in spring 2008 and a related course will be offered in fall 2008) was intended to address the needs of students who did not have undergraduate work in creative writing or found the thought of a graduate-level creative writing workshop overwhelming. Workshops in creative writing do not adequately address concerns with expository writing, and we were reluctant to adopt an expository writing class that would replicate those taken by undergraduates. Instead, the committee decided to develop a course in stylistics, a subject that requires students to read closely and focus on style at the level of sentence. Because of its orientation to linguistics, our stylistics class will also help students develop an up-to-date technical vocabulary for talking about what goes on in an effective sentence. G660, has recently made its way through the remonstrance process and will be offered for the first time in spring 2009.

**How did assessment data and analysis support these changes?** Faculty concern with writing issues led directly to the development of a new course.

**What changes does the department plan to make in the coming years to the program and to assessment techniques, and why?** We created a spring survey to solicit direct feedback from students. It will be desirable to survey our graduates, perhaps in 2011, which will be five years after the first master's degrees were granted.

**How were faculty, students, administration, alumni and other groups involved in assessment?** Discussions so far have involved the Graduate Studies committee. As noted above, one

meeting was devoted to concerns raised by another faculty teaching in the program who is not a committee member. Copies of the checklist for faculty members and the survey for students have been shared with the graduate faculty and are now available on the departmental H drive.

**How were assessment data and results shared with faculty, students, administration and**

**alumni?** New program: does not apply

**In one paragraph, please summarize the most important impacts of the assessment of**

**student learning on the program.** New program: does not apply

**Is there any other information that you would like included in this report?**

The master's degree in English is a relatively new program; we graduated our first students in May 2006. Over the summer of 2007, Karen Gindele, who had directed the program since its inception in 2004, wrote an assessment plan. Karen went on sabbatical in the fall and Margaret Scanlan, who had previously chaired the department for six years, and served concurrently as associate chair for the last of these, took over the graduate program. In spring 2008, she became interim chair and continued to include graduate program administration in her duties, although Rebecca Brittenham assumed all of her other associate chair duties. In short, we have had more administrative change, and more doubling up of administrative duties, than would be strictly desirable. One consequence was that we delayed implementing the assessment survey of instructors for a semester. (The plan specifies that instructors are to be surveyed about student progress every semester, but we waited until spring to turn the plan into a survey form.) The form was drafted, revised, and approved at the April 11, 2008

meeting of the Graduate Studies Committee. It has been sent to all faculty teaching graduate courses in English this semester.