

May 30, 2023

To: Committee on Assessment  
From: Department of English  
RE: Program Assessment 2022

The following members of the department met on Wednesday, May 10, 2023, to assess this year's outcome: Hope Coulter, Ty Jaeger (chair), Toni Jaudon, Margo Kolenda-Mason, Kristi McKim, Felipe Pruneda Sentíes, Celeste Reeb, and Dorian Stuber.

### **Part I. Discussion and Changes to Capstone**

This year the department moved our all-day retreat from August to May. An earlier retreat allows us to take what we've learned during our conversations and apply them to the upcoming academic year. We are specifically interested in making changes to the thesis process and communicating this information to the class of '24 during the summer of '23. We will still meet for a half-day in August to address other items.

In the conclusion of our Program Assessment 2022, we stated:

"The department recognizes that the capstone project was instituted about fifteen years ago. Our faculty have developed as teachers; our courses and assignments have changed. Especially regarding the Literary and Film Studies emphases, it's possible that course goals and methods has drifted from a direct scaffolding to the thesis goals. We've decided, then to begin a process of reviewing our 300 and 400 level courses in context of the current thesis design and goals, to consider whether and how we need to revise the thesis process or goals."

The capstone for the English major takes place in ENGL 497 Senior Thesis Seminar (for Literary Studies and Film & Media Studies) and ENGC 497 Creative Writing Senior Thesis Seminar. While our assessment task this year focuses on the Reading Learning Goal, our interest in revising the thesis capstone addresses all three learning goals: Reading, Writing, and Self-Authorship. The capstone—the writing project completed in the thesis class—is used as direct assessment.

Much of our conversation addressed how we might best revise the capstone to develop and exhibit student achievement in the Reading, Writing, and Self-Authorship learning goals. After all, we direct assess all three learning goals using the capstone.

When we instituted the capstone project nearly fifteen years ago, the Literary Studies and Film & Media Studies emphases required a project we might think of as a more traditional thesis: a scholarly article using primary and secondary

sources, usually written in an objective or academic voice. Over time, Literary and Film & Media Studies faculty have required students to become more flexible readers and writers, expanding the types of reading and writing projects students undertake to include public facing humanities and video essays. We recognize that asking students to write one long, scholarly thesis is not always in keeping with the kinds of writing that they've been doing in the major. Our student body has become more diverse, and we continue to feel the pandemic's aftereffects in student attitudes and levels of preparedness. We are changing the thesis to meet what we have prepared students to do and what they are in fact capable of doing.

With these issues in mind, we revised the LS and Film senior thesis structure to allow for the following kinds of projects:

1. A long-form essay + author's statement
  - a. For this option, students write a sustained essay engaging with a single text. The finished essay will be about 20 -25pp. Students also write a reflection on their process (author's statement, 4-5 pp.).
  - b. If students have experience making visual/video essays in previous classes (e.g., from taking ENGF 365: Digital Storytelling), they can consider crafting a visual essay for their capstone project. Visual essays will need to be roughly 10-15 minutes in length, though we will work out individual requirements based on the density and complexity of students' plans. For a visual essay, students will write a longer reflection on their process (7-8 pp.), to allow them to account for their work with sources.
2. A portfolio of related essays + author's statement
  - a. For this option, students craft a portfolio composed of revised essays from previous classes and new work, totaling roughly 25pp. (e.g., 4 essays of 6-7pp. each). Students also write a reflection on their process (author's statement, 4-5 pp.)
  - b. At least half of the work in the portfolio should be new, and the other half should be substantially revised in both form and content.
  - c. The essays in the portfolio must *work together*, meaning that they share a clear central through line. For instance, students might write essays on different aspects of a single major text or on different works by a major author or director, or they might trace an image, pattern, or technique across related works.

The ENGC 497 Creative Writing Senior Thesis has always allowed manuscripts that include collected, shorter works (e.g., collections of stories, poems, or essays) and substantially revised work from other classes. While the CW Thesis will not change the types of projects that students are allowed/encouraged to undertake, the capstone will experiment with having students write periodic

reflections that account for their revisions in response to their first, second, and outside readers (this in response to concerns from faculty readers).

## Part II. Assessment

According to our Student Assessment Plan, this year we assessed our first learning goal, Reading.

### Reading Learning Goal:

Students will learn to become attentive readers, skilled at close-reading texts and engaging relevant aesthetic, cultural, and historical contexts.

### Indirect Assessment: Senior Survey Data

12 students (out of 16 total enrolled) completed the online senior survey, representing a 75% response rate.

**Two survey prompts directly address our departmental learning goals.**

#### Prompt 1

Our English Department has recently whittled down a long list of learning goals into three points of focus: reading, writing, and self-authorship. No matter your strengths in relation to these areas.



With 9 respondents (75%) feeling “proud to have mastered” the reading learning goal and 3 ((25%) feeling that they have “almost mastered” the learning goal, we are satisfied with the results of the indirect assessment.

**Prompt 2:** This prompts asks for qualitative comments. The survey asks one question to address all three goals:

*We welcome your reflections on the previous question. Are there things that you're learning as an English major that \*aren't\* subsumed within these three learning goals? Anything else you want to add here?*

(5 responses)

- Place within community
- So much of my experience as an English major has been having conversations about individual experiences with a text. I think that I've learned a lot about having difficult or complicated discussions and appreciating other people's perspectives.
- No
- I feel that those learning goals cover it.
- I think the department is set up well other then focusing on more broad areas for classes to be had i think making a required courses that are more generic then having such specialized classes be whats available.

### **Other Relevant Student Responses to the Reading Learning Goal**

Our senior survey asks a range of open-ended questions, ranging from why they majored in English to questions that ask specifically about certain courses (like Literary Analysis (the gateway course that all majors take) to the senior thesis capstone. The following student answers address our majors' passion for reading and the ways in which they feel they have progressed as readers:

- I knew that I enjoyed it in high school, and thought that it would be fun to read things I'd never read before. I liked the diversity of topics in the department and was interested to dig into periods I knew nothing about.
- In my college admissions essay, I wrote about how movies and books were the most prevalent source of joy and stability in my life - one that was constantly shifting and being uprooted from place to place. I chose to major in English with the hopes of improving my self-expression and articulation, authorship, and investigative skills -- to appreciate and discover new modes of expressing beauty and finding human/living connection in and even through all the instabilities, large and small.
- I think that all of the literature classes have been very effective at teaching me a variety of subjects. I feel that because of Hendrix, I could pick up a book from almost any movement or time period and be able to appreciate it.
- There are plenty of interesting and important topics courses to choose from -- there is literally something for everyone, and I have heard countless stories of people who discovered passions for certain genres and/or theoretical concepts that they may have never thought they would come to love before. The kindness, passion, grace, and inclusivity of the

way English courses at Hendrix stands out to me and should be celebrated!

- I don't think my first 200-level English course prepared me at all for advanced classes. It felt on par with my high school classes for difficulty. Literary Analysis, on the other hand, continues to be one of the best class experiences I had here. The spectrum of texts analyzed and general way the class was run solidified my desire to declare my major.
- Literary Analysis is an excellent foundational course! The breadth of texts and films covered prepare you for any English course that you might take and Dr. Jaudon truly teaches you to make essays your own. I had a wonderful experience in this course.
- I felt that these classes prepared me very well, especially in terms of analyzing work and comparing it to historical and cultural backgrounds. I did not feel that the jump from Lit Analysis to my first 300-level class was anything too hard. I felt ready for that next step.
- I've already spoken a bit above to how Dr. McKim's Intro to Film helped me immensely -- ENGL 297 with Dr. Jaudon was also wonderful – this was a course that I had to retake after going through a personal emergency in the fall of 2020. I would love to impress that it was not an annoyance to have to retake this course, as much as I felt bad for not being able to complete it the first time. The course and selected texts were so good that I actually was excited to read many things over again, and to see and write about them with a fresh set of eyes (after the passing of some time). I really appreciated the assignment of noticing journals (and similarly, film impressions from Dr. McKim) which helped me keep track of how I was engaging with texts and helped me bring my insights more clearly into class discussions, to collaborate with my peers in thinking and learning. I loved the diversity of texts, the flexibility afforded to the shape and form of final projects...everything!
- I greatly enjoyed Literary Hybrids because I was able to gain exposure to modern writers who do things that are unique and similar to my own ideas.
- There is not enough Black literature and a lot of the ones that we have consumed focus a lot on trauma. More queer, joyful, perspective-taking, and liberating pieces would be beneficial, especially as there are so little of us in the department and walking into a room where we see at most 3 other people who like us does not make the consumption of our grief any easier. I can count on one hand, outside of my class dedicated to Black Feminism, how many pieces of literature were written by Black people. And a majority of those are from light-skinned or even mixed black people and deal with our relationship to and with white people.

As these responses come from a wide range of prompts, we might expect a wide range of answers. Overall, we feel encouraged by the enthusiasm that

these responses display. Of course, not all of the responses are positive, and as a department, we are continually working to expand and deepen our course readings with diversity, equity, and inclusion in mind.

### **Direct Assessment: Departmental Reflection**

By using the same language as in the Senior Survey to evaluate the reading learning goal, we determined that of our 16 graduating seniors :

- 9 students “mastered” [compared with 9 self-reported]
- 5 have “almost mastered” [compared with 3 self-reported]
- 2 are still “in-process” [compared with 0 self-reported]
- 0 are “struggling” [compared with 0 self-reported]

Our direct assessment generally aligns with student self-evaluations.

### **Conclusion**

We look forward to seeing to how changes to the capstone portfolio will effect the outcomes of our Reading, Writing, and Self-Authorship learning goals. As we measure the outcomes of the capstone, we'll continue to review our 300- and 400-level courses in the context of the revised thesis design.