

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT ANNUAL ASSESSMENT REPORT (MAY 2018)
(Report Drafted by Dr. Toni Jaudon and Submitted by Dr. Carol West, Department Chair)

Narrative highlighting our use of the rubric for ENGL 110 / W1:

In recent years, the department has benefited from a Mellon grant to consider new forms of writing pedagogy. Last year, we extended these conversations by drafting a new rubric to guide course development and assess student learning in W1 courses. This year, faculty members have been beta-testing the rubric in their classes in different forms; several of us have used it to directly assess student learning in English 110 and 200-level courses and have incorporated it into our course learning goals; one of us has also had students directly assess their own learning to the rubric as well. We also have an ongoing English 110 Working Group, which has met three times this spring to discuss the general overview and structure of our 110 sections, to discuss specific assignments, and to discuss specific students who exemplify typical learning trajectories through the course. The English 110 Working Group will continue to meet regularly throughout 2018-19 and report back to the department with summary observations and recommendations. The department plans to make a few refinements to the rubric this summer and to use this to directly assess all students in W1 courses at the end of the semester going forward. By tracking these data, we will be able to refine our pedagogy and track how our students are developing in our courses.

Clarification of the senior thesis / capstone 's relation to the matrix and departmental assessment:

The department's capstone, the senior thesis project, plays a central role in our assessment of student learning. For the past ten years, the department has met to discuss a selection of thesis projects in order to choose the winners of the best thesis prize in critical and creative writing. These conversations led to the development of the formal senior thesis objectives, which are now used to directly assess student learning in the course, in the sense that they are the ground for the grade assigned by the relevant faculty member.

Currently, we also assess student progress toward the learning goals described in the matrix during each student's oral defense of their senior thesis. During that conversation, faculty members ask students to reflect on the relation between their classes and their final thesis project. Faculty then discuss the themes and issues students describe, along with trends they observe in student work, at the department's annual retreat. This conversation allows the faculty to note trends in student performance and to shift pedagogy accordingly in 200-, 300-, and 400-level courses, and to alter the structure of the thesis process as well (for instance, in the addition of a fall thesis meeting to discuss research methods on the critical side of the major).

The department's matrix of learning goals was drafted in response to a seminar on assessment methods in the humanities. Initially, the goal for that document was to provide a clear scaffold by which faculty members could align their classes at the 200-, 300-, and 400- levels. That is, the major purpose of that document was initially to shape course *design* for faculty members—to ensure particular topics received attention at appropriate places in the curriculum—and not to guide assessment of student learning. The matrix also predates the division of our major into

three emphases (literary studies, film and media studies, and creative writing), and thus does not yet reflect the shifts in learning goals those emphases require. For those reasons, we have not to date systematically used the matrix to assess student performance, though we plan to work toward this goal at our annual retreat in August.

Action plan:

This semester, we plan to work to increase our direct assessment of student learning by tracking student achievement in ENGL 297, the gateway course to the major, and in ENGL 497, the senior thesis seminar. Faculty teaching 297 will directly assess student achievement of the matrix's goals, noting whether students achieve, exceed, or have yet to achieve the goals outlined there. Faculty teaching 497 will directly assess student achievement of the thesis seminar goals for critical and creative writing. These data will enable us to consider how our students develop in the major, so that we can shift our pedagogy in 300- and 400-level courses to suit.

More broadly, we are mindful of the need to make our assessment practices clear, user-friendly, and sustainable for years to come. One goal we have set for our retreat next fall is to revise the matrix of departmental learning goals so that individual faculty members can use it to assess student learning in their courses. Our plan is to revise the matrix to accommodate the major's three emphases (noting areas of overlap and difference), to simplify it somewhat (as we expect fewer goals to be easier to track), and to develop an assessment rubric that would enable faculty to directly assess student achievement. We would then be in a position to gather this data as a department and track change over time; this data would guide conversations at the department's annual retreat about course development and would serve as a resource for individual faculty members as they revise their courses as well.

Resources we need:

- time to work together as a department on these assessment issues
- administrative/clerical assistance setting up user-friendly Excel spreadsheets to track data (ideally, we'd have admin help with data entry as well)
- an English assessment consultant who can help us think about the most efficient and effective ways to do direct assessment
- dedicated time during Fall Faculty Conference to do some of the above, including the assistance of an assessment expert to review the new rubric we are going to derive from the matrix

Things we don't need: We haven't always found it helpful to be grouped with faculty in the natural and social sciences when considering assessment issues. These groupings sometimes require us to spend time explaining and justifying the differing assumptions that guide our work as humanists (e.g., that content acquisition isn't an end in itself in our classes but rather serves the larger goal of helping students do critical and creative writing). While these conversations are always engaging, they take up time we could use to make progress on the assessment task at hand. We would appreciate more time to work together as a department instead.