

2018-19 English Department Assessment Report

During the 2018-19 Academic Year, our English department has worked to streamline both our learning goals and their assessment. At our Fall Faculty Conference assessment meeting—which followed on the heels of our annual departmental retreat—we were tasked with establishing a rubric for one or more of our departmental learning goals; yet, during this conversation, we realized that, instead of singling out one of our *current* learning goals for expansion, we first needed to carve down our existing and too-numerous goals into a more manageable and assessable three. In other words, as we understand the complexity and necessity of assessment, we learned how to clarify just what we *do* as a department together.

Towards this end, we began a brainstorming session as to what exactly we accomplish and how to prioritize these goals (i.e. which goals were subsets of others, which goals were assessable, etc.). Department faculty all sketched out the goals most important to them individually, and then—through various processes of collecting and revising phrases--we all settled unanimously on three clear skills that we hope our students to develop: reading, writing, and self-authorship. A mere listing of skills does not a set of learning goals make, however; and thus our faculty further undertook the challenge of writing one sentence that placed this participle into proper context. Once those sentences were established—again, through a process of drafting, revision, discussion—we turned to the building of a rubric that delineated how each learning goal might appear at various levels of competence. We completed this work throughout several of our monthly departmental meetings and during a specifically assessment-dedicated meeting on Reading Day.

The attached rubric offers the culmination of this process, including our new and improved learning goals and descriptions of each level. In addition, we offer a curriculum map that sketches out (very basically) where each goal is introduced, developed, and mastered at our different curricular levels.

What makes us terrifically proud of this rubric is the fact that its creation *actually models* the very skills that we hope for our own students to cultivate. Our collaborative revisions, built from a process of an individual's draft brought to discussion, involve not only our department's own learning goals of reading, writing, and self-authorship *but also* our Writing Level-1 emphasis on writing *as a process*.

Student Assessment Plan

ENGL/ENG 497: Senior Thesis: As per our routine, we assess our students not only within individual courses, as based on writing and discussion, but also as a whole—especially at the senior level—by reflecting on the capstone thesis experience. In the process of determining our thesis prize winners, we talk together about the skills that our students have (and have not developed), and we assess what's exceptional in relation to the norm. Furthermore, during thesis oral exams, we assess—through rotating faculty for each thesis exam—a student's ability to speak and think spontaneously in relation to that student's written thesis. The conversations that we as a department have relative to the thesis, then, help us to gauge and calibrate what we

expect of our students on the whole; these conversations further illuminate our weaknesses and strengths as a department.

W1 Rubric and Assessment (the following paragraphs overlap with assessment descriptions for W1, submitted for the Writing Across the Curriculum Capacity; given that English is the home of W1 courses, it seems important to include these paragraphs here, as well): As we reported last year, we have polished our learning goals rubric and distributed it to all instructors of W1 courses (English 110 and English 200-level [with the exception of ENGL 297, Literary Analysis, which doesn't bear W1 credit]). We have distributed this rubric to our students as an indication of our semester-long goals for each student. To each student course evaluation of a W1 class offered in Spring 2019, we have added one qualitative and one quantitative question, so as to gather data that reflects a student's own self-perception of how the class impacted each student's writing capacity. We are currently in the post-semester process of gathering data that's based directly on the rubric built around our learning goals. Instructors of W1 courses are completing this rubric for the course as a whole (determining how many students are at which level for which goal), such that we have quantitative data by which to frame our conversations as an English department during our annual retreat.

Senior Surveys: In past years, we distributed a senior survey, hard copy, for students to complete and return to the department. This year, we have shifted that survey from paper to an electronic survey. We have further modified some questions, as we hadn't revised it for several years. We ask seniors what worked and didn't work for them, why they chose the major, how we could improve, etc.; we have actively incorporated and taken seriously student suggestions in years past. As per usual, we will aggregate this data for discussion at our August retreat.

Action Plan

Evaluation of Gathered Data for W1: We will bring together a) the data gathered *from students* (via course evaluation) as to how a W1 course impacted their writing ability, and b) the data gathered *from faculty* as to how students were faring in these courses. This pairing of data allows us to read students' self-perception of writing ability alongside faculty's assessment of students' writing ability. During our annual English departmental retreat, we will thus be able to make preliminary claims as to our strengths and weaknesses as a department in the instruction of writing (i.e. are students more or less confident than they should be? Do students' assessments of their writing ability match those of faculty's assessment of students' writing ability? Which aspects of our W1 learning goals seem hardest, according to faculty, for students to attain? Which are we achieving more readily? Which of our learning goals do students mention in their open-ended question?). Addressing these questions allows us a clearer picture as to where we ought to direct our future attention in strengthening our pedagogy.

W1 Pedagogical Training in accordance with need: Toward this end of improving our W1 teaching, we have received a Mellon Departmental Initiative Grant for an accomplished scholar of writing pedagogy to visit Hendrix and offer a workshop in teaching underprepared first-year students. We are excited that, by the time of this scholar's visit in the 2019-20 school year, we will have more substantive data (as described in the previous steps) as to our concrete strengths and weaknesses, as applicable to a) what our students need, and b) gaps in our current pedagogy.

This data will help us to ask sharper questions and gain more precise knowledge in the areas that we most need.

Introduction of New Learning Goals/Senior Surveys: We're all rather proud of our streamlined learning goals for the department, and we will turn to these goals as we move forward with curricular planning and departmental reflection. We will revisit our rubric at our August retreat (it felt right and polished to us in May, but we will reassess its value in August), particularly in comparison with our Senior Surveys.