

OVERVIEW

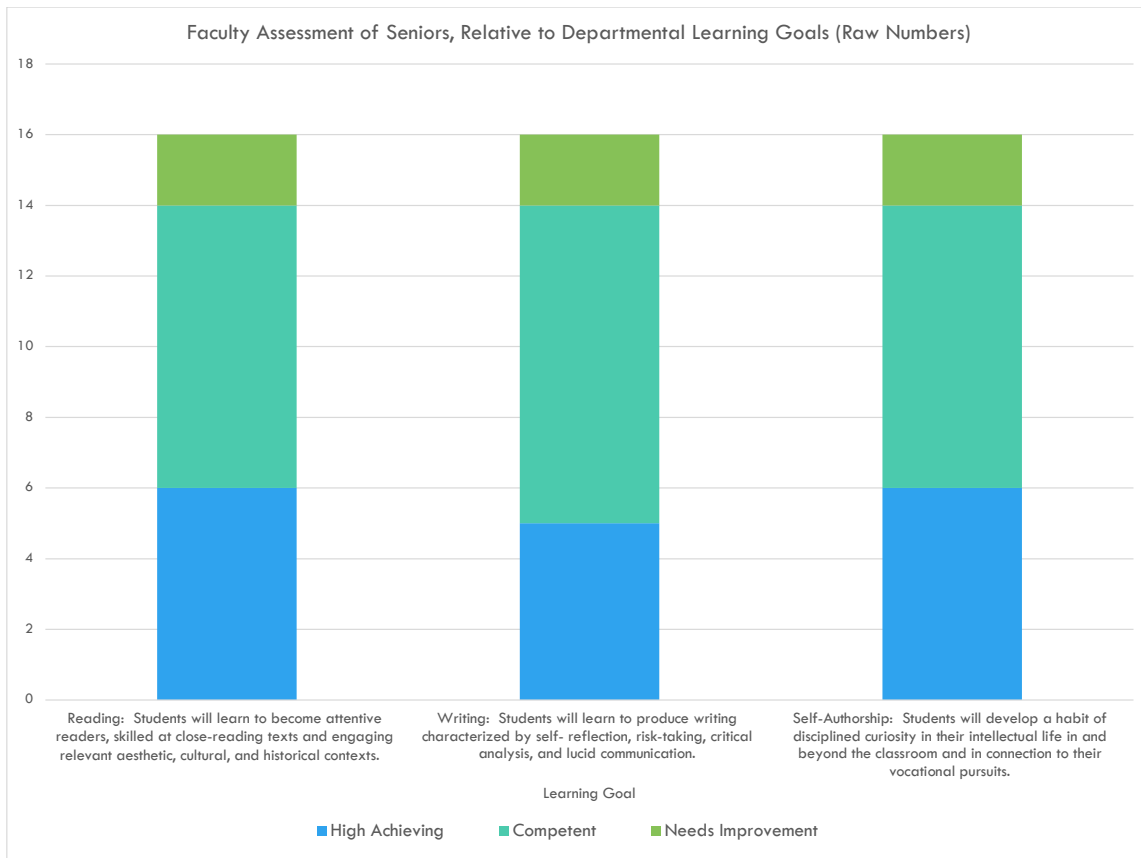
On 13 May 2021, our department met (via Teams) for our annual assessment meeting. Attendees included the following: Hope Coulter, Josh Glick, Erin Hoover, Ty Jaeger, Toni Jaudon, Kristi McKim, and Carol West. During this meeting, we accomplished the following:

- 1) Direct Assessment of the English Department's "Reading" Learning Goal:
 - a. We assessed the competence of each of our graduating seniors in relation to our learning goals rubric. As a group, we discussed each senior's progress within the major, performance in class, and thesis capstone project.
 - b. Through discussion, we arrived at a collective decision as to which of the rubric categories best fit each student's accomplishments.
 - c. We tallied our shared assessment to quantify our department's sense of students' strengths and weaknesses in relation to this learning goal.

- 2) Indirect Assessment of the English Department's "Reading" Learning Goal:
 - a. We considered our students' senior surveys (we are not including this data, which seems more relevant to the department than it is useful to the assessment committee) and our conversations with students, as to their sense of accomplishment in relation to writing within our department.
 - b. We discussed how students' self-assessment does and does not match the results of our departmental direct assessment.
 - c. We considered how student feedback, in tandem with our direct assessment of seniors, reveals strengths and weaknesses of our pedagogy in relation to this learning goal.

FACULTY ASSESSMENT OF SENIORS, RELATIVE TO DEPARTMENTAL LEARNING GOALS (RAW NUMBERS)

Learning Goal	High Achieving	Competent	Needs Improvement
Reading: Students will learn to become attentive readers, skilled at close-reading texts and engaging relevant aesthetic, cultural, and historical contexts.	6	8	2
Writing: Students will learn to produce writing characterized by self-reflection, risk-taking, critical analysis, and lucid communication.	5	9	2
Self-Authorship: Students will develop a habit of disciplined curiosity in their intellectual life in and beyond the classroom and in connection to their vocational pursuits.	6	8	2



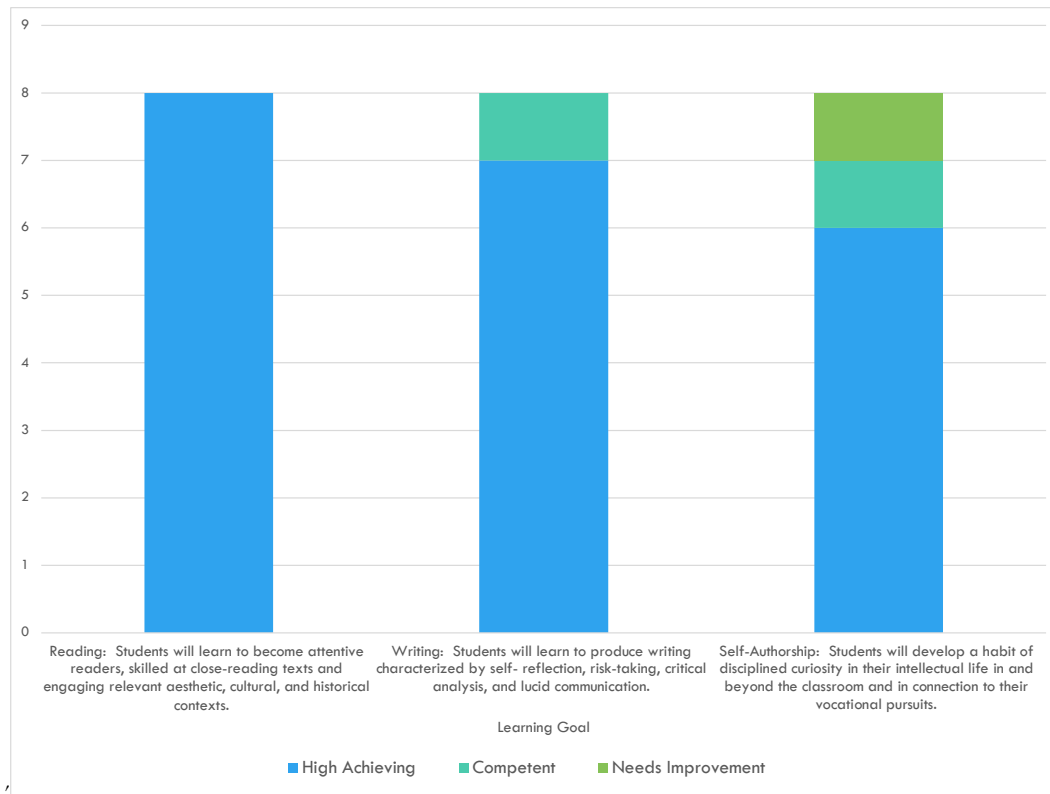
In determining these categorizations, we reflected on the cumulative work of each student. We thought first of their capstone thesis project as an indication of their achievement within the major, and then we also opened this discussion to incorporate their progress throughout their years in the major. We also considered students' co-curricular activities involving the major—their engagement and initiative that draws upon but doesn't necessarily become legible within the thesis project or coursework itself—in making these assessments (particularly with regard to the "Self-Authorship" learning goal).

Though we were to focus on the "Reading" learning goal this year, we realized the value of considering all of these learning goals in tandem. We had a lively and productive discussion about our students' varying strengths in these areas. What the above numbers do not reflect, for example, is the variation among the 5-6 students in the "high-achieving" category; though a solid core of high-achieving students appeared in this category for all three learning goals, we found that some students were better readers than writers, and vice-versa; we also found that students might be superlative readers and writers but more competent with regard to self-authorship. With focus on the "reading" learning goal, we talked through the connectedness of reading skills to writing and self-authorship, the ways that we teach these skills independently and contingently.

STUDENT SELF-ASSESSMENT OF ACHIEVEMENT RELATIVE TO DEPARTMENTAL LEARNING GOALS (RAW NUMBERS)

Learning Goal	High Achieving	Competent	Needs Improvement
Reading: Students will learn to become attentive readers, skilled at close-reading texts and engaging relevant aesthetic, cultural, and historical contexts.	8		
Writing: Students will learn to produce writing characterized by self-reflection, risk-taking, critical analysis, and lucid communication.	7	1	
Self-Authorship: Students will develop a habit of disciplined curiosity in their intellectual life in and beyond the classroom and in connection to their vocational pursuits.	6	1	1

Senior English Majors, self-assessment relative to departmental learning goals



Worth noting among these numbers is the fact that all respondents regard themselves as “high achieving” readers (though these surveys are anonymous, we would concur, insofar as these students read with understanding our repeated reminders to complete their senior survey!).

We note that students found the “self-authorship” learning goal to be the least nourished or mastered, yet we also note that a 50% rate doesn’t offer solid enough data to justify making changes accordingly.

Trained readers and critical thinkers who we are, keen to consider signifying absences, we dedicated most of our discussion of the seniors’ self-assessments to the 50% who *didn’t* respond: what motivates this lack of engagement? Who’s *not* telling us about their experience in the major? The qualitative data gathered from our questions helps us to know more about what’s working and not working in the major; we are gladdened and appreciative to learn that these students were generally rather pleased with their experience as English majors. Would that we also could survey for the non-respondents, as to whether their absent feedback resulted from causes ranging from screen burnout and busy finals week to angry frustration with the major. We discussed possible ways of yielding a higher response rate next year, i.e. distributing a hard copy during the final thesis class, expecting students to turn in either the survey or an electronic certificate of completion (perhaps to the Humanities administrative assistant) in order to receive a capstone grade, etc.

We also reflected on the fact that, toward the close of each thesis defense, we invite our students to speak on the fly about how their thesis process affords a fitting capstone for their time in the major; and *all* of us felt moved—some of us, surprised, even, at how a quieter or struggling student could bring things together in the climactic moment—that our students uniformly could point to how prior coursework and interests culminated in a thesis process about which they felt proud. To be fair, the structure of the exam lends itself to this affirming closure: students feel nervous, after all, and, frankly, a student might feel rather awkward or reluctant to ridicule the department or to insist that no learning has happened whatsoever (the whole point of the thesis exam is to demonstrate one’s learning, after all). Yet, no matter the degree of adrenaline-fueled performativity, it is nonetheless worth noting that students *could* speak with eloquence and persuasion as to why they chose their thesis topic, how the major prepared them for this independent writing completed within the community of the seminar, and how they’d found the work meaningful. Towards this end, we faculty realized that we’re missing something important in not somehow harnessing those closing responses into assessment data: perhaps the chair of the thesis exam (the second reader) might jot down some phrases quickly during/after the conversation, which we then are responsible to compile and submit as assessment data? Should students be expected to *write* such a statement, succinctly tracing out their path in the major? We did not arrive at answers to these questions, yet it was the first time that we departmentally addressed the cumulative value of this moment of the thesis defense—which becomes the beginning of moving toward new and improved assessment data.

We thus regard this year more as one of information gathering (and gaining a sense of where and what information we need further to gather) than one that yields data enough to warrant any changes for AY 21-22.