Expected Outcome: Demonstrate Effective Written Communication

Students in ENGL 4800, the literature capstone, will demonstrate effective written communication skills in the form of a substantial research paper of at least twenty pages.

Papers were judged on two slightly different sets of criteria. In 2012 there were five criteria. Students would demonstrate an ability to

1. analyze a literary text
2. analyze a literary genre
3. create an effective research paper
4. establish a compelling critical voice
5. discuss literary movements and periods

In 2013, these were modified to four criteria. Students would demonstrate an ability to

1. analyze a literary text
2. discuss cultural and/or literary (e.g., genre, history, or movement) context
3. write in a critical voice
4. produce an effective research paper in terms of appropriate structure, compelling synthesis of research, and relevance to ongoing academic conversation
**Assessment Method 1:** Capstone Research Paper

**Assessment Method Description**

During the capstone course, students developed analytic research papers of 20-plus pages. Using a rubric developed by the track faculty, two members of the Undergraduate Studies Committee assessed each research paper. Disagreements were resolved by a third committee member.

The rubric addressed whether the students met the following criteria by demonstrating an ability to

1. analyze a literary text
2. discuss cultural and/or literary (e.g., genre, history, or movement) context
3. write in a critical voice
4. produce an effective research paper in terms of appropriate structure, compelling synthesis of research, and relevance to ongoing academic conversation.

*Analysis of a literary text* means that the student demonstrated the ability to explicate passages from a literary text and articulate how the passages serve as good reasons to support an overall reading of the text.

*Discussion of a cultural and/or literary context* means that the student can articulate effectively how a text is related to historical events and changes or other cultural phenomena within a given time period, and/or how a text is related to literary traditions, other genres, and literary movements.

*Writing in a critical voice* means that the student creates a voice that is authoritative, clear, and effective within the traditions of literary critical discourse.

*Producing an effective research paper* means that the paper achieves a coherent rhetorical structure, incorporates research that supports the argument of the paper, and demonstrates a familiarity with the critical questions surrounding the literary work.
Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion #</th>
<th>Fall 2012</th>
<th>Spring 2013</th>
<th>Total 2012-2013</th>
<th>Total 2011-13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Analyze a literary text</td>
<td>92% (11/12)</td>
<td>89% (16/18)</td>
<td>90% (27/30)</td>
<td>94% (51/54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Discuss cultural/literary context</td>
<td>92% (11/12)</td>
<td>77% (14/18)</td>
<td>83% (25/30)</td>
<td>81% (63/78)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Write in a critical voice</td>
<td>75% (9/12)</td>
<td>72% (13/18)</td>
<td>73% (22/30)</td>
<td>76% (41/54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Produce an effective research paper</td>
<td>92% (11/12)</td>
<td>72% (13/18)</td>
<td>80% (24/30)</td>
<td>83% (45/54)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Percent of students achieving objectives of the Literature Track

The criteria for discussing cultural contexts and generic contexts, these findings were separate in our reporting for 2011-2012 as criteria 2 and 5. In 2012-2013, discussing cultural contexts and generic contexts were combined into criterion 2.

In Fall 2012, twelve portfolios were assessed. In Spring 2013, eighteen portfolios were assessed, giving a total of thirty portfolios that were assessed in academic year 2012-2013.

The rater-training session substantially improved inter-rater agreement in spring. However, inter-rater reliability decreased to 66% in Fall 2012, perhaps because this is the first time the committee members assessed e-Portfolios.

The number of students taking our capstone classes is relatively low because they are distributed across the Department’s three tracks. However, the literature track is the largest of the Department’s three tracks. College of Education students in Curriculum and Instruction also follow this track. Thus, despite the aforementioned modest revision to criterion 2 for this track, we are able to report cumulative results for 54 student papers across three semesters (Spring 2012, Fall 2012, Spring 2013).
As the table reveals, students consistently perform well on criterion 1. Performance on criterion 2 is uneven, ranging over the three semesters between 71% and 92%. While enhanced performance is always desirable, further assessment of this criterion is needed before a recommendation can be made. The area in need of greatest instructional emphasis in this track is criterion 3 (writing in a critical voice). The ability to produce an effective research paper (criterion 4) improved over the course of the academic year.

**How did you use findings for improvement?**

Faculty teaching in this track expressed most interest in developing ways to improve student ability to create an effective research paper and to create a critical voice. Faculty teaching 4000-level classes will provide greater focus on helping student to develop appropriate voice. It is anticipated that increasing the number and length of writings assignments, something that is under discussion by literature-track faculty, will improve student performance on criterion 4. Faculty members are also focusing on continued development of research skills to improve student ability to achieve effectiveness of criterion 4. Faculty members will recommend incorporating Wayne Booth’s *The Craft of Research* as an auxiliary text to all 4000-level literature courses.

We currently use a two-category (i.e., yes/no) system of assessment but plan to move to a four-category system (i.e., advanced, intermediate, basic, little or none) for the next academic year. We are hopeful that this will better reveal areas of success and those in need of improvement.

**Additional Comments**

In order to create an indirect measure, we will be working with OIRA this year to develop and draw data from a survey of recent graduates in the Literature Major to target the four criteria:

1. analysis of a literary text
2. discussion of cultural and/or literary (e.g., genre, history, or movement) context
3. writing in a critical voice
4. producing an effective research paper in terms of appropriate structure, compelling synthesis of research, and relevance to ongoing academic conversation (this last criterion should be split into three questions, one for each of its parts).