

## **English B.A.**

### **Findings and Analysis of Findings:**

Outcome: Language, Literature, and Composition Skills

Measure: Direct Assessment of Senior Writing - In order to analyze how well senior English majors understand the fundamentals of textual analysis, rhetorical proficiency, and language use, the Assessment Committee directly assesses a set of 300-400 level writing projects from 20-25 randomly selected senior English majors using a rubric with measures that correspond to each of the above areas.

Target: At least 80% of the writing projects meet or exceed the "just well enough" level (3 out of 5 on the Likert Scale) for each area of the rubric: Textual Analysis/Mastery of Form; Rhetorical Proficiency, and Language Use.

Findings: Exceeded target status

Textual Analysis/Mastery of Form - XX essays or XX% of the writing projects meet or exceed the "just well enough" level.

Rhetorical Proficiency - XX essays or XX% of the writing projects meet or exceed the "just well enough" level.

Language Use - XX essays or XX% of the writing projects meet or exceed the "just well enough" level.

Analysis: The assessment committee in year 2016-2017 collected 20 random samples of writing from graduating senior English majors across a number of different English courses representing all emphases. This random sampling method and size were approved by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment as valid. "Text" was understood broadly to include not only written works such as literary analyses but also films, video games and web sites, since many of our courses include such visual cultural artifacts. For this year's assessment, all of the artifacts were in the traditional written mode. Our five-level Likert scale asked for evaluation of whether the artifact performed the given item-criterion "very well," "well," "just well enough," "poorly," or "very poorly" for nine items under three areas. We hoped to see at least 80% of the items meet or exceed the "just well enough" level for each area, which translates as a 3.0 on the 5.0 scale (or 60%). Assessment was broken into three primary areas: textual analysis or mastery of form rhetorical proficiency, and language use.

Results:

1. Textual Analysis/Mastery of Form: XX essays, or XX%, received "just well enough" or higher. The average score translates to a XX% average safely above the 60% benchmark set by the Likert;

2. Rhetorical Proficiency: XX essays, or XX%, received "just well enough" or higher. The average score translates to a XX% average, again, safely above the 60% benchmark;

3. Language Use: XX essays, or XX%, received "just well enough" or higher. The average score translates to a roughly XX% average, safely above the 60% benchmark. Based on the collected data, graduating English seniors are meeting our goal of seeing at least 80% of the items meet or exceed the just well enough level for each area.

We were pleased to know that our seniors are meeting our goal. The results from this year align closely with the results from last year, indicating some consistency in the quality of our seniors' work. With that said, as the director of assessment, I am concerned that the Likert scale is not giving us the information we need to get an accurate sense of our students' performance. While I have converted the scores to a 4 point scale in the past, I fear that this conversion has not been quantitatively accurate, so I am working with the assessment office to 1) determine whether or not my conversion to percentage is valid, and 2) what other kinds of scales we could use that would translate to a more familiar quantitative value, similar to grades, which are categories easier for faculty to understand and interpret. While the committee can intuitively agree that our seniors' writing is not quite at the level we would like to see, it is difficult to reconcile the committee's intuitive judgment with the quantitative results. To address this disconnect, it may simply be a matter of being trained to better interpret Likert results.

Regardless, it seems like a good time to work with the assessment office on reevaluating our approach to direct assessment since it is likely we will overhaul all assessment measures alongside the departmental core curriculum revamping next year. Remaining thoughts: As part of our discussion following the direct assessment, the committee again agreed that the process of direct student writing assessment is flawed, owing to the subjective nature of evaluating writing, generally. Hopefully, with some assistance from the assessment office, we will be able to arrive at a scoring system that better addresses the patterns we see. The committee agreed that we saw an improvement in grammar and mechanics in this year's sample (after some disappointment with last year's sample in this area). Several committee members noted a pattern of ambitious theses without the follow-through of adequate support/evidence. From these patterns, we might suggest that instructors, when assigning and teaching argumentative writing, iterate not only the design of a valid argument but also the incorporation of valid and convincing evidence to make that argument sound. The committee noted that many of the samples were wordy and unclear. As a result of these findings, we recommend that instructors discuss the benefits of concision with their students. The committee observed that many senior

samples were littered with errors that could have been remedied with better editing and proofreading.

As a result of these findings, the committee recommends that instructors emphasize the importance of editing/proofreading in their writing instruction. Finally, the committee would like to encourage the department and particularly the committee(s) dedicated to core curriculum revision to share how they believe the assessment committee could best work for them and their goals regarding the performance of English majors. We would love some feedback from faculty on 1) what forms of performance seem most useful to analyze; 2) how those forms of performance might best be evaluated; and 3) how we might use these findings to start collective conversations about our students, our teaching, and our goals/overall mission for majors moving forward with both the curriculum revision and the assessment overhaul. A survey may help us to find these answers.