

Annual Assessment Report

Department: English

Academic Year: 2020-2021

Date of Submission: 2/10/2022 (with apologies for delayed submission)

Department Chair: Sarah Skripsky (2020-2021)

I. Response to the previous year PRC's recommendations

<p>Item: “Your department has done well to meet enrollment challenges with greater attention to the marketing of your major and its courses.” [Could continue to do relevant research and outreach.]</p>	<p>Responses:</p> <p><u>Outreach to Prospective Majors and Minors:</u> We continue to partner with Admissions in recruiting English majors as well as English and Writing minors. Such efforts include participating in on-campus recruiting events, co-authoring letters to prospective and admitted students, co-hosting Zoom calls with prospective majors, etc.</p> <p>We are keenly aware, however, that we are “paddling upstream” in a cultural climate that tends to value STEM disciplines highly while remaining skeptical of the value of Humanities disciplines. <i>In the 2021-2022 academic year, we are connecting with Zak Landrum in Advancement (as well as Admissions colleagues) to better understand how we might innovate in major recruiting and also improve in data collection (self-study) related to English department events such as creative readings and scholarly lectures.</i></p> <p><u>Recruiting Research:</u> In our Senior Exit Survey of Spring 2021, we included a question to better understand how students’ relative interest in the three off-campus programs led by English faculty [England Semester, London Theatre Mayterm, and Westmont in Northern Europe] influences the recruiting of students to the college and/or the English major. In that survey, we invited all senior English majors to respond to the question “When you were considering Westmont and/or a Westmont English major, how important was it that you would have access to an off-campus program led by English department faculty?” We used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “extremely important” (5) to “not at all important” (1). Of the 19</p>
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	<p>senior English majors responding (a complete sample of those seniors), results were as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> --11 seniors responded that access to these off-campus programs was “very important” or “extremely” important” (4-5) --7 seniors were “neutral” (3), --1 seniors responded with “slightly important” (2) --no seniors responded with “not at all important” (1). <p>Overall, these results indicate that our department’s leadership in off-campus programs plays a significant role in effective recruiting.</p> <p>Disruptions to off-campus programs during COVID-19 have not helped our department’s recruiting efforts, but we are hopeful that those programs will recover their stability (and effective role in recruiting) in this next season. We continue to highlight these programs when discussing our department with prospective and current students.</p>
<p>Item: “Your report was thorough and thoughtful, but we would welcome seeing the RAFT + TIP in the appendix.”</p>	<p>Response: John Bean’s RAFT + TIP acronym for designing effective writing assignments across the curriculum is elaborated in Chapter 6 of Bean’s <i>Engaging Ideas</i> (2nd ed.), popularly dubbed the “Bible” of Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) faculty development. This book is available in our library holdings and in most departments on campus (as a gift from Dean Nazarenko following our 2011 college-wide writing assessment). <i>The relevant section of Chapter 6 (pp. 98-100) is included as Appendix C of this report.</i></p>

II A. Program Learning Outcome (PLO) assessment

Program Learning Outcome	<p>PLO #1</p> <p>Graduates of the English major will . . .</p> <p>1. Demonstrate critical discernment in their examination of literary texts in ways that expand their affections and sympathies—by assessing their own cultural and theological assumptions, engaging in research, and evaluating evidence. (Thinking Critically PLO)</p>
Who is in Charge /Involved?	Sarah Skripsky in collaboration with all English faculty (co-designed senior exit survey in Spring 2021, discussed results at May 2021 retreat)
Indirect Assessment Methods	<p>Senior exit survey, Spring 2021 (all 19 seniors responded, 2 anonymously)</p> <p>Question 2 of this survey focused on PLO #1: <i>Thinking Critically in Literary Studies.</i> [Among our department’s 4 key goals for graduates, the first is to think critically in ways particular to literary studies: i.e., to demonstrate critical discernment in your examination of literary texts in ways that expand your affections and sympathies—by assessing your own cultural and theological assumptions, engaging in research, and evaluating evidence. To what extent do you agree with this statement?: “I feel confident in my ability to think critically in these ways.”]</p> <p>Students responded to this question using a 5-point Likert scale with responses ranging from “strongly agree” (5) to “strongly disagree” (1).</p>
Major Findings	<p>Of the 19 senior English majors responding (a complete sample of those seniors), results were as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> --15 students selected “strongly agree” (5); --1 student selected both “agree” (4) and “strongly agree” (5), effectively giving a 4.5; --3 students selected “agree” (4).
Closing the Loop Activities	We discussed these findings at our May 2021 department retreat. We were encouraged by the results and did not see a need to change our teaching strategies related to this PLO.

Program Learning Outcome	<p>PLO #2:</p> <p>Graduates of the English major will . . .</p> <p>2. Read literary texts carefully, analyzing both the contexts and the techniques (e.g., literary devices and genre characteristics) that shape their meaning. (Reading Carefully PLO)</p>
Who is in Charge /Involved?	Sarah Skripsky in collaboration with all English faculty (co-designed senior exit survey in Spring 2021, discussed results at May 2021 retreat)
Indirect Assessment Methods	<p>Senior exit survey, Spring 2021 (all 19 seniors responded, 2 anonymously)</p> <p>Question 3 of this survey focused on PLO #2: <i>Reading Carefully in Literary Studies. [Among our department's 4 key goals for graduates, the second is to read carefully in ways particular to literary studies: i.e., to read literary texts carefully, analyzing both the contexts and the techniques (e.g., literary devices and genre characteristics) that shape their meaning. To what extent do you agree with this statement?: "I feel confident in my ability to read carefully in these ways."]</i></p> <p>Students responded to this question using a 5-point Likert scale with responses ranging from "strongly agree" (5) to "strongly disagree" (1).</p>
Major Findings	<p>Of the 19 senior English majors responding (a complete sample of those seniors), results were as follows:</p> <p>--16 students selected "strongly agree" (5);</p> <p>--3 students selected "agree" (4).</p>
Closing the Loop Activities	We discussed these findings at our May 2021 department retreat. We were encouraged by the results and did not see a need to change our teaching strategies related to this PLO.

Program Learning Outcome	<p>PLO #3</p> <p>Graduates of the English major will . . .</p> <p>3. Identify how literary writers have alluded to the Bible and other religious texts in order to achieve particular rhetorical effects—for example, in addressing issues of justice. (Identifying Religious Rhetoric PLO) <i>*adopted Jan. 2020 following CUPA assessment</i></p>
Who is in Charge /Involved?	<p>As the course instructor for ENG 192 (Capstone), Sarah Skripsky was in charge of the direct assessment of student writing samples. She assigned the relevant essay response for direct assessment of PLO #3 and evaluated those samples.</p> <p>All English faculty co-designed the senior exit survey in Spring 2021 and discussed results at our May 2021 department retreat.</p>
Direct Assessment Methods	<p>We collected relevant student writing samples from ENG 192 (Capstone), Spring 2021. In these writing prompts, students had one of two choices:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Respond to an essay from Dorothy Sayers called “The Business of the Artist” in which Sayers offers advice about virtuous vs. problematic connections between Christian faith and art. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Writing prompt:</u> <i>Prompt 1: How does Dorothy Sayers define “the business of the artist,” and what role does theology and/or religious art play in her argument/thinking? Cite at least 2 specific passages from Sayers in your response of 2-3 paragraphs. Optional point of discussion: to what extent do you agree with Sayers, and why/why not?</i> (2) Respond to an essay from James K.A. Smith, a philosopher who invokes the Good Samaritan parable while calling for Christian artists and writers to help “heal the imagination” in order to be true “neighbors” to all in our society, including African Americans. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Writing prompt:</u> <i>Prompt 2: How does James K. A. Smith suggest that we may “heal the imagination,” and what role does the parable of the Good Samaritan play in his argument/thinking? Cite at least 2 specific passages from Smith (sometimes citing others, too) in your response of 2-3 paragraphs. Optional point of discussion: to what extent do you agree with Smith, and why/why not?</i>
Indirect Assessment Methods	<p>Senior exit survey, Spring 2021 (all 19 seniors responded, 2 anonymously)</p>

	<p>Question 4 of this survey focused on PLO #3: <i>Identifying Religious Rhetoric in Literary Studies.</i> [Among our department's 4 key goals for graduates, the third is to identify religious rhetoric in ways particular to literary studies: i.e., to identify how literary writers have alluded to the Bible and other religious texts in order to achieve particular rhetorical effects—for example, in addressing issues of justice. To what extent do you agree with this statement?: "I feel confident in my ability to identify religious rhetoric in these ways."]</p> <p>Students responded to this question using a 5-point Likert scale with responses ranging from "strongly agree" (5) to "strongly disagree" (1).</p>
<p>Major Findings</p>	<p><u>Writing samples (direct assessment):</u> All 16 seniors in ENG 192 (Capstone) responded to one of the two required prompts (responding to Sayers or Smith). All writing samples demonstrated that students could perform at a "Developing" or "Mastery" level in relation to PLO #3.</p> <p><u>Survey (indirect assessment):</u> Of the 19 senior English majors responding (a complete sample of those seniors), results were as follows: --12 students selected "strongly agree" (5); --1 student selected both "agree" (4) and "strongly agree" (5), effectively giving a 4.5; --6 students selected "agree" (4). One of the students who selected "strongly agree" (5) added this comment: "In every year of my time as an English major, there have been class discussions surrounding Biblical references and what they contribute to specific texts."</p>
<p>Closing the Loop Activities</p>	<p>We discussed the survey findings at our May 2021 department retreat. We were encouraged by the survey results and did not see a need to change our teaching strategies related to this PLO.</p> <p>In future years, more English faculty could collaborate on direct assessment of student writing samples relevant to PLO #3 and potentially revise our assessment tools. In this assessment cycle, Skripsky did the direct assessment work as the ENG-192 course instructor. The relevant writing assignment was an imbedded assessment in which an "A" or "B" grade on the writing sample met our benchmark for PLO #3. <i>In the future, the department could discuss those writing samples and levels of performance in more detail and might choose to change the benchmark or change teaching practices. PLO #3 is our newest PLO, and we may benefit from developing a relevant rubric. That rubric could help us compare the performance of seniors in ENG 192 (Capstone) with students in lower-division English courses such as ENG 060 (Writers in Conversation: The Bible in Literature).</i></p>

Program Learning Outcome	<p>PLO #4</p> <p>Graduates of the English major will . . .</p> <p>4. (Formerly 3) Engage various audiences in writing with sensitivity to rhetorical situations and scholarly standards. (Writing with Rhetorical Sensitivity PLO)</p>
Who is in Charge /Involved?	Sarah Skripsky in collaboration with all English faculty (co-designed senior exit survey in Spring 2021, discussed results at May 2021 retreat)
Indirect Assessment Methods	<p>Senior exit survey, Spring 2021 (all 19 seniors responded, 2 anonymously)</p> <p>Question 5 of this survey focused on PLO #4: Writing with Rhetorical Sensitivity. [Among our department’s 4 key goals for graduates, the fourth is to write with rhetorical sensitivity: i.e., to engage various audiences in writing with sensitivity to rhetorical situations and scholarly standards. To what extent do you agree with this statement?: “I feel confident in my ability to write with rhetorical sensitivity.”]</p> <p>Students responded to this question using a 5-point Likert scale with responses ranging from “strongly agree” (5) to “strongly disagree” (1).</p>
Major Findings	<p>Of the 19 senior English majors responding (a complete sample of those seniors), results were as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> --10 students selected “strongly agree” (5); --1 student selected both “agree” (4) and “strongly agree” (5), effectively giving a 4.5; --7 students selected “agree” (4). --1 student selected “neutral” (3).
Closing the Loop Activities	

III. Follow-ups

Program Learning Outcome or Key Question	<p>PLO #4 Graduates of the English major will . . .</p> <p>4. <i>(Formerly 3)</i> Engage various audiences in writing with sensitivity to rhetorical situations and scholarly standards. (Writing with Rhetorical Sensitivity PLO)</p>
Who will be involved in implementation?	<p>Sarah Skripsky and English colleagues, including a new faculty hire (anticipated Summer 2022)</p>
What will be decided or addressed?	<p>In 2021-2022 and 2022-2023, the department should revisit PLO #4 and should consider the place of writing courses in our major curriculum.</p>
How will the recommendations be implemented?	<p>The department should spend more time discussing the implications of the possible curricular changes outlined above. That discussion should include our new colleague with specialization in creative writing and/or composition/rhetoric.</p> <p>In addition to reviewing the Spring 2021 survey data most directly relevant to PLO #4, the department should also revisit data from questions 9-10 of that survey. Those questions invited more student feedback regarding creative writing and composition/rhetoric courses. Those results suggest that students tend to appreciate creative writing and composition/rhetoric courses but sometimes “opt out” due to factors such as pressure to complete major requirements, limits on writing course offerings (including slow rotation of creative writing workshops), etc. Related comments from questions 9-10 include:</p> <p>-- <i>Because creative writing courses were optional, I did not have the time to take any creative writing courses, which I am sad about.</i></p> <p>-- <i>I selected "neutral" [3] because I haven't felt like there have been that many classes offered focused on creative writing, but I also haven't spent much time actively seeking out classes like those.</i></p> <p>--<i>I only took one creative writing class at Westmont.</i></p> <p>--<i>I would LOVE to see more rhetoric & composition classes!</i></p>

IV. Appendices

- Appendix A: Senior exit survey, Spring 2021: data for all 4 PLOs (questions 2-5)
- Appendix B: Direct assessment of PLO #3: Student writing samples (faith-learning samples) from ENG 192 (Capstone)
- Appendix C: "RAFT + TIP" section from John Bean's *Engaging Ideas* (2nd ed.)