Below is the outcome assessment report for the English Department for the 2011-12 school year. This report has been assembled through the efforts of the following faculty: Terry Reilly, Sarah Stanley, James Ruppert, Karen Grossweiner, Amber Flora Thomas, Derick Burleson, and Rich Carr.

Bachelor of Arts

Student Ability to Employ Research Methods

Objectives: The Outcomes Assessment Plan for the B.A. in English includes the outcome that “students should be able to ‘employ standard research methods’ as a means of demonstrating their knowledge of literature.” To this end, majors enrolled in 400-level English classes are expected to complete a research paper which “coordinates the student’s persona; perspective [on various literary works] with supplementary scholarship to achieve an informed, thoughtful, and integrated analysis.”

Data and Usage: To assess whether this outcome has been achieved, a total of sixteen randomly selected papers from English 425—“Shakespeare: Comedies and Non-Dramatic Poetry” were examined to evaluate the knowledge demonstrated. Criteria for evaluation included:

- initiative and thoroughness in finding bibliographic resources (books, articles, chapters);
- discrimination in selecting secondary sources: i.e., electronic sites and printed resources with scholarly standing, currency, and applicability;
- precision in documenting sources, i.e., formatting according to MLA or Chicago citation formats;
- creativity, originality, or initiative in topic selection and development;
- smoothness in coordinating primary and secondary material to achieve coherence, cogency, and comprehensiveness;
- appropriate use of quotations, paraphrase, and summary;
- a level of critical bibliographic savvy appropriate to upper-division English classes, i.e., better than English 211/213.

Discoveries: The majority of English majors in the sample group wrote papers that were considered very good to excellent on the UAF grading scale. Generally, the theses,—although prompted by a list of suggested topics and/or by class discussion—were well-formulated and provided the writers the means to explore areas beyond the class- or paper-prompt. Most of the students were able to maintain focus on the thesis for the extent of the paper, ultimately
producing a sustained, logical and coherent argument for at least 1000-1500 words. With respect to primary sources, most of the students were adept at providing accurate quotations from Shakespeare’s plays in support of their points, and of citing those passages correctly, according to act, scene and line numbers. Moreover, most of the students were able to access secondary sources in an appropriate manner, integrating the commentary smoothly into their own narratives, and citing these sources appropriately in a conventional MLA Works Cited format. A few of the papers evidenced weaknesses often found among weaker students in lower division composition classes: a weak, unfocused thesis resulting in extended plot summary; reluctance to cite from the play; inability to understand literary criticism and theory, or to reconcile the criticism with their own ideas; and finally, an inability to document sources according to MLA style. Overall, however, this set of papers indicates that these students have made significant intellectual progress as they have progressed through their course of study.

**Recommendations:** The English Department (and especially those of us teaching composition) needs to reach consensus on what a research paper actually is. Some students, even at the 400-level, do not understand the dialogic nature of research, and feel that “research”—i.e., “finding a quote that fits”—is not very helpful and often “gets in the way” of their own ideas. Their resultant papers, though mechanically well-written, are little more than book reports or plot summaries, which often fail to develop a clear thesis or to acknowledge, utilize, or appropriately cite significant criticism. Some of these students are confused by the low grades they receive on these papers, since they received “A’s” and “B’s” for similar papers submitted in composition courses. Another problem needs to be addressed soon: most graduate schools offering an MA require that applicants submit a fifteen page research paper as a writing sample. Most of our students do not regularly write fifteen page papers, and many do not write a fifteen page paper the entire time they are in our program. Instead, they write journals and/or short papers and submit them in portfolios. Many of our BA students intend to go on to graduate school, and unless we encourage (read require) them to write a (good) fifteen page paper sometime during their stay here, we are not giving them the best education we can.

**Student Knowledge of Major Central Methods**

**Objective**

Among the “Program Outcomes” in the Outcomes Assessment Plan for B.A. in English is the principle that the student should “be able to identify major critical methods.” ENGL 310 allows students the opportunity to demonstrate the following:

- Comprehension of texts about critical theory;
- Basic skills in using critical idioms;
- Basic knowledge of critical paradigms and methods;
- Basic knowledge of critical history (from Plato through the 20th century), including changes and/or invariants;
- Critical distance, including some ingenuity and/or originality in assessing others’ critical principles;
- Respect for the goals of literary analysis.
ENGL 310 is a key course in upholding this principle, which may be demonstrated in the “Outcomes Assessment” portion of the final exam where students are asked to respond to five questions.

Explain the difference between mimetic and expressionist theories of art. Name one theorist who is associated with mimetic theory and one theorist associated with expressionist theory. Explain your choices by talking about these two theories in as much detail as you can.

Explain the way defenses work in human psyche, according to Freud. List as least 5 defense mechanisms and provide specific examples of each.

According to Althusser, what is the function of ideology in society? Whose ideology is it? How does it come about? Give examples of where ideology emerges in daily life. Explain the difference between Ideological State Apparatuses and Repressive State Apparatuses.

Laura Mulvey writes: "In the world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female." Explain Mulvey's arguments in as much detail as you can.

Gilbert and Gubar state that 19th century female writers developed "accents of acquiescence." What do they mean by that? Talk about "The Yellow Wallpaper" as an example of that rhetorical strategy.

Six final examinations served as the sampling. Because English 310 introduces students to specialized, theoretical vocabularies, in reading the exams, we asked if students were using the vocabulary of these major theories appropriately and effectively? We also looked at how successful students were when asked to apply a given theory to a text of their choosing and one provided.

Discoveries

In general, students were successful on the first two questions. Questions three and four invited students to create misunderstandings, as a selection of student answers were in error, i.e., they interpreted the specialized, theoretical vocabulary with a context outside the theory. For example, "voyeurism" as used theoretically differs from the term's popular use. Students were successful in applying the theories. Answers ranged from literary texts to film to personal experience to comic heroes.

Recommendations

Continue to challenge students in regard to the "deeply contextual nature of language." Consider an additional exam question asking students to define by what a concept is not as well as what a concept is, e.g. What is different about Mulvey's concept of "voyeur" and the concept of "voyeur" used in another context (reality TV)?

Student Knowledge of History and Grammar of the English Language
Objectives

English majors must complete one of four grammar or language courses: English 317 (Traditional English Grammar), English 318 (Modern English Grammar), English 462 (Applied English Linguistics), or English 472 (History of the English Language).

The following criteria for evaluation are employed in assessing student outcomes:

- Ability to look at language analytically;
- Mastery of the terminology and other communicative tools (e.g. sentence diagrams in 318) involved in each area;
- Ability to apply learned principles to new texts;
- Knowledge of the constancy of change in language;
- Knowledge of the deeply contextual nature of language;
- General knowledge of the structure of English

Data

In English 317 students learn and apply terms and concepts of English grammar: parts of speech, sentence patterns, verb tenses, active vs. passive voice, verbals, nominative absolutes, rhetorical figures and strategies. Six examinations from Fall 2011 were selected with a generally defined range of scores—two high, two above average, two at or below average. In general, exams showed proficiency with identifying sentence patterns, grammatical categories, noun and verb clusters and verb tenses. All tests reviewed showed struggle with building on these base concepts, e.g. creating verbal phrases, compound-complex sentences, cleft sentences. One question on the exam asked the student to “explain the function of the prepositional phrase ‘in the foyer’ changes in each of the following sentences.” The tests reviewed had a range of answers varying in interpretation and use of grammatical terminology.

English 318, Modern English Grammar, focuses on the “structure of current English as seen through traditional and contemporary grammatical theories.” The material covered assumes a sound grounding in traditional grammar, as the course focuses on syntactical analysis at a deeper level, employing terminology and concepts (e.g. structural trees) outside the scope of 317.

For Spring 2012 six final exams were surveyed. The exam had students draw eighteen sentence diagrams. Sections of the test highlighted specific aspects of identifying parts of the sentences and some sections also asked the student for the rationale behind the identification. Of these seven sections, the tests reviewed all showed difficulty in those sections in which they were not also asked to explain their reasoning. Of the six tests we reviewed, three students completed the extra credit.

English 462 is a topics course, the topic varying according to instructor interest and expertise. The Spring 2012 section centered on Old English and Old English Poetry. Those enrolling in a 400-level language course would most likely have an interest and background in advanced language study. The final project asked students to select a poem, translate specific lines from
the poem into Modern English, indicate parts of speech and meter for at least five of the lines, and conclude with a two page paper examining the relationship between the poetic elements and the subject of or action within the poem. The six final projects surveyed showed general attention to relationships between two distinct languages and also the poetic features of both languages. The chief distinction among the final projects lay in student ability to select and develop a sustained focus about the poetic element. The six projects were satisfactory, with two projects outstanding in the detailed, precise analysis of the Old English passages.

Discoveries and Recommendations

The survey of examinations and projects from these three courses indicates that students should be prompted toward developing linguistic interpretation about the functions behind language use. Encouraging students to share their own reasoning and interpretation behind the grammatical features of English, both in the final exams and as a continued practice in the final projects, will help students build their knowledge about the “deeply contextual nature of language.”

In our review, when students were asked to not only identify the terminology but also to analyze and interpret what the terminology affords them as language users, many Department objectives were being met. Knowledge about the constancy of change in language, while not explicitly addressed (as it would have been had English 472 been offered) was implicitly addressed in the topics course. We recommend that this outcome be more evident at both the 300 and 400-level.

Master of Arts

Program Outcomes for the MA in English are as follows:

1. Students should be able to situate literary texts in English within broad historical and cultural contexts, recognize appropriate literary conventions, and interpret particular texts by means of close reading.
2. Students should have a broad understanding of the philosophy of literary studies, be able to recognize different theoretical frameworks, and be able to apply one or more theoretical frameworks to particular texts.
3. Students should be able to write clearly and engagingly about literature, and be able to produce sustained, coherent arguments at an appropriate level of sophistication.
4. Students should complete their courses of study in a rigorous and timely manner.
5. Students who are going on to work or further study in the field of English should be adequately prepared for the next step in their professional lives.
6. Students should consider their graduate program at UAF to be of high quality.

Data

The committee reviewed 2 student portfolios and 2 exit questionnaires from students who graduated in 2011. While the committee is reviewing current graduates from the M.A. program, we will extrapolate from last year’s review. The committee is pleased to note that in 2011-12, the
department initiated an annual "town meeting" for MA students and faculty to better communicate faculty expertise and interests and to learn what students would like added to the program.

Discoveries

1. We conclude that we are providing MAs with a very knowledgeable, accessible, and varied faculty. Current and future faculty vacancies need to be filled to continue this strength.
2. We were successful in providing more variety in the curriculum offered to MA students.
3. This year we initiated more opportunities for growth through the biweekly professional development workshops on teaching and composition. The concerns of previous graduates about the quality of teacher training have been alleviated.
4. We are graduating highly developed and publishable MAs with a consistent track record of publishing and continuing to teach in English and Literature.

Recommendations

1. Students continue to express a desire to have greater access to literary studies activities. Consequently, we need to provide greater access to professional development opportunities for MA students. This should include increasing access to information, conferences, and opportunities to explore career opportunities.
2. MA students should continue to be encouraged to attend the bi-monthly Humanities Colloquium; we should also consider developing a visiting scholars series similar to the visiting writers series if appropriate funding can be found.
3. MA students need clearer guidelines in how to select a thesis chair and committee and how to most effectively receive support throughout the development of the thesis. The role of and expectations for committee members should be also be clarified.
4. MA students need clearer guidelines on what is expected for a MA thesis and to be encouraged to include current research. Perhaps a thesis guide could be developed.
5. MA graduates don’t feel sufficiently prepared for the next step in their lives. The committee was uncertain as to how to address this concern and will seek input from the department as a whole.
6. The committee agrees with last year’s committee recommendations on suggested changes to the exit questionnaire in the following areas:

   1. a question about a course MA student would like to see added to the curriculum,
   2. a question about independent studies students took, and
   3. a question about 400 level courses students took while enrolled in the Program.

Master of Fine Arts

Program Outcomes for the MFA in Creative Writing are as follows:
1. Students should be able to produce material in their chosen genre of a quality that is comparable to the material being published in contemporary literary magazines and journals.
2. Students should have a broad theoretical and technical understanding of their chosen discipline and of at least one secondary creative discipline.
3. Students should be able to write clear and engaging prose about writing craft and literary analysis and be able to produce sustained and coherent critical papers at an appropriate level of sophistication.
4. Students should complete their courses of study in a rigorous and timely manner.
5. Students should be adequately prepared for a career in writing and publishing, including an ability to recognize the strengths and weaknesses in their own work, a sense of the literary marketplace, and a plan for seeking publication.
6. Students should be able to evaluate writing in a way that might serve through teaching or community writing/literacy programs.

Data

In order to determine whether each program had met its outcome goals, faculty evaluated the thesis and comprehensive exams of the six MFA students and one MA/MFA student who graduated in May 2012. Faculty also considered student responses to exit survey questionnaires (see attached).

Discoveries

1. The theses were all of high quality, and were considered by the evaluators to be of publishable quality.

2. Students did exhibit a broad understanding of their chosen discipline, and a sufficient grasp of one other creative writing genre.

3. The comprehensive exams showed that students were able to write clearly and engagingly about literature in their genres.

4. Six students completed their courses of study in a timely manner, and one did not. This student finished the program one year after the projected graduation date.

5. Four students either agreed or strongly agreed on the exit survey that they did feel adequately prepared for a career in writing, while three felt neutral about the questions. This is a significant improvement in the student perception of readiness for the next step in their professional lives over past exit surveys in recent years, and may be due to the current success of Creative Writing Program alumni in finding employment in the field, either in tenure-track, full-time or adjunct teaching positions at universities and community colleges. Current graduates have also published their work in significant national journals during their three years in the program, and this could also add to their feelings of adequate preparation.

6. In comparing the exit surveys from 2012 to those from earlier years, it is clear that significant steps have been taken to address previous concerns. All seven of the student exit surveys showed
either a very strong or strong agreement that there was sufficient latitude in choosing thesis and that the thesis construction was valuable. Students also overwhelmingly agreed that the program gave them a depth of intellectual enrichment, the quality of instruction was high, faculty were accessible, fellow students provided academic stimulation, the required work was appropriate and that visiting writers/scholars greatly enriched their education.

All either strongly agreed or agreed that they would enthusiastically recommend the degree program, and strongly agreed or agreed that they had plenty of access to research tools in the program. This is a marked improvement over the previous years’ surveys where this had been a concern.

Two questions revealed a mixed response. On the question of TA training, four of the seven students responded favorably (either strongly agreed or agreed) while 2 disagreed. As the TA training has since been reconfigured and continues to be modified, this may or may not be a concern. On the question of the range of faculty expertise, three agreed that it was adequate, while four did not agree. This may be related to the below noted areas of concerns below.

- Students indicate disappointment regarding the balance between required curriculum and elective courses.
- Students indicate the range of literature courses offered is not adequate.
- Students also indicated in their comments that they would like to see more literature courses, ranging from the classics to the romantics to contemporary poetry and non-fiction.

Recommendations

It appears that MFA graduates are producing quality work and are having considerable success in finding employment in the field following graduation. The surveys reveal that students in the MFA are generally satisfied with their educational experience and feel that they are getting the faculty and departmental support they need to pursue writing careers. Steps have been taken in hiring new faculty to increase the range of expertise in the department, and in the spring semester the department offered a course in 21st Century Poetry and Poetics. While these are major improvements in response to previous assessments, it appears that the department should continue to work to increase the range of literature courses offered. The English Department should continue to review its graduate course offerings in literature, and to consider including more courses pertinent to MFA students. The committee also suggested revising the exit survey to include more open-ended qualitative questions to encourage students to comment specifically on what was valuable in their experience and which areas need further improvement.

MFA/MA Degree—A Note

We admitted our first three MFA/MA degree aspirants in Fall 2008. Those three have since completed this dual degree—two in Spring 2011, one in Spring 2012. Two others will finish the degree within the next year. An incoming graduate student for Fall 2012 seeks the MFA/MA. The chief originating rationale for the degree centered on preparation for doctoral
programs. The MFA/MA requires that students take both the MFA and the MA comprehensive examinations and write two theses. A graduate student with a teaching assistantship who pursues this degree will receive three years of support, the amount given to MFA students with an assistantship.

With three students only having completed the degree to date, the Department has anecdotal evidence to use as an assessment. One of the three completers is finishing his first year in a PhD program at the University of Edinburgh. The other two noted (1) their enjoyment of the challenge of completing projects of a larger scope than the majority of their peers and (2) the surprising way in which the scholarly and the creative works informed each other. Neither of these currently plans to seek entry into a doctoral program.

The English Department needs to have a full discussion of the MFA/MA degree in the 2012-13 year, as we have additional completers. Topics to discuss include development of an assessment instrument specific to the dual degree and the extent to which the MFA/MA fits English Department priorities.