Outcomes Assessment Summary for English Graduate Programs

Three faculty members participated in Outcomes Assessment for the Master of Arts program in English; another three participated in Outcomes Assessment for the Master of Fine Arts program. The purpose of the project was to assess the effectiveness of the MA in English and the MFA in Creative Writing. Faculty members evaluated major projects and read completed exit survey questionnaires from recent graduates. This report presents the objectives, data and usage, discoveries, and recommendations of the Outcomes Assessment project.

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 5 student portfolios and 5 exit questionnaires from students who graduated in Spring 2010. Exit questionnaires were not available for previous years, but previous portfolios were briefly reviewed by part of the committee. While this is a larger number than in previous years, it still constitutes a relatively small amount of data on which to draw a conclusion. The committee suggests that next year’s reviewers include this year’s data to create a larger and ongoing picture of the MA program.

Discoveries

1. The student portfolios reviewed revealed a wide variety of topics and a solid awareness of literary history.
2. While the majority of the writing was well researched and critically sound, some of the theses seemed to have a weaker grasp of methodology.
3. The exit questionnaires revealed that the students had confidence in the faculty and felt that the quality of instruction and faculty guidance was high. They felt that the amount of work required in the program was fitting, and that the comprehensive examination was appropriate.
4. Some students felt that their TA training could have been better.
5. Four out of five students felt that the visiting writers/scholars program did not enrich their education.

**Recommendations**

- The committee felt that comments concerning TA training were a result of turnover in the composition director’s position. With a new dedicated composition director, the committee felt that concern would be addressed.
- The committee also felt that a few visiting scholars might enhance the intellectual climate of the MA program. A Humanities Colloquium and a graduate student research talk series could serve this purpose. The current visiting writers program is designed for MFA students and thus it is understandable that MA students do not see it as enriching their education.
- The committee had no curricular change suggestions at this point, but felt that gathering additional information regarding MA curriculum and course variety is needed in the future. The committee thus suggested that the exit questionnaire might be revised to add three questions regarding the current curriculum:
  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 courses students took while enrolled in the Program.

The committee reiterates a concern voiced in the last outcomes assessment review with the variance in writing quality in the program. We hope that next year’s committee will take up these questions and well as the Department itself.

The committee also strongly recommends the drafting of a three-year plan by all interested M.A. faculty to loosely determine the direction of the M.A. Program. This plan, although somewhat general, would be an important part of outcomes assessment and should become part of standard practice as the department moves forward.