

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT ASSESSMENT REPORT January, 2005

Section I: Description of Activities and Recent Innovations (in light of the previous five-year review)

This second-round comprehensive review combines review of sections on “key elements,” “areas of concern,” and “recommendations” of the May 1, 1999, “Assessment Committee Report on the English Major Comprehensive Review” with description of activities and innovations in support of program objectives since the last report.

A. The 1999 Assessment Report commented favorably on several departmental initiatives designed to improve student writing skills and associated with the General Education required “Language Rubric” course, English 110 (Key Elements, p. 1). Since the report much has happened. First, we have dropped the expensive and time-consuming “Test for Standard Written English” as a diagnostic tool in English 110, and substituted a “pre-/post-” approach to assessment, beginning with a diagnostic essay (formative assessment) on the first day of class. Evaluation of the diagnostic essays then becomes the basis for a) writing conferences with students and b) recommendations for tutorial work in the Mellinger Learning Center. Diagnostic essays are marked according to a shared grading rubric (see attachment) generated by the department and adopted this year by both ILA and English instructors. Instructors then hold the diagnostic essays for purposes of comparison with a final exam essay whose subject and assignment resemble those of the diagnostic essay. Final examination essays are also evaluated according to criteria of the grading rubric. Note: until recently, the evaluation of learning outcomes in English 110 was informal, not explicitly rubric based and summarized in paragraphs of instructor self-evaluation and course evaluation. Beginning in the Fall of 2004, however, we have begun embedded assessment of student outcomes involving systematic sampling and numerical evaluation of both diagnostic and final essays according to the rubric criteria. Again, in past years, the department has typically met in both January and May, and as part of an extended departmental meeting, reviewed English 110 course design in light of perceptions about student progress in achieving writing skills. Beginning in the Fall of 2004, however, the department has identified those meetings explicitly as “summative assessment” sessions for English 110 *and* major course offerings (see attached schedule of meetings).

B. As mentioned in the 1999 Assessment Report (p. 1), English 299, “Writing Fellows” has continued successfully to train six to eight writing assistants per year for the Mellinger Learning Center. Notably, a number of these trained assistants in the MLC (as many as four of the approximately ten who log time annually) hail from majors other than English and English Education. Achieving this wider representation of majors among assistants has long been a goal of the program. The likelihood of still greater

diversity among tutors will be increased by the new Communication Across the Curriculum initiative and the hiring of a program director.¹

C. The 1999 Assessment Report commented favorably on “curricular adjustments” (p. 1) designed to improve the program. Since the last report, the department has designed and re-designed several courses. English 200, “Introduction to English Studies” is a new (three years old) “gateway” requirement of the English major, designed to introduce majors to the “broad range of scholarship and practice within the discipline of English.” The course usefully absorbs the former English 233 “research methods” course, integrating research with literary analysis, criticism, and theory. Also new in the last three years is English 180, a “G” course under the “Beauty and Meaning in Works of Art” general education rubric. This “appreciation course” was designed to a) relieve unworkable enrollments in survey courses and b) provide opportunity for greater rigor in major survey courses by diverting general education students (who have not had English 200) away from the surveys. While high enrollments in the annual English 200 are a scheduling concern, both course designs are viable and successful.

In addition to these two major changes, English 490, “Directed Studies” provides credit and opportunity for students to work on the departmental publication, “The Printing Press” (an electronic departmental newsletter). Several new upper division literature course titles have been added to English 343, 348, and 350 rubrics, reflecting the area interests of three new tenure-track hires since the department’s last assessment report.

D. A last “key element” of the 1999 Assessment Committee Report noted that the departmental review “provided only limited evidence as to the nature of student progress in meeting the goals of the English major” (p. 1) and mentioned that only a limited number of ICTS scores were available for review. This report offers scores of 36 English Secondary Education candidates who have taken the test from 1995 to 2004 (see attachment). Of the thirty-six, thirty-four passed, and only two students failed the test (one failed twice). Both students who failed were transfer students to Monmouth College whose grades in English courses were well below average. Furthermore, the all-candidate average of our English Department graduates was at or above the state average in all four areas: Writing, Reading, Language Arts, and Literature. In particular, our English Department teacher candidates scored best against the state average in the area of “Literature,” the department’s primary focus in the major.

E. Recommendation #8 (p. 3) of the 1999 Assessment Committee Report recommends developing assessment projects that would better “encompass the full range of goals and expectations that the department has for its majors.” Among these suggested projects are the following: 1) systematic assessment of the senior thesis; 2) embedded assessment of the impact of course offerings and 3) adoption of a portfolio requirement that might provide a “multi-purpose vehicle which can permit broad-based assessment of student majors throughout their program of study.”

¹ This movement toward diversity is supported by the distribution of majors enrolled in the Spring 2005 iteration of English 299, Writing Tutors: 3 English, 2 Education, 1 each Biology, Business, CATA, French, and Undecided.

In response to those recommendations, the following has happened since 1999:

1. The department's senior papers are kept on file and used as reference points in subsequent course and assignment designs. They are also available to students enrolled in English 200 and English 400 who are interested in modeling their papers on accomplished theses. Moreover, each year senior theses are reviewed and evaluated, first by the instructor who screens course essays for exemplary work, and then by the department, which reads and evaluates each of the papers the instructor has nominated for "Honors in English." (In a class of 10 senior English students, typically five papers are nominated and so evaluated by the department: faculty write narrative summaries based upon shared criteria.) Criteria for evaluation are directly tied to program assessment and are:
 - 1) Demonstrate skills enumerated in the General Education "Language Rubric Communications Skills Goals," with special reference to rhetorical development and organization strategies;
 - 2) Understand and use process writing strategies in composing thesis-focused essays;
 - 3) Understand and use library resources for research papers;
 - 4) Appreciate the special uses of language in literature; understand and appreciate figurative language and literary structures;
 - 5) Read, explicate, analyze and interpret works of literature;
 - 6) Recognize and appreciate literary genre and sub-genre distinctions, literary movements, critical approaches to texts, diverse cultural and historical literary traditions;
 - 7) Understand and appreciate cultural, historical contexts in the study of English and American literatures; and
 - 8) Acquire a basic knowledge of the history of English, of traditional grammar and modern grammar theories.
2. The department is presently experimenting with a comprehensive approach to embedded assessment of individual courses. For instance, upper level literature courses have either embedded final exam questions or essay assignments that test for #s 4, 5, and 6 of our Program Objectives/Outcomes (see the attached revised English Program Report). Those teaching English and American survey courses are likewise assessing program outcomes #s 4 and 7. For each program goal, we are obliged to write a paragraph of assessment evaluating student performance. These outcomes are then compiled in three-ring notebooks with copies of syllabi and exams attached (see attachment for samples).
3. We are already finding that the time commitment required for #2 is prohibitive, involving overworked faculty in an over-particularized regime whose complexity may well guarantee long-term negligence. On the other hand, the 1999 Assessment Report suggested that portfolios might well provide a "multi-purpose" vehicle for valid assessment of outcomes. The department has developed fully such a portfolio requirement for majors in the department, due at mid-semester in the capstone English 400, "Senior Seminar" course (see attached web page description and schedule). A full description of the portfolio is linked to our departmental webpage, and a year by year outline of the "English Studies

Portfolio Requirement” is hereby attached. As will become evident in Section IV of this report, then, the department intends eventually to use the portfolio as *the* major assessment tool of the major, and will take steps in that direction, asking for help from the Assessment Committee for resources in that endeavor.

F. The “Areas for Concern—Opportunities for Improvement” section of the 1999 Assessment Report (p. 2) reinforced three departmental concerns expressed in the course of the review. The first was that the number of upper-level course offerings in the major was small, in direct proportion to the 2/3 teaching load in General Education (and other interdisciplinary programs) shouldered by the department (English 110, Women’s Studies, ILA, ISSI, Honors). The second concern involved the department’s attempts to interrogate college-wide assumptions about the level of skills we may expect to see represented in new incoming classes of students. The report states, “It is not certain that our traditional assumptions about skills and interests in reading and writing that students bring with them remain correct. As these assumptions underlie all of our curricular planning, the department’s suggestions for systematic analysis of our current students should be heard by all” (p. 2). The third area of concern noted by the committee involved the challenge and opportunity of hiring replacements in tenure-track slots, and recommendation #4 of the report suggested making “high quality staff replacements a top priority.”

Taking #3 first, since the last Assessment report, the department has hired three tenure-track faculty (two are now tenured), and more recently we have underwritten the hiring of a CAC Director (also tenure-track). The searches were well supported, and successful.

Items #1 and 2 above, however, have not been addressed adequately by administration of the college. The English Department remains more heavily invested in General Education than many departments, and as we will describe in Section III and IV, under-represented in upper division offerings in both literature and writing—courses that are likely attractors to well qualified college applicants. Finally, since the department’s 1998 efforts to analyze student ACT scores and performance in English 110 (see attachment), no institutional research has been done to determine the accuracy of institutional assumptions (where they are shared) about the aptitudes of incoming students in the areas of reading and writing. Analysis of student aptitudes as a function of assessment has not kept pace with the college’s ambitious and largely successful program of enrollment growth. Nor has such analysis made available throughout the three and a half years of curricular revision undertaken by the Curriculum Review Task Force, though it is clear that the CAC proposal that emerged from that group represents shared agreement about the need for substantially greater devotion to communication skills across the curriculum (see attached analysis of FF ACT/English Scores).

This issue raised in #s 1 and 2 above are related to the Assessment Committee’s recommendation #5 that “the agencies of the college, generally, but especially the President and the Dean, should respond to conclusions found in the English Department report (along with evaluations and observations from several other departments) *that substantial and unplanned growth* in several of our more *pre-professional programs*

holds the potential for shifting course content in a number of disciplines away from their traditional liberal arts focus” (p. 3). The Assessment Committee concludes that this development as an outcome of general growth of the college could become a “*threat to the nature and quality of liberal arts education at Monmouth.*” Monitoring aptitude levels of new students and managing enrollment by both aptitude and area interest are appropriate tasks for a visible and empowered “Enrollment Management” team, amply represented by faculty leaders across the curriculum.

Section II: Presentation and Interpretation of Assessment Data (See Attachments)

1. Revised and updated program report, with Departmental Assessment Schedule

This report was updated and revised this last fall by the English Department to reflect changes in programming and assessment strategies.

2. English 110 pre-/post- assessment and rubric

Assessment materials are presented as individual folders for each section of English 110. Each instructor has presented a holistic assessment of her or his particular section, as well as specific commentary upon the three assessment points uniformly adopted by the Department (students #5, 9, and 17).

In addition, the Department includes a number of narratives holistically assessing instructors' sections. These predate the current period where pre-/post- assessments are codified and recorded.

3. Faculty self-evaluations and new program specific assessment folders.

Assessment materials are presented as individual folders for each English course numbered 200 or above. Each instructor has presented a holistic assessment of her or his particular course, as well as specific commentary upon relevant embedded assessment measures addressing Goals #4, 5, and/or 6 of the "Assessment of Major Goals" statement.

4. Portfolios

Included herein is an assessment of an English Studies Portfolio, as well as the assessed portfolio itself. This Portfolio is required of all majors, but has only recently come into full implementation, and so the portfolios assessed are of varying quality and states of completion. The model for the portfolio, both in terms of student portfolio content and assessment review, is featured here as "Autumn McGee's Portfolio" and its concomitant Departmental Assessment. The Department seeks to make portfolio-based review a multi-dimensional and comprehensive tool of departmental assessment, and would appreciate the Assessment Committee's thoughts on the best way to effect this goal.

5. Senior Thesis papers receiving Honors

Each year the English Department nominates several of its graduating seniors for departmental honors, based largely on their senior theses. Included are examples of these theses from the past three years, assessments of them, and a record of which students were nominated for

Honors and which were not. Please note that the Department is negotiating whether it is better to include marked essays or clean copies for assessment purposes. Again, the Department would appreciate the Assessment Committee's thoughts on this matter.

6. Scores of ICTS

These scores have been recorded and analyzed in the comprehensive report as part of an ongoing assessment of our education majors within the English Studies Program.

7. GRE scores

No systematic record of GRE scores has been undertaken on our campus, so this attachment will be supplemented in subsequent versions of the English Department Assessment Report. We have set up a database tracking system with the Wackerle Center, and they have agreed to search their paper files for past scores, in order to generate this assessment measure.

8. Alumni webpage survey

The attached survey is currently in-place, online. Once the hard-copy postcards are sent to alumni within the next month, we anticipate assessable responses very soon.

Section III: Summary of Program Strengths and Weaknesses

In reviewing five years of “SWOTS Analysis” Planning Reports submitted to the Vice President for Academic Affairs, and in summarizing still more recent initiatives and activities in the department, the following are evident strengths and weaknesses of the English Department:

Strengths:

1. A now stable and productive department, after three successful searches for tenure-track replacements (Hale, Willhardt, Belschner) with two tenured outcomes to date (Hale, Willhardt); consolidation of part-time and teacher education responsibilities in one permanent, full-time position (Roberts); a staff of qualified and reviewed part-time instructors (Ambrose, Solberg, Lytle); the successful search and hire of a tenure-track CAC Director (Price).
2. Steadfast commitment to the liberal arts philosophy and to delivery of several components of General Education and interdisciplinary studies; excellence in teaching: three members of the department have won multiple undergraduate teaching awards.
3. An incrementally structured and coherent approach to major field study, involving: an “Introduction to English Studies”; four required surveys; a required Shakespeare course; various upper division genre, period and authors studies and a few cross-listed courses; the Senior Seminar (thesis and portfolio requirements).
4. Faculty leadership in a variety of college committee and task force assignments; leadership in ACM consortium initiatives and off-campus programs; club and student committee sponsorship.
5. The ability each year to attract and engage in major study some of the best Monmouth College students. In recent years 50-60% of English majors have gone on to graduate school programs (Georgetown, University of Indiana, London School of Economics, Washington University, University of Delaware, University of Illinois, Purdue University, Texas A&M, etc.).
6. A consistent record of departmental curricular review: focused sessions on pedagogy and program assessment; spring and summer workshops and retreats; a steady stream of new initiatives and course redesigns.
7. Sponsorship and staffing of the Mellinger Learning Center; training of writing assistants for the MLC; sponsorship of the CAC initiative.
8. Chapter sponsorship of the Sigma Tau Delta International Fraternity; sponsorship of 6-8 writing and discipline achievement awards (Honors Convocation).
9. Publications by Belschner, Hale, Bruce and Willhardt; professional activities and outreach throughout the department; sponsorship of visiting speakers and performance groups.
10. An impressive number of majors who participate in off-campus programs and extra-curricular professional activities (COIL, COURIER, internships in news writing, etc.).

Weaknesses:

Noted in the 1999 Assessment Report and repeatedly mentioned in the department's last five years of SWOTS analyses are two strategic curricular weaknesses (strategic because of their impact upon departmental and college enrollments): 1) too few slots for literature and writing courses at the upper level, and 2) underdeveloped opportunities in Creative Writing and professional writing.

2/3 of the department's course offerings are service courses to general education and interdisciplinary studies. Despite growth in the department, and despite demonstrated ability and willingness to design new courses (see course titles listed under descriptions of rubric courses: English 343, 347, 348, 349 and 350), available slots in the teaching rotations are limited. Department faculty members are routinely deployed at 23-24 hours a year, and teach a steady diet of English 110 (usually two courses or eight semester hours a year). Out of devotion to delivery of course offerings in the major, no one in the department—including the chair who is also coordinator of the Honors Program—has taken release time for outside activities or been compensated for them. The department is stressed by overwork, particularly in view of a) increasing challenges posed by unskilled students admitted to the college who require basic writing instruction and b) assessment measures exacted without compensatory resources for those purposes. Though the CAC initiative and hire will surely enhance learning outcomes and their assessment (the director is likely to assume responsibilities for writing across the curriculum), the department's workload remains excessive, *if* pedagogical reflection, scholarship, and research are to remain vital parts of program development.

The department has repeatedly but unsuccessfully proposed enhancement of creative writing and professional writing instruction and experiences. Unmet demand for sections of English 210 (the introductory creative writing "G" course) is perennial. Student applicant interest in "journalism" and professional writing continues. We have proposed several times a "professional writer's series" as a consecrated and endowed annual events slot, and summer scholarships for students to attend creative writing workshops off campus. We have further proposed an endowed writer-in-residence program, offering students and the campus generally access to course credit and workshop experience beyond what the department can presently offer. Special events visits from professional writers over the last few years have been greeted by students with enthusiasm and appreciation. Appetite greatly exceeds provision in this area.

It is also likely that the department should assume editorial control of the campus creative writing magazine, COIL, since that move is consistent with best practices at most other liberal arts institutions. That move is presently impossible, given staffing constraints. In a related development, funding for the departmental newsletter sent to alumni, the INKWELL, was dropped by the development office and has not been picked up in repeated requests through FIDC. Our in-house electronic newsletter, the

PRINTING PRESS, for which student editors may receive directed studies credit, has been directed and overseen as an overload by a member of the department.²

Section IV: Presentation of Options for Program Improvement

1. The department sponsored the CAC proposal as part of the Curriculum Review Task Force Report and took a leading role in the search and hiring of its director. Subsequently an Assessment funded departmental retreat, part of which was spent coordinating communication goals with the CATA department and the new director, has already and will continue to provide important opportunities for program improvement. It is likely that the English Department will re-conceive course design of English 110 this next spring, coordinating design, goals, and common vocabulary with CATA to create a shared foundation for communication across the curriculum. For this initiative the English Department will request compensation in the form of a funded two-day retreat. It is equally likely that CAC coordination may provide hitherto desirable but unrealized synergies among English, Education and CATA departments.
2. The department looks forward to continuing implementation of an evaluation rubric shared by ILA instructors, for assessment and evaluation of writing in ILA and English 110.
3. The department looks forward to continued implementation and refinement of “minimal standards” for writing assignments in major offerings at the 200 level and above and to biennial assessment meetings to review learning outcomes.
4. While continuing with embedded assessment measures pertinent to measuring learning outcomes in major course offerings, the department will seek advice from the Assessment Committee on particular ways to make the present portfolio requirement for the major the pre-eminent, “multi-purpose,” and efficient tool of annual program assessment.
5. The department will seek from the Assessment Committee reaffirmation of its endorsement for additional resources pertinent to the ongoing work of thorough, summative assessment, particularly in the areas of time-consuming evaluation of measured activities.

² For instance, the Assessment Committee in its 1999 report said the following about the department’s interest in adopting a portfolio requirement as a summative assessment measure (recommendation #9):

“If the English Department chooses to implement a portfolio requirement, the Dean and the members of the budget process must recognize that such kinds of curricular projects have implementation costs, especially in regard to faculty time and energy already in short supply. The budget must be adjusted to provide sufficient support for these sorts of innovations when they are proposed, if the college wishes to have faculty pursue them.”

Since that report, the department has adopted and phased implementation of a portfolio requirement for completion of the major, without institutional support. It remains to be seen whether “sufficient support” will provide the department with opportunities to fine tune the portfolio and time for systematic evaluation of data.

6. The department will seek from the Assessment Committee endorsement of aims to enhance curriculum and programming pertinent to creative and professional writing.

Strategic opportunities present themselves in the following areas:

- a. An endowed “Writer’s Series” (PAC).
- b. An endowed “Writers in Residence” program.
- c. Increased departmental offerings in creative and professional writing.
- d. Annual guaranteed funding for the INKWELL, for support of the PRINTING PRESS, and for editorial sponsorship of COIL.
- e. Named scholarships (competitively awarded) for summer creative writing workshops for deserving and interested students.

End of Report