

English Assessment Conversation
Academic year 2007 – 08
April 29th, 2008

Department Members Present: Marlo Belschner, Rob Hale, Mark Willhardt, and Craig Watson

Goals for English Majors

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.

Student Goals/Learning Outcomes

Departmental members considered goals 1 and 5 as fully met. Goal 4 was affected by the content change in ENGL 110 and was recognized as needing more work in succeeding courses. Goal 6 was acknowledged as being approached in different ways by department members with the primary weakness being in the limited diversity of cultural texts¹. The senior seminar class projects and activities demonstrate achievement of goal 7

Discussion related to student learning

Six concerns discussed were: 1) the uneven preparation of transfer students – this includes their attitude toward coursework and the skills needed to be successful in the major, 2) the need of transfer students to over-enroll in English courses during a semester to finish the major “in time,” 3) a failure of students to differentiate among levels of courses, 4) an admission process that does not screen students for their reading ability, 5) inconsistent advising of students across campus, and 6) the lack of consistent grading standards across campus.

An issue the department discussed is how much class time and instructor consultation time should be used for the draft/revision process. A concern is that students, in general, lack internal motivation for the process and are relying on instructor prompts.

Two possibilities for increasing the “carry-over effect” to future writing assignments were discussed. First was working with students before the final product is submitted. Second was a meeting after return of a submitted paper to provide feedback and discuss improvement issues for future submissions.

¹ In the process of reviewing this draft, the department chair reported that hiring a sabbatical replacement to teach Native American literature is one way the department is addressing the issue.

Issues arising from research papers discussed were the: 1) use of proper citations, 2) use of proper grammar, 3) developmentally appropriate staging of assignments within a course and between courses, and 4) appropriate integration of outside sources with the students' own voice.

Initiative for next year

Possibilities discussed were:

- Building connections throughout the major by having students bring their portfolio to the introductory conference of the succeeding semester,
- Having students to reflect on a specific essay from the previous semester's courses in a conference with a professor from the current semester.

After some discussion, the department chose the second possibility.