

**ASSESSMENT PROGRESS REPORT (2009)  
ENGLISH DEPARTMENT**

**PROGRAM NAME:** English  
**DEGREE:** Bachelor of Arts  
**PLAN NUMBERS:** 14 and 14 A  
**DEPARTMENT:** English  
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**1. Student learning goals:**

The department has identified five learning goals for all majors (a sixth goal applies only to students in the Secondary Education program).

**Goal #1.** Graduates from our program will read and be able to discuss major and exemplary literary works (which experts call the canon) that represent significant applications of literature in the English language. They should also understand the historical, psychological, cultural, and aesthetic background of the canon.

**Goal #2.** Graduates from our program will read and be able to discuss important works by writers who represent diversity, especially in British and American literature (women and writers of color, for example).

**Goal #3.** Graduates from our program will achieve and demonstrate a significant level of literacy, including interpreting and analyzing texts.

**Goal #4.** Graduates from our program will acquire sound written and oral communication skills through the practice of writing and revising, and through studying texts. Those students who take the creative writing track will develop strong creative writing skills and be able to produce good prose and poetry, and those who minor in linguistics will show appropriate knowledge of language use, history, and grammatical analysis.

**Goal #5.** Graduates from our program will develop research skills so that they can retrieve, analyze, and present data from electronic databases, libraries, and other sources, including field work, and use information ethically.

**Goal #6.** Focuses on pedagogy and pertains only to students completing the Secondary Education Minor. While the additional Goal #6 is included on every Portfolio Assessment Sheet (which we refer to later), we score it only for students in the Secondary Education program.

Given the depth and subcomponents of the goals, the department has established a three-year rotation in order to review each goal thoroughly. In the first year of the rotation (2007), we assessed Goals #1 and #2, goals that represent the knowledge

base of our field. In the second year (2008), we focused on Goals #3 and #4, goals that represent skills development. In this, the third year of the rotation (2009), we have focused on Goal #5, which represents the research component of the program. We have also decided to work ahead of our rotational schedule in order to evaluate our assessment procedures for Goal Six ("Pedagogy"). For information on Goal Six, please see "Plan 14 A."

## **2. Learning outcomes for these goals:**

### **Goal # 1: Knowledge of the Canon**

The student will achieve

**Outcome #1** Knowledge of literary periods and movements

**Outcome #2** Knowledge of authors' backgrounds

**Outcome #3** Knowledge of developments in genres

**Outcome #4** Awareness of exemplary works

### **Goal # 2: Contextualizing Texts**

The student will achieve

**Outcome #1** Awareness of cultural diversity

**Outcome #2** Awareness of historical developments

**Outcome #3** Awareness of social milieu

**Outcome #4** Awareness of aesthetic values

### **Goal # 3: Interpreting Texts**

The student will achieve

**Outcome #1** An understanding of the range of critical approaches

**Outcome #2** An ability to read texts for meaning

**Outcome #3** Knowledge of terms and conventions

**Outcome #4** An ability to construct a critical argument

### **Goal # 4: Developing Communication Skills**

The student will achieve

**Outcome #1** An ability to use the formats for writing about literature

**Outcome #2** Development of an effective writing style

**Outcome #3** An ability to complete effective oral presentations

### **Goal # 5: Information Technology**

The student will be able

**Outcome #1** To use email and communicate via a listserv

**Outcome #2** To produce standard documents on a word processor

**Outcome #3** To navigate to and access web pages

**Outcome #4** To use library tech resources for literature research

Goal # 6: Pedagogy

**The student will achieve**

**Outcome #1** An ability to design appropriate lesson plans

**Outcome #2** An ability to implement a teaching performance

**Outcome #3** An ability to develop a sequence of writing assignments

**Outcome #4** An ability to present a critique of visual images

### **3. Courses and activities, where assessed:**

Because our assessment instrument is a student portfolio, all upper-level English courses—both those that are required as a part of the 16-hour major program core and those that are upper-level English electives, of which a typical major must take 17 hours—require written assignments that address one or more of the program’s learning goals. As a result, all writing assignments in upper-level English courses are subject to being scrutinized as fulfilling the standards dictated by the program’s stated assessment goals and learning outcomes.

### **4. Methods used:**

Since 1999, the department’s major assessment tool has been the portfolio that students assemble while taking the one-credit capstone course English 4199 (Seminar in Career Perspectives), which is offered at least once a semester during the regular academic year. We adopted this course because we needed to communicate more effectively with students about assessment. English 4199 has been a required course for declared majors since 1999.

During this course, students **(Step 1)** prepare a representative portfolio of papers and **(Step 2)** complete self-assessment forms about what they have learned and what suggestions they have for program improvements.

**Step 1, preparing a portfolio**, ensures that all upper-level English courses, both those that are required as a part of the sixteen-hour major program core and those that are upper-level ENGL electives, of which a typical major must take seventeen hours, require written assignments that address one or more of the program’s learning goals. As a result, written assignments in all upper-level English courses are subject to being rigorously reviewed in accordance with the standards dictated by the program’s assessment goals and learning objectives, since any such assignment may end up as an artifact in a student portfolio.

**Step 2, completing self-assessment forms**, compels students to assess assessment, as it were, by reflecting on their experiences in achieving or

failing to achieve our stated goals. Specific, directed questions on the self-assessment forms measure students' knowledge and understanding of key information and concepts. The learning objectives are detailed in the instructions provided to students as they begin preparing their portfolio. Specifically, they are presented with the guidelines for our determining how well a particular portfolio fulfills the stated outcomes for each goal. In essence, if we produce students who cannot produce the requisite artifacts indicating that they have achieved these outcomes, there can be no more certain indicator that our program is failing to fulfill its own goals—thereby making certain that the portfolio serves the very purpose of the entire assessment process, which is to enable the faculty to make course and curriculum corrections if needed. Furthermore, this process not only lets faculty assess themselves by overseeing the students' preparation of their portfolios and completion of the self-assessment forms, but also encourages students to reflect on their course of study in English, allows students a formal feedback mechanism to suggest improvements in the major, and provides the opportunity to discuss other professional concerns as students approach graduation (e.g., applying to graduate school; taking the GRE, LSAT, and MCAT; searching for professional positions, especially on the internet; preparing a job letter and resume; and interviewing).

Our assessment cycle is an ongoing process of long-established procedure and both self- and external-evaluation, implemented in every upper-level English course by virtue of the portfolio culture that has been established. Our assessment procedures are reviewed on an annual basis in keeping with institutional guidelines and requirements.

In specific terms, portfolios themselves are put together during ENGL 4199, after class discussion about how the portfolios might reflect students' knowledge, critical thinking about and interpretation of literature, research, and communication skills. The English faculty reminds students of the portfolio requirement by including a written reminder on syllabi and by reminding the students verbally. Preparation of the portfolio also provides the students with a final product and a sense of closure as they approach graduation. Each semester, the instructor of ENGL 4199 collects and assesses the portfolios, along with the other requirements of the course. Then, the instructor gives the portfolios to the Assessment Committee. Two Assessment Committee members score each portfolio according to criteria on a standardized worksheet (see Attachment # 4), and a third member settles discrepancies. For each item, readers enter a numerical rating as well as a brief verbal assessment. This accords with recommendations for scoring from outside consultants and provides for inter-rater reliability. The department also follows several other procedures to maintain reliability in assessing the portfolios. Since 1999, Assessment Committee members have been elected on one- and two-year staggered terms to provide continuity. The fact that half the department has served on the Assessment Committee and half has taught English 4199 reflects our commitment to assessment. For validity, the department relies on the substantial amount of

literature citing the portfolio method as particularly appropriate for assessing English programs.

Our primary stakeholders are, of course, our students. Because assessment has taken deep root in our program and because of our awareness of the critical place that clear course objectives have in relation to student writing assignments, faculty have begun to develop assignments that help the students complete their portfolio requirements. Furthermore, since the Secondary Education certification program in English Language Arts itself requires an elaborate assessment instrument, faculty have become more mindful of correlating learning objectives with student outcomes in all of our program courses. Indeed, assessment issues have become a regular item on the agenda for department meetings for the past several years and more.

As a result of these developments, we have added Pedagogy as a learning goal to our assessment process.

### **5. What are the assessment findings? How did you analyze them?**

Overall, 37 students completed portfolios in “Career Perspectives” (ENGL 4199), the capstone course for the English Department and the basis for our Assessment Report. In preparing portfolios, students use several forms. “Guidelines for Preparing the Portfolio” (Attachment #1) informs students about the papers to include. The “Self-Assessment Form” (Attachment #2) identifies the courses in which students developed their skills within the curriculum, and has a number of other questions, including those on student advising. A second self-assessment form, “Commentary Guidelines” (Attachment #3), requires students to review their portfolios for completeness. Another form (Attachment #4), a “scoring sheet,” provides an easy way for the instructor of record to review and rate the quality of reflection on the portfolios.

As previously mentioned, we are assessing various aspects of the English Department on a rotational basis. In 2009, we are assessing Goal Five (“Information Technology”): “Graduates from our program will develop research skills so that they can retrieve, analyze, and present data from electronic databases, libraries, and other sources, including field work, and use information ethically.” As well, we are working ahead of our rotational schedule to evaluate our assessment procedures for Goal Six (“Pedagogy”). For information on Goal Six, please see “Plan 14 A.”

This year, work in these student portfolios was measured by four raters according to the four learning outcomes specified in Goal Five, and ratings were assigned for each student. The rating options were as follows: “Not available” (evidence not available), “does not meet expectations” (1), “meets expectations” (2), “exceeds expectations” (3).

The numerical results for the learning outcomes for Goal Five are summarized below:

**Outcome 1: To use email and communicate via listserv**

- 35 students did not provide enough evidence to assess this outcome
- 2 students “exceeded expectations”
- Not enough information for a meaningful average score

**Outcome 2: To produce standard documents on a word processor**

- 23 students “met expectations”
- 14 students “exceeded expectations”
- Average score: 2.38
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**Outcome 3: To navigate and access web pages**

- 14 students did not provide enough evidence to assess this outcome
- 2 students “did not meet expectations”
- 15 students “met expectations”
- 6 students “exceeded expectations”
- Average score: 2.17
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**Outcome 4: To use library tech resources for literature research**

- 5 students did not provide enough evidence to assess this outcome
- 4 students “did not meet expectations”
- 13 students “met expectations”
- 10 students “exceeded expectations”
- Average score: 2.22

**6. Conclusions drawn, decisions made, and stakeholders involved:**

The Assessment Committee’s review of the student portfolios revealed two problems with our current assessment methods for Goal Five: (1) “The Guidelines for Preparing the [assessment] Portfolio” and the “Commentary Guidelines” do not adequately assess our students’ research knowledge and abilities, nor do they adequately assess their abilities to use subscription databases and other research technologies; (2) the learning outcomes are vague, outdated, and of limited usefulness in providing for an evaluation of our students’ research and technological skills.

The Assessment Committee thus recommends four new learning outcomes for Goal Five:

- **Outcome #1:** An ability to evaluate paper and digital sources and to make appropriate distinctions between scholarly and popular sources
- **Outcome #2:** An ability to use effectively library resources and subscription databases
- **Outcome #3:** An ability to handle paper and digital sources properly and to follow the format and style conventions of the Modern Language Association
- **Outcome #4:** An ability to use research ethically and responsibly

We also recommend that the “Guidelines for Preparing the Portfolio” and the “Commentary Guidelines”—both currently used in “Career Perspectives”—be revised to elicit additional information about our students’ research skills and their knowledge of research technologies. To this end, we are suggesting the following additions to the “Self-Assessment Form” and the “Commentary Guidelines Form”<sup>1</sup>:

#### Addition to “Self-Assessment Form”

“Provide examples from at least two different courses in the English Department to show that you can use source material accurately and responsibly. The papers should, when appropriate, follow the standard MLA format and should rely on scholarly sources.”

#### Addition to the “Commentary Guidelines”

“Which papers demonstrate your ability to use library resources for literature research? Use the research and bibliography portions of these papers to show your knowledge of library resources (both digital and paper), of MLA form, and to demonstrate your ethical, accurate, and responsible use of source material.”

The Assessment Committee also recommends that the title for “Goal Five”—“Information Technology”—be changed to “Developing Research Skills and Using Digital Technologies.” This title would be more inclusive and would more accurately reflect the description of “Goal Five (see above). .

Stakeholders:

In the capstone course (English 4199), Dr. Minnick scheduled visits from 12 speakers (including a fund raiser, grant writer, advertising executive, lawyer,

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<sup>1</sup> Revised versions of the “Self-Assessment Form” and “Commentary Guidelines” have been attached to this report.

journalist, etc.), two of whom were graduates from UALR. These are valuable interchanges, as current students are made aware of career and social opportunities after graduation.

Because English majors go into a variety of fields, it is difficult to locate stakeholders in the community whose feedback would be especially useful.

## **B.A. in English, Secondary Education Track, Plan #14 A**

In 2009, 37 students provided portfolios for the Career Perspectives course, seven of whom were English Education minors and one who was a non-traditional student. Five of these students successfully passed PRAXIS I and II. One student is yet to take the examinations; one student has since dropped out of the program; and, one student was on a non-traditional track and has moved from the area. Two students have successfully uploaded their portfolios into Chalk and Wire. One student will upload the portfolio at the conclusion of her student teaching intern experience in Spring 2010. Anecdotal comments suggest that the English Education minors believe English Department is doing a very good job preparing them to become teachers. One student wrote: "As a future teacher, I believe my education at UALR is immeasurable." Another student wrote: "As a potential teacher, I believe the courses I have taken will be instrumental in teaching English in high school." A third student wrote: "I think my training was very effective and the department has only improved on developing English majors and in particular, English teachers by trying to give them a variety of experiences in various classroom environments." Suggestions for improvement to the minor include providing more pedagogy courses and providing additional help with the PRAXIS I and II examinations.

The Director of English Education along with the English Department Chair are recommending changes to Goal #6: Pedagogy (ELA Candidates only).

The recommended changes are as follows:

- **Outcome #1:** "An ability to design lesson appropriate plans" will be changed to "An ability to design a unit plan and a concept map." This outcome is assessed on Chalk and Wire Key Assessment #2.
- **Outcome #2:** "An ability to implement a teaching performance" will be changed to "An ability to implement two successful teaching performances assessed according to appropriate NCTE Standards." This Outcome is assessed in English Secondary Methods (ENGL 4202/RHET 4202) and during Block II as part of SCED 4124, in which the English department supervisor is the teacher of record.
- **Outcome #3:** "An ability to develop a sequence of writing assignments" will be changed to "An ability to design a sequence of writing assignments and corresponding rubrics." Outcome #3 is assessed as part of ENGL 4202/RHET 4202 and will also be submitted as part of the Career Perspectives' Portfolio.
- **Outcome #4:** "An ability to present a critique of visual images" will be changed to "An ability to present a critique of visual images and to align NCTE content standards to content/pedagogy papers." Outcome #4 will be assessed as part of Chalk and Wire Key Assessment #1.

We also recommend that the "UALR English Department Assessment Guidelines for

Preparing the Portfolio” (Attachment #1) be changed to match the four outcomes listed above. Specifically, Secondary English minors should include six papers in their Career Perspectives’ portfolio. Three of these papers are the same as required of the English Major: one paper from English Literature, one paper from American Literature, and one research paper. Three additional papers are required for Secondary English Education minors, which include a sequence of three writing assignments with appropriate rubrics and supplementary commentary, and at least two papers prepared for two English Department courses, specifically related to content pedagogy.

There should also be two additional questions to the “Self-Assessment Form” (Attachment #2) to require our students to reflect on their pedagogical work and experiences in the English Department. These changes are as follows:

- SECTION A (Specific Courses):

“Give examples from two different courses, not including ENGL 4202/RHET 4202, that led to your ability to apply pedagogical concepts to literature, writing, linguistics and/or film.”

- SECTION B (General Comments):

“Please comment on your experiences as an English Education minor both in the English Department and the College of Education. Describe your overall assessment of the effectiveness of the program and suggest changes you think necessary.”

There should also be an additional question for the “Commentary Guidelines” (Attachment #3), in order to demonstrate whether English Education minors are meeting content and pedagogical requirements and to help assessors align content work more concretely to NCTE standards.

- “Pedagogy (if applicable): Which papers demonstrate an understanding of visual literacy and content-pedagogy? Please cite particular portions of selected papers and align the work on those papers to discrete NCTE Standards.”

These suggested changes to the portfolio for Secondary English Education minors will be piloted in Fall 2010, and based on this preliminary work, the English Department’s Assessment Committee will reconvene in Spring 2011 to recommend final changes to Goal #6 and its various assessments.

## **ATTACHMENT #1**

### **UALR English Department Assessment Guidelines for Preparing the Portfolio**

For your portfolio, you will be pulling together materials from your course of study in English.

You are not being graded for this exercise. Your record will reflect only the fact that you submitted a complete portfolio. The purpose of the portfolio is to illustrate for an audience outside UALR how well the English major is doing its job. The program is what is being graded.

If you are in the William G. Cooper, Jr., Honors Program in English, we encourage you to include your Honors project as one of your papers.

#### **FOR ENGLISH MAJORS**

- At least one paper from a class in English Literature
- At least one paper from a class in American Literature
- Two research papers of at least 10 pages, with documentation
- Two reading or position papers of 2-6 pages
- Two papers of your choice

#### **FOR ENGLISH MAJORS WITH AN EMPHASIS IN CREATIVE WRITING**

##### **Section One**

- One paper from a class in English Literature
- One paper from a class in American Literature
- One research paper
- One position or reading paper

##### **Section Two** (choose **one** of the following options)

- Two short stories or chapters of a book
- 5-10 poems
- One short story or chapter and 3-5 poems

#### **FOR ENGLISH SECONDARY EDUCATION MAJORS**

##### **Section One**

- One paper from a class in English Literature

- One paper from a class in American Literature
- One research paper

## **Section Two**

- A sequence of three writing assignments and appropriate rubrics designed for students and requisite commentary providing a rationale for writing assignments
- At least two (preferably more) Chalk and Wire papers prepared for two English Department courses, specifically related to content-level pedagogy

## ATTACHMENT #2 (added #A5, #A7 AND #B6)

### UALR Department of English Self-Assessment Form

#### Section A (Specific Courses):

Please answer the following questions in assessing your development within the discipline. Please refer to specific courses and/or professors. Please mention specific topics or areas of study, and/or specific activities such as term paper or research project assignments.

1. Give examples from two different courses that led to knowledge of major movements, periods, and authors in British, American, and other literatures.
2. Give an example from a course that led to a general knowledge of the grammatical structure of English and/or the historical development of the language.
3. Give examples from two different courses that led to a working knowledge of literary terms, the major reference tools, and literary criticism and scholarship.
4. Give examples from two different courses that led to your ability to think, discuss, and write critically about literature.
5. **Provide examples from at least two different courses in the English Department to show that you can use source material accurately and responsibly. The papers should, when appropriate, follow the standard MLA format and should rely on scholarly sources.**
6. Give examples from two different courses that led to a broadening or change in your intellectual interests.
7. **Provide examples from two different courses, not including ENGL 4202/RHET 4202, that led to your ability to apply pedagogical concepts to literature, writing, linguistics and/or film (for English-Secondary Education majors only)**

#### Section B (General Comments):

1. Comment on the advising you received from administration, staff, and

faculty.

2. Comment on the encouragement you received from teachers and administrators.
3. What is your overall assessment of the effectiveness and usefulness of the education and training you received as an UALR English major?
4. If you have participated in any aspect of the William G. Cooper, Jr, Honors Program in English (e.g. taking a Cooper seminar, working on a Cooper project), please comment on your experiences.
5. What would you change to make the experience of a UALR English major better?
6. **Please comment on your experiences as an English Education minor both in the English Department and the College of Education. Describe your overall assessment of the effectiveness of the program and suggest changes you think necessary (for English-Secondary Education majors only).**

## **ATTACHMENT #3 (added #6 and #8)**

### **UALR Department of English Career Perspectives: Commentary Guidelines**

It is essential that in examining your work for the English major, you become reflective by providing evidence through commentary with respect to the papers you submit for your portfolio. In order to provide this essential evidence, please write a detailed commentary in which you address the following:

1. Which papers demonstrate your knowledge of the canon and its historical continuity? Cite particular portions of your selected paper(s), making sure to provide appropriate support and explanation. Please describe the reasons for the selection of your papers in this category.
2. Which papers demonstrate an evidenced understanding of cultural, historical, psychological, political or aesthetic background and knowledge of literature? Cite particular portions of your selected paper(s), making sure to provide appropriate support and explanation. Please describe the reasons for the selection of your papers in this category.
3. Which papers demonstrate an evidenced ability to organize, analyze, and interpret texts in a competent written form? Cite particular portions of your selected paper(s), making sure to provide appropriate support and evidence. Please describe the reasons for the selection of papers in this category.
4. Which papers provide an awareness of the various critical approaches to literature or language study. Cite particular sections from your papers as support and evidence, indicating ways of working with, interpreting, and analyzing texts using specific critical lenses to do so. Please describe the reasons for the selections of papers in this category
5. Which papers show a distinct awareness and understanding of cultural diversity from authors in texts (for example, evidence of exposure to African American Literature, Native American Literature, Chicano/a Literature)? Cite particular examples from your papers that provide support and evidence indicating exposure and understanding particular to working with multi-cultural texts. Please describe how your work with multi-cultural forms of literature has contributed to your appreciation, knowledge, and understanding.

6. **“Which papers demonstrate your ability to use library resources for literature research? Use the research and bibliography portions of these papers to show your knowledge of library resources (both digital and paper), of MLA form, and to demonstrate your ethical, accurate, and responsible use of source material.”**
7. Creative writing skills (if applicable):
8. **Pedagogy (if applicable): Which papers demonstrate an understanding of visual literacy and content-pedagogy? Please cite particular portions of selected papers and align the work on those papers to discrete NCTE Standards (for English-Secondary Education majors only).**
9. Understanding of linguistics or history of English (if applicable):

**ATTACHMENT #4**

**UALR Department of English  
Assessment Checklist**

Semester _____		Name _____
<b>Goal #1: Knowledge of the Canon</b>		
Outcome #1	Knowledge of literary periods and movements	_____
Outcome #2	Knowledge of authors' backgrounds	_____
Outcome #3	Knowledge of development of genres	_____
Outcome #4	Awareness of exemplary works	Subtotal _____
<b>Goal #2: Contextualizing Texts</b>		
Outcome #1	Awareness of cultural diversity	_____
Outcome #2	Awareness of historical developments	_____
Outcome #3	Awareness of social milieu	_____
Outcome #4	Awareness of aesthetic values	Subtotal _____
<b>Goal #3: Interpreting Texts</b>		
Outcome #1	An understanding of the range of critical approaches	_____
Outcome #2	An ability to read texts for meaning	_____

Outcome #3 Knowledge of terms and conventions \_\_\_\_\_

Outcome #4 An ability to construct a critical argument \_\_\_\_\_ Subtotal \_\_\_\_\_

**Goal #4: Developing Communication Skills**

Outcome #1 An ability to use the formats for writing about literature \_\_\_\_\_

Outcome #2 Development of an effective writing style \_\_\_\_\_

Outcome #3 An ability to complete effective oral presentations \_\_\_\_\_

Outcome #4 An ability to observe correct conventions \_\_\_\_\_ Subtotal \_\_\_\_\_

**Goal #5: Information Technology**

Outcome #1 To use email and communicate via a listserv \_\_\_\_\_

Outcome #2 To produce standard documents on a word processor \_\_\_\_\_

Outcome #3 To navigate to and access web pages \_\_\_\_\_

Outcome #4 To use library tech resources for literature research \_\_\_\_\_ Subtotal \_\_\_\_\_

**Goal #6: Pedagogy (ELA Candidates only)**

Outcome #1 An ability to design appropriate lesson plans \_\_\_\_\_

Outcome #2 An ability to implement a teaching performance \_\_\_\_\_

Outcome #3 An ability to develop a sequence of writing assignments \_\_\_\_\_

Outcome #4 An ability to present a critique of visual images \_\_\_\_\_ Subtotal \_\_\_\_\_

Key: 1 - does not meet expectations; 2 - meets expectations; 3 - exceeds expectations

**Portfolio Average** \_\_\_\_\_

