

Degree Program: Professional and Technical Writing
Department and College: Rhetoric and Writing, CAHSS
Degree type (AA, AS, BA, BS, BBA, BSE, BSW): BA
Prepared by: Earnest L. Cox (elcox@ualr.edu)

Submitted to College Assessment Committee on _____

Approved on _____

Submitted to Provost Assessment Advisory Group on _____

Approved on _____

Respond to all four questions, following the Degree Program Assessment Plan Form Instructions. Attach additional pages as needed.

1. What are your student learning goals for this degree program? Include which core competencies are addressed by these goals where applicable (see list at <http://www.ualr.edu/provost/assessment/competencies.shtml>).

Key learning goals for the BA in Professional and Technical Writing:

1. Students should write well-organized technical, persuasive, and nonfiction documents. (Core competency: verbal literacy)
2. Students should be able to design documents to meet the needs of specific groups of readers. (Core competencies: verbal literacy, critical thinking, social and cultural awareness)
3. Students should be able to conduct research using print, online, and primary sources and document their research correctly. (Core competencies: critical thinking, information technology)
4. Students should recognize and respond appropriately to ethical problems embedded in writing situations. (Core competency: ethical and moral consciousness)
5. Students should edit and proofread documents effectively. (Core competency: verbal

literacy)

6. Students should learn appropriate and current technology to support their professional goals.

(Core competency: information technology)

Our department's mission statement affirms our commitment to "providing the highest quality of writing instruction at every level," "intensifying and expanding literacy education in every UALR discipline," and "developing human beings to their highest potential." Our learning goals for the BA program are direct extensions of that mission.

2. What are your learning objectives or outcomes associated with each student learning goal?

Objectives for Goal #1:

1a. Students will arrange content within their documents using appropriate patterns (such as spatial, chronological, relational, and logical) to develop ideas persuasively.

1b. Students will use reflective writing to discuss and justify their organizational choices.

Objectives for Goal #2:

2a. Students will develop appropriate content—facts, examples, definitions, descriptions, testimony—to meet the needs of specific readers.

2b. Students will format documents in a way that makes information accessible and usable to readers (such as using formatting appropriate to a document's genre, using headings to make information easy to locate, choosing appropriate typefaces and page layouts, etc.)

2c. Students will modify vocabulary and sentence structure choices to be appropriate for specific groups of readers.

2d. Students will use reflective writing to discuss their assessment of the readers' needs and the choices students made to address those needs.

Objectives for Goal #3:

3a. Student papers contain correctly formatted citations for print, online, and primary sources.

3b. Students will use reflective writing to discuss how they located and selected sources for their research, specifically addressing why certain sources were chosen and what measures students took to ensure their sources were credible.

Objectives for Goal #4:

4a. Students will use reflective writing to discuss how they addressed ethical concerns in the documents they produce (including issues such as copyright, writing about human subjects, selective quotation, analyzing sources for bias, making information accessible to readers with disabilities, considering the safety and well-being of readers, etc.)

Objectives for Goal #5:

5a. Students will accurately correct mistakes in grammar, spelling, and punctuation, both in their own work and in that of other writers.

Objectives for Goal #6:

6a. Students will produce documents that demonstrate proficiency with word processing and internet browsing software; many students will also produce documents that demonstrate skills in presentation and graphics software.

3. Where will the objectives be addressed in your program? In which courses and through which activities will they be assessed? (Attach Curriculum Assessment Map.)

See attached Curriculum Assessment Map.

4. How will you assess each objective? (a) Methods; b) Design; c) Assessment cycle; d) Stakeholder involvement.)

- a. Methods — Senior Portfolios and Exit Interviews

We assess all of our objectives using the senior portfolio, an activity currently strongly recommended of all majors. For new majors (those entering after the revised major in the 2008 catalog) the portfolios are required. Students may choose to complete this portfolio as part of the coursework for RHET 4190 (Colloquium in Rhetoric and Writing, which is offered each fall and required of the new majors), or they may choose to work on it independently under the supervision of the chair of the BA Assessment Committee. Students graduating in the fall or spring submit their portfolios for assessment one month prior to their graduation date; students graduating in the summer submit their portfolios at the same time as the spring graduates.

Students are required to submit at least seven pieces of writing that they have completed during their time in the major. Six of the pieces usually come from our core courses, although we allow substitutions when necessary; the seventh piece is a reflective essay that critically discusses the student's perspective on his or her own learning. Students may choose to submit additional pieces from elective courses if they feel these pieces will help to demonstrate their progress on our learning objectives.

In developing the portfolio, each student is required to associate a document with one or more of

the rubric categories that we use for evaluation. The rubric categories are listed below:

- Reflective Essay
- Content Development
- Research and Documentation
- Organization Skills
- Voice and Style
- Effective Copyediting
- Professional Formatting

The portfolio documents are also holistically evaluated on an eighth category listed below, although students do not associate specific documents with this category:

- Range of Writing Ability

The portfolios are then rated by the BA Assessment Committee, a group of five faculty members, on a six point scale. A rating of 6 is considered “excellent,” 5 is “very good,” 4 is “good,” 3 is “fair,” 2 is “below average,” and 1 is “poor.” We consider a rating of 4 to be acceptable. If we have many scores at 3 or below, we feel that we should examine our curriculum and pedagogy for potential trouble spots.

To ensure reliability and consistency in portfolio ratings, members of the assessment committee attend a calibration meeting each year before rating the new portfolios. These meetings also serve as a training session when new members are rotated into the committee.

After the portfolios have been rated, the committee meets with the graduating students for exit interviews (conducted with groups of 3-4 students at a time). We begin the interview by inviting students to discuss their work; committee members then follow up with questions. Throughout the meeting, which lasts 45-60 minutes, the students and committee members focus on the published criteria for a successful portfolio (listed above). Students and committee members also discuss the students’ career plans and ways of improving the PTW program.

After the exit interviews, members of the assessment committee write reports analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of the portfolios and synthesizing their impressions from the

interviews. They submit these reports along with their individual portfolio rating sheets to the BA Assessment Committee chair, who compiles the findings into each year's assessment report.

b. Design

Students are not required to take courses in our program in any particular sequence, with the exception of 4000-level electives that have 3000-level prerequisites. As a result, we currently do not have intermediate "milestones" that we can use for assessment purposes.

Currently we collect all our data from students who are about to graduate. We will also begin an effort to track where our majors go after graduation so that we can contact them and their employers at regular intervals after graduation. We anticipate that it will be at least two years before the first data of this type becomes available. The chair of the BA Assessment Committee will be responsible for collecting and analyzing this information.

c. Assessment cycle

We will use the senior portfolios and exit interviews to assess all of our objectives every year; this involves reading approximately 7–10 portfolios each semester.

We consider that three years' worth of rating data is an appropriate amount to indicate major trends in the program; we currently use this measure to determine when rating trends are significant enough to act upon (rather than just showing a temporary fluctuation due to individual students). Therefore, barring any major curriculum changes, we will revisit and revise our assessment plan every fourth year.

d. Stakeholder involvement

Faculty: Membership in the assessment committee periodically changes so that different faculty members can be involved in the assessment process. The annual assessment report will be distributed each year to the entire faculty for comment and discussion.

Students: Students are allowed to offer their own impressions of their learning experience and of

the program when they write their reflective pieces and participate in exit interviews. We plan to broaden this involvement soon by maintaining better contact with our alumni.

Employers and community stakeholders: We are planning to develop an advisory board drawn from some of the companies that employ our graduates (such as Acxiom, Alltel, EDS, Clear Channel Broadcasting, DataPath, and others). Keeping track of our alumni will also enable us to conduct employer surveys as a part of our assessment process.

Undergraduate Degree Program Assessment Progress Report

Degree: BA Professional and Technical Writing

For Calendar Year: 2009

(Date submitted to college committee:) _____

(Date posted on college assessment website:) _____

By: Earnest L. Cox (elcox@ualr.edu)

Overall Rating: _____

Respond to all six parts following the “Degree Program Assessment Progress Report Instructions.” Attach additional pages as needed.

(NOTE: Parts 1 through 4 can be copied from the relevant sections of your assessment plan.)

(1) Student learning goal(s) addressed this year:

Key learning goals for the BA in Professional and Technical Writing:

1. Students should write well-organized technical, persuasive, and nonfiction documents.

(Core competency: verbal literacy)

2. Students should be able to design documents to meet the needs of specific groups of readers.

(Core competencies: verbal literacy, critical thinking, social and cultural awareness)

3. Students should be able to conduct research using print, online, and primary

sources and document their research correctly. (Core competencies: critical thinking, information technology)

4. Students should recognize and respond appropriately to ethical problems embedded in writing situations. (Core competency: ethical and moral consciousness)

5. Students should edit and proofread documents effectively. (Core competency: verbal literacy)

6. Students should learn appropriate and current technology to support their professional goals.
(Core competency: information technology)

Our department's mission statement affirms our commitment to "providing the highest quality of writing instruction at every level," "intensifying and expanding literacy education in every UALR discipline," and "developing human beings to their highest potential." Our learning goals for the BA program are direct extensions of that mission.

(2) Learning outcomes/objectives for those goals addressed this year:

Objectives for Goal #1:

1a. Students will arrange content within their documents using appropriate patterns (such as spatial, chronological, relational, and logical) to develop ideas persuasively.

1b. Students will use reflective writing to discuss and justify their organizational choices.

Objectives for Goal #2:

2a. Students will develop appropriate content—facts, examples, definitions, descriptions, testimony—to meet the needs of specific readers.

2b. Students will format documents in a way that makes information accessible and usable to readers (such as using formatting appropriate to a document's genre, using headings to make information easy to locate, choosing appropriate typefaces and page layouts, etc.)

2c. Students will modify vocabulary and sentence structure choices to be appropriate for specific groups of readers.

2d. Students will use reflective writing to discuss their assessment of the readers' needs and the choices students made to address those needs.

Objectives for Goal #3:

3a. Student papers contain correctly formatted citations for print, online, and primary sources.

3b. Students will use reflective writing to discuss how they located and selected sources for their research, specifically addressing why certain sources were chosen and what measures students took to ensure their sources were credible.

Objectives for Goal #4:

4a. Students will use reflective writing to discuss how they addressed ethical concerns in the documents they produce (including issues such as copyright, writing about human subjects, selective quotation, analyzing sources for bias, making information accessible to readers with disabilities, considering the safety and well-being of readers, etc.)

Objectives for Goal #5:

5a. Students will accurately correct mistakes in grammar, spelling, and punctuation, both in their own work and in that of other writers.

Objectives for Goal #6:

6a. Students will produce documents that demonstrate proficiency with word processing and internet browsing software; many students will also produce documents that demonstrate skills in presentation and graphics software.

(3) Courses & activities where assessed:

See attached Curriculum Assessment Map.

(4) Methods used:

a. Methods — Senior Portfolios and Exit Interviews

We assess all of our objectives using the senior portfolio, an activity currently recommended of all majors. For new majors (those coming in under the 2008 catalog and our revised major) the portfolios are required. Students may choose to complete this portfolio as part of the coursework for RHET 4190 (Colloquium in Rhetoric and Writing, which is offered each fall and required of the new majors), or they may choose to work on it independently under the supervision of the chair of the BA Assessment Committee. Students graduating in the fall or spring submit their portfolios for assessment one month prior to their graduation date; students graduating in the summer submit their portfolios at the same time as the spring graduates.

Students are required to submit at least seven pieces of writing that they have completed during their time in the major. Six of the pieces usually come from our required courses, although we allow substitutions when necessary; the seventh piece is a reflective letter that critically discusses the student's perspective on his or her own learning. Students may choose to submit additional pieces from elective courses if they feel these pieces will help to demonstrate their progress on our learning objectives.

In developing the portfolio, each student is required to associate a document with one or more of the rubric categories that we use for evaluation. The rubric categories are listed below:

- Reflective Essay
- Content Development
- Research and Documentation
- Organization Skills
- Voice and Style
- Effective Copyediting
- Professional Formatting

The portfolio documents are also holistically evaluated on an eighth category listed below, although students do not associate specific documents with this category:

- Range of Writing Ability

The portfolios are then rated by the BA Assessment Committee, a group of five faculty members, on a six point scale. A rating of 6 is considered “excellent,” 5 is “very good,” 4 is “good,” 3 is “fair,” 2 is “below average,” and 1 is “poor.” We consider a rating of 4 to be acceptable. If we have many scores at 3 or below, we feel that we should examine our curriculum and pedagogy for potential trouble spots.

To ensure reliability and consistency in portfolio ratings, members of the assessment committee attend a calibration meeting each year before rating the new portfolios. These meetings also serve as a training session when new members are rotated into the committee.

After the portfolios have been rated, the committee meets with the graduating students for exit interviews (conducted with groups of 3-4 students at a time). We begin the interview by inviting students to discuss their work; committee members then follow up with questions. Throughout the meeting, which lasts 45-60 minutes, the students and committee members focus on the published criteria for a successful portfolio (listed above). The exit interviews are also an opportunity for students to receive oral feedback on the pieces chosen for the portfolio, including the reflective essay. Students and committee members also discuss the students’ career plans and ways of improving the PTW program.

After the exit interviews, members of the assessment committee write reports analyzing the

strengths and weaknesses of the portfolios and synthesizing their impressions from the interviews. They submit these reports along with their individual portfolio rating sheets to the BA Assessment Committee chair, who compiles the findings into each year's assessment report.

b. Design

Students are not required to take courses in our program in any particular sequence, with the exception of 4000-level electives that have 3000-level prerequisites. As a result, we currently do not have intermediate "milestones" that we can use for assessment purposes.

Currently we collect all our data from students who are about to graduate. We will also begin an effort to track where our majors go after graduation so that we can contact them and their employers at regular intervals after graduation. We anticipate that it will be at least two years before the first data of this type becomes available. The chair of the BA Assessment Committee will be responsible for collecting and analyzing this information.

c. Assessment cycle

We will use the senior portfolios and exit interviews to assess all of our objectives every year; this involves reading approximately 7–10 portfolios each semester.

We consider that three years' worth of rating data is an appropriate amount to indicate major trends in the program; we currently use this measure to determine when rating trends are significant enough to act upon (rather than just showing a temporary fluctuation due to individual students). Therefore, barring any major curriculum changes, we will revisit and revise our assessment plan every fourth year.

(5) What are the assessment findings? How did you analyze them?

Senior Portfolio Findings

In 2009, we had 6 students submit their portfolios for assessment. The number of portfolios submitted was unusually low, but was the result of our transitioning from the "recommended" portfolio of our previous degree plan to "required" portfolios in our revised degree plan that began in the Fall 2008. Before the revised degree plan, most students assumed that the recommended portfolios were a graduation requirement, and many students submitted portfolios. That process worked well until the knowledge that the portfolios were recommended and not required became well-known among the students. The number of students who participated dropped as expected, and so the portfolios were made a requirement for majors in our new degree program.

This new degree makes the Colloquium in Rhetoric and Writing course and the portfolios graduation requirements for our majors, so we expect that the number of portfolios submitted will increase over the next 1-2 years.

The portfolios were rated on a six point scale. A rating of 6 is considered "excellent," 5 is "very good," 4 is "good," 3 is "fair," 2 is "below average," and 1 is "poor." The average of ratings given by members of the Assessment Committee for the 2009 senior portfolios were as follows:

Reflective Letter

4.8

Content Development

4.5

Research/ Documentation

4.0

Organizational Skills

4.5

Voice/ Style

4.6

Effective Copyediting

4.3

Professional Formatting

4.9

Range of Writing Abilities

4.5

The average ratings were in the “good” to “very good” range, so we have no plans to make any major changes to our curriculum and pedagogy. According to the portfolios, our students are successfully meeting the objectives for the major.

Although rated in the “good” category, the lowest rated category was “Research and Documentation” which is a change from last year’s lowest rated category of “Reflective Letter.” The changes are probably a reflection of the different strengths and weaknesses of the individual student writers who submitted portfolios. Therefore the ratings do not call for any substantial change in the writing program or the assessment procedures. The assessment committee will monitor both the “Research and Documentation” and “Reflective Letter” findings in 2010 for any trends.

Exit Interviews Findings

All six students who submitted senior portfolios also participated in final exit interviews. The exit interviews have become a very informative method of evaluating our program. One committee member observes the following:

“I think the exit interviews have been as helpful as anything we’ve done to assess and improve our program. Once the students realize they are not going to be grilled, they are candid about strengths and weaknesses and I believe we’ve taken a lot from their comments in the shaping of our new BA.”

Exiting seniors cited the following as strengths of the program:

- a diverse offering of courses that allow students to adapt their progress in the program to their personal and professional interests,
- the growing number of on-line courses that allow students to combine and practice writing with technology,
- students are more confident in their individual writing processes and the development of a writer's voice over time, and
- helpful, professional, and competent faculty and staff

The exiting seniors made the following suggestions for improvement:

- incorporate more course-appropriate technology throughout the major and in all courses,
- add a course that focuses on formal professional development and the job options available for students with Professional and Technical Writing degrees,
- offer more specialized, “hands-on” courses including more internship opportunities,
- a course or part of a course that deals with managing the social realities of workplace writers.
- work on earlier visibility of the major for students during their time at UALR, and
- more courses, both technical and nonfiction writing classes, held in computer classrooms.

(6) What conclusions were drawn and what decisions were made as a result? How were stakeholder groups involved?

Conclusions and Resulting Changes:

In their interviews and in their portfolio cover pieces, most students expressed satisfaction with the program and indicated their ability and confidence as writers evolved significantly throughout their coursework. The writing samples themselves provided evidence that students were able to write well in a wide variety of genres, that they were able to adapt their writing style and content to the needs of their audiences, that they were gaining proficiency in copy editing, and that they especially were learning to use technology to design their documents.

The results of our assessment activities for 2009 suggest that the Professional and Technical Writing undergraduate curriculum is successfully achieving most of its goals, so no major changes to the curriculum seem necessary. This is especially important because the department began implementing a new, revised BA in the Fall of 2008. The changes exhibited in the revised major were the direct results of our previous assessment activities, and many of the student suggestions for improvement in 2009 have already been addressed in the design of the new major.

For the next few years we will be transitioning students from the old major to the new, so it would be prudent to allow the new major to become fully executed before we make any major changes to our pedagogy.

In the meantime, we will continue to fine tune the major and our assessment by discussing the following issues within the department:

incorporating more technology (especially New Media) into all our writing courses,

addressing the importance of teaching correct documentation and research throughout the program,

exploring the feasibility of the department assisting students in purchasing affordable laptops and software to make up for the lack of computer classroom availability, and

designing an effective electronic portfolio system. We currently allow students to submit portfolios in both electronic and hard copy formats. In 2010, we will begin to allow students to submit web-based portfolios as well.

No major revisions in our assessment activities are deemed necessary, although the assessment committee will consider adding a brief alumni survey to the assessment process.

Stakeholder Involvement:

Faculty: Membership in the assessment committee periodically changes so that different faculty members can be involved in the assessment process. The annual assessment report will be distributed each year to the entire faculty for comment and discussion.

Students: Students are allowed to offer their own impressions of their learning experience and of the program when they write their reflective pieces and participate in exit interviews. We plan to broaden this involvement soon by maintaining better contact with our alumni.

Employers and community stakeholders: We are planning to develop an advisory board drawn from some of the companies that employ our graduates (such as Acxiom, Alltel, EDS, Clear Channel Broadcasting, DataPath, and others). Keeping track of our alumni will also enable us to conduct employer surveys as a part of our assessment process.

Curriculum Assessment Map: Degree Program Assessment (BA in Professional and Technical Writing, 45b)

Courses and Activities	How Outcomes are Addressed and Assessed	Goal #1: Organization		Goal #2: Documents designed for reader needs			
		Outcome #1a	Outcome #1b	Outcome #2a	Outcome #2b	Outcome #2c	Outcome #2d
RHET 3301 Editing for Usage and Style	Emphasis: Assessed:	Somewhat Project	Somewhat Project	Little Project	Somewhat Project	Extensive Exams, project	Somewhat Project
RHET 3315 Persuasive Writing	Emphasis: Assessed:	Extensive Papers	Somewhat Papers	Extensive Papers	Little Papers	Extensive Papers	Somewhat Papers, projects
RHET 3316 Writing for the Workplace —or— RHET 3326 Technical Writing	Emphasis: Assessed:	Extensive Papers, projects	Somewhat Papers, projects	Extensive Papers, projects	Extensive Papers, projects	Extensive Papers, projects	Somewhat Papers, projects
RHET 3317 Intro to Nonfiction Writing	Emphasis: Assessed:	Extensive Papers	Somewhat Papers	Extensive Papers	Little Papers	Somewhat Papers	Somewhat Papers, projects
RHET 4301 Theories of Rhetoric and Writing	Emphasis: Assessed:	Somewhat Papers	Somewhat Papers	Extensive Papers, projects	Little Papers	Somewhat Papers	Somewhat Papers, projects
Senior Portfolio	Emphasis: Assessed:	Somewhat Project	Extensive Project	Somewhat Project	Somewhat Project	Somewhat Project	Extensive Project

Curriculum Assessment Map: Degree Program Assessment (BA in Professional and Technical Writing, 45b)

Courses and Activities	How Outcomes are Addressed and Assessed	Goal #3: Research skills		Goal #4: Ethics	Goal #5: Copyediting	Goal #6: Technology
		Outcome #3a	Outcome #3b	Outcome #2a	Outcome #2b	Outcome #2c
RHET 3301 Editing for Usage and Style	Emphasis: Assessed:	Little Project	None	Little Not assessed	Extensive Exams, project	Somewhat Project
RHET 3315 Persuasive Writing	Emphasis: Assessed:	Somewhat Papers	Somewhat Papers	Somewhat Papers	Somewhat Papers	Little Papers
RHET 3316 Writing for the Workplace —or— RHET 3326 Technical Writing	Emphasis: Assessed:	Somewhat Papers, projects	Somewhat Papers, projects	Somewhat Papers, projects	Somewhat Papers, projects	Extensive Papers, projects
RHET 3317 Intro to Nonfiction Writing	Emphasis: Assessed:	Somewhat Papers	Somewhat Papers	Somewhat Papers	Somewhat Papers	Little Papers
RHET 4301 Theories of Rhetoric and Writing	Emphasis: Assessed:	Somewhat Papers	Little Papers	Little Papers	Little Papers	Little Papers
Senior Portfolio	Emphasis: Assessed:	Somewhat Project	Extensive Project	Extensive Project	Somewhat Project	Extensive Project