English Department Assessment Reports
2007

We have made some changes in our major and in its end-point assessment within the past four years, and we contemplate further refinements in the future. We have also added two new minors based largely in the department. The assessment of our major program (and embedded general education goals) is followed by brief preliminary observations about the one-year-old minors and an assessment of how English 101E meets a university foundational general education goal. Based on ongoing monitoring, we are convinced that the major, minors, and general education components of our curriculum achieve their goals well, but we still have ideas for increased achievement.

Major and Departmental Assessment

MISSION AND LEARNING GOALS

Mission Statement

In all its courses, the English Department aims to

- Enhance writing, speaking, critical, and analytical skills,
- Engage students in the creative processes of reading and writing,
- Encourage an appreciation of literary art and the way it enriches personal and public life,
- Help students understand the way language and literature both express and shape cultures and identities,
- Enable students to listen to a rich diversity of human voices.

In addition, the department serves its majors by preparing them for

- Lifelong enjoyment of reading and writing,
- Continued use of critical reading, writing, and analytical skills gained through practice,
- Careers or graduate programs in which the broad skills of communication and interpretation are essential, such as law, communications, or public relations,
- Careers or graduate programs that demand specific knowledge of literature or writing, such as journalism, publishing, and teaching.

Learning Goals for the English Major and Minor

The English Department has designed a sequence of courses and requirements for majors that should allow them to

- Learn to write and speak effectively in a variety of forms and for diverse audiences and purposes,
- Learn to apply skills of close reading and analysis to a variety of texts and, in the process, begin to understand the complex ways meaning is made,
- Understand the variety of interpretive strategies through which readers may approach a text; become aware of their own interpretive strategies,
Understand the interconnectedness of literary texts and the conversation among them,
Understand that literary texts both shape and are shaped by their historical and cultural contexts,
Learn to conduct independent literary research, using appropriate resources and technologies.

The goals for the English minor are the same, but we would expect less breadth in the student’s reading and historical understanding.

ASSESSMENT METHODS

Some of our originally-proposed systems of assessment in 1995 never got off the ground because they proved unwieldy or problematic in practice (major portfolios). In our recent revision of the major (proposed and approved in 2004, first class affected Class of 2006), we retained some of our historic end-point assessment practices and changed others. One important element is still evolving.

Additionally, instruments that have become available as a fruit of other endeavors have provided valuable assessment data as well. These are helpful in assessing success of students along the way, before they get to the end-point assessment of their senior year, and for assessing the impact of English courses on non-majors. I am thinking of our work with the last NCATE assessment effort in conjunction with Professor Bob Welker (a matrix of learning goals with our courses), the indirect assessment of progress toward learning goals provided by the IDEA forms, and the recent completion of a program from the registrar to report grade average by section for the department (I have been asking for such information since at least May 2001 and am delighted that Janine and Jack have figured out a way to produce these reports routinely).

Our end-point assessment for majors includes three major elements:

- A written four-hour exam composed of three essay questions linked to particular learning goals of the major (more on this below);
- The revision and presentation of one of the students’ longer (12-15 page) researched critical essays from an upper-level literature course for presentation at the Senior Symposium late in spring semester of the senior year;
- Completion of a reflective survey on the major’s learning goals and the student’s achievement of them.

These elements (the first two of which are graded by multiple faculty members) combine to compose the letter-graded, one-credit English 405: Senior Exercises. By awarding one letter-graded credit, we hope to encourage students to do their best (and thus give us more accurate assessment information) without unduly stressing them out (it’s only one credit). Because of the grading methods, the process involves the entire department faculty, and includes the judgment of from six to twelve different faculty members in determining any one student’s grade.
SUMMARY AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

Overall, we are happy to find that the English major and general education courses in the department seem to be helping students meet their learning goals quite effectively. Furthermore, our end-point assessment has shown that all majors can fulfill our expectations for meeting learning goals, with a very high percentage doing so with better-than-average performance.

I am appending with this report a copy of the learning goal matrix prepared by Professor Bob Welker and I in preparation for the university’s 2003 NCATE accreditation visit. While the matrix is not directly a part of our departmental assessment strategy, and some of the learning goals deal more specifically with state-mandated goals for education students, it also reinforces over and over again that the English Department’s own learning goals are lined up with the kinds pedagogical approaches, reading, and writing assignments found in our required curricula.

IDEA Forms and Learning Goals

Assessment takes place first and foremost within each class. The NCATE matrix reminds us that the kinds of assignments we make in our classrooms relate specifically to stated learning goals. With the advent of the IDEA forms, we can point to indirect assessment data indicating that English classes achieve appropriate learning goals.

The first departmental learning goal—“to learn to write and speak effectively in a variety of forms and for diverse audiences and purposes”—corresponds substantially with the IDEA Objective 8: “Developing skill in expressing myself orally or in writing.” Student responses on the IDEA forms would suggest that the department’s courses are doing an excellent job of meeting this goal. Students can rate their progress towards relevant learning goals on a scale of 1 to 5. Each semester since our use of IDEA began, the department’s success on this goal has far exceeded that of all classes at Wittenberg or in the IDEA database that indicated improving written and/or oral expression as a relevant learning goal:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>English % &gt;4</th>
<th>English% &gt; 3.5</th>
<th>Witt % &gt; 4</th>
<th>IDEA % &gt; 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2005</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2006</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2006</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2007</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This clear success is all the more impressive when one takes into account that nearly all English classes indicate this as an essential or important goal, and when one realizes that the English courses make up part of Wittenberg’s overall average.

Another major departmental learning goal—to help students read closely and analytically—corresponds to IDEA objective 11—“learning to analyze and critically evaluate ideas,
arguments, and points of view.” Again, English classes indicating this as an essential or important goal, seem to succeed in helping students learn this skill at higher rates than the Wittenberg or IDEA database averages:

**Students’ Reported Progress on Critical Analysis in English Classes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>English % &gt; 4</th>
<th>English% &gt; 3.5</th>
<th>Witt % &gt; 4</th>
<th>IDEA % &gt; 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2005</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2006</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2006</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2007</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Not surprisingly, as the items most closely associated with the two primary departmental learning goals, Objectives 8 and 11 are most often selected as essential or important in English classes. The third most common objective chosen corresponds to a bundling of several of our learning goals stressing the connection between literature (art) and the society that forms it. Objective 7, “gaining a broader understanding and appreciation of intellectual/cultural activity,” while not perfectly aligned with our learning goals, is similar enough to be deemed essential or important by a substantial number of classes in the department. Our percentages of top ratings on this objective are not as strong as on the first two, but still are typically better than the Witt and IDEA database in general for this objective:

**Students’ Reported Progress on Understanding Art in Context in English Classes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>English % &gt; 4</th>
<th>English% &gt; 3.5</th>
<th>Witt % &gt; 4</th>
<th>IDEA % &gt; 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2005</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2006</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2006</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2007</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The final learning goal of the major, to learn to conduct appropriate independent research, corresponds most closely to IDEA’s Objective 9: “learning how to find and use resources for answering questions or solving problems.” While our performance on this goal is a bit more uneven than on previously-mentioned ones, it still shows that we help students considerably towards this goal:

**Students’ Reported Progress on Learning to Do Research in English Classes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>English % &gt; 4</th>
<th>English% &gt; 3.5</th>
<th>Witt % &gt; 4</th>
<th>IDEA % &gt; 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Clearly, the routine and immediate indirect assessment of major learning goals offered by the IDEA forms indicates that the English Department is doing very well in helping students achieve progress on those goals. The only somewhat less stellar performance is in the area of research. As we have moved to a curriculum in which students in all upper-level literature classes write a substantial and original researched critical essay, clearly some of those students feel less certain of what they’re doing. In the section on projected changes below, you will see some of our ideas for improving our performance on this learning goal within those advanced courses. Research is also a key component in our English 101E classes, and I will discuss that separately in the assessment of English 101.

In addition to the information related to student progress on relevant learning goals provided by the IDEA summaries, general information on students’ perception of classes and pedagogy in the department is heartening as well. In the four semesters for which we have data, the summary average (taking into account progress on objectives, excellent teacher, and excellent course scores) of English classes has been at or above the Witt and IDEA averages consistently:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>ENGL % &gt; Witt Sum.Av.</th>
<th>ENGL % &gt; IDEA Sum. Av.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2005</td>
<td>91% (all scores adjusted)</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2006</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2006</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2007</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>56% (81% unadjusted)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While these scores do not give us helpful data on differentiating, say, English 101 from courses for the major, they do provide an overall affirmation that the department members, on the whole, take teaching seriously and succeed well in their goals.

Patterns of Assessment within Courses
While the summary of grade reports by semester and section prepared by the Office of the Registrar may be helpful primarily as an internal aid to mentoring of new faculty members (more on that in the assessment of English 101E, below), it also confirms that students are, on the whole, meeting learning goals in their courses through passing performances on assignments. Typically, as well, grade distributions and averages within courses at both ends of the major suggest that students who take more English classes do burnish their skills and perform more advanced tasks at a higher level as they go on, as indicated in the chart below:

**“Value Added” as Indicated by Average Grades in Introductory and Capstone Classes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>ENGL 200 Average</th>
<th>401/402/405 Av.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003-2004</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>3.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-2005</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>3.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2006</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>3.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>3.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The exception that proves the rule (one hopes) in 2006-2007 is easily attributable to a junior colleague’s teaching one of only two sections of English 200 for the first time; the higher grades may be a result of superior teaching and generous opportunities for revision, or they may reflect an opportunity for mentoring in relation to departmental norms and expectations—or both. The grade reports offer an objective tool for when colleagues, especially new hires, visitors, and adjunct instructors, ask “where they are” in terms of departmental practices. These reports could be a valuable tool in helping to send students consistent messages about expectations.

**End-Point Assessment**

Until recently, the English Department had one of the most byzantine end-point assessments at Wittenberg; it combined a 4-credit class in which students produced a long, independent critical or creative thesis or portfolio, a four-hour written exam, and an oral presentation derived from the written thesis or critical portion of the creative portfolio, followed by questions from a faculty panel. Each portion was a lot of work for students and faculty alike, since the entire department devoted most of Saturday to grading the written exam, each oral presentation had to be scheduled by the chair taking into account four different people’s schedules, and the classes made already-tight staffing even tighter, resulting for several years in some professors’ not being able to teach a single upper-level course in their field in a given year.

Additionally, although many students rose to the occasion and produced their best work in the thesis/portfolio, many felt overmatched and unprepared for such a sustained (25-page) independent work after having a variety of experiences in 300-level classes. For a host of reasons, then, beginning with the Class of 2006, we shifted the emphasis in the upper-level courses in the major. We did away with the separate thesis (literature track) and portfolio (writing track) classes, raised the number of upper-level literature classes required of all majors, and ramped up the standard expectations in 300-level literature classes to include a
12-15-page researched critical paper on a topic developed independently. The end-point assessment now consists of the written exam (with questions that link to important learning goals and skills) and an oral presentation at the Senior Symposium, followed by questions from the audience, which includes a faculty panel, but also friends and other majors. The presentation is based on, and revised from, one of the long papers from an upper-level literature class. Thus, the genesis of the project has a classroom context, but the student must also see earlier work with more experienced eyes—literally re-vise—and think about communicating complicated ideas orally.

So far, the new Senior Exercises (English 405) reflect students’ success in demonstrating competence in departmental learning goals. One blunt but undeniable measure of that success is the high grade-point-average earned in the various capstone courses; they do well by the end of their English major.

**Format of the End-Point Assessment Instruments**

*The Written Exam*

The written test consists of three long essay questions. Question One is an interpretive question about a “common text” that has been designated for that year’s class. The common text is a book-length work of high literary merit that students will not have been taught in a class. Often, we choose fairly contemporary works so that there is not a large body of academic criticism available. Students are allowed to bring their copy of the book so that they may include specific evidence from the text for their claims. This question keys strongly to the first three learning goals (writing, analysis, critical strategies), and probably to the fourth as well (cultural context). Students are told of the common text the summer before their senior year, and reminders go out throughout the fall semester, encouraging students to read the book again over winter break and to work in study/discussion groups together to teach themselves about the book. This question also tests what students can do on their own, without a professor leading them in their reading and providing contextual materials for them. In recent years, we have sometimes been able to choose a common text linked to a Witt Series distinguished author (Maxine Hong Kingston, Tim O’Brien) or other major colloquium speaker (Terry Otten on Arthur Miller), so the designation of the common text also provides some unity and camaraderie for the students.

Question Two provides a choice of two poems and a short-short story and asks the student to offer a close analytical reading of the work. This question of course keys to the first three learning goals (writing, analysis, critical approaches). Question Three poses a broad-based historical or thematic claim and asks students to develop an argument in response using four works diverse in period and genre to illustrate their points. This question keys to the first five of the six major learning goals.

The exam is administered from 9-1 on the second Saturday of spring semester each year, proctored by several members of the department’s Comprehensives Committee (soon to be renamed the Assessment Committee). At 1:30, all full-time members of the department assemble and break into three reading teams, one for each question. Students’ names are not on the blue books (only their Social Security numbers), so each reading is blind; professors read
holistically and assign a score of 0-4 on the back of the book, so the second reader is not
influenced by the first score. After a second reading, if there is a disparity between the two
scores, the book goes to a third reader to break the tie; the essay earns whatever score is assigned
by two professors. Thus, normally, each student’s exam would be read by a minimum of six
different professors, and, if a third reader were required for each section, could be read by as
many as nine professors.

Before the advent of English 405, we simply totaled the points (maximum 12 possible) and
awarded a “pass” to all scores of 6 or above, “fail” to 5 or below, and “distinction” for scores of
11 or 12. Now we use a 12-point grading scale, assigning letter grades of A+ through F to
scores 12-0. That translates into their letter grade for the written exam portion of English 405.

The Senior Symposium
As described above, students previously took a four-credit class in which they were guided
(almost like fifteen independent studies) in writing 25-page papers on topics of their own choice
and development. They then chose some part of that argument to present to a faculty panel,
who asked them questions and then issued a mark of “pass,” “fail,” or “distinction.” Students
did receive a regular letter grade in the course English 401 or 402.

Now students choose from among the long papers they have written for upper-level literature
courses and focus the argument, do additional research, offer better evidence, etc., as they revise
the paper for presentation at the Senior Symposium (an all-day event late in spring semester,
followed by the departmental awards colloquium and the senior party). The students are placed
in thematic panels, as for a professional conference, and each panel is attended by a faculty panel
of three professors, along with students’ friends, peers, and younger majors. The faculty
members have a grading rubric and are asked to score holistically based on the presentation and
the responses to questions. These three scores are then averaged to the letter grade for the
presentation. The grade for the written exam and the presentation are then averaged for the
grade in English 405 (1 credit).

Results of End-Point Assessment

The data presented below show that students over the past four years have demonstrated
achievement of departmental learning goals. The table shows the number of students achieving
each score on each question of the written exam; the second demonstrates that the change from
the thesis/portfolio class to the senior exercises has not resulted in significantly different
assessment results (in the form of grades for those experiences).

Student Performance on Sections of the Written Exam, Classes of 2004-2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Year</th>
<th>Question One</th>
<th>Question Two</th>
<th>Question Three</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Score # achieving</td>
<td>score # achieving</td>
<td>score # achieving</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8
The global conclusion one may draw from this table is that the vast majority of students succeed in earning at least a minimally passing grade on each kind of question. And in recent years, we have noticed that Question Two (the close-reading of a short text with no context given) seems the most challenging (although this year’s results might suggest either that we were hasty in our conclusions or that we have successfully reinforced the practice of close reading in our courses as a result of those discussions). Of course, it might also be expected that Question Two would be more difficult, since most are so accustomed to reading literature specifically in its social and historical contexts within our classes.

The Paper and Presentation

The department has long noted that we award higher marks on the presentation of a student’s own argument than we do on the written exam, and that trend continues with the new format of the Senior Symposium. When considering the impromptu, timed nature of the one writing task versus the deep background and preparation of the other, this disparity makes some sense. But also, we are measuring students’ ability to think and work independently in different ways; most students invest more in their own research project than in the widely varied elements of the exam.

Student Performance on the Senior Oral Presentation, Classes of 2004-2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Year</th>
<th>Distinction</th>
<th>Pass</th>
<th>Fail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004*</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Class of 2006 included students who were completing the old literature and writing tracks under the old requirements and students who were following the new requirements for the Senior Symposium. The Class of 2007 is the first class entirely engaged in the Senior Symposium system and the process of choosing and revising a substantial researched critical paper from an earlier upper-level literature class. As you can see from the large number of high marks on these presentations, we have been impressed with the quality of the work that students are able to produce when they begin from a classroom context and then revisit their project with hindsight and more finely-honed skills.

For the last two years, we have held a department meeting specifically for the purpose of debriefing on the activities of the Senior Exercises, occurring a week or two after the Senior Symposium. To add to the collegial atmosphere and keep up our engagement, we meet at Los Mariachis for drinks and substantial appetizers. It has worked well and has even been a fun conversation to have; I’ve dubbed it the Assessment Fiesta. My notes of those meetings are also appended. While we agreed as a department that the quality of the work presented and the manner in which it was presented made us proud, we are still mindful that this is not the same task as writing a substantial thesis with little classroom support in terms of literary-historical context (as was the case in the old English 401). But we do gain in quality to some extent because the students are working from within a class in which they’ve already absorbed a fair amount of knowledge about the period/author/genre/theme about which they’re writing.

The Senior Survey: A Work in Progress

When we proposed the new format for the major and its capstone experience, we wanted to include an “indirect” method of assessment in addition to the various direct methods embodied in the written exam and the Senior Symposium. Over time, our vision has shifted from requiring students to write a short (3-4 page) essay reflecting on their English major to asking them to complete a survey with space for open-ended comments on each question as well as a Likert-type scale for quantitative responses. While the idea of the reflective essay pulled strongly at us (we’re English professors, after all), it soon became clear that we might not get very usable or consistent data unless we circumscribed the format so much as to make it a list of questions, anyway. So–why not have a list of questions?

Using the survey of the Political Science Department as an inspiration and our own learning goals as the basis, the department Comprehensives Committee (soon to be re-named the
Assessment Committee) designed a survey this past spring.  Bob Rafferty was very helpful in getting it set up for us so that only students in English 405 had access and so that the responses would be completely confidential.  I received a download of the information (in very unwieldy and somewhat incomplete form) from the Computing Center after graduation.  As I transcribed the information onto the initial survey document and calculated average responses for the question, I did notice some interesting possible glitches that made me concerned about the quality of the data on this first run.  But that might be the case anyway.

First, only seven of our seniors responded, so the sample size is too small to mean much of anything except anecdotally, anyway.  This small response was disappointing, but not unexpected.  The survey was not ready to go on the day of Senior Symposium, so our original plan–to have a couple of breaks in the day’s schedule so that seniors could go to Hollenbeck 124 and fill out the survey–did not work out.  Instead, we were forced to depend upon the good will of the students in responding to several plaintive e-mail reminders from me.

Of the seven who filled out the form, five were very positive, giving strong objective marks on most questions and writing helpful comments.  One person gave very negative marks on every question but wrote no comments, so we don’t know what changes might be helpful.  And the seventh student really worries me: that person gave low marks, but all positive comments, leading me to suspect that he or she didn’t pay attention to the values of the scale and accidentally reversed them!

Despite this unreliable and probably somewhat skewed set of results (might the unexplained negative survey be an outlier and the one with positive comments and negative scores be a mistake, both of them carrying far too much weight in a set size of only seven?), some patterns clearly emerge.  Even with two apparently dissatisfied students in the mix of seven, each question related to learning goals of the department and major scored better than a 3, which would be the neutral answer on the scale.  Most scored around a 2, which would correlate to the students’ agreeing that their major helped them meet that learning goal.  The department was least successful in a “speaking” goal that we extrapolated from our first stated learning goal (and which relevant to general education goals, anyway).  Students commented that they had learned and improved a lot in terms of informal speaking, such as in-class discussion and debate, but that they had not had as many opportunities for formal presentations as they would have liked before the Senior Symposium.  Judging from student comments, it seemed that certain classes had indeed offered such opportunities, but those classes were not numerous enough that every student could be assured of running into one of them in the course of his or her major schedule.

Some students also wanted more instruction in literary research.  These comments were somewhat frustrating, though, as they noted they had received such instruction, but forgot it and didn’t know where to begin.  We will consider methods for improving and reviewing research skills in upper-level classes, though (see below).

**General Education Learning Goals**
While I will offer a separate assessment of English 101E’s effectiveness below, I wanted to address the department’s effectiveness in meeting university learning goals before I move on to write about the two interdisciplinary minors and the English 101E foundational goal.

Some of the university goals, such as the improvement of writing in writing-intensive courses and the awareness of the arts in culture in those courses designated for the “A” requirement, are addressed above in my discussion of the IDEA form goals that link to them.

Additionally, we included several questions about general education goals in our senior survey, flawed though it may be.

While the speaking goal did not show on the data set downloaded by the Computing Center, similar questions within the major questions received average responses agreeing that courses in the department had helped them achieve that goal, especially in informal speaking, such as group discussion and debate.

Strangely, the general education question about research earned a much lower response than the question about research in the major.  I’m not sure what to make of that, especially since the general education category would add English 101E, which typically spends several weeks on doing library research.  Some students wanted more from the reference librarians; others saw the research papers in every 300-level class as a valuable skill-building assignment.

The question on the general education goal in computing drew agreement that the department helped students appropriately.  Obviously, this question linked to them more in terms of the formatting of writing and on-line research resources.

Students felt we had helped them meet the general education diversity goal, although here the comments seem much more positive than the numerical score would indicate.  While the average of numerical scores was 2.3 (agree), comments included these: “WOW.  We have talked about this goal in every class, probably 90% of days.  You are doing a terrific job with your goals” and “We are doing this quite well.”  Most seem to recognize that they read a diverse set of texts in most English classes, and certainly in the major as a whole.

Overall, then, while there will be some ideas for enhancing these goals below, we seem to be meeting our responsibility to the general education embedded learning goals.

**CHANGES SUGGESTED BY ASSESSMENT RESULTS**

Years of formal and informal assessment and departmental discussion (as well as a helpful visit by an external program reviewer) went into the changes in the major approved by the faculty at the end of the 2003-04 school year and implemented beginning with the Class of 2007.  They
also led eventually to the new majors and course re-numbering that took effect in Fall 2006. Those changes included

- a return to a single, flexible English major rather than a two-tracked major (focus on core learning goals)
- agreement to uniform requirement of 12-15-page researched critical paper on at topic of the student’s own development in all 300-level literature classes (more consistent, repeated practice in research)
- change from the written exam, oral exam, English 401 (literature) and English 402 (writing) to English 405: Senior Exercises (1 credit) (draw on sophistication from classroom context, link to learning goals, attach weight of credit to gain more reliable assessment performances)
- dropping of the writing minor and establishment of separate creative writing and journalism minors (efficient use of faculty expertise, specificity of student interests, presence on transcript)
- re-numbering of advanced journalism and creative writing classes (avoid confusion about registration and requirements, make requirements more clear and uniform)

As mentioned above, department members participate together in the group grading of the written senior exam, and useful discussion takes place before, during, and after that activity. The Comprehensives Committee (soon to be re-named the Assessment Committee) creates the exam and helps in various ways with the administration of it. A tenured faculty member acts as the coordinator of English 405, setting up workshops for the seniors on choosing their paper for revision, strategies for additional research and revision, writing for presentation, etc. And, as mentioned above, the whole department meets after the Senior Symposium (and with various data reported out by me) to assess and think about the future (my notes on those meetings from 2006 and 2007 are appended).

Changes we made to English 405 in 2007 based on discussion of assessment in 2006 include:

- Giving the students twenty minutes rather than fifteen to present. This led to more detailed analysis and deeper context.
- Each student provided a longer (200-word) abstract. Again, this helped convey the depth of the argument better than the 100-word abstracts of the first year.
- Students were required to submit a Works Cited list with the abstract. This helped to focus on the research they did, but also on which research particularly supported the core of their argument in the presentation.
- Rather than each paper’s being followed by questions and answers only from the faculty panel, all three papers will be presented back-to-back, followed by an open question and answer period in which faculty members should make sure they ask each student a question, but in which students will also be asking questions. This, we hoped, would lead to higher-level discussions and some broader thinking.
- We also vowed to implement the indirect assessment portion of 405, which at that point we thought might be a reflective essay. We ended up doing a survey instead.
Better publicity for the event, with students’ names and the titles of their presentations on the programs. This succeeded partly, but was somewhat hampered by the relatively late scheduling of the panels.

The English 405 coordinator should emphasize the Senior Symposium as an opportunity to sharpen and revise the original paper, perhaps doing appropriate additional research. The coordinator should also suggest that students form writing groups to provide feedback and support for each other, and we should provide a list of faculty members and their areas of interest and expertise to aid students in getting advice on their papers (if they want advice in addition to that of the professor in whose class they wrote the original paper).

These changes were all implemented for 2007, with the results judged very positively by the department. We felt that the extra time allotted for presentations and the emphasis on strengthening, rather than merely shortening, the paper provided for very strong papers. Most faculty reported that the question-and-answer periods also offered a high level of discourse. We were enthusiastic about the changes instituted after the first year (see meeting notes of 2007 for more detail).

But our satisfaction with the changes from 2006 does not mean that we will rest. Based on departmental discussions, suggestions from professors, and formal discussion of assessment results, we will be working on further refinements to our department procedures, learning goals, pedagogy, etc. Changes we will make or will discuss making in the next few years include:

- Re-name the Comprehensives Committee the Assessment Committee. I think this will foreground the importance of the elements of the Senior Exercises and place them within the larger context of departmental assessment.
- Ask professors who regularly teach English 200, English 280, and English 290 to meet together to try to come up, not with a common syllabus, but with a common set of learning goals. Discussions within the department about this will help all of us know what we can reinforce from earlier classes and what we might need to review.
- Continue a conscious emphasis on close reading in all classes and demand textual evidence in analytical papers.
- Review the departmental learning goals to see if some are redundant or repetitive, or if others need to be added. This came up as the Comprehensives Committee worked on using the learning goals as the basis of our senior survey.
- And speaking of the senior survey—work on ways to get a better response rate without creating animus or a feeling of coercion on the part of the students. Also: see if we can get the data in a more transparently usable format from the Computing Center. It took several hours for me to enter and average the numbers and cut and paste the written responses with just seven respondents; it will take a whole day for a class of 40.
- Logistics: keep the Senior Symposium, Department Awards Colloquium, and Senior Party all on one day, but make sure that the day is not the same one on which results of honors thesis defenses are due to the Office of the Registrar. This made for much stress this year, and we always have a lot of students writing honors theses.
We will require that students submit not only an abstract of their Senior Symposium, but also a copy of the final reading text to the department a week before the symposium so that faculty panelists can read the papers ahead of time if they wish (in order to review texts, formulate good questions, etc.). This should also help to combat procrastination.

More logistics: review the grading rubric for the presentations to make sure that the values of the categories are clear—or come up with a different scale or description. Some people felt that they were interpreting certain qualities differently than others because they were not clearly enough defined.

We will continue to discuss a number of other ideas, such as requiring students to have a conference with the professor for whom the paper was originally written, setting up a “norming” session for faculty beforehand, etc. (See Assessment Fiesta notes 2007).

We will continue to discuss and share ideas for reviewing research techniques and resources in our 300-level literature classes, responding to the final papers in those classes, and sharing other pedagogical tips for those advanced classes.

We would like to launch an alumni survey sometime soon, but the large number of English Department alums makes this difficult. We have constructed some lists for ourselves, but often the e-mail addresses from the alumni office are outdated and crash the whole list.

RESOURCE NEEDS

We have become aware of no particular resource needs other than computer support for surveys; if an e-mail survey seems untenable for alumni, we might need support for the large mailing. We also need regular reporting of routine information from the registrar, such as the grade reports that have been developed recently showing averages for whole sections, courses, and professors.

PLAN FOR CONTINUED ASSESSMENT

We will continue using the same tools for assessment: IDEA forms, student performance within classes with clear learning goals, and the constituent parts of English 405: Senior Exercises: the written exam, the oral presentation, and the senior survey. In addition, sometime in the coming assessment cycle, we would like to get at least a trial alumni survey out.

Additionally, we will meet together to grade the written exam and to debrief after the Senior Symposium. More informally, we will share in department meetings, e-mails, and conversation strategies for improving our teaching of learning goals such as research, close reading, and diversity. We will also no doubt be discussing proposals by the Curriculum Review Committee and make proposals to take into account their impact on department staffing and curriculum.

Journalism Minor Baseline Assessment

MISSION AND LEARNING GOALS
Journalism Minor Mission Statement

The minor prepares students to report truthfully, ethically, and thoroughly on matters of personal and public interest.

Journalism Minor Learning Goals

Students minoring in journalism should be able to

- understand principles and laws involving free speech and freedom of the press, including the responsibility of the press to question policies and monitor uses of authority;
- understand the role of journalism and the media in society as reflector and shaper of public opinion and concern;
- convey information and opinion accurately, fairly, and ethically;
- think critically, analytically, and independently;
- conduct research and supply evidence adequate to the claims based upon it;
- write correctly and clearly in appropriate journalistic style and format;
- critically evaluate their work and that of others for accuracy, clarity, fairness, appropriateness, and grammatical correctness.

ASSESSMENT METHODS FOR THE JOURNALISM MINOR

We will require seniors in their final semester to submit a portfolio of several different kinds of stories (published or unpublished, with published stories preferred) along with a brief (2-4 pages) reflective essay on how they think they have met the program’s learning goals. These portfolios will then be read by a panel of professors in the minor, who might contact individual students for follow-up questions if necessary. Information from these portfolios and essays can then be used to discuss possible changes to and/or improvements in the program.

Since the minor has only been recognized for one year, an assessment is not yet feasible. But journalism courses are included in the high marks remarked on in classes above, and when I manually pull out the IDEA forms for journalism classes from this past year, they do show some distinctive goals and patterns different from most other departmental courses.

INFORMAL SUMMARY AND FUTURE PLANS

I should note that I was able to review IDEA reports only for the journalism minor courses taught in the English Department; while that covers a majority of the courses, a key course from the Communication Department (Comm 290) is a required course for the minor, and other courses from the Communication Department and the Art Department can be applied to the minor.

Based on the evaluations of journalism courses in the English Department, they are meeting their goals well in this first year. Several of the minor’s learning goals might be usefully subsumed under the IDEA objective 4: “developing specific skills, competencies, and points of view needed by professionals in the field most closely related to this course.” Of the four journalism
courses taught in the department this year, all selected that objective as essential or important (I fear that Mac forgot to fill out his blue form for one course, so all the goals are weighted as important). The percentages of students rating their progress on that goal with a 4 or 5 in the four courses are 86%, 100%, 93%, and 100%. Another IDEA objective clearly correlating to the learning goals of the journalism minor is objective 8, “developing skill in expressing myself orally or in writing.” While the departmental average of very positive (4 and 5) responses on this objective is quite high, the average on these courses is particularly good: 100%, 86%, 86%, and 87%.

Two other areas suggest that the courses are probably doing a good job, but may need to work on common understanding and vocabulary of what they’re aiming for. For instance, the learning goals suggest that students should learn to “think critically, analytically, and independently,” which would seem to suggest that IDEA objective 11, “learning to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view,” would be important. But in the context of the English Department and its body of literature courses, professors and students alike may associate this more with literary analysis and criticism than with the kind of critical thinking required of excellent journalists. Thus, one of the four courses indicated it of minor importance, the course with the unmarked blue form marked it important by default, and two additional courses flagged it as an important goal of the course. The percentages of students rating their progress in that area a 4 or 5 are less consistent than some other goals: 50%, 73%, and 100%. The class in which 100% of the students rated their progress in critical analysis high was the new course on opinion journalism—the one in which they read well-known columnists and reviewers extensively and in which they were writing their most overtly literary-critical pieces. So some discussion of this terminology in classes might be worthwhile.

Another such item is IDEA objective 6, “developing creative capacities.” All courses rated this goal as essential or important, and all received fairly high scores (the one course marking it essential received 100% 4 or 5 ratings). But in those classes with somewhat lower scores (73%), I wonder if students simply do not recognize that even hard news writing has some stamp of creativity. Furthermore, I wonder if we do need to emphasize the difference between journalism and creative writing in order to help students internalize professional standards and practices. This might be a valuable conversation for the journalism faculty to pursue together.

A complete assessment of the minor based on full sets of data will be included in the next assessment cycle (I assume that the new minors will report the same year as the English Department, since most of the courses are in the department).

Creative Writing Minor Baseline Assessment

MISSION AND LEARNING GOALS

Creative Writing Minor Mission Statement
The minor provides a venue in which students regularly cultivate their own creativity while learning to understand and appreciate the diversity of other people’s experiences.

**Creative Writing Minor Learning Goals**

Students minoring in creative writing should be able to

- display knowledge of the main creative genres and major practitioners;
- demonstrate appropriate knowledge of technique in several genres;
- make meaningful choices regarding elements such as language, point of view, plot, prosody, organization, etc.
- hear and weigh constructive criticism honestly;
- give constructive criticism truthfully and tactfully;
- present themselves and their work professionally.

**ASSESSMENT METHODS FOR THE CREATIVE WRITING MINOR**

Second-semester seniors will either create a portfolio of their best writing from several classes with a brief (2-4 pages) reflective paper on how they feel they have met the minor’s learning goals, or, if they are enrolled in English 403: Advanced Projects, simply append the reflective paper on the minor to their final project (students in 403 will already have offered a portfolio to gain admission to the course). Their work and the reflective essays can then be reviewed by creative writing faculty to see if changes or improvements need to be made to the minor or its courses.

**INFORMAL SUMMARY AND FUTURE PLANS**

Like the journalism minor, the creative writing minor has existed formally only since last fall, so a full assessment based on complete data will have to wait for the next assessment cycle. But the creative writing minor, too, has a couple of obvious links between its learning goals and IDEA objectives, so we can take a quick look at the successful work these courses are doing.

All creative writing courses offered in 2006 rated IDEA objectives 6 (“developing creative capacities”) and 8 (“developing skill in expressing myself orally or in writing”) as essential, as one might presume from looking at their learning goals. Within those courses, a large percentage of students indicated they had made good progress in developing their creative capacities: 93%, 83%, 80%, 82%, 100%, 92%, and 100%. Similarly impressive numbers of students felt they had made progress in developing their skills as writers: 100%, 83%, 67%, 94%, 92%, 83%, and 94%.

As with the journalism courses, some items seem not to be interpreted by students as they are by professors—or at least, that’s my take on it. All but a couple of the course blue forms indicated that learning to work as part of a team was essential or important; this no doubt refers in their minds to the essential pedagogy of creative writing—the workshop in which everyone reads each other’s work and contributes feedback. While this is certainly a kind of teamwork, students
don’t seem to think of it as such, with much smaller (and more inconsistent) percentages of students marking their progress a 4 or 5 on that objective when it was marked: 57%, 47%, 54%, 35%, and 67%. Again, I would suggest that creative writing professors either not select that objective or else suggest the terminology of teamwork with the students to help them make the connection to the skills they’re learning in workshop.

Overall, our creative writing classes seem to be doing an excellent job in helping students meet their goals.
**English 101E Assessment**

**LEARNING GOALS**

In English 101E, students should improve their ability to

- produce mature, coherent, persuasive prose
- make connections between analytical reading and analytical writing
- develop ideas thoroughly
- use rhetorical strategies appropriate to subject and audience
- focus a thesis and support it with well-selected detail
- structure an essay by means of well-developed and coherent paragraphs
- generate mature and effective sentences
- observe the conventions of written prose
- use the library and other research resources appropriately
- assess the relevance and validity of sources
- use sources ethically and understand the concept of academic integrity

**ASSESSMENT METHODS**

Because of the foundational nature of the skills taught in English 101E and the heavy load of writing assessment within each course, the main method of assessment is monitoring of grades in the heavily writing-intensive classes. The new grade reports being generated by the Office of the Registrar will be a big help in doing this. This is also particularly helpful because of the large number of visiting and adjunct faculty members teaching this class.

Additionally, the adoption of the IDEA system offers us useful indirect assessment of the students’ perceived progress on key learning goals.

Finally, the department schedules a 101 grade “norming” session early in the fall semester of each year, during which we review several actual 101 papers that achieve various levels of success. Each person grades the papers in advance, and we then discuss any major differences that might arise and how we see the paper’s success in relation to the course learning goals and departmental standards. This exercise helps not only to keep 101 standards front-and-center in the minds of permanent members of the department, but helps to introduce new and temporary faculty members to departmental expectations. The chair and/or other mentors can then follow up with individual discussions about grading.

**SUMMARY AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS**

**Grades in English 101E**

Grading in English 101 needs to achieve a tricky balance. Because of the wildly varying backgrounds in writing with which students enter the course, one doesn’t want to punish a student for early problems if she makes good progress. On the other hand, one doesn’t want to
give award high grades to work that is still middling just because the student has worked hard and improved.

The pedagogies favored in this class also set it apart in terms of strategies for and results of grading. For instance, if, on a given paper assignment, a student hands in a draft to the professor, who marks it and writes an end comment before handing it back for revision—or if some version of that drafting and feedback model happens more than once on a given paper—a student might likely produce an end product much better than what he would have produced by just handing in his original “finished” draft. Frequent required conferences on drafts can have a similar effect. But if students assume they can receive similar grades without internalizing that process in later classes, others may perceive that grades in English 101 aren’t sending an appropriate message about the quality of a student’s work. Members of the department think about these tensions a lot and discuss them regularly.

Grade reports generated by the Office of the Registrar suggest that overall, students earn grades in English 101 that are similar in distribution and average to the university’s class offerings overall. Likewise, it becomes clear when individual instructors give generally higher grades (or perhaps when they have an exceptional class). This instrument will offer an opportunity for me as chair to talk to individual instructors just to make sure that she or he is in line with departmental expectations and has cogent reasons if there are consistent differences over time.

The following table offers a summary of average grades awarded in English 101E:

**Average Grade in All English 101E Sections, 2003-2007**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Year</th>
<th>Fall–All sections</th>
<th>Spring–All sections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003-2004</td>
<td>2.697</td>
<td>3.136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-2005</td>
<td>2.920</td>
<td>2.938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2006</td>
<td>2.943</td>
<td>2.963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>2.966</td>
<td>3.110</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You will note that the average grade in English 101E hovers around a B, somewhat higher than the overall university average, which I believe is around a B-. In looking at the complete records, though, some interesting—and potentially problematic—patterns emerge that the department will need to discuss.

A fairly sizable majority—two-thirds most semesters—of individual section averages are below the overall averages shown in the table above. In fact, most sections are closer to the B- average. But a very small number of permanent department members give much higher grades on average, as do (and here is the potentially problematic part) most of the visiting and adjunct faculty members during this time period. It’s certainly possible for me to talk with permanent members of the department and make sure there are valid pedagogical reasons for their higher-than-average grades, but with new people constantly coming in and teaching short-term,
we may or may not know there’s a potential mismatch until that person’s teaching at Wittenberg is nearly over.

All this is not to say that there’s a peculiar virtue to giving certain grades. In fact, when a student earns a high grade in English 101E, it’s usually because he or she has made substantial progress toward learning goals. I note these data primarily because English 101E is probably more reliant on visiting and adjunct instructors than any other course at Wittenberg, and this sometimes makes it difficult to know whether this foundational course is sending a consistent message to students and to other professors who might have these students in later classes.

**Progress on Learning Goals: The IDEA Forms**

I don’t want to give the impression that grades in English 101E are disproportionately inflated or that they do not signal actual student achievement in the courses. The students’ own reports on IDEA forms for English 101E courses suggests, in fact, that they feel the class helps them considerably in reaching the learning goals it espouses.

Although the use of IDEA forms for helping to assess learning in English 101 is promising, at this point it is also inconsistent and very labor-intensive for the chair. Part of this stems from the fact that, in the past (even up to and including fall semester of this past year), we received packets of evaluations for some courses without receiving a report for the course. With a clearer line of responsibility and a clearer sense of what should be done with the data in the Associate Provost’s office now, that will probably change. Another problem is that some of our faculty are still struggling with the most appropriate ways to use the blue form for the IDEA evaluations. And then, of course, we have, especially with 101, the problem of faculty members who might be here for only one course or a few years; they may not understand how to use the forms the first time. These all point to more faculty development work I should do in addition to the faculty meeting/workshops we’ve already spent talking about how to use the IDEA forms.

In picking through the forms for 101 courses (more on this below), it became clear that, while most students find English 101 helpful in improving their writing skills, not all sections are as effective as others in that goal. In an examination of 101 section reports, the only goal that all instructors deemed essential was IDEA objective 8, developing skill in written or oral expression. Most sections received scores of 4 or 5 from over 85% of the their students. Some, however, did less well; there seems to be some correlation between lower percentages of satisfaction on objective 8 and more additional objectives being deemed essential or important. That is, when faculty members focused only on objective 8 and, say, objective 9 (associated with doing research to find answers) and objective 11 (critical and analytical thinking), the reported student progress on all goals seems to be higher. But overall, students report that they are developing their skills of written expression in English 101.

**101 Grade “Norming” Sessions**

These sessions, held early in the fall semester, give the faculty members of the department a chance to review together learning goals for the course, discuss shared expectations and standards, and share pedagogical philosophies and techniques. New and temporary faculty
members might find them especially helpful, but long-time members of the department also find them valuable in keeping us fresh on this shared enterprise of teaching expository and argumentative writing. The norming session for this year is scheduled for Friday, September 7, from 4-6.

**CHANGES SUGGESTED BY ASSESSMENT RESULTS**

The main changes suggested by assessment of English 101 will lead to some changes in the way data are reported, if possible, and to additional faculty development work on the part of the chair and possibly the departmental English 101 Committee.

First of all, I want to explore whether it might be possible to have the IDEA forms for English 101 processed as a separate group; in other words, I would receive two “department” reports—one on English 101E courses and one on all other English courses. In cases where it is appropriate to consider all together, it would still be easy to combine the two reports, but it’s very cumbersome to try to pull each individual 101 report to try to construct meaningful comparisons.

I also see the need for more work on faculty development in using the IDEA forms well. I have already led sessions at department meetings, and I will probably do that again. But as I have looked at the reports in the process of writing this assessment report, I can see that I could help specific individuals get better information from their IDEA forms (and get more on-target assessment data for the department, as well). I will especially work with new and adjunct faculty members on how to use the IDEA forms.

At the norming session, I also intend to ask the department if they would like the English 101 Committee to review our current description with learning goals to make any changes, deletions, or additions. This should lead to a fruitful conversation on what we’re doing in English 101 and keep us grounded in our goals.

A long-term goal will be to advocate even more strongly for staffing needs in 101 to be filled at least by full-time visitors rather than rafts of individual adjunct instructors. That has been the case since at least 1989 until this coming year of 2007-2008, when we have no visitors, but at least six sections to be taught by adjuncts. If the first year is crucial, it is not helpful to have experienced English professors teach WittSems only to have their English 101 courses be taught by adjunct instructors.

**RESOURCE NEEDS**

The resource needs suggested by this assessment are those mentioned above, which I will reiterate: we need to pay our toll to “flexibility” by hiring full-time visiting instructors rather than adjunct instructors, and we need to see if the IDEA reports can be grouped to isolate English 101 into a single group report.

**PLAN FOR CONTINUED ASSESSMENT**
We will continue using the assessment methods discussed above, but the chair (and perhaps the department’s 101 Committee) will be more proactive in helping individual instructors set their goals clearly and use the IDEA forms in a focused way to measure student progress on important learning goals.