

Union College English Department Assessment Goals: General Departmental

Stated generally, our departmental goals include the following: to help students think analytically about the full range of literature viewed in a variety of ways; to see that they leave the school with secure writing skills; to encourage independent and interdisciplinary thinking; and to prepare them for further study if desired.

1. We want our introductory students to be familiar with two major modes of literature -- fiction and poetry -- their techniques and devices, and relevant critical approaches. We want this introduction to include literature from at least three cultures.
2. We want for our majors some historical grounding (a requirement of a course pre-1700 and one pre-1900 for majors), and for majors and all others the opportunity to take additional historically-based classes.
3. We want our majors and other students to have knowledge of the work of Shakespeare.
4. We want our students to have the opportunity to investigate a diverse range of literature as well as a variety of critical approaches. Therefore, our classes are grouped now as Historical Studies Courses, Cultural Studies Courses, Genre Studies Courses, Author Studies Courses, and Advanced Seminars for juniors and seniors.
5. We want students to have the opportunity to be in smaller classes where writing and discussion are a central part of the coursework.
6. We want for our students a sense of intellectual self-reliance in dealing with a variety of literature combined with competence in writing (including creative writing workshops) as a way of responding to, and participating in, literary traditions.
7. We want a program for our Honors students that informs them of research procedures, encourages them to work at the highest level, and creates a sense of shared goals and community.

Assessment Goals with a Focus on English 100 and English 101, our Introductory Courses

1. We want our students to develop close reading skills of prose or poetry in at least three cultural traditions. In a prose course, at least one novella, novel, or sustained work of nonfiction should be included. In a poetry course attention will be paid to oral as well as written poetic forms.
2. We want to introduce students to literary terminology and to suggest a handbook of literary terms.
3. We want our students to improve their writing skills, including the formation of a thesis, the development of an argument with evidence from the text to support it, the organization of an essay, the making of transitions, the formation of clear, concise sentences, and the use of correct mechanics.
4. We want to allow students possibilities for revision of essays, through drafts, rewriting graded essays, or other methods.
5. We want to require students to use MLA documentation and to direct them to one or more possible sources.

Assessment Goals with a Focus on Intermediate English Courses (numbered in the 200s)

1. Further development of close reading skills of literature viewed in an historical context, a cultural context, the context of a particular literary genre, or in terms of the extended work of a single author or group of authors.
2. Further development of writing skills, as outlined in numbers 3-5 above.
3. When appropriate in individual classes, to introduce students to the use of the MLA Bibliography.

Assessment Goals with a Focus on Seminars (numbered in the 300s and 400s)

1. To develop independent research skills (in seminars in text-based subjects) or independent creative skills (in seminars in creative writing).
2. To know and be able to utilize the Schaffer Library's online databases appropriate to English studies.
3. When appropriate, to be able to use primary as well as secondary research sources (manuscript materials, various drafts of literary works, original publications).
4. To take some responsibility for the learning experience (through oral presentations, individually or in groups).
5. To complete a substantial original essay or creative work (10-15 pages in Junior Seminars; 15-20 pages in Senior Seminars; 25 pages and above for Honors Thesis Seminar).

Assessment Procedures

For All courses

1. Set up an annual end-of-the-year meeting with English majors and minors to discuss the nature of the offerings of the year past and of the year to come. Discuss matters of kinds of classes offered, kinds of writing assignments presented, class size, challenge, satisfaction level, perceived needs from the student point of view. Ask students about advising to get an anecdotal sense of how successful the department has been in guiding them through the new curriculum as well as through the college-wide requirements. Make the ideas gathered from this meeting part of the conversation of a subsequent department meeting concerned with assessment. In other words, seek the opinions of our students on how well the curriculum is meeting their needs and desires, and to note potential stress points or areas felt to be needing improvement.

For 100 Level Courses (Introductory)

1. Faculty teaching 100 level courses will meet once per term to discuss and compare readings, assignments, essays.
2. With the course goals in mind, they will discuss and evaluate sample sets of early and late papers from sections of English 100 and 101.

For 200 Level Courses (Intermediate)

1. Faculty teaching 200 level classes in the previous year and those scheduled to teach these classes in the current year will meet in the fall term to discuss and compare ideas for working with students at the intermediate level. During the previous year request samples of first and last essays from several 200 level courses in each category (Historical Courses; Cultural Studies Courses and so forth).
2. At the general end-of-term meeting with majors/minors, (see above) focus some of the discussion on a consideration of how well the classes are perceived to have met the goals for 200 level classes. Bring results to the department meeting in which assessment is discussed.

For 300 & 400 Level Courses (Advanced Seminars)

1. Faculty teaching 300/400 level courses will meet in the spring term to discuss and compare their assessments of the seminar courses. With stated goals for 300 & 400 level courses in mind (independent research, use of library databases, use of original manuscript material and so on), read through and discuss a sample of assignments and essays from each seminar. Discuss oral presentations, strengths and weaknesses.
2. At the general end-of-term meeting with majors/minors (see above) focus some of the discussion on a consideration of how well the classes are perceived to have met the goals for 300 / 400 level classes. Bring results to the department meeting in which assessment is discussed.
3. For the evaluation of the Honors Thesis Seminar: Thesis director and secondary readers meet to discuss effectiveness. In addition, meet with the students to discuss the effectiveness of the seminar experience. Each thesis will be read by the seminar director and a secondary reader, who will also examine each student at an oral thesis defense to determine whether a student receives Honors in English.

For Matters of General Curricular Concern

1. At a department meeting discuss course offerings and enrollments to see if an adequate range of courses is offered in support of curricular goals, and if we are keeping to our desire for smaller classes.
2. At a department meeting, anecdotal review of advising – what problems are advisers seeing in terms of course availability, student understanding of program offerings and requirements, intersection of our requirements with General Education at the College. Include information from student comments at the meeting with majors. (This might be combined with a review of the transcripts of seniors to see what mixes of courses are showing up.)

Issues we will be considering as we review the new curriculum in the next few years:

1. Do enrollments suggest that students are taking advantage of the range of courses offered?
2. Does the list of courses offered suggest that the department is meeting its own expectations?
3. Does the number of overloaded courses (particularly Introductory Courses) indicate a problem in keeping our commitment to smaller class sizes? If so, how to deal with it?
4. Does the number of WAC courses, term by term, and the student responses to them, suggest that we are keeping our commitment to making writing central to learning?
5. Do our hirings and the courses we offer suggest that we are following our goal of encouraging interdisciplinary thinking?
6. As a department we support the college's efforts to increase diversity on campus. Do our course offerings and hirings appropriately support this goal?
7. Have we succeeded in creating an appropriate, and appropriately challenging, environment for our Honors students? For our majors in general? For our introductory students? We believe that regardless of whether students at Union College need more challenge, they certainly need to be willing to (be persuaded to) accept the challenges they have been given.