

MEMORANDUM

Date: August 22, 2019

To: Beth Wightman, Chair of English
Kent Baxter, Interim Associate Dean, College of Humanities
Jack Solomon, Office of Academic Assessment and Program Review

From: Sandra Stanley, Assessment Liaison, English Department, College of Humanities

Re: The English Department 2018-2019 Annual Assessment Report

GE Arts and Humanities Assessment

Focusing upon the assessment of General Education Arts and Humanities student learning outcomes, the English Department Assessment committee (Harry Hellenbrand, Jack Solomon, Sandra Stanley, Chair) directly assessed six classes in three GE course offerings (ENGL 300 Contemporary Literature, ENGL 316 Shakespeare, and ENGL 333 Comics and Graphic Novels).

In six of the classes, we assessed SLO #5: Students will be able to use appropriate critical vocabulary to describe and analyze works of artistic expression, literature, philosophy, or religion and a comprehension of the historical context within which a body of work was created or a tradition emerged. In five of the classes, we assessed SLO #2: Students will be able to analyze, interpret, and reflect critically upon ideas of value, meaning, discourse and expression from a variety of perspectives from the arts and/or humanities. In one of the classes, we assessed SLO #3: Students will be able to produce work/works of art that communicate to a diverse audience through a demonstrated understanding and fluency of expressive forms.

The Assessment Liaison collected random writing samples/projects from six classes. The faculty worked with a rubric scored from 1-3: 1 Does not meet expectations; 2 Meets expectations; 3 Exceeds expectations. Below are the mean score results for each of the classes:

ENGL 300 #1—SLO #2 = 1.7; SLO #5 = 1.4 (10 samples)

ENGL 300 #2—SLO #2 = 2; SLO #5 = 2 (10 samples)

ENGL 316 #1—SLO #2 = 2.3; SLO #5 = 2.1 (11 samples)

ENGL 316 #2—SLO #2 = 2; SLO #5 = 1.7 (5 samples)

ENGL 333 #1—SLO #2 = 2.1; SLO #5 = 1.9 (10 samples)

ENGL 333 #2—SLO #3 = 2.3; SLO #5 = 2.4 (10 samples)

As a result of this assessment process, the committee had the following observations:

1) Faculty often do not take into account GE SLOs as they are constructing their final projects; thus, the papers/projects and the SLOs are often not directly aligned in the assessment process. We found this especially true of SLO #5. We encourage the Chair to remind all faculty teaching GE courses of the GE SLOs, and we encourage faculty to list the GE SLOs on their syllabus. Please see CSUN Syllabus Policy: [syllabus-best-practices](#).

2) Since the prompts between classes vary, the evaluators feel that the assessment process is not as consistent as it could be. This is simply an observation.

3) The evaluators were influenced by the quality of writing in their assessment of the works, even though writing was not specifically listed in any of the SLOs. The committee found some of the writing to be so poor that its content was obscured or rendered unintelligible. The assessment committee affirms the central importance of writing in the holistic assessment of these SLOs. Harry Hellenbrand volunteered to review the papers that the committee determined were papers that scored between 1 and 1.5 (did not meet expectations) largely due to the student's poor writing skills. Below is a summary of his findings:

The papers that we scored as low/failing share several characteristics that are detectable as early as the first paragraph. Often, sentences do not work conventionally; rather, commas splices and fragments abound. These flaws are not just grammatical. They detract from the argument since grammar signals additional problems with subordination, equivalence, differentiation, and particularization. In turn, the implicit logic that usually makes a paragraph and a whole essay cohere is not developed.

Some of the problem is a result of not knowing the "rules." But a lot of it reflects confusion about what the essay is to do. What must be described in order to be explained? What constitutes evidence? What is most important to say first, second, and why? How do you develop your argument/central point?

4) Most of our assessed papers focused upon analysis; however, we had one batch that focused upon a creative project. Thus, we tailored our assessment instruments to the projects, using GE SLOs #3 and #5 for the creative project and GE SLOs #2 and #5 for the analytic papers.

Departmental Review of the SLOs

The following options (Creative Writing, FYI-JYI, Honors, Literature, Subject Matter) and the Graduate Program reviewed their SLOs. Each option has anywhere from three to six SLOs to assess. Generally, all the groups affirmed their current SLOs, although several faculty members indicated that they were open to discussing how SLOs may be streamlined or assessed more holistically. The Subject Matter option especially noted that

any changes in Subject Matter would be difficult since their SLOs are tied to state standards.

Preview of Planned Assessment for 2019-2020

The next Assessment Liaison should discuss plans for future assessment with the faculty. I, however, have two suggestions for future assessment that the Department may wish to consider:

- 1) This year is the inaugural year for the revised graduate program and the new popular culture minor. After consulting with the graduate advisor, I suggest that we may wish to assess the program in AY 2020-2021; however, the graduate program may wish to begin its data collection in AY 2019-2020 in preparation for a longitudinal study of the program. Although minors do not have to be assessed, the popular culture minor may also want to collect data if popular culture faculty desire to assess the minor in AY 2020-2021.
- 2) In AY 2017-2018, the Department focused upon an assessment of the common undergraduate SLO # 5 (Students will analyze culturally diverse texts). Given that writing was a central issue in our GE assessment for AY 2018-2019, I suggest that in AY 2019-2020 the various options may wish to focus upon a writing-related SLO (for example, the common undergraduate SLO #2--Students will demonstrate effective writing skills).