**Departmental Assessment Report**

**English**

**MA (Literature and Rhetoric/Composition options)**

**2015-16**

**1.What learning outcome(s) did you assess this year?**

Goal 1 from the English M.A. Students Outcome Assessment Plan (SOAP): "All students graduating with an MA in English will….Acquire an enhanced knowledge of research and writing skills developed in the undergraduate major, demonstrating an ability to write a professional-quality research/critical paper"

**2. What instruments did you use to assess them?**

Over the course of 2015-16, the English Department reassessed and revised our Graduate Writing Skills Requirement (GWSR), which, heretofore, had been too closely aligned with the writing sample guidelines for admission to the M.A. program. The new GWSR requires students to complete this requirement upon completion of two semesters' worth of graduate coursework and before the they submit a Petition for Advancement to Candidacy. The GWSR is now met through submission and evaluation of a research paper that must demonstrate accomplishment in the following areas: scholarly merit, organization and structure, complexity of evidence, and professionalism. Completion of the GWSR should now more fully indicate students' readiness to begin writing an M.A. thesis.

The English Department developed a new instrument for assessing this writing requirement: a detailed rubric that an evaluation team of department graduate faculty use to assess students' GWSR submissions.

**3. What did you discover from these data?**

At this stage, we have only received and assessed one student cohort's GWSR evaluations, so we are still in the early stages and have had opportunity to compare neither performance on the GWSR over time nor against a cohort's ability to write a successful M.A. thesis.

**4. What changes did you make as a result of the findings?**

As described above, the GWSR has been changed to reflect our new goals for measuring the quality of graduate student writing midway through our English M.A. students' program of study. Catalog changes were submitted and approved for both the Literature and Rhetoric & Writing Studies options. Graduate faculty devised and are currently using a rubric designed to measure four areas of accomplishment in graduate students writing.

**5. What assessment activities will you be conducting in the 2016-17 academic year?**

At the end of 2016-17, we will have the opportunity to compare our students' performance on the GWSR with their ability to complete and submit a thesis in a timely fashion. We will also have the ability to compare performance on the GWSR across student cohorts.

The English Department's Graduate Committee will also revisit the M.A. SOAP to align it both with the results of our department's recent program review and program changes we have made to both the Literature and Rhetoric & Writing Studies options.

**6. What progress have you made on items from your last program review action plan?**

Our recent 5-year Review made 5 specific recommendations. None of them were directly linked to learning outcomes per se, but did speak to the conditions in which teaching and learning occurs.

*Continue to build MA community*: With the recent revival of Sigma Tau Delta (the English Studies honor society) we have been able to begin planning some events bringing together students and faculty to celebrate achievements. We look forward, too, to reactivating our once more-active Students of English Studies Association (SESA) and toward offering more events such as orientations (one occurred the Friday before classes began), workshops on CV writing, conference presentations, and other areas of paraprofessional training. We are updating our web pages, and have begun using our email lists more extensively as well as expanding our social media presence.

*Support faculty travel*: An increase in the Department’s operating budget last year allowed a little more support for faculty scholarship. For the most part however, there is still much room for improvement (as the Review Panel noted) in the University’s support of faculty scholarship.

*Provide space for the community to develop*: No action taken. If anything, our needs for faculty office space and decent classrooms is more pronounced. We do look forward, however, to the future use of the planned Levine Reading Room as some sort of social/cultural center.

*Classroom space must meet pedagogical needs*: No action taken. Our classrooms remain problematic, with no dedicated seminar rooms (a specific recommendation from the Review Panel).

*Continue Efforts on Multiple Choices for Culminating Work*: We are moving ahead with the addition of a Project as well as a Thesis option. Paperwork for the creation of a new course to allow official recognition of that choice is making its way from the Department Graduate Committee to the appropriate College and University committees for approval. In the mean time, we are communicating the possibility to our students and accommodating within the existing course numbering system.

*Staffing*: In this area we have made some progress. We have engaged in discussions about the future curricular and disciplinary needs of the program, and those discussions have allowed us to determine specific hiring requests. This year we added three faculty in Literacy/Composition Pedagogy, and we look forward to the their strengthening our Composition/Rhetoric option especially. This year we will be looking to hire Literature faculty who will (finally) replace a long-lamented gap in our offerings: 20th and 21st Century British Literature. We will be looking for two people who can also expand and update our curriculum by providing expertise in global Anglophone literatures and digital humanities.