

## Goals of the Undergraduate Major in English

### Abilities:

1. The ability to read a familiar or an unfamiliar text in any of several genres (including not only traditional belletristic forms such as poetry, fiction, and drama but also such non-fiction forms as the essay, the autobiography, the personal letter, etc.), and from any of several cultural or historical origins in such a way that the act of reading incorporates literal comprehension, aesthetic responsiveness, informed awareness of the traditions and contexts) within which the text may be most productively read, rhetorical and logical analysis of its argument, and critical reflection on the implications of its origins, tradition, aesthetics, rhetoric, and argument.
2. The ability to write about various kinds of texts in such a way that one's own writing articulates and embodies the multiple dimensions of the complex act of reading described above (that is, literal comprehension, aesthetic responsiveness, awareness of tradition and appropriate context, rhetorical and logical analysis, and critical reflection) in clear, accurate, and effective prose.
3. The ability to use reading and writing (as described in #1 and #2 above) as a means of enabling the reading and study of other kinds of texts and situations and of producing other kinds of writing--that is, as a means of understanding and writing about a wide variety of other kinds of topics, problems, and issues (e.g., personal experiences, topics in academic courses outside English, social issues, films and other kinds of media, administrative problems within an institution or business, political campaigns, and a host of other topics and situations) which demand skills in critical reading/observation and effective writing in appropriate forms.
4. The ability to articulate a critically informed, carefully reasoned position about the social and philosophical value of the various components of English as a field of study.
5. The ability to find (in a textbook, library, or elsewhere) the kinds of information that are relevant to the problem or issue being addressed in the writing situations described in #2, #3, and #4 above and to integrate that information into one's own written work in a manner that both supports one's own rhetoric and argument and does justice to the source of the information.

### Knowledge:

1. Useable familiarity<sup>1</sup> with a wide variety of works in various forms by British writers of various periods.
2. Useable familiarity with a wide variety of works in various forms by American writers of various periods.
3. Useable familiarity with a wide variety of works in various forms by writers from outside the British and American literary traditions.
4. Useable familiarity with the history and grammatical structure of the English language and with linguistic theory in general.
5. Useable familiarity with the history of rhetoric and with modern and contemporary theories of rhetoric.
6. Useable familiarity with analytical techniques, bodies of information, and theory drawn from work in other academic disciplines.

7. Useable familiarity with a wide variety of works in various forms by members of American minority groups.
8. Useable familiarity with such linguistic concepts as "correct" usage, usage levels, and the dialects that make up American English--and of the social and cultural implications of the differences in language use that such concepts point to.
9. Useable familiarity with such rhetorical concepts as rhetorical situation, rhetorical appeals, theories of invention, audience and forum analysis, and elements of style and argumentation.
10. Useable familiarity with such backgrounds to English and American literature as the Bible, mythology, and folklore.

### **Attitudes:**

1. Belief in the personal and social importance of reading as a complex and culturally significant act.
2. Belief in the personal and social importance of performing well in a variety of writing situations.
3. Belief in the centrality of language to human endeavor in all areas and therefore in the usefulness of English as a means to achieving valuable personal and social abilities.
4. Belief in the importance of aesthetic responsiveness to language as it is used in a variety of expressive and communicative situations.
5. Belief in the importance of analysis and critical reflection as language-based activities--that is, activities both required and enabled by language.
6. Belief in the interdependence of all the dimensions of language activity--reading, writing, listening, speaking, and thinking.

### **Department of English Assessment System for the Bachelor of Arts in English**

In the absence of adequate funding to implement our assessment program, the Department of English is currently assessing students in the Bachelor of Arts in English on a semester-by-semester basis. Each undergraduate English major is required to take English 300: Senior Seminar in the last semester before graduation. At the end of this course, each individual professor assesses the student on the basis of three exercises that are seen by the department as standard elements of the course.

First, each student is asked to perform or propose a substantial revision of a single assignment written in a previous course, preferably one early in the career of the major. Since revision is a key component of rhetoric and composition, the student performs this exercise to demonstrate achievement in written communication.

Outcome: Comparisons between the two essays demonstrate that, in all issues covered by the Department's goals for the major, the revised versions of the students' papers indicate significant improvement. This improvement is evident both to the instructors who teach the seminar and to the students themselves.

Second, we ask each student to compile a portfolio of his or her written work accomplished throughout that student's career in the major. In addition to organizing the portfolio for presentation, the student must write a reflective statement about this record of accomplishment. This statement centers on a self-assessment of whether the student has met the goals that the department has set forth as expectations of accomplishment for its majors. Individual instructors of English 300 may add other elements to this introduction-to-the-portfolio assignment that enrich its assessment function.

Outcome: The reflective analyses that students complete as a part of their portfolio submission indicates that students are able to offer credible reasons, specifically with reference to the material included in the portfolio, why they are meeting the goals articulated for the major.

Finally, each student is asked to write a major research paper, thought of as the senior thesis, during the course of the semester. The purpose of this research paper is to demonstrate that the student is capable of selecting and focusing a topic of his or her own choosing (relating to any aspect of English Studies), that he or she is capable of performing the research necessary to write about the topic in an informed and productive manner, and that he or she is capable of composing and revising these research results in a manner and within a genre appropriate to the topic and the student's interests.

Outcome: The particular challenge for students in completing this assignment focuses on two things: the magnitude of the problem they are asked to address and the length of the analysis that such a problem should warrant. The multiple goals for the major are in one way or another embedded within these two aspects of the task. Most of the students enrolled in the capstone seminar for a given year are able to articulate a problem and develop an analysis consistent with the 30 pp. required for the assignment. A small percentage (10%-20%) of the total students in a given year's class have some difficulty with these aspects of the assignment. It seems that they are able to manage the major's goals (as reflected in the magnitude of the problem addressed and the depth of the corresponding analysis) most readily when framed within the context of smaller assignments.

It bears note that in the process of having the students assess their own progress in the major and having the professors assigned to English 300 assess their own students' progress, the classroom community also performs an informal assessment of the major itself: the appropriateness and clarity of its goals, the relevancy of its canonized skills, the adequacy of its ability to promote lifelong learning.