

**Department of Comparative and World Literature**  
**Assessment Report for the B.A. Curriculum**  
**Fall 2012**

Faculty in the Department of Comparative and World Literature believe it is essential to assess continually the different ways in which our majors and minors meet our Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs). Because we are a small department, we are able to do this regularly and with all faculty present. Each year we discuss SLOs, focusing on how these are met by our students (in individual courses and through the program as a whole), in what ways we might improve our assessment measures, and how we construct our courses and orchestrate our program offerings in light of the results that our assessment measures yield.

We are continuing to focus on two distinct measures of how our SLOs are met in the curriculum, through (1) a broad analysis of syllabi for all undergraduate courses the department offered during the academic year 2011-2012 (which is the only adequate measure of some of our goals, such as those that require students to work in depth in different literary traditions: more below), and (2) a more focused, critical analysis of student writing based on an examination of a sample of student papers from a lower-division class (CWL 270) and a sample from an upper-division class (CWL 420).

We are also in the process of expanding our assessment measures to include both the self-assessments that all of our BA students write for inclusion in their Portfolios, and the BA Exit Surveys students complete shortly before graduation. The Portfolio and the exit surveys have been a part of our program for some time, but we have yet to use them directly as part of our own assessment of the BA program.

Finally, perhaps the most tangible way that assessment has transformed our department has to do with our SLOs themselves. Based on our analysis of previous assessment results, we decided to change the language of the SLOs to provide crisper and more accessible definitions of our desired outcomes (see **Addendum 1 – Student Learning Outcomes**). Through unanimous consensus we made provisional changes and plan to ratify these changes soon.

Measure One: Course Syllabi and Structure of the B.A. Degree

Before we turn to the extent to which departmental syllabi demonstrate the successful realization of SLOs (see **Addendum 1- Student Learning Outcomes**) in the curriculum, it will be profitable first to consider how Program Requirements as a whole (see **Addendum 2 - Program Requirements**) affect assessment. Our majors take as many as 27 of the required 39 units through upper-division literature-focused courses in other departments (e.g., English, Ethnic Studies, Foreign Languages and Literatures, Humanities, Jewish Studies, Women and Gender Studies), and as a result, students will meet SLOs in great part in other departments and indeed by virtue of the very fact of taking these courses. As a result of this year's assessment process, the department has reconfirmed its commitment to the idea that several of our SLOs are met primarily or exclusively through the successful completion of the curriculum as a whole. Successful completion means that the courses the students have taken were found to have SLOs appropriate to our program goals (we collect syllabi and if necessary confirm the learning outcomes of said courses with the instructors). SLO #6, for example, "study literature in at least one foreign language at the level of an upper-division course" must happen outside of the department. SLO #10 is by definition (see **Addendum 2 - Program Requirements**) achieved through a carefully selected set of four connected courses which advisors must approve in

consultation with students. Though the analysis of coursework and syllabi may seem a “broad” measure of assessment, it is in fact a hands-on approach that brings us into direct contact with students in order to ascertain conclusively the successful achievement of these particular SLOs. One result of our recent discussion of assessment measures has been to encourage advisors to keep SLOs in the foreground of the advising process. Moreover, we plan to check the SLOs built into syllabi not only from our own courses, but from any elective that our majors or minors take in fulfillment of our program, to make sure that the coursework in that class does indeed meet our goals.

Other SLOs are measurable by syllabi within our own department, and we took a two-pronged approach to assess these. First, each faculty member reviewed syllabi for courses offered over the last two semesters and determined their alignment with program SLOs (see **Addendum 3 – Reflection of B.A. Student Learning Outcomes in Syllabi for Undergraduate Courses, 2011-2012**). The results were conclusive and instructive. First, we considered the portal course to the major, CWL 400, which has recently become our GWAR course as well. We have determined that all of SLOs ##1-5 are addressed in this course, and that its focus on bringing these SLOs to the foreground and its requirements that students reflect (in classroom discussion and either directly or obliquely in writing) on these SLOs provides an excellent foundation for progress through the program.

Our assessment also confirmed that SLOs ##2-5 are met in most undergraduate courses, and that there is no path through our major or minor requirements that could possibly leave any SLOs unmet. Our findings do not suggest redundancy, however; on the contrary, our scrutiny of syllabi revealed that because of the different approaches to the SLOs adopted by each course we offer, majors and minors not only adequately meet these outcomes, but in fact develop considerable mastery.

We tested this hypothesis through the other means of program assessment we conducted this year: evaluations of student writing (see “Measure Two” below). Although we are still building our sample pool and working toward more accurate tracking of individual students to corroborate our results, preliminary findings tentatively support our determination that over time in our program, majors and minors develop significant mastery of the SLOs in comparison to the adequate achievement of SLOs evidenced by papers written by students who have taken fewer courses in the program.

Finally, we continued our ongoing discussion about how we might orchestrate our individual offerings to provide scaffolded learning opportunities for students who progress through the course in a normative fashion (through lower division courses, CWL 400, and then upper division courses). This discussion led us to the conclusion that while our lower division courses did indeed adequately cover all relevant SLOs, they did not necessarily call attention to the SLOs themselves so that students could recognize that they were laying foundations for progressive achievement in goals that would be developed in different ways throughout the program. In 2010, we determined that the first step toward improving this would be to ask faculty to work clearer statements of SLOs into syllabi themselves, and to make them a topic of discussion on the first day of class if appropriate. This year, we decided to follow this measure one step further by adding a pedagogical emphasis. We have begun to encourage our instructors to discuss the SLOs for individual courses at regular intervals over the semester. By directly tying learning back to learning goals articulated at the start of courses, we believe we can help students to grasp the aims of learning activities and to understand the connections between given lessons or courses and their overall role in student development through the CWL program. We have set up an automatic email reminder to go out to faculty near the end of the semester to remind them to have a final discussion with students to ascertain *their* senses of whether or not course SLOs have been achieved. These discussions are ongoing at the time of writing and will be useful in multiple ways: in determining how well SLOs have been communicated, in letting

faculty see how students understand both the SLOs and the relation of course material to them, and in gauging the distance between student capability with regard to SLOs and their cognizance of them. We hope to reflect on these during future meetings and thus have more concrete data and results to analyze for future assessment reports.

### Measure Two: Analysis of Student Writing

With the input of all faculty members, we created and adopted a “general writing rubric” (**Addendum 4 - Rubric for Assessing Alignment of Undergraduate Work and Student Learning Outcomes**) that is now used in all program-wide assessments of written student work. The rubric itself has proved useful for clarifying desired outcomes in student writing; some instructors have chosen to share this directly with students, and others have translated it into various worksheets or verbal instructions. Our use of it as an assessment tool also suggested to us the need for a clearer tie between relevant SLOs (those that can or should be measured by student output in writing) and the writing assessment process. We therefore devised (in 2010) an additional assessment rubric that directs faculty to evaluate student work in terms of the specific language and aims outlined by particular SLOs. This two-pronged (general rubric + targeted SLO analysis) approach allows us not only to assess SLO achievement in course writing, but also to discover the relationship between the overall quality of writing and the achievement of particular SLOs.

Each faculty member assessed a sample of undergraduate writing from lower division (CWL 270) and upper division (CWL 420) courses in terms of their achievement of the same SLOs. This time, we assessed nearly twice as many papers as we did during our pilot of this procedure. In total, we analyzed 30 papers from academic year 2011-2012. For our first implementation of this procedure in 2010, we used a partially blind process in which faculty assessed papers from students in classes they did not teach. We did this to maximize objectivity and to minimize potential bias, thus providing a reliable baseline measure of our achievement of SLOs. This year, we took a different approach. We asked faculty to score papers from their own courses. We did this for a few reasons. First, we wanted to provide a quantitative measure to concretize faculty members’ holistic senses of student achievement. We also realized that faculty would be best positioned to determine the reasons for students failing to show evidence of having achieved SLOs. Such failure could indicate an insufficient grasp of SLOs, but it could also indicate nothing more than a different interpretation of the final assignment – in other words, strong students who have clearly achieved the SLOs may not fully demonstrate them in their last writing assignments. Discrepancies may prove instructive for faculty in crafting final assignments, or in determining the role of a given course in our overall program. Hence, these assessment measures are not simply being used to collect data to confirm our program’s achievements. We are also using the results as bases of ongoing conversation about the overall structure of our program and students’ paths through it.

The results (**Addendums 5 & 6 - Numerical Analysis of Undergraduate Papers for Writing Skills and Program Outcomes**) show significant improvement in students’ achievement of SLOs as they move from lower division to upper division courses (i.e., CWL 270 shows significantly lower scores than other CWL classes). These results confirm our expectations and our findings from previous assessments. They suggest the weakness of lower division writing relative to the strength of upper-division writing, as we predicted they would. Part of this is because lower division writing does not aim at the SLOs as directly as upper division writing. As one senior faculty member with considerable experience assessing writing suggested, this is unavoidable, since more fundamental lessons about writing and literary interpretation needed to be learned first.

The results have incited productive reflection on individual class goals and their accordance with overall program learning outcomes. For example, in the final paper assessed from one course (CWL 423), a particular learning goal was not targeted (analyzing texts from multiple traditions). This goal was achieved, rather, through syllabus as a whole, and through separate writing assignments each of which targeted separate literary traditions. As a department we endorsed this approach and recognized the deficiency of the assessment measure in reflecting actual course outcomes. At the same time, we determined that it would be useful for instructors in such courses to reiterate for students the role of the final papers in this SLO which it only partially meets. This case brought to our attention the utility of *first* tying the term papers in each course to the particular SLOs deemed relevant by the instructor, at the time the papers are assigned, and *then* assessing the papers in light of those particular SLOs. We are considering implementing this procedure effective next semester. An added benefit is that this procedure will encourage faculty to keep specific SLOs in mind as they formulate assignments in classes, thereby strengthening our approach to actualizing SLOs through classroom practices.

### Prospect for Future Assessments

The results of both studies led to a productive discussion about better directing students' attention to their accomplishments of SLOs and the relevance of particular assignments in achieving them. They have also contributed substantially to our ongoing review of our programs' overall structures and the importance of tracking individual student paths through the program. This leads to the next phase of our assessment project: identifying the clusters of courses students take and chronology of students' progress through our BA and MA programs. Acquiring, organizing, and reviewing this information will allow us to better capitalize upon the results of our present assessment studies in order to determine what if any modifications we may need to make at various levels: from that of individual courses to that of program requirements as a whole. To sum up, the review of the SLOs, syllabi, and student writing did indeed confirm our sense that the major successfully achieves its overall mission and meets all of the particular SLOs we assessed. However, we have also determined that we might be able to improve our program further with more data about our students' experiences and individual progress. As part of this effort, we aim to incorporate student self-assessments (part of their Portfolios) and surveys completed by students as they exit the program into our program assessment efforts to achieve a fuller sense of how the various approaches to SLOs undertaken through coursework and program structure coalesce to shape student learning over the course of their enrollment. We also plan to collate data about student coursework, time to completion, and points of entry into or exit from our program to create fuller senses of how we might take the most effective action based upon current assessment results, and how we might improve assessment methods in the future.

## **Addendum 1- Student Learning Outcomes**

1. Students will <understand> ~~develop an understanding of~~ the scope and goals of the field of Comparative Literature.
2. Students will learn various techniques of literary analysis.
3. Students will <recognize> ~~develop sensitivity to~~ different modes of literary expression.
4. Students will ~~learn to~~ analyze, in oral form, texts from multiple literary traditions.
5. Students will ~~learn to~~ analyze, in written form, texts from multiple literary traditions.
6. Students will ~~achieve the ability to~~ study literature in at least one foreign, i.e., non-native, language at the level of an upper-division course in that language.
7. Students will <read deeply in> ~~explore~~ two literary traditions ~~in some depth~~.
8. Students will <read broadly in a number> ~~be exposed to a breadth of~~ different literary traditions.
9. Students will <study works from> ~~be exposed to~~ at least one less commonly experienced literature.
10. Students will <study works related to an> ~~pursue one individual~~ area of focus <chosen by them>.

## **Addendum 2- Program Requirements**

### **Core Courses**

CWL 400 Approaches to Comparative Literature 3

Units selected from CWL courses on advisement. Each course must involve comparison of literary texts from more than one national/linguistic tradition; e.g., CWL 420, Studies in Comparative Literature; CWL 430, Heroic Tales of the Mediterranean. One course may be a lower-division CWL course. 9

### **Program Electives**

These courses must be chosen in consultation with an adviser. They may be from a program other than CWL and must fulfill minimum distribution requirements (courses may satisfy more than one distribution requirement): 27

1. Two courses in a non-English literary tradition
2. Two courses in a second national/linguistic literary tradition
3. Two courses focusing on literature written before 1800 (must differ in period or literary tradition)
4. One course in a literature "less commonly experienced" in the student's academic preparation (e.g., African, African American, Asian American, Chinese, Israeli, Japanese, Raza, Lesbian/Gay, Latin American), not part of the focus
5. Four courses in a student-defined area of focus or an organizing principle

**Total** 39

NOTE: Up to 9 units in lower-division CWL courses only may be used toward the total units; all other courses must be upper-division courses.

**Addendum 3—Reflection of B.A. Student Learning Outcomes in Syllabi for Undergraduate Courses, 2011-2012**

	230.1	230.2	230.3	230.4	230.5	230.6	250.1	250.2	260	270.1	270.2	400	420.1 (mod)	420.2 (ethic)	421	423	430	440
1. Students will develop an understanding of the scope and goals of the field of Comparative Literature	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x	x			x
2. Students will learn various techniques of literary analysis.	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x
3. Students will develop sensitivity to different modes of literary expression.	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x
4. Students will learn to analyze, in oral form, texts from multiple literary traditions.	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x
5. Students will learn to analyze, in written form, texts from multiple literary traditions.	x	x	x	x	x	x						x	x	x	x		x	x
6. Students will achieve the ability to read literature in at least one foreign, i.e., non-native, language at the level of an upper-division course in that language.																		
7. Students will explore two literary traditions in some depth.													x	x		x		
8. Students will be exposed to a breadth of different literary traditions.	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
9. Students will be exposed to at least one less commonly experienced literature.	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x		x	x
10. Students will pursue one individual area of focus.																		

**Addendum 4 – Rubric for Assessing Alignment of Undergraduate Work and Program Goals**

<u>Paper Information</u>	
Course: _____	Semester/Year _____
Student Year in Program _____	
Student Year in University _____	

<u>Assessment Information</u>
Reviewer: _____
Date _____

**OVERALL ASSESSMENT**

<b>Thesis</b>	__Strong	__Adequate	__Deficient
<b>Organization</b>	__Strong	__Adequate	__Deficient
<b>Analysis</b>	__Strong	__Adequate	__Deficient
<b>Style/Mechanics</b>	__Strong	__Adequate	__Deficient

**ALIGNMENTS**

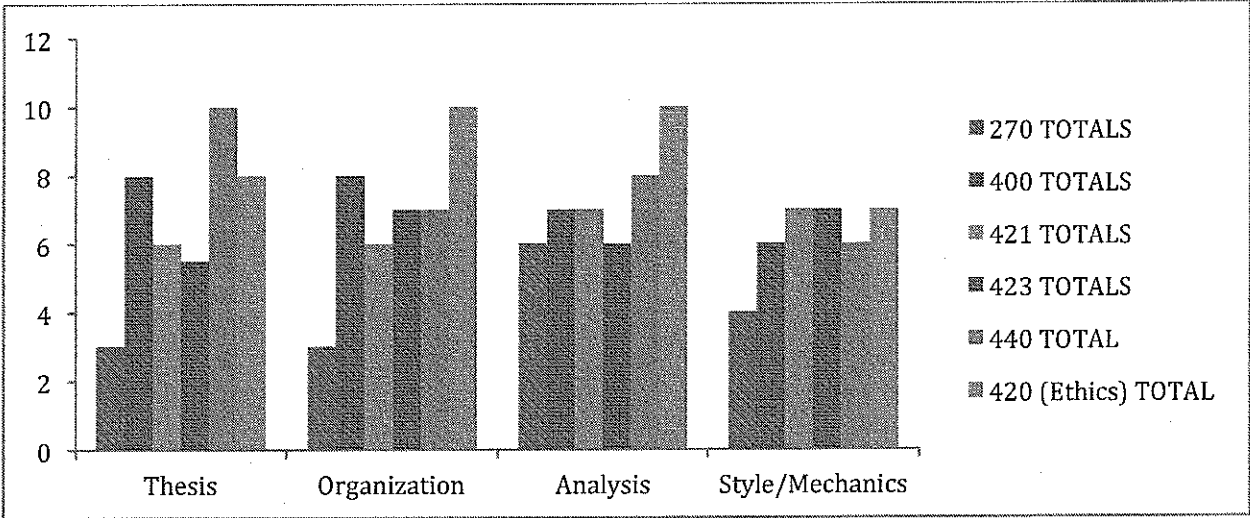
<u>Program Goal #1:</u>
<u>Students will gain understanding of the scope and the goals of the field of comparative literature.</u> (one of the following goals must be met)
<input type="checkbox"/> The paper identifies and discusses issues central to comparative literary studies.
<input type="checkbox"/> The paper applies comparative methodologies to analyze texts or literary traditions in terms relevant to the field of comparative literary studies

<u>Program Goal #2:</u>
<u>Students will learn various techniques of literary analysis</u> (the first two goals, and one of the final two, must be met)
<input type="checkbox"/> The paper makes an argument that requires literary analysis
<input type="checkbox"/> The analysis demonstrates adequate critical thinking skills; the claims and supporting evidence are plausible.
<input type="checkbox"/> The paper identifies and analyzes the use or effects of literary devices or other features of literary discourse (such as style, perspective, organization, etc.) in an effective manner.
<input type="checkbox"/> The paper identifies, discusses, and effectively relates more than one aspect of the literary text(s) (such as theme, plot, symbolism, historical conditions, etc.)

<u>Program Goal #5:</u>
<u>Students will learn to analyze, in written form, texts from multiple literary traditions</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> The paper compares texts from at least two literary traditions
<input type="checkbox"/> The paper makes a plausible analysis of the similarities or differences among the texts it treats, taking into account issues of language, culture, or other aspects of their respective traditions



**Addendum 5 – Numerical Analysis of Undergraduate Papers for Writing Skills**



### Addendum 6 – Numerical Analysis of Undergraduate Papers for Program Goals

