

San Francisco State University
Inventory of Program Assessment Activities, 2010-11

Program/Degree: M.A. in Literature

College: Arts & Humanities

Date: August 31, 2011

Program Mission: The M.A. in Literature Program develops professional skills, aims for breadth of knowledge, and provides opportunities for specialization. The program seeks to serve at least three constituencies of students: those who either teach or want to teach at the secondary or community college level; those who want to go on for the Ph.D.; and those who have no professional objectives in English but want to continue their studies in the discipline for their own intellectual development. The program is designed both to give students a broad background in literature written in English, and to provide the opportunity for in-depth study.

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1a. Exposure to, and recognition of, a variety of significant theoretical paradigms current in literary studies.	ENG741, "Theory of Literature," the portal course for all classified students in the program [I-D].	2003-04	PHASE 1: A questionnaire was developed and administered to students in the program who had completed ENG 741.	From our sample of 21 respondents, the average value given to the prompt measuring the effectiveness of their section of ENG 741 on this point was 1.9 (where "1" is "very effective" and "5" is "not effective"). That is a strong overall showing for this primary objective of this course in particular and the program in general. However, several students rated this prompt quite low, suggesting that some sections of 741 are doing a better job than others with regard to this objective.	We have used these findings to generate discussion about the objectives of ENG 741 among the faculty who teach the course and the graduate faculty in general. Sharing of syllabi and talking about how best to achieve this objective in meetings has led to greater cooperation and overlap among the faculty who teach ENG 741

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1b. Exposure to, and recognition of, a variety of significant theoretical paradigms current in literary studies.	ENG741, "Theory of Literature," the portal course for all classified students in the program [I-D].	2010-11	PHASE 2: Content analysis of student writing. For this phase, we tracked 8 students they progressed through the program, evaluating their writing at 3 junctures: the admission essay, the Eng 741 (portal course) seminar paper, and the CE project (thesis). At each juncture, faculty assessed students' ability to recognize and to integrate theoretical paradigms into their writing, rating them as being able to do so CAPABLY, i.e. "with proficiency"; ABLY, i.e. "skillfully and effectively" or MASTERFULLY, i.e. "with the complexity, originality, and depth befitting the master's level."	All 8 students evaluated demonstrated an increasingly sophisticated command of literary critical material as they moved through the program. Our findings suggest that by the end of the program, students not only <i>recognize</i> a variety of significant theoretical paradigms current in literary studies but exceed this goal by effectively <i>integrating</i> theoretical material into their own arguments. At the time of admission, 62% of students were able to both recognize and integrate theoretical paradigms into their writing "capably." By the time they wrote their Eng 741 seminar paper, 100% students were able to do so "capably, and the strongest students (67%) were able to do so "ably." Student theses demonstrated that, by the time of graduation, 75% of students were able to recognize and integrate theoretical paradigms into their own writing "masterfully," i.e. at the very highest level.	This SLO is one of the primary goals of Eng 741. In 2011-12, the Graduate Literature Curriculum Committee plans to re-examine the current configuration of the course, assessing whether we should split Eng 741 into 2 separate courses in order to address two of the course's major goals more effectively: a) to expose students to a variety of theoretical paradigms; and b) to introduce students to graduate-level research and writing.

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2a. Close-reading of literary texts.	Seminars (700-level courses) and Culminating Experience [M]	2004-05	PHASE 1: Content Analysis: Examine a representative selection of seminar papers and Master's theses. If possible, it would be useful to compare the writing a given student produced early in her career (seminar work) with her culminating experience (thesis).	Because close reading is so essential to what we do in the discipline of English, students must demonstrate an appropriate ability to read texts closely in order to gain admission to the program. Hence, there was a high-level of close-reading evident in the early seminar writing examined. However, when compared to the theses, both qualitative and quantitative development is noticeable. That is, by the end of their program, most students are demonstrating more sophisticated and sustained close-reading skills.	Development of students' close-reading skills takes place over the period of their seminar work. The writing students are performing for their seminars is having the desired effect: high-quality theses.
2b. Close reading of literary texts (continued)	Seminars (700-level courses) and Culminating Experience [Master's thesis]	2008-09	PHASE 2: In Spring 2009, on the recommendation of the Office of Academic Planning, we modified our assessment method to examine a student writing at 3 junctures in the master's program: 1) the admission essay; 2) Eng 741 (portal course)	Results using this new method confirm our earlier findings. While students enter the program with strong close reading skills--meeting the criteria of being able to read closely "capably"--students showed consistent improvement throughout the program. By the completion of	As noted, seminars and thesis work are having desired effect: strong close reading skills.

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			<p>seminar paper; and 3) CE project (Master’s thesis). To do so, we developed faculty-administered assessment rubric for evaluating student progress at those 3 junctures. At each juncture, faculty assessed whether their strongest, average, and weakest students read texts closely “capably,” “ably,” or “masterfully.” We defined those terms as follows: CAPABLY i.e. with proficiency. To meet this criteria, students should demonstrate a solid comprehension of the literary texts they consider and should have developed sound critical strategies for analysis, but may not have yet developed a complete critical vocabulary, an extensive knowledge of literary criticism, or an advanced understanding of a text’s historical, political, and social contexts.” ABLY i.e. skillfully and effectively. To meet this criteria, students’ readings of literary texts should be well-developed, engaging, and insightful, and</p>	<p>Eng 741, faculty report that even their weakest students are “able” close readers. By the time of completion of their master’s thesis, faculty report that 86% of students are reading closely “masterfully.” That is, by the end of their program, students’ close reading skills show a significant increase in complexity, originality, and depth.</p>	
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			<p>should incorporate theoretical and historical material with clarity, accuracy, and purpose. MASTERFULLY, i.e. with the complexity, originality and depth befitting the master's level. To meet this criteria, students should demonstrate a sophisticated command of a large body of literature and integrate relevant theoretical, critical, and historical material with precision and power. In short, they should make an innovative, nuanced, and compelling argument. Evaluation was based upon 42 writing samples of admits to the program, 14 seminar papers from Eng 741, and 7 MA theses.</p>		
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3a. Writing a literary argument	Seminar papers, culminating experience (thesis) [D-M]	2005-06, continuing in 2006-07	PHASE 1: Content analysis. Began tracking a group of 10 students, in their first or second semester of the MA program. In 2006-07, these papers will be compared to later seminar papers and/or culminating experience work (thesis).	Based on the evidence of the early seminar papers, students come to the MA in Literature program with varying degrees of knowledge and skill re: writing a literary argument. Student papers demonstrated different degrees of facility with analyzing literary texts, asking critical questions, detecting cultural assumptions, synthesizing ideas, integrating extra-literary primary and secondary sources, and organizing an argument.	This study is the beginning of a two-year (or more) assessment project. When finished, we plan to use the findings to help faculty develop strategies for addressing the issues that emerge. We know that students complete our program with excellent skills in writing literary arguments. For instance, Scott Lehman's thesis (Spring 2006) was chosen to represent the SFSU in the Western Association of Graduate Schools annual Master's Thesis competition. However, this project will show how our program impacts individual students, who begin with varied skill levels, as they progress through the program.

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3b. Writing a literary argument, continued	Seminar papers, culminating experience (thesis) [D-M]	2006-07, continuation of 2005-06	PHASE 2: Content Analysis. Continued tracking a group of 10 students, from their first or second semester of the MA program into their third and fourth semesters. Compared the early phase papers (examined in 2005-06) with later seminar papers and/or culminating experience work (thesis).	First phase results indicated a wide range of accomplishment skills in entry-level graduate work re: writing a literary argument. First phase results isolated differential achievement levels in the following areas: fluency of literary text analysis; framing critical/theoretical questions; posing and demonstrating cultural conceptualizations; integrating critical thinking; synthesizing primary, secondary, and affiliative cultural sources into a coherent, nuanced argument. Second phase results affirmed the hypothesis—that marked and demonstrable improvement in writing a literary argument was achieved over the duration of the graduate program, <i>but this improvement was keyed to the tier of the entry level of critical sophistication in writing a literary argument.</i> Advanced seminar papers and theses provided clear demonstration that the program increases the achievement related to entry-level assessment.	Originally, this study was designated provisionally as a two-year project. However, the nuanced tiers of achievement and the findings of improvement in relation to the particular tiers indicate that the study should be continued—not as a substitute for SLO # 4 (Methods of Literary Research, slotted for 2007-08) but as a rich and fertile source of ongoing information about the progress graphs of our graduate students. For instance, in 2006-07, tracking only one conference (the convention of the National Association for Humanities Education meeting in San Francisco in early 2007), 17 of our graduate students had papers demonstrating literary argument accepted for presentation by an outside panel of literary professors. This group (A. Groves; A. St. John; C. Zepeda; D. Gill;

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					<p>C. Ceaser; G. Matassa; M. Turkis; K. Wilkins; G. Pursley; J. Kitses; R. Young; S. Eslamieh; C. Mouton; S. Ellis; D. Lawson; S. Sakamoto; H. Larrimore) affirmed our sense that the top tier of our entry-level graduate students would rise to literary argument accomplishment commensurate to the level of advanced doctoral scholars and professors from an international pool. Improvement was significant relative to all levels of achievement. We need to track these results on a longer term basis—to entry-level postgraduate employment positions and beyond—in order to evaluate the impact our program has on the professional lives of our graduate students, factoring in the diversity of backgrounds, professional goals, and ability improvement tracks. Such monitoring</p>
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3c. Writing a literary argument, continued	Seminar papers, culminating experience (thesis) [D-M]	2008-9, continuation of 2005-06 and 2006-07	PHASE 3: Content analysis (modified). Preliminary results from phase 1 and 2, based on tracking a group of 10 students, showed that the program increases achievement related to entry-level assessment. In response to these preliminary findings, we determined that in order to isolate particular areas of strength and weakness, we would need both a larger pool of data and a more systematic approach. (See recommendations under 3b “use of findings” above). In Spring 2009, on the recommendation of the Office of Academic Planning, we modified our assessment method to examine a student writing at 3 junctures in the	The third phase isolated the following criteria in assessing student’s ability to write a literary argument: a) ability to frame critical questions as part of an interpretive argument; b) ability to detect cultural assumptions as represented in a wide variety of literary and literary-cultural texts; c) ability to synthesize ideas bringing together multiple themes and perspectives; d) ability to integrate literary and extra literary primary and secondary sources as part of a persuasive argument; and e) ability to organize a literary interpretive argument capably with clarity, precision, and purpose. As expected, admission essays demonstrated a wide variety of facility with writing a literary argument. While the strongest admission essays satisfied all	will doubtless help our faculty sharpen the acuity of their curriculum, pedagogy, and long-range planning regarding this critical skill. In response to our preliminary findings using the new method, in Spring 2010, we will hold a meeting for all literature faculty to address how we can better support student writing in our 741 course and other graduate seminars. We also plan to continue this study: in order to isolate particular areas of strengths and weakness in student writing (criteria a-d) with more acuity, we need to continue to collect a larger pool of data. We plan to track these results for at least two more years. Finally, ongoing evaluation of student progress has underscored the need to follow student progress beyond
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			<p>master's program: 1) the admission essay; 2) Eng 741 (portal course) seminar paper; and 3) Culminating Experience (Master's thesis). We also developed a faculty-administered assessment rubric for evaluating student progress at those 3 junctures. Using the rubrics, faculty assessed whether their strongest, average, and weakest students satisfied a set of criteria for writing a strong literary argument "capably," "ably," or "masterfully." We defined those terms as follows: CAPABLY i.e. with proficiency. To meet this criteria, students should demonstrate a solid comprehension of the literary texts they consider and should have developed sound critical strategies for analysis, but may not have yet developed a complete critical vocabulary, an extensive knowledge of literary criticism, or an advanced understanding of a text's historical, political, and social contexts. ABLY i.e.</p>	<p>the criteria "capably," the average and the weakest admissions essays showed deficits in one or more of the criteria evaluated. Upon completion of Eng 741, 83% of students were fulfilling all relevant criteria "ably," although deficits were noticed among the weakest students in the ability to frame critical questions as part of a literary/theoretical argument (a) and ability to organize an interpretive argument with clarity, precision, and purpose (e). By the end of the MA program, 100% of the theses evaluated fulfilled at least 4 out of 5 of the criteria "masterfully," e.g. with complexity, originality and depth. The strongest theses (57%) met all 5 the criteria "masterfully." In sum, the results from this study and previous years provide a clear demonstration that students write literary arguments with increasing sophistication and mastery as they progress through the program.</p>	<p>the completion of the MA (see 3b "use of findings" above). To do so, we have implemented an exit/alumni survey to track graduates after they complete the MA program.</p>

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			<p>skillfully and effectively. To meet this criteria, students' readings of literary texts should be well-developed, engaging, and insightful, and should incorporate theoretical and historical material with clarity, accuracy, and purpose. MASTERFULLY, i.e. with the complexity, originality and depth befitting the master's level. To meet this criteria, students should demonstrate a sophisticated command of a large body of literature and integrate relevant theoretical, critical, and historical material with precision and power. In short, they should make an innovative, nuanced, and compelling argument. Evaluation was based upon 42 writing samples of admits to the program, 14 seminar papers from Eng 741, and 7 MA theses. The assessment is based upon 42 writing samples by applicants admitted to the program, 14 seminar papers from Eng 741, and 7 MA theses.</p>		
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3d. Writing a literary argument, continued	Seminar papers, culminating experience (thesis) [D-M]	2010-11 , continuation of 2005-06, 2006-07, and 2008-9	PHASE 4: Content analysis of students' writing. This phase tracked a group of 8 students as they progressed through the program and examined their writing at 3 junctures: 1) the admission essay; 2) Eng 741 (portal course) seminar paper; and 3) CE project (Master's thesis). As described in more detail above (3c), faculty assessed students' ability to write an effective literary argument according to whether it fulfilled a set of criteria for doing so CAPABLY, ABLY, or MASTERFULLY.	The results from this study and previous years indicate that students write literary arguments with increasing sophistication and mastery as they progress through the program. Admission essays demonstrated a wide variety of facility with writing a literary argument. While the strongest admission essays satisfied all the criteria for writing a literary argument "capably," the average and the weakest admissions essays showed deficits in one or more of the criteria evaluated. By contrast, the strongest Eng 741 seminar papers (50% of those evaluated) fulfilled all the criteria for writing an effective literary argument "ably," and even the weakest papers fulfilled at least 3 out of 5 of those criteria "ably." By the end of the MA program, the strongest theses (50% of those evaluated) fulfilled 5 out of 5 of the criteria for writing a thesis "masterfully," whereas the weakest theses still fulfilled at least 3 out of 5 of the criteria "masterfully." As in our results for phase 3, deficits were noticed among	In September 2010, we held a meeting for all literature faculty to share "best practices" in supporting student writing in our graduate seminars. In 2011-12, the Graduate Literature Curriculum Committee will also examine the possibility of adding an additional portal course specifically focused upon writing and research methods at the graduate level and weigh other means of increasing the quality of student writing.

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4. Methods of literary research (including using library resources, and proper citation of sources in written products).	ENG 741 (portal course), seminar papers, CE (Master's theses). [D-M]	2010-11 (postponed from 2007-08, see 3b "use of findings")	Content analysis of students' writing. We tracked a group of 8 students as they progressed through the program and evaluated their writing at 3 junctures: 1) the admission essay; 2) Eng 741 (portal course) seminar paper; and 3) Culminating Experience (Master's thesis). At each juncture, faculty assessed whether students were using methods of literary research CAPABLY, i.e. "with proficiency"; ABLY, i.e. "skillfully and effectively" or MASTERFULLY, i.e. "with the complexity, originality, and depth befitting the master's level."	the weakest students in the ability to frame critical questions as part of a literary/theoretical argument. In their application essays, we found that students varied in their mastery of methods of literary research: while 100% of students were using proper citation methods "capably," only 62% of essays showed evidence of having "capably" used library resources. By contrast, 100% Eng 741 seminar papers showed evidence of having mastered methods of literary research at either "capably" or "ably." By the time they had completed their theses, 100% of students demonstrated that they had mastered methods of literary "masterfully."	Since our results indicate that the program is meeting this SLO successfully, no action is needed at this time. However, as described above (1b and 3d) the Graduate Literature Curriculum Committee is weighing ideas about how we might achieve this goal with more efficiency.

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