

2014

Assessing Student Learning in the English Major Capstone

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Homestead, Melissa J., "Assessing Student Learning in the English Major Capstone" (2014). *Quality Initiative*. 2.
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Assessing Student Learning in the English Major Capstone



ACE 10 Course: English 487

Melissa J. Homestead, Professor of English

ACE 10 Question

The English department has developed a set of learning outcomes and a programmatic assessment process for the English major that uses the English major capstone (an ACE 10 certified course required of all majors) as a collection site for student work to be assessed. The course includes two components. First, students are asked to look back on their work in the major and select samples covering a range of learning outcomes in the major to be included in a portfolio. Second, students engage in a common intellectual inquiry and produce substantial final projects keyed to the common inquiry. This final project then becomes a key component of the portfolio.

Student Work: Students devise their own projects within the ACE requirements

English 487
Melissa J. Homestead
Spring 2014

Final Capstone Project

As we discussed at the beginning of the semester, your final capstone project will bridge the interests and expertise you have developed in the English major and the reading and joint inquiry of the mid-portion of the semester. At the very beginning of the semester, you spent time reviewing your learning in the major, thinking about what work you have done in other classes best represents your learning, and writing a reflective essay about that work to serve as an introduction to your portfolio.

In the remaining weeks of the semester, we will be reading three more novels, reading poetry, and watching a documentary about slam poetry and reading critical essays keyed to these literary works. Each of you will also be part of a group researching and presenting on issues keyed to our literary works in common, and you will be writing additional close reading essays and a public literary event essay. However, you will also want to start thinking forward to your final project and to the final version of your portfolio that will include this project. Return to your reflective essay and think about how you want to bring your interests and expertise to bear on the four novels we will have read and/or with questions of the public life of literature (literary value and popularity, censorship, and poetry out loud). You will be able to define your own project in a prospectus, a proposal to me in which you 1) describe your proposed topic, 2) explain its relationship to our common reading and inquiry and to your interests and expertise and 3) define what would constitute excellence and success for the project you have devised. You will also need to append to your prospectus an annotated bibliography (in MLA citation style) of sources you will be using in developing your project. **This prospectus is required.** If you fail to submit a prospectus by the deadline, I may reduce your grade **on the final project** by a full grade.

This course is certified under the outcome 10 in the ACE general education program, and as such students enrolled in the course must “Generate a creative or scholarly product that requires broad knowledge, appropriate technical proficiency, information collection, synthesis, interpretation, presentation, and reflection.” This language suggests some of the important elements of both product and process for your final project. Your project may be creative or scholarly. If you choose a scholarly approach, your project might be a fairly standard “research paper,” presenting an analysis of one or more novels we read in the class supported and complicated by reading of and citation to materials such as scholarly journal articles about the novel(s), scholarly books on the history of the American novel or an author’s career, and/or literary and rhetorical theory. You also might write a scholarly paper that takes more of a public humanities/policy approach, analyzing controversies concerning the teaching of a particular novel or its place in libraries or comparing the differences in educational philosophy of the “Poetry Out Loud” and slam poetry competitions. Even a creative project, however, must involve some form of research (“information collection”), and because you would not normally quote from or cite to research resources in a creative piece, such a project will need an introduction documenting your research and explaining how it has informed your creative work. Whatever approach you take, your project should draw on the knowledge and expertise you have developed in English studies (i.e. if you

Method of Analysis

The English department has thirteen learning outcomes for majors. We score four outcomes every year (the foundational outcomes) and the additional outcomes on a rotating basis. This year, we will be scoring outcomes 1, 2, 3, 4, 9, 11, and 13. Our scoring is conducted by a group of faculty from across the subdisciplines of English studies using a rubric. Our learning outcomes and the rubric for outcomes to be scored this year are represented below.

Outcomes for the English Major

- English Majors will:
1. demonstrate familiarity with a wide range of texts, writers, genres, and cultures.
 2. read texts closely and attentively.
 3. support claims they make in their writing with specific examples and evidence.
 4. write and revise for a variety of purposes and audiences.
 5. consider the significance of new ideas, texts, and literacy practices in the context of their own lives and worlds, including their personal, academic, professional, and civic goals and purposes.
 6. understand the importance of cultural differences in the study of texts and literacy practices.
 7. understand how texts and literacy practices are shaped by their historical, social, cultural, intellectual, and aesthetic contexts.
 8. set their own learning goals and understand their own learning.
 9. identify and take critical positions on texts and literacy practices with an understanding of what is at stake in assuming those positions.
 10. use appropriate vocabularies for describing the work of writing (e.g., craft language for creative writing students, rhetorical language for rhetoric students)
 11. conduct both primary and secondary research (including using the library) and understand the uses and limitations of the information yielded by various research methodologies.
 12. understand how media and technology shape texts and literacy practices.
 13. write with clarity, grace, and voice appropriate to writing tasks.
- Adopted Spring 2007

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	No Evidence
Demonstrates familiarity with wide range of texts, writers, genres, cultures	Portfolio shows familiarity with broad range of texts, writers, genres, cultures	Portfolio shows familiarity with somewhat broad range of texts, writers, genres, cultures	Portfolio shows familiarity with a limited range of texts, writers, genres, cultures	Portfolio does not show familiarity with a range of texts, writers, genres, cultures	
Reads texts closely/attentively	Writer provides sophisticated analysis; frequently points to specific passages or ideas in texts	Writer provides somewhat sophisticated analysis; occasionally points to specific passages or ideas in texts	Writer provides general or perfunctory analysis; may point to passages or ideas, but in a general or confused way	Writer provides little or no analysis; offers only summary of or generalizations about texts	
Supports claims in writing with specific examples and evidence	Writer provides ample, sometimes novel, examples and evidence to support claims	Writer provides adequate examples and evidence to support claims	Writer provides weak or general examples or evidence to support claims	Writer provides little or no examples or evidence	
Writes & revises for variety of purposes & audiences	Portfolio includes writing for a wide range of purposes and audiences	Portfolio includes writing for a somewhat wide range of purposes and audiences	Portfolio includes writing for a limited range of purposes and audiences	Portfolio does not include writing for a range of purposes and audiences	
Identifies & takes critical positions with understanding of what is at stake	Writer chooses appropriate critical tools and uses them to generate insightful readings	Writer chooses appropriate critical tools to generate readings	Writer uses critical tools, but in arbitrary, general, or confused ways	Writer does not use critical tools	
Conducts primary & secondary research with understanding of uses/limitations of methodology	Portfolio shows appropriately chosen and well executed research methods	Portfolio shows appropriately chosen and mostly well executed research methods	Portfolio shows use of research methods, but they may not be well chosen or well executed	Portfolio shows little or no use of research methods	
Writes with clarity, grace, and voice appropriate to writing tasks	Writer consistently writes with clarity, grace, and voice appropriate to writing tasks	Writer usually writes with clarity, grace, and voice appropriate to writing tasks.	Writer sometimes writes with clarity, grace, and voice appropriate to writing tasks.	Writer rarely or never writes with clarity, grace, and voice appropriate to writing tasks.	

Findings

Our scoring of student portfolios is scheduled to take place on APRIL 11TH. Stay tuned!

Improving ACE 10 Learning

The English Department Assessment Coordinator and subject area coordinators, as appropriate, present the results of assessment activities the subject to the department, and, based, on department discussion and feedback, individuals or committees in the department may take action to improve teaching and learning or revise curricula.

