English Department Learning Goals

Pedagogical Objectives and Curricular Implementation

The successful writer is an informed, selective reader. Whether literary critics or poets, essayists or fiction authors, journalists or screenwriters, serious writers engage the challenge of reading and interpreting a wide range of cultural texts in order to expand their knowledge of narrative models and to increase the sophistication of their own writings. Our students will increase their facility in both of these areas by acquiring critical skills, disciplinary knowledge, and practical analytical perspectives through their coursework. As a result, they will be able not only to read disciplinary texts from an informed position, but also to use their enhanced interpretive proficiency to navigate personal conflicts, cultural tensions, and professional challenges. That is, they also will be able to apply their skills metaphorically to reading, interpreting, and responding to the texts of their lives. These objectives apply to all students taking courses in the English Department.

Because we believe that instruction in writing and in literary study are mutually dependent, we introduce students to the major through five required 100- and 200-level courses. Literary studies concentrators may count no more than one introductory creative writing course for their major; creative writing concentrators may count no more than two. Students will develop an understanding of literary history and the aesthetic of diversity by taking the surveys of the literature of the English-speaking world that we offer at this level. All English majors, whether they focus on literary studies or creative writing, must take at least two of these surveys; most take more than this. When they take creative writing courses, they also learn to conceive of writing as a synthesis of invention and of textual interpretation (whether the texts are literary models, dynamic performances, or even current events). The survey and creative writing courses are thus mutually dependent in forming the student’s foundation in the major: the literary surveys aid the development of the student’s rhetorical voice and ability to present interpretive analysis in defense of a central thesis, while the expression coursework demonstrates to the student that writing is always an interpretive act. Together, they teach that the artistry of one's writing evolves in proportion to the plurality of readings one performs and the range of ideas one encounters.
To foster the writer’s ability to examine literary texts from a multiplicity of perspectives and methodologies, we require our majors to complete English 250: Methods of Critical Analysis. Students learn in this course to imagine the variety of interpretive conclusions made possible by performing literary analysis from a variety of theoretical perspectives. Students also improve their research skills by imitating the ways in which specialists combine their own interpretive readings with concepts from secondary sources and supportive evidence from primary sources. By building upon close reading to construct creative analyses of source texts, students learn to think about and to practice the discipline as professional writers and readers do.

At the upper level, we offer students a selection of courses that intensify and focus the study of literature and writing. Our upper-level courses all fall under one of five possible studies areas, each of which approaches literature and writing through a different lens. Literary Traditions (LT) courses examine literary works in the context of specific schools or periods, for example, Romanticism or Modernism; Author Studies (AS) courses explore the canon of a specific author or group of authors, such as Shakespeare or early American women; Applied Theory (AT) courses examine a selection of literary works through the lens of a particular theoretical approach, such as psychoanalysis or narrative theory; and Genre Studies (GS) courses take a look at literary works in the context of the genre to which they belong, such as the short story or Elizabethan and Jacobean drama. Advanced Writing (AW) courses extend the skills in and understanding of the creation of literary texts begun in the introductory writing courses. Students may take no more than two courses in any one studies area to insure some breadth and range at the upper level. While each of these studies areas exposes students to different dimensions of literary study, they all include pedagogy in conducting research, developing analyses, and composing pieces of writing at a level of complexity appropriate to advanced study in the major.

Thus, in 100- and 200-level courses, our students have increased their understanding of the techniques, issues, and traditions of literary study and the composition of literature. In the 300 level they have built upon this understanding developing a more complex facility with modes of written discourse, including evaluation of texts generated both by professional authors and by student peer authors, through research-based expository writing, through rigorous editing and revising of creative and analytical manuscripts, and through expanded knowledge of exemplary disciplinary texts. In 400-level courses, students apply their accumulated expertise to projects that
aspire to professional quality, which they complete in an SYE Senior Seminar (ENG 450) that integrates the critical concepts and creative techniques they have encountered in the English curriculum. Some students qualify as well to engage in 400-level independent study projects, either the one-semester SYE Senior Projects (ENG 489/90) or the two-semester SYE Honors Projects (ENG 498); however, all majors must complete a senior seminar in order to complete the major. Here, then, are the English Department's learning goals for all majors, condensed into a nutshell:

**Student Learning Objectives**

1. Students will expand their knowledge of narrative models
   
   A. By acquiring critical skills;
   
   B. By accumulating disciplinary knowledge of specific texts, genres, authors, and movements; and
   
   C. By learning practical analytical perspectives.

2. Students will increase the sophistication of their written work
   
   A. By developing a rhetorical voice;
   
   B. By presenting interpretive analysis in defense of a central thesis from a variety of theoretical perspectives; and
   
   C. By continuing to practice and to improve research skills.

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