

Form E-1-A for Boston College Departments/Programs

Department/Program Literature Core Program, AY 2022, English Department

- 1) **Have formal learning outcomes been developed? What are they?** (What specific sets of skills and knowledge does the department expect its majors to have acquired before they graduate?)

Here are the learning outcomes that were fine-tuned by a Literature Core Committee in 2012 (following a self-study):

By the successful completion of their Literature Core course, students will be able to demonstrate:

- an ability to close-read, interpret, and analyze texts;
- an ability to write clear, coherent, organized, grammatically correct and stylistically competent prose;
- an awareness of literary genres and terminology;
- a recognition of the historical and cultural specificity of literary texts; and
- an appreciation of the human imagination.

- 2) **Where are these learning outcomes published? Be specific.** (Where are the department's learning expectations accessible to potential majors: on the web or in the catalog or in your dept major handouts?)

Faculty are instructed to include these learning outcomes on every Lit Core syllabus; additionally, this information is found on our departmental website:

https://www.bc.edu/bc-web/schools/mcas/departments/english/about/learning-outcomes.html#literature_core

The information is also distributed to all advisors and first-year students through the Academic Advising Center programs and materials.

- 3) **Other than GPA, what data/evidence is used to determine whether graduates have achieved the stated outcomes for the degree?** (What evidence and analytical approaches do you use to assess which of the student learning outcomes are being achieved more or less well?)

The director assessed two dimensions of the program this year.

- 1) **Number of pages of formal writing.** This assessment sought to determine how many pages of formal writing (papers, essays) students were required to produce over the course of the semester. This process of assessment involved collecting all the syllabi for Fall '21 and Spring '22 semesters and tallying up the total number of pages assigned in formal writing assignments. Informal write assignments such as Canvas posts were not included.
- 2) **Diversity of authors.** In keeping with the increased attention to issues of diversity, difference, and justice within MCAS, it was decided to assess the program in terms the

race/ethnicity/sexual orientation of the authors of assigned texts. The process of assessment involved collecting all the syllabi for the Spring '22 semester and tallying how many assigned texts were produced by queer authors and authors of color.

- 4) **Who interprets the evidence? What is the process?** (Who in the department is responsible for interpreting the data and making recommendations for curriculum or assignment changes if appropriate? When does this occur?)

Christina Klein (director), Alex Puente and Andy Crow (steering committee), and Min Song (English department chair).

- 5) **What were the assessment results and what changes have been made as a result of using this data/evidence?** What were the major assessment findings? Have there been any recent changes to your curriculum or program? How did the assessment data contribute to those changes?

The data results of the assessments are attached.

Number of pages of formal writing: The assessment revealed that the majority of instructors in the fall semester assigned somewhat fewer pages of formal writing than did those in the spring. This may be due to the fact that the fall semester was the first to be fully in-person after the disruptions of the pandemic. In the fall, a majority of instructors (79%) assigned 5-10 pages of writing. In the spring, a majority of instructors (57%) assigned 11-15 pages of writing. Most instructors in both semesters also assigned informal writing exercises (e.g., close readings, Canvas posts), and many also included some kind of creative assignment (e.g., podcast, creative writing, reflective essay). This is in addition to quizzes and exams. One of the strengths of the Lit Core program is that instructors have the flexibility to design their courses to meet their own and students' interests. This assessment indicates that instructors are assigning an appropriate amount of formal writing and they are also assigning a variety of other assignments so that students can have a range of learning opportunities.

Diversity assessment: The Literature Core program enrolls about 2,000 students each year, most of whom are freshmen and sophomores. Since many of these students will not take another literature course at BC, this is the best place in the curriculum to introduce students to creative writers from a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences. The diversity of a syllabus, however, can be challenging to assess. Which categories should count as markers of diversity (e.g., we didn't assess for class identity)? How should we treat authors who belong to a certain community but whose work does not engage specifically with that community (e.g., Kazuo Ishiguro)? Should distinctions be made among authors who are American and non-American?

This assessment indicates that students are being exposed to range of non-white and queer authors, with authors of Black and Asian backgrounds appearing most frequently (in 77% and 54% of courses, respectively). The number of such authors in any given course ranges widely, from zero to more than six, with most courses including between three and six. This range can be explained in part by the course topic and the instructor's area of specialization. There is no "correct" number of queer authors or authors of color that should be included on any given syllabus, and I will not recommend any specific changes to the program based on this assessment. Instead, I see this data as a starting point for a conversation within the department and the university about the degree of exposure students are gaining to authors who can introduce them to a wide range of human experiences.

6) **Date of the most recent program review.** (Your latest comprehensive departmental self-study and external review.)

The latest departmental self-study was completed in 2012, with major changes to the course offerings. Guidelines and goals were streamlined, learning outcomes revamped, and the four “branches” of Lit Core offerings were eradicated in favor of one unified mission. Each Literature Core course now offers students a different subcategory, or theme, but the learning outcomes remain consistent across sections, as do a variety of disciplinary requirements, as stated in our guidelines.