

ASSESSMENT DOCUMENT TO KATHY MARLOCK

REVISED VERSION 11/27/06

FROM MEG SEMPREGA, CHAIR

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT
WEBSTER UNIVERSITY

Degrees and Certificate Offered:

B.A. in English with emphases in

Creative Writing

Drama

Literature, Society, and Politics

Minor in English

Minor in Professional Writing

Certificate in Professional Writing

The curriculum of the English Department is designed to demonstrate the interaction of literature with every area of human values and human concern. The central works of English and American literature are joined by other great literatures studied in translation. Classes are small and discussion-oriented, and students are individually mentored by their professors and advisors. Students graduate with not only a substantial knowledge of literature and excellent writing abilities, but also critical reading, thinking, and communication skills.

The student with a major in English selects an emphasis in creative writing; drama; or literature, society, and politics.

English majors can perform writing internships with businesses, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies. The department faculty also helps to prepare teachers by serving as advisors for all of our Education and English double majors.

Students may choose to pursue an Honors distinction within the English major.

Creative Writing

The English Department's Creative Writing emphasis is a dynamic program featuring classes in poetry, fiction, drama, nonfiction, and translation--supported by requirements and diverse electives in the study of literature. Creative writing is taught in workshops limited to 15 students by teachers who are themselves working, published writers. More than two-thirds of our majors identify

themselves as creative writers; the presence of this population of self-directed writers positively influences the character of the department and brings to the literature classes the perspective of the working writer.

Each year students in the program edit and publish a literary magazine, *The Green Fuse*, which contains poetry, fiction, non-fiction, drama, and translations. *The Green Fuse* welcomes works by Webster students from all disciplines. Playwrights have opportunities to learn from the many productions on campus, which is home to the professional Repertory Theatre of St. Louis and the prestigious Conservatory of Theatre Arts and may see their own work produced in the annual Emerging Playwrights' Festival, "Surfacing."

The primary focus of the program is on learning the art of reading as a writer: opening up influences, gathering strategies, widening the range of what's possible in a student's own writing. Students will discover the precarious balance between the solitary, private act of writing itself and the communal, public act of passing written work before the unblinking critical eye of the world. Publication as an end in itself is not the ultimate aim here; however, a dedicated faculty who are constantly writing and publishing operate on the assumption that students also will be seriously committed to the development of their own work.

Small classes, high standards, and a congenial atmosphere combine to foster each student's growth as a writer.

Drama

The English Department's emphasis in Drama is designed to give students a strong grounding in our rich legacy of dramatic literature from the Greeks to the present day. From the *Oresteia* to *Hamlet* and to *Angels in America*, students in the emphasis read masterworks in every major period of dramatic literature. Survey courses like Major Dramatists I & II give students the big picture, drawing links between writers, ideas, and important periods. More narrowly focused courses like Tragic Themes, Modern Drama, Contemporary Drama, and Shakespeare I & II help students become better acquainted with specific authors, themes, or periods.

It all begins with the written word. Our dramatic literature classes are designed to engage and involve students as active readers and scholars. We view plays as performance texts, and as such we must read as actors, designers, writers, and critics. The emphasis in Drama is designed to give students the necessary literary background and analytical skills they will need as teachers, writers, scholars, and theatre professionals.

Literature, Society, and Politics

The English Department's emphasis in Literature, Society, and Politics reflects our interest in literature's relationship to the human endeavors of the larger world. In this emphasis, we explore literature not only in terms of its aesthetic dimensions, but also in terms of the ways it expresses the values, views, and dynamics of a given cultural and historical context. Thus we consider topics such as the role of the individual in society, the identity and status of marginal groups, the relationship between humankind and the Earth, or the role of myth in our lives.

Professional Writing

The minor and certificate in professional writing are designed for students who want to learn about - and prepare to meet - the writing and other communication challenges found in business, nonprofit, governmental, and community settings.

Students can choose from courses in areas such as journalism, writing for public relations and advertising, screenplay and scriptwriting, creative writing, and business and technical writing as well editing, linguistics and rhetoric, and cross-cultural communication.

DEPARTMENTAL HONORS IN ENGLISH

Last year, identifying a need to recognize our most capable students, the English Department initiated Departmental Honors in English. By completing requirements in addition to those required for a B.A. in English, the student may have the opportunity to work with a faculty mentor on an independent creative or scholarly project in writing, and—meeting additional requirements, including proficiency in a foreign language—may earn honors in English.

We are phasing out an earlier tool of assessment, and introducing the Portfolio as a requirement for all students, including those who seek honors. (See “Assessment Process” below.)

Requirements for Departmental Honors in English

An English major may earn recognition as an outstanding student in the English Department by completing the additional requirements below.

To earn departmental honors, an English major must:

1. Complete at least 45 credit hours in residence at Webster University.
2. Maintain a G.P.A. of 3.5 in English coursework.
3. Complete at least 15 credit hours in English courses offered at the 3000 and 4000 levels.
4. Complete at least two semesters of a foreign language with a grade of B or higher in each semester, or test out of that requirement.
5. Further explore cultures other than British or U.S. in one of four ways: complete a third semester of foreign language; complete an approved course in literature in translation; complete an approved course in world literature; or participate in study abroad.
6. Complete ENGL 4900 Senior Honors Thesis for 1 credit hour, for a total of 43 credit hours.
 1. Creative Writing Emphasis: original creative work by the student.
 2. Literature, Society, and Politics Emphasis: an original scholarly essay.
 3. Drama Emphasis: an original scholarly essay on dramatic literature or an original play.

Intended Outcomes / Program Goals for All English Majors:

Our overall objective is that every student will learn to read critically, think critically, and write critically, no matter his or her emphasis in the English Department.

To that end –

Students will have read widely while in the department. They will have a foundation in the canonical works of literature, as well as newer works that challenge or expand the canon. Students are expected to read widely both in and outside their areas of emphasis.

Students will have an understanding of and appreciation for the various periods, genres, and styles of literature. They should be able to see and appreciate the thematic links and influences between works within and across genres. They are encouraged to attend live theatre performances and to review film critically.

Students will have an appreciation for the role of literature and the arts in society and culture. They should appreciate the key role the written word plays in human expression and the search for meaning.

Students will develop an awareness of historical context and the particular perspective of the work as it speaks from inside or outside the mainstream culture.

Students will acquire the skills to perform close readings/explications of complex literary texts. They will learn the specific language, beyond jargon, to articulate clearly aesthetic concerns and insights and will pursue a facility and appreciation for the use of research to explore diverse critical responses to literature.

Students will become accomplished writers of analytical papers. They will be able to provide evidence from the text to support arguments. They should have a strong competency in the use and conventions of the MLA (Modern Language Association) citation style.

Additional Goals for the Creative Writing Emphasis:

Students will also learn to read as writers: opening up influences, gathering strategies, and widening the range of what is possible in a student's own writing.

Students will appreciate the precarious balance between the solitary act of writing itself and the communal, public act of passing written work before the unblinking eye of the world.

Students will develop an appreciative comprehension of both the art and the craft of writing (and the significant abiding differences between the two).

Students will discover and establish a genuine self-discipline and a regular work regimen that is viable for the individual student.

ELEMENTS OF THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

In assessing the progress of our students and the properties of our curriculum, members of the Webster English Department have used the small size of our department to our advantage. Our approximately 120 majors will have multiple encounters with each of the seven full-time faculty members in their course work. Thus, we know our students well and are aware of their strengths, needs, and progress. As a faculty we routinely share information on the progress of our students, curriculum design, and the success of our techniques through

department meetings, informal conferences, shared evaluations, and collaboration in response to student difficulties. Our offices, classrooms and student lounge are all housed in Pearson House; thus, our constant contact with each other, formally and informally, allows us to know what and who is working in our program. All fulltime faculty members teach the core courses for the major.

Faculty Members and Areas of Expertise

Karla Armbruster, Ph.D. Professional Writing; Environmental Literature; US Literature

David Clewell, MFA. Poetry Writing; Poetry; 20th-Century US Literature; Poetry in the Curriculum

Michael Erickson, MFA. Playwriting; Greek, Renaissance, and Contemporary Dramatic Literature

Sheila Hwang, MA, ABD. 18th- and 19th-Century British Literature; 18th-C. World Literature; Multi-Ethnic US Literatures

Steven Lattimore, MFA. Fiction Writing; The Short Story; 20th US Fiction

Anne McIlhane, Ph. D. Early Modern Literature; Romance; Epic

Margot Sempreora, Ph.D. US Literature; World Drama; Women's Literature; Literature and Film

A corps of talented adjuncts also provides support for our programs by regularly offering such specialized courses as translation, non-fiction writing, Russian Literature, and The French Novel.

Other Ongoing Methods of Assessment:

Course syllabi are collected and reviewed; faculty evaluations are circulated among all fulltime faculty members; grading practices are discussed; and determinations concerning those students suited to pursue the Honors track are made.

Capstone Method:

A portfolio is required of each graduating senior. (If the student pursues the Honors track, the portfolio is required in addition.) Portfolios are graded according to a three-part scale: "Meets Expectations," "Exceeds Expectations," "Fails to Meet Expectations." The grade given to the materials submitted in the Portfolio is determined by faculty review of the Department's Intended Outcomes, as demonstrated in the student's papers, list of English courses taken at Webster or transferred, book list, and reflective essay. In the graduating year 2005-2006 most portfolios were found to meet expectations, with a few exceeding expectations. Two Honors projects have been completed in this new capstone

opportunity: one was a collection of poetry in translation and the second a long analytical essay on Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. Faculty members are selected by, or assigned to, Honors Candidates according to a match between the professor's area of expertise and the student's creative discipline, or area of literary inquiry. The mentor and an additional reader evaluate the student project **independently** to determine if the project meets the Department's standards for a designation of "Honors in English." (Because the mentor has been involved at every stage of the project it would be extremely unusual for an Honors candidate who has fulfilled all other requirements to fail to receive Honors because of the final project.)

Portfolio Review for English Majors

Students who begin the English major in Fall 2005 or later must submit a Portfolio as a requirement for the English major. Students who entered prior to 2005 may opt to submit a portfolio rather than an overview. Students will enroll in English 4600: Portfolio Review (0 credit hours) in their final semester of undergraduate study. Students must pass English 4600: Portfolio Review in order to graduate. Portfolios must be submitted to the student's faculty advisor by April 1 for May graduates, and by November 1 for December graduates.

The portfolio will be used as a means of assessing the knowledge and skills the student developed as an English major and will also help the Department assess the quality and success of its programs. Portfolios will be retained by the department.

The portfolio will include:

1. Photocopies of three original, graded formal writing assignments from at least two different ENGL courses including at least one paper from a course **at the 2000 level or above**. Each portfolio submission should be a copy of an original assignment bearing the professor's comments and grade. If un-graded, the work must be initialed by the genre advisor. Material in the portfolio should reflect the student's highest achievements as an English major.
 - a. Emphasis in Creative Writing. Students in the Creative Writing emphasis will submit two samples of creative writing presented and discussed in a creative writing course and one analytic essay from a literature course.
 - b. Emphasis in Literature, Society, and Politics. Students in the Literature, Society, and Politics emphasis will submit three analytic essays from literature courses, totaling 15 pages or more.

- c. Emphasis in Drama. Students in the Drama emphasis will submit EITHER three analytic essays from literature courses, totaling 15 pages or more, OR one sample of creative dramatic writing presented and discussed in a creative writing course, and two analytic essays from literature courses.
2. A list of courses taken for the major.
3. A personal reading list from the college years. The list should include at least fifty titles, and may include class texts.
4. A reflective statement of approximately 500 words in which the student evaluates his or her development during the years as an English major. The student might answer the question, "How has my knowledge/understanding and writing ability changed since I started the English major?" The statement might include discussion of one or more experiences involving reading, writing, or creativity that had a significant effect on the student's understanding of his or her purpose as an English major. The student may wish to comment on the selections of books or organization of the reading list in his/her reflective statement.