Annual Assessment Report AY23-24

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

- **Name(s) of all program(s) and degree type(s) assessed** (Major, Minor, Graduate, or Non-Degree)
  - English Major, with Concentrations in Literature and Creative Writing. There were no students in the Comparative Literature Concentration. Since this assessment was based on the capstone course for the major, there were no students in the Minor to assess.

- **Names and contact information of the faculty coordinating the assessment of each program and report**
  - Ana Rojas, Chair & Assistant Professor (arrojas@usfca.edu)
  - Dean Rader, Professor (rader@usfca.edu)

- **Your Mission Statement; note any changes since last report**

  - The study of literature and writing has long stood at the center of humanistic education. In that tradition, the department of English educates students in the rich intellectual and creative values embodied in literary works. Because literature by its very nature expresses the complex intellectual, spiritual, moral, social and psychological life of human cultures, its study is integral to the Jesuit mission of valuing "learning as a humanizing, social activity." Our inclusive curriculum fully supports "a diverse, socially responsible learning community of high quality scholarship and academic rigor sustained by a faith that does justice.

  - No changes since last report

- **Your PLOs; note any changes since last report**

  - 1. Students will demonstrate in writing and speech the ability to develop clear and coherent interpretive essays and original creative writing; they can articulate in writing and discussion/workshop their responses to literary and/or peer texts.

    2. Students will demonstrate knowledge of and sensitivity to pluralism in response to texts that focus on diversity and social justice issues, i.e. writings that underscore the complexity of race, ethnicity, gender, class and sexual orientation.

    3. Students will learn to read texts from multiple perspectives: e.g. learn differentiated readings via various contemporary critical theories.

4. Students will identify characteristics of different literary genres: novel, short fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and drama.

5. Students will identify differences between various historical periods and literary movements.

- o These PLOs have been in place since 2013.

- **Your current Curricular Map; note any changes since last report**

    - o See Appendix (pgs. 8-9)

    - o No changes since last report

- **Your assessment schedule between APRs: a year by year list of PLOs assessed since your last APR and those to be assessed before your next APR (Contact your FDCD for clarification if needed)**

    - o PLOs assessed since last APR (April 25-27, 2017)

        - ▪ 2023-2024 – PLO #1

        - ▪ 2020-2021 – PLO #5

        - ▪ 2018-2019 – PLO #4

        - ▪ 2017-2018 – PLO #3

        - ▪ 2016-2017 – PLO #2

    - o PLOs to be assessed before the next APR (Spring 2026)

        - ▪ All PLOs have been assessed since the last APR

- **Description of the assessment methodology**

    - o For 2023-24, we have decided to assess Program Learning Outcome (PLO) #1. That outcome is as follows:

        1. Students will demonstrate in writing and speech the ability to develop clear and coherent interpretive essays and original creative writing; they can articulate in writing and discussion/workshop their responses to literary and/or peer texts.

        We last assessed this outcome in 2015-16, so it was good to revisit it now. The English Department at the University of San Francisco has three tracks: literature, comparative literature, and creative writing. For the purposes of this assessment, we looked at three random samples of the senior thesis project for literature students and three (somewhat) random samples from senior theses for writing students.

However, for the writing students, we selected one fiction project, one nonfiction, and one poetry.

- **Rubrics (and other instruments, if applicable)**
    - We used the following rubric to assess these documents:

      a) Below Expectations: Students are unable to complete critical and research-based assignments with proper literary citation styles. Students' work fails to demonstrate standard techniques and devices in creative writing. Students do not offer appropriate editorial responses to critical and creative works in peer-review and workshop formats.

      b) Acceptable: Students can complete critical and research-based assignments with proper literary citation styles. Student's creative work reflects adequate knowledge of standard techniques and devices. Students offer appropriate editorial responses to critical and creative works in peer-review and workshop formats.

      c) Exemplary: Students complete works that demonstrate superior understanding of critical writing and offer significant contributions to the field. Student's creative works are considered original and show sophisticated writing techniques and devices. Students provide excellent editorial responses to critical and/or creative works in peer-review and workshop formats.

- **Description of your results, noting any significant findings from the data or assessment process**

    - The Senior Seminar class, offered in the spring of 2024 is in effect a senior thesis. The class meets every spring semester and is required of all graduating majors. The students write a document of 35-50 pages and then present their work in an all-day conference at the end of the semester. Ana Rojas examined three samples from her literature section of ENGL 490: Senior Seminar in Literature, and Dean Rader examined three samples from ENGL 491: Senior Seminar in Writing.

      Both of these classes utilize the workshop format. Students receive feedback from each other, from graduate TAs, and from the professors. Students read and respond to each other's work, and they meet one-on-one with faculty members. The Senior Seminar presentation day is planned entirely by the students and represents a public

culmination of their efforts, which more than adequately meets the *speech* component of the learning outcome.

o Regarding the three samples from creative writing students, Dean Rader found these to be **exemplary**. In all cases, the students demonstrated a facility with the various formal requirements for their genre, they demonstrated the ability to write clearly, they deployed appropriate literary devices at the right time, and they wrote at a high level. For example, the fiction submission, "Trash Queen," brilliantly mixes observation, reflection, dialogue, foreshadowing, and excellent pacing. Essentially a novella, "Trash Queen" follows the life of a young artist in a less than ideal romantic relationship as she befriends a homeless woman (The Trash Queen) and embarks on a new art project. Thematically, the story—like the protagonists artwork—explores the commodification of women and the female body.

"Family Trip" deploys an almost experimental collage format, moving between present and past, to weave together a series of family histories and traumas that ask big questions about the ways in which families relate to each other. The author moves from location to location, altering her pacing and syntax along the way, to compile a kind of tapestry of family interaction.

The poetry sample, *Love Flares and Other Poems*, is arguably the least innovative of the three writing samples but nevertheless demonstrates a strong understanding of the lyric tradition. The poems are mostly written in free verse but include some classic forms like an ekphrastic poem and a four quatrain poem a la William Carlos Williams. Most undergraduate poems are overwritten, relying too much on adjectives and descriptors. This collection is unusually minimalistic and in reminiscent of poems from the Imagist movement of the early 20th century.

In the case of the fiction and nonfiction submissions, Rader found these to be in par with typical work a graduate student would produce in a top MFA program. The poetry submission was excellent for an undergraduate project, and if the student were to pursue graduate work in creative writing, this writing sample would be good enough to gain admission to many programs.

o Regarding the three samples from literature students, Ana Rojas found two to be **acceptable** and one to be **exemplary**. In all cases, students demonstrated that they could complete a critical and research-based assignment with proper literary citation styles; all the samples were the result of thoughtful revision and offered appropriate editorial responses to feedback from peer-review and workshop formats. In the case of the exemplary sample, the work submitted demonstrated a superior understanding of critical writing and offered significant contributions to the field.

The first senior thesis in literature, "From Sin to Liberation: Feminine Sexuality and Catholic Patriarchy in Elizabeth Acevedo's *Beastgirl & Other Origin Myths*," offered a close and careful reading of two poems in Acevedo's collection. The thesis situates its reading in relation to biographical and cultural contexts, before analyzing its

selected poems to demonstrate how religious patriarchy can create an environment of feminine sexual shame.

The second senior thesis in literature, "The Compatibility of Love, Marriage, and Identity in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," offered not only an analysis of the protagonist's three marriages, but also argued that, as a result of the way the text questions the role that marriage plays in a woman's life, it continues to function as a tool for women today to interrogate the value of the institution of marriage in their own lives.

The third senior thesis in literature, "If We Get There: Poetry and the Queer Fantasy," put in conversation two poems by two different queer poets, Richard Siken and Danez Smith. Not only did the thesis offer a thoughtful comparative analysis of its chosen poems, but from this reading, developed a wider theory of "queer time." This thesis sought "to define this particular type of uncertain queer temporality that has no temporal or spatial location as the queer fantasy." This sample was **exemplary**, providing a rich and sophisticated analysis of relatively recent texts for which there is very little existing scholarship. The originality and theoretical sophistication of this thesis is on par with graduate-level work, and would make an excellent writing sample for admission to a graduate program in English.

- **Description of how the results were shared with faculty and how your department/program responded to the results, including any plans for future improvement or assessment of your program indicated by the results**

    o Results were shared with the department via email, and to be discussed in the next department meeting.

- **Discussion of any significant feedback from your previous year's report and how your program responded to that feedback**

    o Feedback from 2022-2023 report

        ▪ *Mission Statement*: The mission statement for the English major and minor clearly describes the objectives and values of the programs. The statement also clearly aligns with the broader mission of the university.

        ▪ *Program Learning Outcomes*: Newly revised learning outcomes clearly and succinctly describe the knowledge and abilities students obtain and practice in the English department's programs. As the report acknowledges, these program learning outcomes mirror those of the

Literature Core and seem therefore to focus more on student learning in the English Literature concentration. The report indicates that English faculty continue to develop the programs' learning outcomes, considering whether additional/separate outcomes are appropriate for students in the Writing and Comparative Literature concentrations.

▪ *Curricular Map:* English has not yet developed a curricular map based on its current (recently revised outcomes). The submitted curricular map links courses to prior program learning outcomes. Since the various English programs' outcomes are still in development, curricular maps may be revised/developed in the future.

▪ *Assessment Methods:* Faculty in English did not engage in direct assessment of student learning during the 2022-2023 academic year. Instead, faculty have reflected upon several prior years of assessment and curricular development. The English assessment report presents a comprehensive and useful summary of years of assessment efforts, including discussion of methods, results, and conclusions. This summary provides context for the department's continuing revision of curricula and program learning outcomes. The report explains that the department has revised program learning outcomes, a process resulting in a succinct and clear statement of capabilities and knowledge students gain in the program. However, the report also notes that further work continues on possible alternative or additional outcomes for students in the Writing and Comparative Literature concentrations. The report also indicates plans to begin direct assessment of the first of its current outcomes before its next APR (Fall 2025). Collection and assessment of student work accordingly may begin in Academic Year 2024-2025.

▪ *Assessment Results and Closing the Loop*: See "Assessment Methods" above.

▪ *Summary Comments:* Having assessed the department's prior set of program learning outcomes and implemented curricular changes (reported in last year's reflection), faculty in English have begun developing new program learning outcomes. Though outcomes for the Literature concentration are established, additional or alternative outcomes for the Writing and Comparative Literature tracks are being considered. Faculty in English plan to begin direct assessment of student learning before the department's next APR (2025).

o How the department responded to feedback

- The English Department has long sought to update its PLOs, and this was an effort begun when Ryan van Meter was Chair. The Department hopes to use our upcoming APR as an opportunity to reflect on and revise our PLOs and update our curricular maps, including for the concentration in Comparative Literature. Due to various administrative changes, our next APR has been moved from Fall 2025 to Spring 2026.

- Given that the department had assessed all but PLO #1 since our last APR, we thought it important to assess this remaining PLO before our next external review.

APPENDIX

Curricular Maps

Program Learning Outcomes X Courses	PLO1 1. Students will demonstrate in writing and speech the ability to develop clear and coherent interpretive essays and original creative writing; they can articulate in writing and discussion/workshop their responses to literary and/or peer texts.	PLO2 2. Students will demonstrate knowledge of and sensitivity to pluralism in response to texts that focus on diversity and social justice issues, i.e. writings that underscore the complexity of race, ethnicity, gender, class and sexual orientation.	PLO3 3. Students will learn to read texts from multiple perspectives: e.g. learn differentiated readings via various contemporary critical theories.	PLO4 4. Students will identify characteristics of different literary genres: novel, short fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and drama.	PLO5 5. Students will identify differences between various historical periods and literary movements.
Courses or Program Requirement					
English 192 -- Introduction to Literary Study	I		I	I	I
Minority Literature requirement	D	D	D	D	
English 310 -- Literature 1 (1100-1700)	D	D	D	D	D
English 320 -- Literature 2 (1700-1900)	D	D	D	D	D
English 330 -- Literature 3 (1900-present)	D	D	D	D	D
English 340 -- Shakespeare	D	D	D	D	D
Literature Track requirements:					
English 399 -- Critical Analysis	D/M		D/M	D/M	D/M
English 410 -- Special Topics in Literature & Film	D		D	D	D
English 490 -- Senior Seminar in Literature	M		M	M	M
Writing Track requirements:					
English 360 -- Intro to Writing Nonfiction	I		D	I	
English 361 -- Intro to Writing Fiction	I		D	I	
English 362 -- Intro to Writing Poetry	I		D	I	
English 364 -- Intro to Writing Oral History	I		D	I	
English 400 -- Special Topics in Writing	D		D	D	
English 450 -- Fiction Workshop	D/M		D/M	D/M	
English 460 -- Poetry Workshop	D/M		D/M	D/M	
English 470 -- Nonfiction Workshop	D/M		D/M	D/M	
English 499 -- Senior Seminar in Writing	M		M	M	
Electives:					
English 198 -- Ignatian Literary Magazine	D			D	D
English 321 -- History of the English Language	D		D		D
English 480 -- Internship in Writing and Lit.	D				

Institutional Learning Outcomes X Program Learning Outcomes	PLO1	PLO2	PLO3	PLO4	PLO5
	1. Students will demonstrate in writing and speech the ability to develop clear and coherent interpretive essays and original creative writing; they can articulated in writing and discussion/workshop their responses to literary and/or peer texts.	2. Students will demonstrate knowledge of and sensitivity to pluralism in response to texts that focus on diversity and social justice issues, i.e. writings that underscore the complexity of race, ethnicity, gender, class and sexual orientation.	3. Students will learn to read texts from multiple perspectives: e.g. learn differentiated readings via various contemporary critical theories.	4. Students will identity characteristics of different literary genres: novel, short fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and drama.	5. Students will identify differences between various historical periods and literary movements.
Institutional Learning Outcomes					
1. Students reflect on and analyze their attitudes, beliefs, values, and assumptions about diverse communities and cultures and contribute to the common good.		X	X		
2. Students explain and apply disciplinary concepts, practices, and ethics of their chosen academic discipline in diverse communities.	X	X	X	X	X
3. Students construct, interpret, analyze, and evaluate information and ideas derived from a multitude of sources.	X	X	X	X	X
4. Students communicate effectively in written and oral forms to interact within their personal and professional communities.	X			X	X
5. Students use technology to access and communicate information in their personal and professional lives.	X				
6. Students use multiple methods of inquiry and research processes to answer questions and solve problems.	X		X		
7. Students describe, analyze, and evaluate global interconnectedness in social, economic, environmental and political systems that shape diverse groups within the San Francisco Bay Area and the world.		X			

Key:
I = Introductory
D = Developing
M = Mastery