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English Discipline Assessment Report 2014/2015

English Discipline

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Assessment of students' basic knowledge of literary history:

The 2000 level surveys, early and later American and early and later British provide the basis for English Majors' and Minors' understanding of literary history. This understanding is reinforced by 3000 level elective English courses many of which focus on shorter, more concentrated periods.

Content of 2000 level surveys:

Faculty emphasize conventional historical divisions and the writers who fit within those periods as well as the writers who push against the conventions of a particular period; key definitions of a period and when periods begin and end; what distinguishes the different periods; and the complications of making these divisions. Faculty do not emphasize memorization of specific dates. All classes treat the historical context of the period and how the literature of the period is shaped by and relates to political, cultural, and social contexts, including changing ideas about art and the artist, gender, and science. The history of the text as an object and readerships are also treated. Most of the sections are taught chronologically, though one faculty member teaches the course in separate blocks--African American, Native American, for example.

Method of instruction: lecture, readings, discussion, tests, and papers.

Goals and expectations:

Students should have a basic knowledge of conventional historical periods and key definitions of the different periods. When given a passage or a text, students should be able to identify the period and how that text or passage reveals concerns of the period. They should be able to apply their knowledge of historical periods to the 3000 level English courses and be able to place the texts from these courses in the relevant period. Even if students have not had the relevant survey for a 3000 level course, they should have an understanding of the ways that historical periods are viewed by literary critics, and they should be able to apply these methods to the texts of the class.

Methods of evaluation: Tests, papers, midterm and final exams.

Upper level classes (3000):

The upper level classes in English often focus on a specific historical period within a larger historical period, exploring it in depth. These classes build on and reinforce students' knowledge from the surveys, but, because not all four surveys are required for a student to take an upper level class, faculty cannot expect students to have an understanding of the historical period relevant to a specific 3000 level class. Usually a brief strategic review of history is sufficient to ground the students.

Assessment:

The current structure of requiring students to take three out of the four historical surveys and to take a variety of upper level (3000) electives adequately covers our goals for student mastery of literary history. While most faculty think it would be advantageous for students to take all four surveys, they do not believe it essential. They would prefer that students have the opportunity to take a greater variety of electives at the 3000 level.

Consistency among sections:

Not all faculty assign papers, and among those that do, there is some variation in number and length of papers. We have decided to continue our discussion of this issue and work toward more consistency.

Conclusion:

The 2000 level surveys and the 3000 level elective English courses fulfill our goal of giving our students a basic knowledge of literary history.

We are considering adding to our senior exit surveys a question about the efficacy of the 2000 level surveys.