# Annual Academic Assessment Report Cover Sheet

Assessment reports are due the 1st Wednesday after the Fall Term.
Email to: assessment@unlv.edu

## Program Information:

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<th>Program Assessed</th>
<th>English Department Undergraduate Program</th>
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<td>Department</td>
<td>English</td>
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<td>College</td>
<td>Liberal Arts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Department Chair</td>
<td>Gary Totten</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment Coordinator</td>
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<td>Date Submitted</td>
<td>20 December 2017</td>
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**Contact Person for This Report**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Ed Nagelhout</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>895-5073</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td><a href="mailto:ed.nagelhout@unlv.edu">ed.nagelhout@unlv.edu</a></td>
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In conjunction with current efforts to review and update our curriculum, the Department of English plans to develop a comprehensive assessment plan for the future, which will include significant discussions over the coming year of the ways that assessment can improve our teaching, enhance our students’ learning, and create a more open and supportive environment.

This report will describe our first steps toward curriculum reform, the ways that we hope to establish assessment at the center of that reform, including the role of both short- and long-term assessment strategies for improving our departmental learning environment.

CURRICULUM REFORM IN THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

The Department of English held a retreat before the Fall 2017 semester, and among the many issues that we covered on that day, the faculty agreed overwhelmingly that we are ready to initiate curriculum reform. We also agreed that curriculum reform is not something to rush into, and that assessment needs to play a key role in our short- and long-term discussions around curriculum reform.

In the Fall 2017 semester, we began discussions to critically review our current major goals/objectives in order to revise them to align with current standards for 21st Century literacy and the 21st Century English major. Our current major goals/objectives are:

Upon completion of the B.A. in English, students will be able to:

- demonstrate familiarity with major authors, works, genres, and movements in British and American literature
- demonstrate the ability to read, write and think critically
- demonstrate an understanding, of English language, literary history, and linguistics
- demonstrate knowledge of theoretical and critical methods
- demonstrate knowledge of multi-ethnic literature

As a faculty, we agreed that these goals/objectives are not wholly aligned with current standards in the discipline, nor do they offer us measurable opportunities for evaluating the success of our students, the success of our courses, and the success of our major.

As we continue discussions in the coming year for developing a more comprehensive assessment plan, we began our work with this guiding question:

How might we update our degree objectives and learning outcomes in line with disciplinary guidelines?

As a comparison, we reviewed two nationally recognized sources:

First, the NCTE 21st Century Literacies Framework (http://www.ncte.org/governance/21stcenturyframework) provides insight for us into literacies as “multiple, dynamic, and malleable, inextricably linked with particular histories, life possibilities, and social trajectories of individuals and groups.” We believe that literacies are at the core of our major, and an understanding of these literacies from a broad, yet flexible, perspective like this is imperative to our future success in the classroom.
The Framework also provides a set of key terms and concepts that we can apply to the revision of our own major goals/objectives. For example,

Active, successful participants in this 21st century global society must be able to

- Develop proficiency and fluency with the tools of technology;
- Build intentional cross-cultural connections and relationships with others so to pose and solve problems collaboratively and strengthen independent thought;
- Design and share information for global communities to meet a variety of purposes;
- Manage, analyze, and synthesize multiple streams of simultaneous information;
- Create, critique, analyze, and evaluate multimedia texts;
- Attend to the ethical responsibilities required by these complex environments.

More importantly for this report, the Framework helps us think more deeply and more critically about how we might use assessment more effectively in our department. For example, the Framework describes both “traditional elements of assessment for 21st Century student learning,” along with “newer elements of assessment of 21st Century student learning,” such as important considerations like access, depth of information readily accessible to students, selection of tools or media, ethical and legal implications for remixing products, the ethics and safety exhibited in students’ online behavior, and the extent to which students recognize the impact of their own digital footprint, among others.

The Framework also provides insights that force us to consider more flexible and responsive assessment practices such as

- students’ greater proficiency with tools or formats than the teacher, which may generate outcomes not anticipated in an assessment rubric;
- technology glitches beyond students’ control that negatively impact the quality of the final products;
- scope of collaboration, in the classroom and globally, leading to a greater need for processes that assess progress and achievement of individuals and groups;
- support and celebration of the increasing diversity in students’ talents, imagination, perspectives, cultures, and lived experiences;
- recognition that the processes of learning and doing are as important as the quality of the final product;
- students’ self-evaluation and reflection on process and product integrated into the learning process and contributing to students’ continued growth;
- ability of students and teachers to examine growth over time in authentic ways.

Second, we reviewed and discussed the MLA Teagle Foundation Report on the Undergraduate Major in Language and Literature (https://apps.mla.org/pdf/2008_mla_whitepaper.pdf). And while it is nearly ten years old, it still offers relevant insight into current standards for skills exhibited by English majors across the country. In general, the skills listed are fairly straightforward, and in many ways traditional, such as write clearly, speak articulately, read closely, and evaluate and present evidence accurately, but this
does not diminish the fact that we need to account for these skills and determine best practices for assessing these skills, as well as provide the best opportunities for students to exhibit these skills effectively.

The conclusions from the Teagle task force further offer terms and concepts to consider in revising our major goals/objectives and in developing a more comprehensive and long-term assessment plan:

- the arts of language and the tools of literacy are key qualifications to full participation in the social, economic, literary, and cultural life of the twenty-first century
- literature and reading are central to undergraduate education; interpretation, translation, and cross-cultural communication are essential in today's world
- to meet the demands of technology, globalization, and the explosion of disciplinary knowledge, baccalaureate degree programs in English should include the following:
  - a coherent program of study
  - collaborative teamwork among faculty members
  - interdepartmental cooperative teaching
  - the adoption of outcome measurements

ROLE OF SHORT- AND LONG-TERM ASSESSMENT IN CURRICULUM REFORM

Thinking about comprehensive assessment means mapping the entire learning environment for our majors. On the one hand, we want to keep in mind the guiding questions established by the Office of Assessment:

- What are the student learning outcomes? Please provide a numbered list.
- Which learning outcomes were assessed?
- How were they assessed? (Programs must use at least one direct assessment of student learning.)
- Undergraduate programs should assess at least one University Undergraduate Learning Outcome (UULO) each year, which may or may not overlap with a program learning outcome.
- What was learned from the assessment results?
- How did the program respond to what was learned?

These guiding questions help establish a baseline of expectation, but we also need to determine our specific needs and the ways that our assessment plans will fit university expectations, exceed disciplinary standards, and provide appropriate evidence that shows the success of our major. More importantly, in constructing our long-term assessment plans, the English department will begin conversations over the coming year that examine assessment as a support tool for both students and faculty.

To do this, we will begin with our own guiding questions:

- What needs to be measured?
- Why does it need to be measured?
- How should it be measured?
- How can these measurements help our students?
- How can these measurements help us as teachers?
• How can these measurements improve our departmental learning environment?

• How can our assessments provide evidence/materials for assessing strength/success of the major?

AND, AT THE SAME TIME,

• How can our assessments provide evidence/materials for students taking the next step towards a career after graduation?

Aligned with these guiding questions is our own framework for assessing our work at multiple levels:

Major --> Major Goals/Objectives
    | Course --> Course Outcomes
    | Projects --> Evaluation Criteria
    | Daily Learning Activities

We can also use this framework to establish consistency and coherence across the major and for describing the relationships between and among the different levels. This is important in that many students still experience our major course by course. Even though links between and among courses are clearly visible to those of us who know the content, we realize that students often fail to see the connections.

While understanding how the various courses in a major fit together to build a coherent knowledge base will ultimately be a major goal/objective for English, we certainly will want to keep this in mind as a primary goal for developing a long-term assessment plan. This will help us have productive discussions and plan a curriculum designed to provide students with the opportunity to do that integration (including the design of a capstone course). How it is accomplished, whether some course structures and learning activities are more successful at achieving the goal than others, remains a question that we hope our assessment plan can answer.

In conclusion, over the coming year, the Department of English will be initiating curriculum reform and determining the ways that assessment can best support our students, our faculty, and our learning environment.

This will include a review of our current First-Year Experience course, our Milestone Experience courses, and the development of our Culminating Experience course. Moreover, curriculum reform will address the effectiveness of our credit requirements, the horizontal and vertical structure of required and elective courses, and the transparency between and among in-class projects and learning activities, course outcomes, and the goals/objectives for our major.