

ANNUAL REPORT
STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT
ENGLISH (AY 2020-2021)

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Note: Per the provost's request, we are now turning in annually a report that documents our assessment work from the *previous* calendar year which can now include all data (including spring work). Each year we will continue to cycle through all our courses and then report on the previous year's activity.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW & STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

The English program encompasses two main components: Composition, consisting of lower-division WRTG courses 090, 110, 111, 211, and 212, and the upper division ENGL course 311; and the Bachelor of Arts in English, consisting of a core of required ENGL courses on the 200 level, and advanced ENGL courses on the 300 and 400 levels in Literature, Literature and the Environment, and Creative Writing. Assessments of student learning outcomes in each of these components serve different goals and embrace separate criteria. The GER-oriented service component of Composition is not an element of the BA in English, though it is delivered by English faculty, one term hire, and adjuncts.

English B.A. Program Student Learning Outcomes:

- **Apply various theoretical approaches and methodologies to the analysis of literature or the craft of writing.**
- **Critically analyze or explicate literature and writing from diverse, marginalized perspectives.**
- **Demonstrate advanced reading and writing skills specific to their literary or creative disciplines.**
- **Reflect on their own writing, demonstrating an awareness of technique, audience, and purpose.**
- **Demonstrate professional skills through a capstone experience, internship, or senior thesis.**

The English faculty assesses our work in three primary categories:

- **Program Assessment:** B.A. in English degree with three emphasis areas (literature, creative writing, and literature and the environment)
- **Course Assessment:** composition, literature, creative writing courses
- **Additional Assessment:** 110 portfolios
 - Note: This assessment is done for our most vulnerable students to help ensure their success moving forward.

PROGRAM ASSESSMENT: PROCESS & ANALYSIS

All English B.A. graduates are required to take either the Humanities Capstone course or complete a thesis or internship. In each of these options students typically present their final work through community presentations, thesis defenses, etc. Starting in Fall 18, at least two English faculty members have attended each of these events or presentations, and using the above outcomes as a rubric, they create a “scorecard” to evaluate each student in those areas. We use these “scorecards” to assess the program outcomes. Most of our students choose an internship.

Internships Students

In AY 19/20 we had three students complete internships, all with *Tidal Echoes*: Callie Ziegler, Erika Bergren, and Kelsey Walsh. They all worked with Professor Emily Wall, faculty advisor for the journal.

- **Faculty Scorecard:**

- Professor Emily Wall**

- **Callie Ziegler:** Callie was this year’s senior editor. She proved to be outstanding. Covid and the quarantine happened halfway through her internship, and she ended up out of state, living back home, but never missed a beat. We continued on meeting weekly, and she accomplished every task for the internship. She got very creative about how to launch and sell the books, and even created a sense of fun and community connection through all of it. We were very lucky to have Callie as our editor when the pandemic hit.
 - **Erika Bergren:** Erika was the junior editor, mentoring under Callie, and learning the ropes of the journal. She proved herself to be an excellent student. She used listening, writing, speaking, and analytical skills as she learned from Callie and me how to publish a journal.
 - **Kelsey Walsh:** Kelsey Walsh was the fall intern. Her primary work was soliciting work and organizing all submissions into a manuscript that could be read and judged by the board. Her other major task was writing two interviews to be published. Her writing skills were outstanding; it took very little revision and help on my part to finish those. She also demonstrated excellent public speaking skills and creative innovation. She created an Insta Reading Series on Instagram and Facebook that received many “likes” and views.

- **Student Self-Reflection on SLOs:**

- **Callie Ziegler:**

Being editor this year was quite different from last year. We had so many email meetings with a lot of professional people. Usually, we meet these people in person, but not this year. Last year, I worked on my professional behavior in person, this year I learned how to be professional in emails. It made it more difficult because some of the people had never met me before, so they are going off my emails to judge me professional.

About 1/3 of this years internship was done through social distancing. This really tested my ability to work independently and perform required tasks in a timely manner. There were difficult times, but everything came together in the end.

With no physical launch, we had to think on our feet and come up with a new way to showcase our featured artists and people published. We worked together and planned a virtual launch. Being senior editor this year was challenging, but I believe I learned how to be a better leader. I had to learn different ways to teach and show my junior editor the ropes due to social distancing. I had to delegate tasks, keep up with who was doing what, and keep them on track of deadlines.

- **Erika Bergren:**

Being the junior editor of Tidal Echoes this year was an incredible opportunity. I very much enjoyed learning all the technical aspects of the internship and am very grateful to have had the guidance of Callie and Emily as senior editor and advisor on this project, especially since a large chunk of it was done through social distancing and online.

I did a lot of the reaching out to bookstores and libraries toward the end of the internship, which was difficult because a lot of businesses were locking down due to COVID-19. When lockdown first occurred, I had a hard time adapting and working independently, but this internship has really made me be better about working on my own and being a reliable team member when I know others are counting on me.

Overall I feel like I learned many of the inner workings of publications through this internships as well as skills required to be part of a team even remotely, like being accountable and doing tasks in a timely manner. Though this year was a strange one for everyone and we all had to adapt and change a lot of our routines, I feel fully prepared to take over as senior editor next year.

- **Kelsey Walsh:**

Throughout my internship I had to develop many new skills in order to meet the needs for the journal. This opportunity required that I manage my time in a professional manner while keeping in contact with many people to address the current tasks for the week. Some of the tasks that I completed this semester included: promoting through paper materials or on the radio, communicating with Tidal Echoes' staff, and creating material for the editorial board. This internship strengthened both my professional writing and public speaking, all while forcing me to be in charge of my own deadlines and communicating if I was struggling.

I would say that I met the goals for this internship because I pushed my boundaries by speaking publicly at events and improving my writing by publishing promotional advertisements. One of the pieces I am most proud of was my 49 Writers blog post because it needed to be more creative than a traditional PSA and so I was tasked with becoming a more well-rounded writer. There were certain challenges throughout the process such as: transcribing interviews, ensuring the manuscript was accurate, and formatting all the grading material for the board, however I feel that I was able to meet the challenges and complete the tasks in a timely manner.

I am thankful that I had the chance to intern with Tidal Echoes and look forward to working with the team as we get closer to the launch party for this year's Tidal Echoes release.

Thesis Student

In AY 20/21 we had one student, Justin Price, advised by Kevin Maier. His thesis is "incomplete" at the time of writing this report. We also note that this thesis project bypassed our new faculty review process; this may be a good reminder that we want to continue to follow our new protocols.

COURSE ASSESSMENT: PROCESS & ANALYSIS

On a two-year cycle, we assess every WRTG and ENGL course being taught on all three campuses. In the fall of 2019, we assessed all the ENGL courses (Literature and Creative Writing), and in the fall of 2020, we assessed all WRTG courses.

During our convocation meeting, when faculty from all three campuses are “in the room” (this year it was over Zoom), we set aside two hours to complete the bulk of our investigations. For each course, we create “assessment groups.” For example, this fall we had groups for each composition course, with several being combined due to falling numbers of faculty. Each group has a faculty chair, one who has taught the course a number of times. Faculty are assigned groups by the Directors of Writing but can elect to change groups if they want.

Prior to convocation, faculty members send the Directors of Writing paper samples with instructor comments and a copy of their syllabi. The Directors of Writing compile these into reading packets and distribute.

During the convocation meeting, each group reads through the artifacts and compares them to the SLOs for that particular course. Each group then makes a list of observations and/or recommendations. The faculty have found the open conversation during these meetings to be the most valuable aspect of this assessment work. Ideas are shared about assignments, problems are discussed, and new approaches are tried. We find that often we end up wanting to slightly revise course descriptions and/or SLOs.

After convocation, the chair of each group is responsible for producing a 2-5-page report on the group findings. Emily Wall, as Co-Director of Writing, compiles all the reports and creates a comprehensive assessment report that is then shared with all faculty who teach these courses (including adjunct faculty).

Note: We invite all adjunct faculty to be part of these conversations and find this time to be a good mentoring opportunity.

Writing Courses Assessment Report, Convocation, Fall 2020

WRTG 090/110 Group:

Rod Landis (chair)

Math Trafton

Geoff Kirsch (adjunct)

We reviewed three recently written student papers, one 090 and two 110 samples, as well as a WRTG 110 syllabus. Two were narrative papers and one a response to a poem.

Writing assessment at UAS dates from the incorporation of three community colleges into one regional university. In 1990 upper and lower division reviews of student writing were instituted, of which WRTG 110 portfolio assessment remains as a vestigial curiosity.

Our overriding impression is that perhaps, after 30 years, the time has come for our developmental writing students to write papers that do not fulfill mere narrative or descriptive purposes. While it is hoped that narrative and descriptive aspects of writing are present in any finished piece of writing, to assign papers that have them as foci seems to work against some important teaching objectives.

While we stop short of recommending that composition faculty cease assigning narrative/descriptive papers, we do urge a conversation about the issue this year, perhaps in the wrap-up discussions that follow lower-division writing portfolio assessment. The specific reasons are thus:

1. A solid thesis is difficult to build into and often, when it is there, difficult to identify in a narrative paper. Learning how to frame a thesis statement/paragraph is an important feature of WRTG 110. Far too often students get away with an “implied thesis” in narrative papers, and narratives are often the first paper assigned.
2. Narratives often result in simplistic and repetitive expression in student work at this level. If the purpose of such a paper is, for example, not just to tell a story or describe a memory, but to relate self-discovery, then it is assumed narrative elements serve a developmental phase of what will eventually be an essay that is “about something.”
3. The SLO’s for WRTG 110 do not align with assignments of narrative and descriptive essays. Two of the three listed outcomes specifically reference response writing as a skill to be practiced. We only have so much time to teach a lot of approaches to writing. Ten years ago it was common for WRTG (then ENGL) 111 to also include in the curriculum narrative papers, but department faculty decided to concentrate on other writing modes, such as persuasion, process, exposition, and evaluation, that better equip the developmental writer for college writing in classes other than English.

As a side issue, we would like to see if possible two drafts of the papers offered as samples: one an earlier draft and one finished draft. Three total seems to be the right number for the time allotted, however.

WRTG 111 Group:

Kevin Maier (chair)
Richard Simpson
Teague Whalen

Followed our usual procedures. Group of Richard Simpson, Teague Whalen, and Kevin Maier read a range of student papers and reviewed syllabi from around the region. As a first step, we all “graded” these essays. We had relatively close alignment on paper grading, but found that the instructor graded essays from their courses higher than the group, on average a half or full grade higher.

We had a broader discussion about SLO 4: **Demonstrate a critical engagement with the cultures and environments of Southeast Alaska.** How can we measure this? Is this a core part of what we’re doing? Harder to assess via student papers, but perhaps accomplished with a conversation like this one during annual assessment. Some of us design our class around this SLO, not a core part for others.

Outcomes: might be useful to have a larger discussion about grade inflation. And about the ways in which retention issues encourage us to be more encouraging than critical. Let students organize and think about what grades mean? Equity issues. Pandemic presents an opportunity to rethink what the class looks like, what grades look like. 111 assessment groups suggest we have a conversation about grades as a full department.

Also might want to discuss SLO 4, which is the UAS specific SLO for WRTG 111. Is this something we want to revisit?

WRTG 211/212 Group:

Will Elliot (chair)
Emily Wall
Stephen Florian

WRTG 212 has benefited from some substantial improvements over the past two years, as recommended by the previous assessment. At that time, the assessment group recommended updating the SLOS, addressing particular holes in students' content knowledge, and ensuring more continuity in staffing. WRTG faculty have since worked to implement each of these recommendations, with the assessment group reconvening at the 2020 Convocation to evaluate progress.

The assessment group noted satisfactory progress on the recommendations above. For example, the revised SLOs specified greater student competency with design, formatting, and other aspects of publishing professional documents. Now that 212 is being consistently taught by full-time faculty, we've been able to observe this in consecutive 212 sections.

To confirm these general impressions, the assessment group examined a sample syllabus and student paper. Beyond the immediate goal of assessing 212, this is enormously helpful for professional development, allowing faculty to compare the concrete details of each other's course materials and activities. For example, two instructors were using the same type of assignment, a "process description" (e.g., a recipe or instruction manual), to teach different skills, and therefore scheduled that assignment at different but equally effective points in the semester. Discussing such parallels helps instructors design more effective and relevant assignments.

Evaluating the sample syllabus and paper more closely, the group arrived at the following conclusions. In general, the syllabus was exemplary as a resource students can return to throughout the course for guidance as they pursue the SLOs; similarly, the sample paper achieved each SLO satisfactorily. One aspect the group noticed was a tension in the paper between long and conversational paragraphs, typical of other classes, and the more concise style and formatting (e.g., simple commands, bulleted lists) appropriate to technical writing. Balancing the two modes of writing is tricky for professionals, but especially so for students, who approach the SLOs of each class influenced by the conventions of other courses.

No changes were recommended by the group, but a final issue raised concerned the perennial challenge of assessing wide-ranging program SLOs in a single student paper. For example, one member found it difficult to evaluate whether the paper met the program learning outcome of "Critically analyze or explicate literature and writing from diverse, marginalized perspectives." While the paper didn't explicitly engage with such perspectives, the syllabus strongly emphasized issues of audience, which necessarily includes "diverse, marginalized perspectives," so the assessment group was confident the SLO is being met. Ultimately what this reflects most clearly is perhaps just how many different types of courses the English program encompasses; in that sense, the program SLOs are important for unifying these diverse offerings by broadening the relevance of each individual course.

ADDITIONAL ASSESSMENT & PILOT PROGRAMS

WRTG 110

With WRTG 110, we undergo more rigorous assessment. In addition to the above practices, we also assess assignments, SLOs, and student success four times a year, at each portfolio reading. Students in WRTG 110 submit a portfolio of papers at mid-term and at finals time.

Students must pass the portfolio to pass the class. Portfolios are read by the Directors of Writing (Emily in Juneau, Rod in Ketchikan) and a panel of faculty, both part-time and tenure-track. Each reading session begins with a “norming” session where everyone participating rates several papers and then compares scores and notes. After the reading, we have an assessment session where we compare assignments, discuss problems, and share ideas. This is a particularly valuable exercise for adjuncts who benefit from the mentoring of more senior faculty.

After each of the four reading sessions Professors Landis and Wall collect data on pass rates, and create a mini report of questions, ideas, problems, analysis of SLOs, etc. and share with all English faculty. We take particular note of any section that has a higher-than-normal no-pass number, and of any students who are taking the class more than once. This conversation often centers around student barriers to success and we brainstorm ways to solve any of the issues we can address. (Note: we did not include last year's reports here but would be happy to share them with anyone interested.)

The Directors of Writing have kept meticulous records of the lower-division composition assessment for over two decades. This portfolio requirement for WRTG 110 (used to be ENGL110), which has been singled out more than once by accreditors as a model for programmatic assessment, is regional in scope. Until 2008 all three campuses participated; after which Juneau and Ketchikan continued to offer the WRTG 110 class and gather department faculty to perform formative and summative writing portfolio assessments. Eventually budget constraints made associated travel costs too high, and for the past five years Juneau and Ketchikan have held separate evaluation sessions twice a semester. However, there has always been a document that reports the regional performance of students in this university-wide composition course.

- In the past five years (Spring 2015-Spring 2020) **491** students were enrolled in WRTG 110. (We did not count summer, as those numbers are typically much smaller, although a regional portfolio assessment team consisting of Ketchikan and Juneau faculty adjudicate these students' work, too.)
- Of those 491 enrolled, **418** (85%) submitted final portfolios for evaluation. This number assumes some student attrition at mid-term, when the formative review occurs and those whose work is incomplete or unsatisfactory often withdraw from the class. Every effort is made to keep them; at mid-term portfolios that do not receive a satisfactory pass are "warned," not "failed," and students are typically placed on an improvement plan with mandatory visits to the Writing Center, supplementary skills work, and the like.
- Those students submitting portfolios receive a grade only after they learn whether the portfolio panel has passed them, after which they are able to register for WRTG 111. The satisfactory pass is a vote of confidence that they will do well in the next class of the course sequence. Over the past five years, **355** WRTG 110 students passed the final review, and **63** failed -- which requires them to repeat the class.

- **85% of those who took this class over the past five years passed.** This is significant because the instructor -- while depended upon for his or her perceptions regarding student work -- does not decide whether the student writing passes; the panel does, making this assessment activity a standard for objectivity and impartiality.

Directed Self Placement

Will Elliott chaired a working group (Allison Neeland and Emily Wall) to explore the option of Directed Self Placement after then-Provost Karen Carey asked us to explore it. With the quarantine, this process was expedited and moved up a semester.

Our switch from proctored exams to an online directed self-placement process for writing classes (DSP) has been successful, reducing logistical hurdles and costs for students, without posing drawbacks for faculty and advisors. Specifically:

- A significant number of students selected their WRTG class via DSP in the Fall semester— 70, enough to fill 3 sections.
- Retention rates match those of previous years.
- No students self-placed inappropriately and needed to be moved into a different class.
- Rural students no longer have to overcome the logistical barriers of proctored exams.
- Students saved money in testing fees.

The university administered 402 English placement tests in AY18/19, for a cost of \$3680 to the university. More specifically, 167 English placement tests were given between the end of Spring '19 and beginning of Fall '19. Based on 2019 enrollment, we estimate that directed self-placement will save students \$1670 between Fall '20 and Spring '21.

Finally, we have just learned that the New Jersey Institute of Technology wrote to ask if they could model their DSP after ours.

The B.A. in English Offered 100% Online

One of our department goals for the past two years has been to see if we can put our degree entirely online. Nearly all of our upper division courses already are offered online in shared rotation with Ketchikan, Juneau, and Sitka. The WRTG courses are now offered online as well. We found this fall that the only courses *not* regularly offered online are the 200-level survey and literature courses. Those courses are taught by Juneau faculty and have traditionally been taught only on campus. However, the quarantine has offered us a sudden but useful crash course in teaching all our courses online, and after teaching online this fall, the literature faculty have agreed that going forward, those 200-level courses will be taught in a hybrid format (both online and on campus). The result of this decision is that any student now interested in the B.A. in English will be able to take it 100% online.

The English and Writing faculty respectfully request marketing support (and funding if needed) to market this degree in the next few months.

INNOVATIONS IN FACULTY TEACHING & STUDENT SUCCESS STORIES

Innovations in Faculty Teaching

While the switch to online teaching in the middle of the Spring 2020 semester required some careful adjustments to our course syllabus, it also permitted new directions in pedagogical practice. Previously not all faculty taught online courses, but now 100% of our faculty are teaching online, and brainstorming ways to make our courses more accessible moving forward, even after the quarantine has ended.

In Richard Simpson's ENGL 217 Introduction to Film course, online delivery permitted access to filmmakers from around the world to visit the classroom. Richard reached out to Shaz Bennett, director of *Alaska is a Drag*, which won Best Feature Film at numerous Independent Film Festivals in 2019, and invited the director to join class for a discussion with students about the film (<http://www.alaskaisadrag.com>). Before her visit, students viewed the film together online and then prepared questions for the filmmaker. Shaz shared her experience making the film, answered all questions she received, and inspired students to create their own films. The opportunity to speak with and learn from a Hollywood filmmaker offered the course a personal view inside the filmmaking process and many students were inspired to create a film of their own as a final project for the class.

Math Trafton and Emily Wall collaborated to reimagine the way the ENGL 261 workshop is set up. Once we changed the prerequisite from 211 to 111 (following a Statewide mandate to align all GERs), we found we needed to change the course; students were coming in with a much different level of preparedness. We are also seeing an increase in dual enrollment in that class. Both Emily and Math separately redesigned their classes to experiment, then had a meeting and shared a series of emails to discuss what worked/didn't work in their redesigned classes. Each took ideas from the other one. The 261 class is now pretty aligned between the two campuses, and in its new form is better serving our students.

Student Success Stories

Almost exactly a year ago, Math Trafton got a handwritten card from Orin Pierson saying this: *"Hi, Dr. T, this is just a note of appreciation. Last night, or evening really, I was enthralled with the book I'm reading, The Overstory by Richard Powers, and I lost track of time and got too charged up from coffee and great reading and I really couldn't sleep last night. Then in that liminal restlessness I found myself in a gratitude reverie. I have filled my life up with creative writing. I'm working toward my MFA in fiction and learning so much. I'm leading a creative writing workshop in my community, having led workshops, thus far, with nineteen cohorts of writers, and it continues to be deeply inspiring. I may even continue the education beyond the MFA. I only rattle all that off to illustrate that my favorite thing in life these days is creative writing, that journey into one's own mind, that practice of building one's voice, and then the great gift of empowering others to connect to their own voices too. All of that and more started, for me, in your classes specifically. Your gifts as a teacher continue to rain goodness into my life. Thank you forever for your hard work and generosity with your students."*

In the past year, Math has also written letters of recommendation for Delcenia Cosman (MFA/MA in Creative Writing at UAF), Paula Bengtson (master's in Marriage and Family Counseling at University of St. Thomas), and Rosie Ainza (MA in Peace and Justice and University of San Diego). The first two are, we believe, BLA graduates, so not our program students, but they both took a number of ENGL461 courses with Math.

Emily Wall has written several letters of recommendation for students applying to M.F.A. programs. And one of her BA English students (and *Tidal Echoes* editor), Lexi Cherry just graduated from the UAA MFA program. Another student completed her MFA, is now teaching, and invited Emily to do a collaborative assignment with her workshop and Emily's. A third recent graduate has just entered her first year in an MFA program in Florida.

One of Emily's creative writing students, who has taken 4 workshops with her, had work published in a national literary journal with a very small acceptance rate. This was a huge boost to this student's confidence in her work.