Student Learning Assessment Report
University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez
Department of English
February 2, 2007

Submitted by Judith Casey, Ed.D., Assessment Coordinator

Section I: Mission and Student Learning Outcomes (Graduating Student Profile)

Mission Statement

The English Department, which exists in the academic environment in which English is a second language, addresses the needs of all students who enter the UPR-Mayagüez. It directs its efforts toward the development of educated, responsible, and cultured citizens and professionals in all areas as well as in fields related to English Studies, primarily those involved with the study of Linguistics and Literature. Graduates of departmental programs will be qualified to contribute in an effective manner to the social, cultural, and economic development of Puerto Rico and the world at large. The English Department focuses its efforts and initiatives equally in three fundamental areas: instruction, research, and service to the university community.

Learning Outcomes of the Department of English

Upon completion of their General Education courses offered by the Department of English, students should have the following skills, values, and knowledge:

- Communication skills in writing and speaking in English
- Critical reading, writing, thinking
- Analysis, interpretation, and evaluation of courses
- Problem-solving strategies/abilities
- Research skills
- Honesty and ethics, including awareness of plagiarism
- Respect for nature and the environment, particularly of Puerto Rico
- Knowledge about Puerto Rican heritage and culture
- Values of a democratic society and the role of the individual in such a society
- Awareness of the role English plays in academics and professions
- Respect for diversity in all its dimensions
- Appreciation for the humanities, the arts, and the sciences
- A good foundation for advanced studies and/or success in their professions
- Teamwork
- Interest in life-long learning

English Majors, in addition to the above, by the time of their graduation, will have the following skills, values and knowledge:
• Computer literacy and its linguistic applications
• Knowledge of up-to-date linguistic and literary tools and techniques
• Awareness of contemporary issues
• Knowledge of the systematicity of language
• Knowledge of different literary genres
• Writing essays for academic discourse communities
• Writing for civic discourse communities
• Knowledge of literary and historical continuity in British and American literature

Section II: Department Student Learning Assessment Project

Focus of the Assessment Project

The Department of English, in addition to graduating English majors from our BA and MAEE programs, also is responsible for student outcomes that specifically encompass the overall learning outcomes of the College of Arts and Sciences, the outcomes for general education. In Ingl 3201-2, the third and fourth semesters of required courses for students placed in the basic track, have an emphasis on reading and writing. Using this population, our focus will be on “how to write an effective thesis statement.”

Justification

Proficient academic writing is required of all RUM students, all of whom pass through our English Department. Knowing how to write an effective (clear, limited, and useful) thesis statement—the focus of the current project—provides the basis for academic writing and for many other kinds of writing as well. Two semesters ago, we assessed this outcome in Ingl3202. Because this outcome is taught in the prerequisite course Ingl 3201, it might be expected that the majority of Ingl3202 students would know how to write an effective thesis statement. Our data indicated that our expectations were not fulfilled, as the combined summary of faculty assessment indicated less than half, 42% of students, were capable of achieving the objective at the semester’s onset. However, since the learning of this skill is on-going for a student’s entire RUM education, the percentage tells us very clearly that we must continue to emphasize the teaching and learning of this crucial aspect of academic writing.

Thus we decided to repeat the same assessment in all sections of Ingl3201 and Ingl3202, and to create a rubric to further support the teaching and assessment effort.

Population

Our plan for one particular example of closing the loop of assessment is focused not on our English majors, a relatively small group, but instead on one selected group of students, the 894 currently enrolled in Ingl3201 (21 sections taught by 10 faculty) and Ingl3202 (8 sections taught by 4 faculty), the final courses of the basic sequence. Thus the total number of faculty impacted was 14.

Assessment

The plan for Fall 2006 included a pre-intervention measure, a variety of classroom intervention applications, and a post-test to be completed at the end of the term. At this time, a
variety of teaching strategies were collected from the faculty, though no new teaching strategies were implemented. At the first committee meeting of Ingl3201-2 faculty in August, 2006, the 15 faculty members present (14 of whom were teaching the courses in question) created a rubric for the purposes of this project (see appendix A).

**Pre intervention activity:** Formal pre-intervention assessment of this objective was carried out by all faculty using the newly created rubric to evaluate the first revised, edited paper students wrote at the start of the term.

**Classroom Interventions:** Some specific examples were collected (please see Appendix B). In general, faculty use a combination of instructional methods to teach how to write an effective thesis statement:

(a) Students are given the definition of a thesis statement: essentially, one sentence containing a topic and the opinion of the writer.

(b) Students read assigned writings in order to identify and discuss thesis statements written by others.

(c) Students practice writing and refining thesis statements (usually in groups) on assigned topics. A thesis statement that is too narrow will not give the writer enough to write about; a thesis statement that is too broad will not allow the writer to focus in depth.

(d) Students work through a series of drafts in order to complete a formal paper; thus students receive feedback on the effectiveness of their thesis statements and have ample opportunity to revise and improve them.

Ultimately, students are assigned a formal paper that must have a thesis statement. Students will develop and revise their work through a series of drafts. The thesis statement, if problematical, will be revised and refined along with the rest of the paper over a period of several weeks. In this way, students experience first hand that the creation of an effective thesis statement is essential to the success of their writing. Students on average will write three or four formal papers during the semester, each one of which will be required to have an effective thesis statement that is developed by writing a series of drafts, incorporating the professor’s corrective feedback.

**Post-Intervention:** Faculty applied the same rubric to the final revised, edited paper students wrote at the end of the term.

**Results**

The results of the post-intervention assessment showed very little change from the beginning of the semester. However, the totals for the pretest for all students clearly indicate that most were already successful at the start of the semester.

The following chart summarizes the faculty’s pre- and post-test results using the rubric; the chart shows all four items of the rubric combined (a complete, detailed report is available from the English Department) of all students in Ingl3202 and then in Ingl3201. The response “yes” indicates complete success; “partial” indicates that the student has a good grasp of the characteristic; “no” indicates that the student was not able to succeed.
The data show that there was a slight improvement overall in the “yes” category, but the change is not significant. For Ingl3201, not all faculty managed to submit their post-tests. Thus for purposes of comparison, only those completing both pre- and post-tests (seven sections) are shown in the following chart, which summarizes all four categories of the thesis statement. As above, the improvement is not significant; in fact, the “somewhat” and “no” categories increased slightly.

Possible Reasons or Hypotheses

As educators, we hope that the overall percentage of students able to write an effective thesis statement will increase from pre-test to post-test; however, our results were inconclusive. Thus, if the results show that the resulting percentage of success at end of term is the same or less than at pre-intervention, the assessment team can easily consider that the difficulty and complexity of each writing assignment increases as the semester progresses. For example, at the
start of the term, students may write their first paper expressing an opinion of a work they have read. Their thesis statement will include the topic and their opinion. However, at the end of the semester, students may be required to write a formal argument paper involving detailed support for each claim, including refutation of the opposition, and to do research to back up their thesis. In this case, the thesis statement is naturally required to be quite well developed and appropriate.

Course of Action

The pooled results were returned to the Ingl3201-2 committee, which consists of all faculty teaching the course each semester (tenured, tenure track, temporary, and graduate TAs). In January, the committee discussed the results and reaffirmed their consensus as to their interpretation of the specific objective of “write an effective thesis statement.” While the results were acceptable, faculty were not satisfied with the apparent lack of progress. In March, 2007, faculty will devote one of their meetings to a discussion of interventions. A recommendation will be made at this time that the faculty implement an end-of-term writing sample, similar to the one they always take at the start of the semester, and use these two writings as a basis of comparison rather than the process of comparing revised drafts. In this way, a more accurate picture should emerge of how our students’ writing has improved; such an approach will also eliminate the complex problem of how to compare the effectiveness of thesis statements that are written in a variety of genres, given tasks that increase in difficulty as the semester progresses.

In February, in preparation for the March meeting, the committee began a general review and revision of all student learning outcomes currently listed on the official syllabus. In light of our experiences with the assessment of writing an effective thesis statement, the committee felt ready to examine all objectives and thus be prepared, in March, to more fully discuss our overall teaching theories, approaches, methods, and classroom activities. We will also have the collection of intervention measures gathered previously, to share with all faculty. The committee will then take whatever action is necessary to improve results and to ensure consistency of instruction across sections, based on their collaborative and mutual understanding of each objective (as time permits – the follow-up will be on-going) and the combination of strategies to be used to teach each objective.

Closing of the Loop: Second Project

Section IIb: Additional Department Student Learning Assessment Project

The Department of English, following its previous plan, is engaging each sector in Loop Closing Projects. Therefore, a member of the Literature Sector, Dr. Nandita Batra, carried out her own project during the fall semester as well. Her report is given here:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INGL4017: The Romantic Movement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus of Assessment Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>- The learning outcome to be measured is for students to “relate excerpted passages from the primary texts to their contexts.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>- The focus is on English Majors taking INGL4017: The Romantic Movement.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Approximately 14 students in Dr. Nandita Batra’s class.</td>
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<td>- Pre-test: to give excerpted passages that have not yet been discussed.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
- Intervention: lecture, reading, class discussion, essay writing, tests.
- Post-test: excerpted passages will appear in the final exam.

**Justification**
- This objective tests knowledge, reading and analytical skills.

**Measures**
- Pre-test and final exam.
- No new tools will be created for the assessment project. The post-test will be the final exam created for the course.

**Results**
- All students meeting the requirements of the course should show an improvement in the objective.
- There may be greater discrepancy between English and non-English majors both in the pre and post tests.

**Possible Reasons or Hypotheses**
- If more than 50% of the post-test population shows marked improvement, then the course interventions lead to successful achievement of learning outcome.
- If less than 50% of the post-test population shows marked improvement, either intervention methods and/or the professor and/or the students have not been successful.

**Course of Action**
- If less than 50% of the post-test population shows marked improvement, then the course interventions need to be reconsidered and/or supplemented the next time the course is offered.

**Timeline of Proposed Activities**
- Pre-test was administered in October, post test during final exam period in December.
- An assessment report was prepared by January 2007.

**Results Analyzed**
- 6 Students from Ingl. 3322 (Survey of British Literature II) volunteered to take the pre-test in November 2006. Coincidentally, they presented a range of students, A-F. As described above, the pre-test consisted of excerpted passages from the text that had not yet been discussed in class, but which had been assigned as the reading for that day. The textbook included explanatory notes on the passages. All the students who volunteered were English majors.
- The students scored the following percentage points on the pre-test: 10, 8, 0, 8, 10, 0.
- After the pre-test, the intervention was applied: the texts were discussed in detail and methods for analyzing them were also discussed.
- Part II of the final exam given in December 2006 also consisted of excerpted passages from the assigned texts. The students scored the following percentage points on this part of the test: 90, 96, 50, 100, 92, 80.
- Although the final exam scores varied, the results showed that 100% of the students showed a marked improvement in their understanding of and ability to analyze the assigned texts. This suggests two possibilities (which are not mutually exclusive): (a) the intervention method was extremely successful (b) the students were much better prepared for the final exam than they had been for class.

**Dissemination of Report to Department of English Faculty**

This report was given at a regularly scheduled meeting of the Department of English faculty on February 8, 2007. In January, 2007, it was presented to the Arts and Sciences
Assessment Coordinators, and also to the Ingl3201-2 Course Committee (which consists of all faculty teaching these courses).

**Next Learning Assessment Closing the Loop Project**

In line with our plans, during spring 2007, two additional loop projects have been planned. One involves our intermediate students, as a representative of our general education and service courses in that track. The second project is being carried out by the members of the linguistics sector. In this way, all four main groups of the Department will have carried out one (or more) projects: basic (ESL) track, intermediate track, literature majors, and linguistic majors. The advanced track, which consists of a smaller population, is also in the process of completing a comprehensive independent study of assessment begun last year, which we expect to receive shortly. In this manner, all faculty of the Department of English will have been exposed to the goals and methods of organized and accountable assessment measures. Once completed, as a long-term goal, the Department will be able to move forward as a group to extend the practice of on-going assessment as an integral component of each classroom.
APPENDIX A
Ingl 3201-2 Rubric for “Write an effective thesis statement”
MSCHE project for Closing the Loop, Fall 2006, Department of English

To Ingl3201-2 faculty: after your students have completed the final drafts of their first formal essay, please write in the boxes the number of students achieving each quality/characteristic – generally defined as yes, partial, or no.

If you have more than one section, you can put all of the numbers on this page. N = number of students who have completed the papers that you have graded.

COURSE: Ingl 3201 Ingl 3202 (please circle the course you are teaching)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality/Characteristic of effective thesis statement:</th>
<th>Yes—quality or characteristic is present</th>
<th>Partial—quality or characteristic is partially present</th>
<th>No—quality or characteristic is not present</th>
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<td>Includes topic and opinion in one statement/assertion (not a question)</td>
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<td>Appropriate Focus: not too broad (single main idea)</td>
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<td>Appropriate Focus: not too narrow (can be supported by details and examples to satisfy requirements of assignment)</td>
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Thesis guides writing; writing supports thesis: paper is unified and coherent

| Section n = |                                           |                                                       |                                             |
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Please give this form to Judy as soon as you have graded your first papers. You will receive another copy of the form to use in the same way for the last revised essay your students write in the semester (not the final exam). Thank you for your help!
APPENDIX B

Sample classroom activity on how to write an effective thesis statement -- Students reconstruct the criteria in class [tell teacher what to put on board] then review in groups, taking some from the list [assigned randomly], then each group shares and defends its answers. Alternatively, the whole class practices with a few, then individuals or pairs do the rest as class/homework.

3201 exercises Review these examples [previously written by students in the class] and decide if each one is Acceptable or Unacceptable. If it is Unacceptable, please explain.

Women are obsessed with diet because of the influence of society that says that thin women are beautiful.

Euthanasia: "Life is a right not an obligation".

The excessive violence that people see at the video games, TV and hear from music is what makes people be violent in real life.

The agriculture in Puerto Rico is declining because the government is withdrawing its assistance programs.

The computer in the future will be the center of all jobs.

Everyone should accept and help children with special needs with their challenges through life.

The teacher in P.R. should use reggeaton music to make the class more interesting.

Education is important to achieve goals, but it is not essential to obtain success in life.

Foods that are genetically modified should be labeled on the package.

To be a successful volleyball player in a competitive level you must have the ability, courage, and wish to do it.

Nowadays, unemployment is a problem caused by the increase in the population.

In Africa the famine will finish when the development country will commit to help send specialist people in the areas of agriculture, politics, economics and other, because in Africa the opportunity is for rich people and these people are not participating in the solution of famine.

Technology is making our life easier but is stealing ours jobs.

Hydrogen can be another power source (combustion) to this new era.

People should eliminate low carb diets from their lifestyles.

People shouldn't think about Euthanasia like an alternative when they have a terminal disease.

The Alzheimer disease affects the nervous system and the capacity to remember simple things.

Mother Nature has a way to keep everything in order in our planet.