

Assessing Our Programs

Over the last four years, we have asked our graduating seniors to submit a **portfolio** of their work in English at MSU. We also asked them to attend an **exit interview** with faculty members of our assessment committee, and then to fill out an **exit survey** on the major.

This three-part assessment plan has already enriched our BA program. For instance, majors may now elect a junior-level course called “Writing for the Workplace”; another junior-level course called “Selected Authors,” which will focus this spring semester on Toni Morrison; and a one-hour course required of all majors, “English Studies,” which introduces our students to the major and to the profession. Dr. Kelly Marsh currently teaches the course. Then next fall, rising seniors will take another one-hour course, this one focused on reflective writing and professional portfolios.

Additionally, in the spring semester of 2008, we implemented an assessment plan focused on the **MA program**. Devised by the graduate faculty and our director, Dr. Richard Patteson, this plan draws data from results on the MA examination and from a new **exit survey**. Results from the first and second administrations of the survey suggest that our MA graduates love the program and its faculty.

Specifically, among our MA graduates from 2009, thirty-five percent “strongly agreed” and fifty-nine percent “agreed” that the program prepared them well to analyze and interpret English and American literature.

Students also praised the program for making them effective literary researchers. Indeed, fifty-nine percent “strongly agreed” and

thirty-five percent “agreed” that they had learned to use library resources effectively and to document primary and secondary sources correctly and ethically.

Just as encouraging, seventy percent “strongly agreed” and twenty-four percent “agreed” that the program improved their writing skills.

We happily report, too, that results on the MA examination have improved. Two years ago, we set a benchmark that 75% of the graduates will be able to write “satisfactory” or “excellent” essays on the MA exam. In 2008 the graduate faculty found that only 70% of last year’s graduates met these standards; however, in 2009, the pass rate rose to 78%.

While this improvement pleases us, we want to generate more than pass-fail data from the MA examination itself. Therefore, we have recently devised a rating sheet. Keyed to the rubric for evaluating the four essays on the exam, the rating sheet will allow us to determine areas of strength and weakness among these criteria: knowledge of field, effective thesis statements, insightful analysis, clear organization, and correctness. We will implement the rating sheet in the spring 2010 semester.

Under the leadership of Director of Composition, Ann Spurlock, we have also begun assessing our Composition Program by administering pre- and post-essay examinations for students enrolled in Comp I and II. Next year, I’ll report those results.

*Rich Raymond,
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