

**Form E-1A for Boston College "Literature Core" Course Assessment
Dept. of Romance Languages & Literatures (May 2024)**

1) Have formal learning outcomes been developed?

Students enrolled in RLL Literature Core courses will be expected, at the end of the course, to demonstrate the following abilities:

- ¶ Students will demonstrate the ability to read and evaluate texts critically.
- ¶ Students will demonstrate proficiency in employing academic prose to effectively sustain an original literary argument supported by textual evidence.
- ¶ Students will demonstrate an understanding of the differences between literary genres.
- ¶ Students will be familiar with representative texts drawn from a wide range of periods and be equipped to engage in an informed and critical way with similar texts in the future.
- ¶ Students will be able to identify and analyze the distinctive features of literary productions.

2) Where are these learning outcomes published?

They are published on the "About" page of the RLL Department website:

<https://www.bc.edu/content/bc-web/schools/morrissey/departments/romance-languages/about.html>

3.) Other than GPA, what data/evidence is used to determine whether graduates have achieved the stated outcomes for the degree? (What evidence and analytical approaches do you use to assess which of the student learning outcomes are being achieved more or less well?)

A. Direct Evidence: Analysis in-class discussions, quizzes and exams, and a representative sampling of final papers.

B. Indirect Evidence: Student survey. An online Qualtrics student survey is administered in each Lit Core class, asking how well they believe they have achieved the learning outcomes, what they found especially helpful, and what suggestions they have for improvement of the course in future iterations.

This year, in carrying out our assessment, we chose to focus on the specific Learning Outcome: "Students will demonstrate an understanding of the differences between literary genres."

C. Faculty Group Discussion: the Lit Core Instructors meet as a group to share their experiences and impressions of the semester regarding their work with their students in their progress towards the Learning Outcomes.

4) Who interprets the evidence? What is the process? (Who in the department is responsible for interpreting the data and making recommendations for curriculum or assignment changes if appropriate? When does this occur?)

The evidence is interpreted by the instructors of the courses in question who submits a summary of their discussions to the Dept Chair (who is also the dept “Core Liaison”). The results of the online student surveys and the discussions by the Lit Core instructors are then also shared with and discussed by the entire FT faculty of the department, who might suggest revisions in light of the collective experience of the department in Core courses that they have taught in past semesters.

5) What changes have been made as a result of using the data/evidence? (Have there been any recent changes to your curriculum or program? Why were they made?)

Results of 2024 Assessment Process:

As far as the indirect evidence -- the online survey -- is concerned, we had a 50% return, i.e., 38 responses, and happily, all the students responding said that they either “*Strongly agreed*” or “*Mildly Agreed*” that this year's selected LO (“understanding of the differences between literary genres”) had been met.

The same conclusion was reached by the instructors involved. I quote directly from the report of the sub-committee which evaluated student performance in our Lit Core Course, i.e., “Contextos: Introductory to Literary Analysis in Spanish:”

“Generally speaking, the instructors agreed that students were adept at understanding the particularities of different literary genres by the semester’s end. This is in part due to the design of 'Contextos,' which has discrete units on prose, poetry, theater, and film. Both instructors noted that students understood and correctly used distinct literary terms with relation to different genres (e.g., discussing a 'narrator' in prose pieces but a 'poetic voice' in poetry, or different kinds of shots in films). Throughout the semester, students practiced using this critical terminology during in-class discussions and in their written assignments. Martha added that, when appropriate, students were likewise able to employ terminology associated with one genre to the discussion of a different genre (e.g., discussing the rhetorical figures we study in the poetry unit within the context of analyzing a short story). Specifically with regard to theater, students are tasked with performing a scene from one of the works studied in class. During this activity, students demonstrated a keen awareness of the ways in which costumes, special effects, and staging affect storytelling in dramatic works. Both instructors agreed that, as a whole, the final papers showed a sensitivity to the distinct literary devices employed in different genres, although most students chose to write about prose or theatrical texts (v. poetry). As part of the paper writing process, students were required to read and evaluate at least two pieces of secondary bibliography. In this activity, they were likewise exposed to how other academics have employed distinct terminology with regards to the analysis of different literary genres.

Nevertheless, instructors did note that students sometimes demonstrated some confusion in their terminology. For instance, while they recognize the difference between poetry and prose, they sometimes used the terms “*cuento*” (short story) and “*novela*” (novel) interchangeably. Instructors will focus on clarifying these terms in future semesters.”

Results of 2023 Assessment Process:

Both the examination of student work and the students’ own feedback (via the online Qualtrics survey) concluded that this learning outcome has been met. In the online survey, the overwhelming majority of the 68 students who responded indicated that they “strongly” agreed and 8 “mildly” agreed that the LO had been reached.

However, last year’s cohort – in addition to the 4 sections of Spanish “Contextos” (taught in Spanish) included one Lit Core section conducted entirely in English (“Love, Sexuality and Gender: The Western Literary Tradition”). Final assessment of student work by the professor in question identified a different problem area: that of the ability to write mature, clear expository prose. Of the 20 students in the course, at least 15 were noticeably deficient in this skill. Though the professor gave abundant feedback on the required essays with regard to the expository prose and engaged in some discussion thereof during class time, this in the end proved insufficient. Hence, the next time the course will be taught -- it was not taught in AY23-24 -- the syllabus will be changed to include in as many classes as possible (no fewer than one per week), remedial exercise in expository writing taken from one of the leading text books on the subjects such as Warriner’s English *Grammar and Composition*.

Alas, since last year’s report, we professors have come to realize that the use of AI in the writing of at-home written assignments, including the all-important final papers, has risen dramatically in our courses. We have tried to re-configure the nature and requirements of the assignments, especially the final papers, to limit the possibility of using AI, but those remedies were of only minimal efficacy. Hence, we convened as a group to deliberate the matter and arrived at some further responses to the AI challenge, to wit: (1) convert at-home writing assignments to in-class performance; (2) require students to present an outline of their papers, with bibliography, before submitting the final draft; (3) lower the weight of the final papers as a percentage of the final grade; (4) add, wherever feasible, a final oral exam or “discussion,” one-on-one with the instructor, to check on the student’s success in mastery the contents of the course and to elaborate further on her/his final paper. We will continue to discuss the matter as a department and arrive at additional remedies to the AI challenge.

6) Date of the most recent program review. (Your latest comprehensive departmental self-study and external review.)

The last Self-study and External Review were carried out in 2010.