

Salt Lake Community  
College

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# Assessment Report: ENGL 2600/2700

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Critical Introduction to Literature/  
Introduction to Critical Theory



## Summary

### Background

English 2600, Critical Introduction to Literature, serves both as a General Education humanities distribution course and as a requirement for the AA/AS with an emphasis in English. English 2700, Introduction to Critical Theory, is required for the AA/AS. Both courses articulate widely across the USHE system. The department offers 4 to 5 sections of English 2600, and 1 section of 2700, each semester. English 2600 is taught in traditional, online, hybrid and web-enhanced formats. English 2700 is taught only in the traditional format (though it can be web-enhanced) for purposes of articulation, though it has been taught fully online in the past. Both classes are capped at 25 students per section.

During Fall Semester 2006 (the semester pertinent to this assessment) we ran 4 sections of English 2600 and 1 of 2700. All 5 sections were taught by full-time faculty members.

### Context

No formal assessment of English 2600 or 2700 has ever been undertaken, though faculty have engaged in discussions, shared syllabi, mentored new instructors, and collaborated on goals and outcomes. Because this was our first assessment, we began modestly, assessing only one trait we found central to the college's SLO 1, which reads as follows:

Upon successful completion of any program at SLCC, students:

1. Acquire substantive knowledge in the discipline of their choice sufficient for further study, and/or demonstrate competencies required by employers to be hired and succeed in the workplace.

We focused on the first part, "acquiring substantive knowledge in the discipline of their choice sufficient for further study," because most student in 2600 and virtually all those in 2700 self-declare as transfer students and as future English majors. The trait we assessed was formulated as follows:

Student can write critically about a text, applying a theoretical perspective.

### Methodology

While we do not have a formal course leader or committee for our literature offerings, we all require assignments in both 2600 and 2700 that ask students to demonstrate their ability to write critically about a literary text while also applying a theoretical perspective. This is in keeping with our stated objectives, outcomes, and assessments on the departments 2600 and 2700 CCO's (see Appendix). For this first assessment we conducted a holistic, blind reading of student work with the following parameters:

- Three of four Fall Semester 2600 sections participated, as did the 1 Fall Semester 2700 section.
- Four readers were involved in the assessment.
- The total number of papers evaluated was 62.

## **Results**

### Scoring:

# of papers evaluated at Proficient or Exemplary level: 44 (51)\*

% of papers evaluated at Proficient or Exemplary level: 71% (82%)\*

\*Please see specific discussion in Part II for an explanation of the two sets of numbers.

### Reliability:

# of 3rd reads: 2

% of 3rd reads out of total papers evaluated: 3%

% of reads which were reliable: 97%

## **Recommendations**

The committee recommends assessing more traits next year using a broader scale to allow us greater nuance in assigning scores. For example, while we did not specifically assess for matters such as MLA documentation, including use of sources and citation, we did find that students' abilities here varied widely. We also think a broader scale will help us better capture the true range of student performance.

The committee also recommends that faculty teaching literature meet to further discuss course goals and outcomes, and to plan ways for improving our consensus on the variety of ways we can best help students meet the outcomes. While we placed a high percentage of students in the exemplary/proficient range, we want to rethink and expand our notions of proficiency for the coming year.

The committee will focus on adjusting curriculum and assignments to reflect whatever consensus we reach through discussions, with the goal of designing a new assessment to revisit this year's trait as well as including several others.

## Departmental Context

Department members have worked together to produce CCO's for both courses assessed this year, as well as a PCO's for our A.A. and A.S degrees in English. Additionally, as we wrote UEC grants to put both English 2600 and 2700 online (in 2001 and 2002), faculty collaborated in creating and teaching the courses and later in mentoring those who had not previously taught the course online. This resulted in more faculty discussion of literature courses than had occurred previously, even though it did occur informally.

However, while we agreed on goals, objectives, and outcomes, we did not choose a department text nor did we mandate specific assignments. We do not consider this a problem as the texts we have chosen (and generally those available) are quite close in conception, design, and apparatus.

Given our varied approaches and the informality of our discussions we decided on a very limited scope for this assessment in hopes that we would learn how we are doing with our current approach and how we might need to adjust our practice before we conduct a more comprehensive assessment.

## Process

The literature assessment was created by an ad hoc committee of four full-time literature faculty. We discussed the assessment in general terms during the fall, deciding to keep copies of one set of papers in which students conducted critical analysis and applied theoretical perspectives. In spring semester, we decided on the limited scope and the single trait to examine, "Student can write critically about a text, applying a theoretical perspective." The chair sent out suggestions to other committee members via email, and we decided the specifics of our plan in this same medium.

First, we selected sections of each course for assessment based on faculty member compliance with the plan to keep unmarked sets of papers available. We planned to conduct the assessment after spring semester and met on May 1, 2007, from 12:00 until 4:00 to do so. Prior to reading any of the papers to be assessed, we conducted a brief norming session by reading a sample student paper provided by the chair and discussing our ratings, which were identical.

Each of the four readers submitted papers from their own courses with all identifying information removed. The chair then assigned each set of papers a number from 1 to 4, and then assigned a number to each paper within the set. We were thus able to provide complete confidentiality to the students.

We set up our four-point scale for assessment as follows:

Student can write critically about a text, applying a theoretical perspective, in a way that is:

4: Exemplary

3: Proficient

2: Below Average

1: Does not exhibit the outcome.

Each paper received two readings, and, where scores differed by more than one point, an additional reading. Only two papers fell into this latter category, and discrepancies were resolved in one additional reading. All those involved in the reading were present to view the recorded outcomes, and general discussions took place immediately thereafter and later through email.

## Introduction

As discussed under the “Methodology” section, the assessment evaluated only 1 trait with a score between 1 and 4. Each paper received two readings, and the scores were recorded on separate sheets for each reader. In the cases where a third read was needed, the third reader’s score was compared to the two discrepant scores and combined with the original score to which it was closest, with the other score being thrown out.

Because many scores were only 1 point apart, we are presenting the data below in two ways. The first number in each category is derived by assigning the lower score to the paper, while the parenthetical number derives from assigning the higher score.\* Thus, for example, a paper that received both a 4, Exemplary, and a 3, Proficient, is recorded first as a 3 and parenthetically as a 4. The performance breakdown for the 62 papers is thus as follows:

Does Not Exhibit Outcome 2 (1)	Below Average 16 (10)	Proficient 30 (24)	Exemplary 14 (27)
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Papers scoring in the proficient and exemplary categories are considered to have reached an acceptable level of performance in English 2600 and 2700. The percentage of papers reaching each level is as follows:

Exemplary	23% (43%)
Proficient	48% (39%)
Below Average	26% (16%)
Does Not Exhibit Outcome	3% (2%)
Total	100%

\*Ignoring the problem with scores only 1 point apart and simply averaging all scores yields an average score of 3.0 for all readings, meaning proficient, but this clearly fails to capture the nuance provided by the method used here.

## Interpretation of Data

Depending on which scoring method we use, the data show that either 71% or 82% achieved an acceptable outcome, with either 29% or 18% below an acceptable outcome. As the different ways of scoring the data provide are off by at least 11%, we believe that a broader scoring range, from 0 to 6 (as used in the 1010 assessment), would probably give us more nuanced and helpful

information. We also note that the differences in what is considered an exemplary or proficient paper reveal the concerns we noted in our post-evaluation discussions, that we may have quite a range of practices for teaching and evaluating students' critical and theoretical abilities.

While we were not assessing for such issue as use of appropriate sources, adherence to MLA documentation style, and fluency in writing about literature, our informal post-evaluation discussions suggest that students are not as proficient in these areas as they should be. Recommendations in Part III further reflect areas that concerned us in discussion.

## Recommendations and Conclusions

### Plan of Action

Based on this first foray into literature assessment, the committee recommends that literature faculty do the following:

- Meet several times in the year (with one meeting to occur early in the fall semester) to further discuss exactly how we define “critical and theoretical” knowledge as outcomes, with the goal of reaching greater consensus than we may at present share.
- Examine such issues as terminology for critical analysis, explicit instruction in writing critical analysis, and expectations for research.
- Discuss ways in which we, as individual teachers, may tend to privilege certain critical approaches at the expense of others, with the goal of defining what constitutes an acceptable set of approaches.
- Use a 6-point scale for assessment to better tease out real differences in our evaluations and provide better data.
- Add additional traits for the next assessment, to include student performance in using and documenting sources, and others as decided through further discussion and in keeping with program outcomes.
- Determine if we should add other literature courses into the assessment (those not required but offered as electives for degrees, for general education, and for diversity purposes), and if different assessments need to be tailored to different classes.

### Process: Readers

Although we had agreed to conduct our evaluation together in one afternoon, we now believe it would be more effective to meet as a group for norming and then take sets of papers to other locations for reading and evaluation. The work is demanding enough to require more solitude and more comfort than a campus meeting room provides. We would also like to include more faculty readers in our next assessment as a way of both improving our departmental discussions regarding literature courses and expanding our consensus on how we expect individual courses to contribute to our program outcomes.

## Appendix: Outcome Goals as Currently Provided on CCO's

### English 2600 Outcome Goals

**The objectives for this course are as follows:**

- Students should develop an awareness of the various genres of fiction, poetry, and drama and the conventions these genres use in their development and aesthetics.
- Students should develop an understanding of what criticism and research can add to their own responses to and understanding of a text.
- Students should develop an awareness of the contemporary methods of critical analysis and theory including formalism, psychoanalysis, deconstruction, feminism, gender studies, cultural studies, genre theory, post-colonialism, reader response, etc.
- Students should conduct literary research and practice writing within the discipline.

### English 2700 Outcome Goals

**The objectives for this course are as follows:**

- To become aware of our own theoretical positions and articulate them clearly;
- To become aware of how our critical practice is informed by these positions;
- To gain an awareness of the history of critical theory;
- To understand the major developments in criticism in the twentieth century;
- To practice various critical stances on different kinds of texts;
- To allow our own practice to be informed and challenged by new information;
- To learn the conventions for writing a critical paper and develop facility with this kind of writing.