

## AY18 Program Learning Outcome (PLO) Assessment: CRITICAL THINKING

### ENGLISH/WRITING

**Assessment Type:** Academic Program

**Year/Term:** AY18

**Level:** ENGL 436 ([online](#))

**Learning Outcome:** Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)

**Assessment Method/Tool:** Program Critical Thinking Rubric

**Measurement Scale:** 3-1

**Sample Size:** 49 (17 students)

	Proficient		Competent		Developing	
	(# of students)		(# of students)		(# of students)	
Explains Issues Clearly	31	63%	14	29%	4	8%
Presents Evidence Effectively	6	12%	35	71%	8	16%
Addresses Rhetorical Concerns	17	35%	19	39%	13	27%
Presents Thoughtful Position, incld. Multiple Perspectives	15	30%	24	50%	11	20%
<b>Medians</b>		33%		45%		22%
<b>Median % scoring 2 or 3</b>						<b>78%</b>

**Benchmark:** **100%** Institutional benchmark median percentage of students meeting "Proficient" or "Adequate" levels

**Median % Achieving Benchmark:** **78%** Actual median percentage of students meeting "Adequate" or "Proficient" levels

## Closing the Loop Statement

The data were drawn from three paper assignments submitted in Weeks 3-7 in ENGL 436 Themes: All Seeing Eye offered online. The assignments used the same rubric, which scored based on position, organization (clearly explaining), development (evidence, analysis, synthesis), incorporation of secondary materials (multiple perspectives), and rhetorical awareness, in addition to format, citations, and use of language.

There were 18 students originally in the course. One withdrew toward the end of the term. Of the 17 remaining, 13 were English/Writing majors, 2 were Integrated Studies majors with minors in English/Writing, and one was a student from another major. 10 were seniors and 7 were juniors. All were online transfer students, except for two on-campus students who started at EOU as freshmen.

ENGL 436 students demonstrated the most strength in **organizing (explaining)** ideas. This was perhaps made easier by the fact that the assignment required a short paper, so many wrote five-paragraph essays. They were also generally comfortable in taking a **position**, which in literature studies is an interpretation, and in **development (presenting and analyzing evidence for that position)** from close reading of quoted passages in literature and of described scenes in film.

One might imagine strengths in these areas arising from **preparation** in previous literature courses and/or from ENGL 436 assignments requiring informal literature/film analysis as part of class discussion and exercises. The theme was surveillance and built from discussions of power dynamics associated with seeing and being seen through physical surveillance and up to big data. Students seemed **engaged** with the topic, and together generated good ideas that spurred ongoing critical thought.

Given that data were collected from three similar assignments over the course of four weeks, it is also worth noting that papers were slightly stronger at the midterm, perhaps once students got used to the drill and before they were tired or distracted by other work.

The dips in performance associated with **development (presentation of evidence, analysis, and synthesis)** can be attributed mostly to one student who consistently failed to include specific evidence. A second student did something similar in one assignment. The first student indicated trouble keeping up with courses this term, so the student may have been doing just what was possible in the time available. The second student has struggled in the past with literary analysis, so having only one paper below expectation was a success.

The more significant challenges relate to rhetorical awareness and addressing multiple perspectives. In college-level literature studies, **rhetorical awareness** of audience, purpose, and occasion requires students to orient their literary analysis toward an audience of scholars who are interested in new interpretations. Usually, this expectation is embedded in other criteria like position and development, so elevating it to its own criterion was enlightening. Students

who are just writing to meet the requirements of an assignment, where the teacher is the audience, are less equipped to present effective literary analysis than students who are writing to present analysis to and engage with the ideas of other scholars. About a quarter of the students struggled to shift from the teacher as audience to other scholars as the audience, and this orientation was demonstrated in some inability to take an interpretive position on texts and/or present effective analysis of evidence (or, as noted above, even to recognize the need of a scholarly audience to see textual evidence).

The ability to address **multiple perspectives** is related to rhetorical awareness of a scholarly audience. Some students are quite good at presenting and defending their own positions to a teacher, but when asked to meaningfully incorporate secondary materials, they struggle with synthesizing those materials into their argument and analysis, perhaps because the task feels like one more teacher-oriented hoop to jump through and/or perhaps because synthesis is one of the most difficult critical skills. ENGL 436 focused quite a bit on synthesis, requiring students to read theory and other secondary materials almost every week and to incorporate at least one source in each of the three papers. Often this work resulted in intellectually interesting discussions that would appeal to literature scholars, but about 39% of papers failed to meet expectations for integration of secondary sources, either because they ignored the requirement or because they integrated quoted material without adequate discussion, lacking presentation of the source's argument and/or commentary on the source idea and its connection to the rest of the paper. This challenge aligns with other data collected by EOU regarding students' ability to integrate sources. Some students fail to understand why one would integrate sources except to meet a teacher's requirements (egocentric non-scholarly orientation) and/or lack the skills to do so effectively.

I would add that, given the demographics of the students in ENGL 436, that these challenges perhaps speak less to EOU's preparation of upper-division students through the English/Writing degree or General Education program and more to the fact that **EOU is a transfer magnet**. Of the students completing ENGL 436, all but two (88%) were transfer students and six (35%) arrived at EOU during the current academic year. Therefore, their successes or failures in ENGL 436 say more about them or perhaps the structures of the course than about EOU.

I would also add that a 100% target is not realistic, even at the upper division, given the lives of students. (Students may have the skills but lack the time or energy to engage with the task.)

The results of this assessment will be shared with the English/Writing Faculty as part of our Annual Program Assessment.

## Action Plan

### Course Recommendations:

- Develop a Week 1 mechanism for **assessing** the interpretive skills of students new to me--can they make an argument of interpretation, can they close-read literary and film

texts and write about that reading, and can they comprehend literary scholarship and integrate it into their thinking and writing?—and then assigning some additional work to those needing practice.

- Require draft **revision** focused on rhetorical awareness and integration (summary, analysis, and synthesis) of secondary sources.

#### Program Recommendations:

- Develop methods of helping students **envision literary scholarship**: take students to conferences, talk more about our literary research as part of literature courses, get students involved in research practica, have students view or listen to scholars discussing their scholarship, etc.
- Discuss the **“Explains Ideas” criterion**. “Organizes ideas into logical steps” seems more useful.

#### EOU Recommendations:

Part of the problem with EOU students’ difficulty integrating sources has to do with **rhetorical awareness!**

- Offer professional development associated with supporting students as scholars within and beyond courses.
- Invest in tenure-line faculty who understand scholarship in their fields.

Part of the problem with EOU students’ difficulty integrating sources has to do with the fact that they are **transfer students!**

- Develop discipline-specific methods of welcoming transfer students—house the orientation course in the disciplines or as a partnership between Student Affairs and programs? Student Affairs personnel may not be equipped to communicate scholarly expectations or assess readiness.