

## Form E-1-A for Boston College Departments/Programs

### Department/Program Literature Core Program, AY 2023, English Department

- 1) **Have formal learning outcomes been developed? What are they?** (What specific sets of skills and knowledge does the department expect its majors to have acquired before they graduate?)

The learning outcomes for the Literature Core Program were extensively revised during the 2022-2023 academic year as part of an overall internal review of the program. This was the program's self-assessment project for this year. This process of review and revision was initiated by department chair Min Song and guided by program director Christina Klein. The process entailed:

- One-on-one discussions between the chair and the program director to develop a vision for a revised Lit Core
- Full department meeting to explore what was currently working with the course and brainstorm possible areas for improvement
- Multiple drafts of new learning goals
- Creation by chair of new Core Committee within the English department to facilitate cooperation between, and bring greater coherence to, our two core curriculum courses (Lit Core and FWS). The members of the committee include: Chair, Associate Chair, Assistant to the Chair, Lit Core program director, FWS program director, and Writing Fellows program director
- Review and approval of new learning goals by the department Core Committee
- Review and approval of new learning goals by the whole department
- Review and preliminary approval of new learning goals by Dean Kalscheur
- Revision of more granular "Guidelines to Teaching Literature Core" that offers guidance on how instructors can implement the new learning goals.
- Review of revised "Guidelines" by department Core Committee
- Dissemination of revised "Guidelines" to all instructors

#### These are the new learning goals:

##### **1. The power of close reading:**

Close reading, or the careful analysis of literary texts, is the foundational skill of English as an academic discipline. It is also foundational to the Jesuit tradition of *eloquentia perfecta*, which refers to the cultivation, through the study of language, of the whole person who can act ethically in the world. Students will learn how to engage substantively with literary texts and to appreciate the unique qualities of literary language. They will develop the art and skill of close reading, which will enable them to appreciate the nuance and complexity of literary language and thereby discover meanings that are not apparent through superficial reading. They will learn how to recognize the formal properties of texts and think critically about them. They will be given opportunities to practice their own analytical and creative interpretations of texts.

- Students will identify the unique qualities of literary language.
- Students will perform close-readings of literary texts, think critically about them, and produce their own analytical interpretations.

## **2. Literature as equipment for living:**

This phrase, drawn from literary scholar Kenneth Burke, highlights the humanistic dimension of literary study. Students will discover how literature can illuminate the ‘big questions’ that life raises and aid them in navigating the worlds they inhabit. Students will encounter texts drawn from a wide range of genres, styles, time periods, and media, as well as authors who belong to dominant and non-dominant groups. In working with these texts, they will learn how literature opens doorways onto the perspectives of other peoples, times, and cultures, and how it helps us imagine diverse ways of being human. Students will have opportunities to reflect on their own values and the principles that guide their life, often by discovering alternative ways of looking at the world. The course thus holds true to the ideal of *studia humanitatis*: it develops the habits of mind, heart, and imagination that contribute to student formation.

- Students will discuss and examine how literature opens doorways onto the perspectives of other peoples, times, and cultures and how it helps us imagine diverse ways of being human.
- Students will develop the skills of reflection by discussing and writing about literature in ways that help them understand their own values and the principles that guide their life.

## **3. Fostering intellectual community**

A strong sense of community supercharges classroom discussions and enriches the learning experience of all its members. Students will experience a discussion-based course that encourages them to share ideas and perspectives with each other. They will have opportunities to forge meaningful human connections with each other, which can help them integrate into the larger BC community in healthy ways. Students will be invited to participate in activities that foster a sense of social and intellectual community. By cultivating a sense of connection rooted in the life of the mind, students will gain a greater appreciation for the challenges and rewards of being active members of a larger community.

- Students will have opportunities to forge meaningful connections with each other as human beings and as readers, writers, thinkers, and members of an intellectual community.
- Students will explore different ways of bringing their whole person into the classroom.

## **4. Active learning and pedagogical experimentation**

Students will encounter a variety of activities and assignments designed to stimulate creative and independent thought. In addition to at least one essay of sustained textual analysis, they may work on assignments such as short reflections, personal narratives, creative writing, visual or material projects, performances, podcasts, oral presentations, and archive-based exercises. They may also encounter non-literary material (such as films, music, archival documents, etc.) that deepen their understanding of literary texts or extend the course’s thematic topic. Students’ experience of pleasure and joy as they engage with literature is a highly desirable outcome. In this way, the course aims to teach students how to be lifelong readers.

- Students will complete a variety of activities and assignments designed to stimulate creative and independent thought, including at least one essay of sustained textual analysis,

- 2) **Where are these learning outcomes published? Be specific.** (Where are the department's learning expectations accessible to potential majors: on the web or in the catalog or in your dept major handouts?)

Once these learning goals have been officially approved by the relevant university committee, they will be posted on the English department website and instructors will include them on their syllabi. They will also be distributed to all advisors and first-year students through the Academic Advising Center.

- 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?)

The director and the chair are currently developing assessment strategies to be put into place during AY 2024.

1. All syllabi will be reviewed in advance by the chair and director to make sure the readings, activities, and assignment are explicitly geared to the new learning goals.
2. Discussion is underway to form an assessment group for AY 2024-25. This cohort will implement, and subsequently review, a series of specific pedagogical strategies with the goal of determining a set of teaching "best practices" that produce the desired learning outcomes and that can be used by all instructors.

- 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?)

Christina Klein (director), Min Song (English department chair), and members of the department Core Committee.

- 5) **What were the assessment results and what changes have been made as a result of using this data/evidence?** What were the major assessment findings? Have there been any recent changes to your curriculum or program? How did the assessment data contribute to those changes?

The result of our assessment was our revised set of learning goals.

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

The latest departmental self-study was completed in 2012, with major changes to the course offerings. Guidelines and goals were streamlined, learning outcomes revamped, and the four "branches" of Lit Core offerings were eradicated in favor of one unified mission. Each Literature Core course now offers students a different subcategory, or theme, but the learning outcomes remain consistent across sections, as do a variety of disciplinary requirements, as stated in our guidelines.



Form E-1-A for Boston College Departments/Programs  
**English Department: First-Year Writing (FWS): Core Writing Program 2022-3**

**1) Learning Outcomes:** The Boston College First-Year Writing Program (FWS) has had formal learning outcomes since 2004. They were most recently reviewed in 2018 and plans are underway for a review and revision starting in 2025.

The FWS outcomes read as follows:

**Outcomes for the Boston College First-Year Writing Seminar**

By the end of First-Year Writing students should be able to do the following:

**Rhetorical Knowledge**

- Focus on a purpose in their writing
- Respond to the needs of different audiences
- Respond appropriately to different kinds of rhetorical situations, including but not limited to academic rhetorical situations
- Write in several genres

**Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing**

- Use writing and reading for inquiry, learning, thinking, and communicating
- Understand a writing assignment as a series of tasks, including finding, evaluating, analyzing, and synthesizing appropriate primary and secondary sources
- Integrate their own ideas with those of others

**Processes**

- Be aware that it usually takes multiple drafts to create and complete a successful text
- Develop flexible strategies for generating, revising, editing, and proof-reading
- Understand writing as an open process that permits writers to use later invention and re-thinking to revise their work
- Understand the collaborative and social aspects of writing processes
- Learn to critique their own and others' works
- Learn to balance listening to and relying on others with responsibilities of doing their part

**Knowledge of Conventions**

- Learn common formats for different kinds of texts
- Develop knowledge of genre conventions ranging from structure and paragraphing to tone and mechanics
- Practice appropriate means of documenting their work
- Control such surface features as syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

**Composing in Electronic Environments**

- Use electronic environments for drafting, reviewing, revising, editing, and sharing texts
- Locate, evaluate, organize, and use research material collected from electronic sources, including scholarly library databases; other official databases (e.g., federal government databases); and informal electronic networks and internet sources
- Understand and exploit the differences in the rhetorical strategies and in the affordances available for both print and electronic composing processes and texts

2) These learning outcomes are published in our mentoring guidelines and on our website, listed under resources for faculty: <https://www.bc.edu/bc-web/schools/mcas/departments/english/about/learning-outcomes.html>

### 3) **Assessment**

This year was the first time Dr. Jessica Pauszek, a tenure-line assistant professor who will trade off directing duties for FWS with Paula Mathieu, taught the graduate pedagogy class. She will take over as FWS Director in fall of 2024. As we move toward this transition, we are planning to assess and revise FWS outcomes and rethink certain structures in our program, including staffing (including graduate students and part-time faculty). We are beginning by selecting exemplar syllabi and assignment prompts to help guide new instructors and review all new syllabi.

Typically, around 80% of all FWS classes are taught by either graduate students or adjunct instructors. By design, there is a lot of faculty turnover every year, as our graduate Teaching Fellows (up to 22 people per year) teach one or two sections of FWS for one academic year, which requires a great deal of training and support, and then graduate. But we have also lost many of our adjunct instructors to jobs with benefits and better pay. In the past two years combined, due to the departure of several part-time faculty, we have hired **eleven** new part-time instructors.

In 2022-3, we received permission from MCAS Dean's office to allow select MA teaching fellows (those who were interested and whom the MA director felt were academically strong enough) to teach two fall and one spring FWS section. The program is sending out anonymous surveys to get feedback on the success of this program, but the TFs anecdotally expressed appreciation for both the pedagogical training and the extra funding.

With so many new instructors each year, we realize how important our program outcomes are and how necessary it is to see *how* they are being incorporated in the FWS assignment prompts. As a writing seminar, FWS centers on the writing projects the students work to complete. As a result, the assignment prompts—which are the invitations to and directions for the writing prog are in many ways the key documents of our program. This past year, in preparation of our upcoming review of outcomes, we started exploring how clearly our learning outcomes are communicated in assignment prompts and statements of assessment.

### 4) **2022-2023 Assessment Process:**

The FWS staff reviewed the syllabi and assignment prompts from teaching fellows and part-time faculty, through a [checklist](#) the FWS Director created to assure that all program outcomes occur in each class. We conducted this review as part of our ongoing mentoring of our TFs and as part of hiring new instructors and reviewing syllabi.

### 5) **Results**

1. **New Adjunct Instructors and Teaching Fellows Meet All Outcomes:** 2020-2022: In the graduate seminar that all MA and PhD teaching fellows (TFs) take prior to teaching FWS, all TFs draft an assignment sequence and syllabus that meets the above course outcomes. I and the FWS Mentors (Dacia Gentilella, Martha Hincks, Kristin Imre, and Brian Zimmerman) help the TFs revise their course documents to that each assignment has clear writerly goals that can be taught and assessed. We make design of [clear assignment prompts](#) central to teaching FWS. This year, we assessed that all TFs who taught FWS has clear writerly goals outlined in their assignment prompts that collectively met all the FWS outcomes. In 2022, we extended this assessment to our

new adjunct faculty who teach FWS. **We found that all outcomes are being met in the syllabi but could be signaled more clearly. It might also point to a need to streamline the course outcomes, which is a plan for 2025 once the new FWS Director is in place.** Our hope is that the FWS Digital Archive can help prepare and onboard new instructors so that students are all given quality instruction in writing. **In 2023-2024, our planned assessment initiative is to build a digital archive of exemplar FWS course materials, including assignment prompts, lesson plans, readings, sample student essays.** The FWS Program Director (Paula Mathieu) will be working as part of an Integrated Learning Group through the Center for Digital Innovation in Learning (CDIL) to begin to build this digital archive to help make onboarding of new instructors and communicating course goals and outcomes clearer and more accessible.

**2. New Adjunct Instructors Have Mixed Classroom Success:**

When hiring so many new staff each year, some instructors adapt to teaching BC teaching of FWS better than others. Through course evaluations and class visits, the FWS Director, with advice from the English department chair, identified instructors needing extra mentoring and support. This included additional classroom visits and feedback meetings, in-person and zoom meetings, and feedback on class materials. The goal is to have high standards for classroom instruction and to offer mentoring to those who teach FWS.

**3. Exploring Pilot Opportunities for Graduate Teaching Fellows:** Innovation is an important part of keeping the FWS program vital and a rich experience for students. In 2022-2023 we ran a pilot project inviting five TFs to teach two fall sections of FWS instead of one, and one spring section. This gave instructors more teaching experience and more income. Survey results from the graduate participants is pending but seem overwhelmingly positive. For a second year, two TFs with English Language Learning tutoring experience taught one ELL FWS section in the fall and a traditional FWS class in the spring. These pilots give interested TFs more pedagogical experience working with a broader range of BC first-year students.

**4. Need for Hiring Long-Term Faculty** In 2022-2023, the English Department hired three Professors of the Practice whom, we hope, will teach FWS as part of their regular teaching schedule, but it's unlikely these hires will change our current metric of overreliance on adjunct and graduate labor. The department is seeking innovative ways to increase the presence of full-time faculty among the instructors of FWS.

### **Present and Past FWS-Related Innovations**

- **BC Writing Center:** The BC Writing Center, in its fourth year, has moved from a pilot to a small permanent program. The program now has support from the Provost's office, an annual budget, and a graduate assistant. Several questions are still pending, including space for the center and leadership (it is still being run voluntarily by three English faculty for no additional compensation).
- **Enrichment Opportunities.** Each year the Boston Rhetoric and Writing Network (BRAWN) sponsors a Summer Institute, which is a free two-day pedagogy workshop, open by application, to teachers of college-level writing in the Boston area. This year and last year,

several BC FWS instructors participated in these workshops, including this year's institute held at Harvard. In May 2018 and June 2019, the Boston College First-Year Writing Program hosted the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>. The institute, which has been supported with funds from MIT, Boston University, Northeastern, and U Mass Boston as well as Boston College, annually hosted 100 teachers of writing for two days with two keynote addresses by prominent local scholars (Neal Lerner from Northeastern and Tamera Marko from Emerson College in 2018; Jessica Restaino from Montclair State U in 2019) and 16 workshops on topics ranging from anti-racist assessment practices to visual learning strategies and designing effective writing prompts. Seven BC FWS faculty took part in the 2018 Institute, and eight attended the 2019 event. There was no Summer Institute in 2020 but a 2021 institute will take place in June. The call has been circulated to all FWS faculty and Teaching Fellows, who have been encouraged to attend.

- **Core Renewal** Through the Core Renewal Program, Paula Mathieu, FWS Director, taught an Enduring Questions paired course with Lisa Friedman in Educational Psychology, for Fall 2018 and fall 2019. The course, Writing for Social Action, pairs with social-science course on inequality in the US, to teach writing as a tool of inquiry and social transformation. Eileen Donovan-Kranz taught another pilot, Writing as Activism, open to students in the PULSE and other service programs. By reflecting on these pilot courses, the FWS Program will seek more ways that students might engage in meaningful writing and the course's relationship to the core overall. We will evaluate these core courses in 2022 and consider plan for moving forward.
- **Streamlined Mission Statement** In Spring 2017, working with Julian Bourg, Dean of the Core, the FWS Program wrote a new mission statement, to share the goals of the program widely:
  - *The FWS Program invites students to explore why one writes, in order to help them see writing as an intellectual and personal tool for living that can be developed and honed. Writing-core courses ask students to write and rewrite in a variety of genres, discuss their works-in-progress in class, and receive individualized feedback from their instructors. Classroom activities center around the ways writing and revising help reveal new insights, orient ourselves to broader conversations, deepen our ability to communicate with others, express what is important to us, and create changes in service of the common good.*
- **Focus on Critical Reading and Writing.** In our 2013-2015 writing assessment, we found that students were engaging in critical reading and writing fairly well but could use improvement in putting themselves into conversation with sources and ideas of other writers. Since 2014, we have adopted new approaches to teaching and mentoring new instructors, drawing specifically on Joseph Harris's *Rewriting: How to Do Things with Texts*, to focus on helping students work critically and creatively with the words and ideas of others. In 2015, we formally added a requirement to FWS: At least one assignment should ask students to work critically with an academic text and put it into conversation with other texts and ideas.