2006-2007 Assessment of Portfolios for Program Assessment

English Courses

Specific courses for which there is material in the portfolios:
- ENGL A340: Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales* (Sebastian)
- ENGL A341: Chaucer, *Troilus and Other Poems* (Sebastian)
- ENGL U188: The World of the Vikings (Sebastian)
- ENGL U199: Arthurian Legend (Sebastian)

1. Do the students demonstrate satisfactory progress on learning objectives (see Assessment Matrix)?

   **B1:** Again, because this particular point of assessment was designed for the Medieval Survey class, it is not possible for its demands to be met in any of the courses under analysis here.

   **B2:** Some interesting work on literary themes, conventions, and techniques, and some good attempts at contextualization. Students are required in U188 to make a presentation on a Viking artifact or cultural practice. In class exams also require students to understand practices such as holmganga, and to be able to interpret tapestry scenes.

   **B3:** The bulk of the final exams for each course is a close reading of a particular passage which students are expected to recognize and be able to explain its importance. This would certainly seem to suggest that Dr. Sebastian is meeting the goals. Essays and in class exams for A340 and A341 show that students are deeply engaged in close textual readings, and that they are developing a facility for interpreting literary texts.

   **B4:** The exams, in particular, demonstrate that students are required to be familiar with expressions from Old Norse and Old English (?), even in common curriculum courses!

   **E1:** The materials for all of the classes (A340, A341, U188,U199) demonstrate that students are engaged in substantial amounts of essay writing.

   **E2:** I was particularly happy to see that Dr. Sebastian requires students to do in-class presentations and encourages them to use PowerPoint (a valuable skill) and be creative.

2. What is the weakest aspect of the English courses based on student portfolios? How should this be addressed?

Although students have written some elegant and thoughtful prose, it is somewhat disconcerting that the major essays for the courses do not require students to carry out research. Rather, students seem to be able to achieve high grades without doing any research at all (for example, ENGL 340: one student received an A+ on his paper while using only the Riverside Chaucer; another student received an A with only one outside source). This criticism may be inappropriate for the discipline, but I would certainly like
to see students required to visit the library and perform some research (if simply so that they do not complain so much in my own courses).

3. **What is the strongest aspect of the English courses based on student portfolios? Why?**

   Dr. Sebastian provides plentiful guidance for each assignment, and his dedication to improving student writing comes through in the copious feedback he provides. Perhaps most impressively, Dr. Sebastian provides a wide variety of creative options for student assignments. For example, in his Arthurian Literature class, students were given the option to do a workshop with Middle School students. Although I would prefer that students write traditional essays, some of the students who chose the creative option clearly put a great deal of effort into the assignment and produced very creative works (medieval games, crossword puzzles, recipes). Certainly, this must have been a worthwhile endeavor for students.

   Overall, this material supports the program assessment, in that it demonstrates that the outcomes outlined in the syllabi and the program matrices are being well met. We are more than happy with what John’s doing.

4. **Are additional learning objectives being met in the English courses?**

   It is surprising that Dr. Sebastian’s examinations include substantial components of art history – well done!

5. **Additional comments or concerns?**

   Dr. Sebastian has put together some very fascinating courses – no wonder students rave about him!