ENGLISH DEPARTMENT SELF-STUDY
Summer 2000

Introduction

We conducted our self-study during the second two weeks of Mayterm. Our process was to consider curriculum and syllabi the first week and each of the standards, one at a time during the second week. The process was a little like "Quaker dialogue:" each member was given time to offer reflections on the issue at hand and then we discussed different points raised while one person took notes to write the report on that question or standard.¹ We reached general consensus about what to report before moving on to the next issue.

To summarize briefly, some of the strengths of our department as we now function are:

Diverse approaches (and wide collective experience) in teaching the skills of critical reading, thinking, and writing

Diverse teaching styles, insuring that students who major in English will be stretched and encouraged to experiment with different learning styles

A range of attitudes toward and uses of available technology, which contributes to the diversity of teaching styles, but reasonable consensus about appropriate uses of computer technology

A solid traditional curriculum with a variety of specialized courses at upper levels (though we agreed that we expend a rather disproportionate amount of collective time on lower-division courses, especially English 2)

Wide and widening inclusion of works by authors from underrepresented groups and of questions that fruitfully complicate students awareness of diversity

A good track record in overseeing innovative independent studies and honors projects for upper-level students with extra initiative

A variety of thoughtful ways of integrating faith and learning (which happens fairly naturally in literature classes)

Good intra-departmental communication
Some of the areas we plan to work on are:

Regularizing curricular offerings that widen the scope of literary traditions to include more literature from different ethnic groups and foreign literature in translation

Pooling resources and ideas for rotating courses like English 2 and English 6 and cross-checking grading standards and methods

Making English 6 (our main GE course) more topical, offering different sections keyed to different topics, to make it more invigorating and attractive to students who might otherwise be disinclined to take it

Changing testing and entrance requirements so that we can target students’ needs more effectively (SATII rather than TSWE)

Cross-referencing English courses more closely with neighboring disciplines like History and Social Sciences to encourage students to work across disciplines

Getting more help for students who are significantly underprepared in either reading or writing skills

Similarly making sure that students master basic computer technology related to preparation of research and other kinds of papers

Including more emphasis on speaking skills

Communicating expectations more clearly on syllabi and reaching more detailed consensus on those expectations

We are, on the whole, a well-functioning department, aware of each other’s gifts as resources, and able to put those resources to appropriate use. We have a good record of success with students who have gone on to graduate or professional schools or into jobs that require and build sophisticated writing and speaking skills.
Christian Orientation Standard

Introduction:
As a department, we enthusiastically affirm Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s assertion, through the voice of her heroine Aurora Leigh, regarding the place of literature in the life of faith:

The world of books is still the world . . .
And both worlds have God’s providence, thank God,
To keep and hearten: with some struggle, indeed,
Among the breakers, some hard swimming through
The deeps -  (Aurora Leigh, I 792-796)

We agree that our greatest pleasures and gifts teaching at Westmont come while swimming through that world of books with our students, even when we encounter struggle in the deeps. We also agree that God’s ability to “keep and hearten” resists quantification or description, and sometimes even resists observation in the confines of our teaching environment. Yet each department member readily shares stories of how students’ experience in Westmont English classes, or in the department in general, has brought them (as literature finally brings Aurora Leigh) “nearer to the central truth” (800).

Methods:
Our ways of bringing students to the water and for coaching them through the deeps vary as much as the different swimming holes we paddle in. Our approaches to teaching in a way that encourages and fosters Christian maturity fall into six categories, though the categories themselves elude clear labels and often seem to overlap.

1. Our reading lists emphasize the richness of a student’s faith tradition through exposure to a variety of Christian authors, quite often previously unknown to them as Christians. One department member referred to these texts and authors as our “Cloud of Witnesses” to share with students. Several categories of texts, or specific texts and authors, that recur in our teaching
include: Medieval mystics, especially Julian of Norwich; seventeenth-century devotional poetry; eighteenth-century British literature in process and consequences of sectarianism; Victorians with responses to faith that raise all of the current issues we encounter; current literary theorists such as Frank Lentricchia (whose book on literary terms raises the issue of Christian response to most terms) and Brian Ingraffia on postmodernism and the Bible; in American literature teaching genre—particularly sermon and autobiography—as a means of making distinction (particularly important in understanding American romanticism) between institutional church and Body of Christ; Flannery O'Connor; and T.S. Eliot's poetry of spiritual journeys. Students profit not only from the broad content of this body of material, but also from the habits of mind cultivated by reading poetry as devotional practice.

2. No matter what text we are teaching, we often frame discussions, set reading lists and construct writing projects to stress the ways faith and literature intersect and diverge. While we all rushed to concur with the department member who stated that he is "careful not to create a single-issue approach to Shakespeare," we acknowledge that reading and discussion of literature invites broader and richer sensitivity to God and to God's creation. We often tend with special care to these conversations in our general education courses. For example, one department member organizes Introduction to Literature with Nicholas Wolterstorff's understanding of shalom: the self having identity insofar as it is meaningfully related to God, to human community, and to the rest of creation. Another department member poses her questions about students' response to texts as "young American college students," as well responses to texts as "Christian believers"; the combination assists them in seeing not only the variety of responses possible, but the variety of responses they might embody, with varying degrees of consistency, or inconsistency. We are all inclined toward asking what difference literature makes for the way we as readers lead our lives—going beyond aesthetic questions to moral questions and making bridges from the literature to contemporary issues.
3. Our texts, discussions and essay assignments often attempt to follow Niebuhr's admonishment to "comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable." In other words, we recognize the plethora of opportunities in literature to challenge some students' complacency about matters of faith, while also speaking to the experiences that some students fear will alienate them from the love of God. We frequently return to the vicarious experience literature offers its readers to participate in the formation of virtue, even though the path to virtue mapped in a text may be one that some of our students have difficulty recognizing. Some specific texts and topics that challenge them in this way include: the role of doubt and of homoeroticism in Tennyson's *In Memoriam, A.H.H.*; the introduction of missionaries and their mistakes in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*; an anthology on great ideas in Advanced Composition to help students consider how one might feel compelled by thinkers of other religious traditions. One faculty member uses a trip to the Museum of Tolerance as an opportunity for Advanced Composition students to develop essays. Perhaps the most valuable moral service of much of literature, both "sacred" and "secular," is the way it often shows a journey towards forgiveness. Through sharing these texts with our students, we get to see what forgiveness might look like, and thus perhaps have a better chance of enacting it ourselves.

4. We consider tradition formation in ways that invite students to reconsider, if not to modify, their "habitual objects of attention" (Phillipians 4:8). The course on Jewish literature, for instance, brings out questions of intersection of moral and aesthetic questions in ways that sometimes strike students as novel, but as invaluable. Some of us have invited students to read guidelines from a publisher on how to write a "Christian Inspirational Romance," and students often detect something amiss with these guidelines. At least one department member invites discussion of approaches to literary canon formation--particularly how Christianity might contribute to one's inclusion/exclusion in a given canon—to suggest how other aspects of history have combined or conflicted with Christianity in determining "aesthetic value." One faculty member has shown students some fundamentalist letters of complaint about his own fiction; the reactions offer students a chance to decide
what makes literature "Christian." Our attention to texts from Christian authors in cultures that often seem alien to many of our students—particularly African, Latin American and working-class authors—contributes to our goal in all classes to disengaging Christianity from culture.

5. Literature classes frequently bring us back to the Biblical text we share as a Christian intellectual community. Here our teaching methods vary to meet the challenge of our students' varying degrees of familiarity with scripture. In some cases, students' biblical knowledge in recognizing allusions can help to draw a class session together as a community of Christian readers. In other cases, a faculty member might be the one who has to take the initiative in helping students' recognize scriptural allusion and scriptural cadences in literature. Some department members frame essay questions that ask students to discuss authors' use of biblical allusion. One member has grown more interested in the genre of poems written in response to scripture, and sometimes focuses on this genre in both literature and writing classes.

6. Finally, we seek to foster an appreciation in our students for the prodigious gift of a liberal arts education—of four years in a peaceful setting, dedicated to the cultivation of the intellect. Opportunities to dwell on literature and writing (whether encountered as an English major, or through general education coursework) are gifts for which we encourage students to take stewardship. Classroom activities may help students as a corrective to our cultural tendency to make faith an individual experience, and to help them see that their increasing knowledge ought to be a gift they share in community. Writing classes and activities stress community building and responding to others with civility. In addition, several of us design literature and writing classes to draw students' attention to the ways that using language is a moral act; we try to make them aware of how they use language as a moral act, especially with respect to authority and their voicing of their own authority. One department member is overt in her talk of writing in spiritual terms (writing as an act of love; revision as an opportunity for grace). Another
pointedly raises questions of finding ways to tell the truth when one knows one lives in a culture of irony, hyperbole and lies.

Evaulation:

At times, essays that students write give us evidence of their progress toward Christian maturity. Other times, students name habits of mind they've encountered from poetry as devotional practices. The unique experience of teaching and living with students on England Semester (and for two department members on Europe Semester) has allowed for many memorable experiences of students' testimonies of how literature has strengthened their Christian faith. Each member of the department can share anecdotal evidence of student expressions of gratitude for exposure to contacts with Christian minds and ideas that they may not have made otherwise. For instance, several of us have had the experience of teaching texts that confront doubt and having those classes followed by students approaching us for private conversation about their own doubts and the place of doubt in faith.

In addition, we have noticed that our class discussion over the course of a semester--and even more so over the course of four years in the major--suggests that students have a larger view of faith after their study in the department than they did before. We also have the often whimsical experience of hearing ourselves and our colleagues quoted back to us in student conversations, with phrases such as “What might we have to forgive this author in order to get the gift offered?” Many department members have received e-mail messages and letters from alumni that testify to a prolonged (sometimes to what they see as a belated) understanding and appreciation of the complexities of their faith, and the former students attribute that keeping and heartening to their study in the English department.
Societal and Intellectual Engagement Standard

General Statement

There are a number of areas of activity within the English major which, by conscience and design, consistently involve students in active societal and intellectual engagement.

Student Learning Outcomes

The study of English at Westmont is in large part defined through developing the written and oral communication skills in students necessary to respond critically and persuasively to the demands of audiences that continually change.

In every English course students respond often in writing as well as verbally to a broad spectrum of prompts. Since much of our departmental teaching is more or less “Socratic” in method, the give-and-take between pupils and professors as well as concerted efforts to engage students in collaborative learning has resulted in conscious efforts to develop the interpersonal competence among students necessary to maximize the potential of such learning environments.

Every semester, introductory classes in literature as well as more advanced classes in the literature of major periods, authors, and special topics, focus on character and characterization, as well as classic questions of great ultimacy such as how shall we, as individuals or in groups, live. The what and how of societal and intellectual engagement is, in other words, part of the very subject material with which English majors deal on a daily basis. Thus it is against such a backdrop of daily, on-going “conversations” that student learning outcomes in this area should be assessed.

While many students in the major enroll, prospective student teachers in particular must take courses designed to respond to creating awareness of “the other,” ethnically, spiritually, nationally, and in terms of gender. “Race and Ethnicity in American Literature,” as well as “Women Writers,” and “Environmental Issues in Literature” expand empathy for those vulnerable because of marginalization. The England Semester, an off-campus semester-
long program, also immerses its students in living and learning situations in at least five to six national cultures and at least three of their literatures.

One area, however, where the department feels more needs to be done is in the area of gender studies, particularly literature dealing with sexual orientation.

Students in the English major demonstrate taking responsibility for their learning in a variety of ways. Those ways include an off-campus program unique to the English major, England Semester, where the ability of students to engage themselves intellectually and socially is tested by living and working together and independently on traditional and diverse literatures in unfamiliar settings overseas for three and one half months.

Students have also designed alternative majors bringing English into relationship with other disciplines in order to fulfill special intellectual and vocational interests.

There are a number of writing courses whose completion depends on going beyond meeting the routine expectations outlined for learning in courses. For example, in “Modern Grammar and Advanced Composition,” “Creative Writing,” and “Introduction to Journalism,” students are encouraged, and sometimes required, to submit their work for publication in campus, local, and national publications. Participation by English majors on the staffs of student-run publications like The Horizon and The Phoenix necessitates students assuming responsibility for a number of different types of learning.

Other examples of students assuming responsibility for their learning include self-initiated Major Honors Projects, Senior Comprehensive Exams, completions of a rigorous Graduate School (preparation) Track, and the establishment of the “Westmont Student Union,” a student-run topic-centered forum to which various speakers are invited.

In the department’s Writer’s Corner, student tutors begin the process of learning how to teach others, while improving their own written and oral communication skills in the process. A different form of tutoring is also undertaken in other writing courses where peer editing is used extensively. Not only are interpersonal and intellectual skills honed, the phenomenon that can occur when teaching, of never really learning anything as well as you do
when you have to teach it, does occur. Subsequently, the realization that often comes with such teaching, with learning how to listen intelligently, with learning how and when and where to ask questions whose power does not lie in the answers, equips one to continue learning in personal, academic, familial, and workplace settings.

Even the extracurricular character of some departmental programs engineers student development in active societal and intellectual engagement. Students in English serve in student leadership roles in student-led campus publications, an honorary society unique to the English major, and in campus-wide leadership and academic honorary societies.

Christian vocation, while not a formal curricular focus, is an active agenda among all members of the English department in their courses. Ultimate questions shared across cultures, genders and epochs of recorded history, are often driven by ethical and spiritual concerns. As these concerns appear in literary texts, they speak powerfully to our students. In turn, students raise questions about how people of faith are to live in a modern world. When questions don’t come, or when they have come in abundance, several professors create specific course-ending writing opportunities challenging students to reflect on the engagement of their course work with their faith.

One area where the department needs to do more, and perhaps an area that could impact Christian vocation indirectly, is in developing internships and practica within the Santa Barbara community. While some professors independently pursue opportunities for students to use their writing, editing and teaching skills within the community, making more “institutional” efforts in this area might increase participation within the civic, charitable, and cultural life of selected communities.
Critical-Interdisciplinary Thinking Standard

Evidence of Outcomes

By far the most accessible and demonstrative evidence of outcomes is found in students' speaking and writing, which usually (though not invariably) shows growth—often quite remarkable—over the period of their undergraduate career, or in just one course. Some courses require portfolio documentation. The department is considering also a required two-unit capstone course, which would provide other kinds of documentation.

1. General Thinking Skills: Current Strategies

In their writing and speaking students are pressed to give due regard to both the general (e.g., a thesis, a leading idea) and the specific (e.g., supporting evidence, discrete facts)—the "leaf" and the "forest" having equal importance, in one professor's metaphor. The department, however, does not focus exclusively on the mode of writing that traditionally has provided "a claim and a warrant," for there are diverse opportunities in other purposes, modes of writing, and audiences' expectations.

We monitor our students' logic and encourage them in the habit of automatically evaluating others' logic, in what they hear and read, for both soundness and validity. Some writing courses touch on formal logic and informal fallacies; Max Shulman's "Love is a Fallacy" is a useful vehicle.

Some courses introduce alternative schemes for distinguishing modes of thought, such as Bloom's taxonomy and the "hermeneutical spiral." Some emphasize self-consciousness about the mode of thought employed at a given moment in class, with encouragement to cultivate the "higher" modes. Some focus on gestation, brainstorming, and the like.

We encourage students to pursue the "so what?" question, to search for implications and agendas for further thought, to think of a thesis not only as a proposition but also as a central concern.

2. Diverse Disciplines: Current Strategies

By assigning readings that demonstrate how texts engage the rest of the world, we find opportunities to synthesize students' writing and reading with
other disciplines, noting the significance of divergent disciplinary methods. For a proposal to do more in this area, see 4. below.

3. Diverse Modes of Problem-Solving: Current Strategies

One professor encourages students to think of achieving one's aim in writing as a complex problem in rhetorical choices, analogous to any mathematical problem in that it requires resourceful imagination to create a unique solution, with the concomitant benefits and satisfactions. Students in English courses encounter three other quite diverse kinds of problems: understanding and appreciating a text, understanding, evaluating, and synthesizing others' criticism of a text, and understanding, evaluating, and synthesizing critical theory, their own and others', in working with a text.

Some professors encourage research-reporting alternatives to the traditional paper (examples in 5. below). At least one professor requires a three-page analysis articulating the student's understanding of the mode of thought involved—this as a way of encouraging pertinence and utility in students' choice of innovations.

4. Practical Collaboration with Other Disciplines: Current Strategies

It is departmental policy to encourage double-majoring. The multifarious content of literature makes our field naturally interdisciplinary, and we attempt to model collaboration out of our own experience of other disciplines, drawing into the study of literature voices and theories from other fields. Individual faculty have achieved particular syntheses with disciplines such as visual art, theatre, music, religious studies, philosophy, history, physics, and medicine.

As for involving students directly in this collaboration, one method that has proved useful is organizing students in a class (especially upper-division) into small groups consisting of majors in different disciplines, and asking them to bring to discussions the special perspectives of their own major. Another is referring students to faculty in other disciplines pertinent to their writing projects. Some faculty use cross-disciplinary texts such as A World of Ideas. We assign comparison-contrast exercises (e.g., paired texts) as a stimulus to broad synthesizing. Since any disciplinary approach to a subject permits knowledge
only in its particular terms, we focus on the significance of terms for things; one professor uses the analogy of transparent anatomical drawings, each representing different features of a very complex whole.

Team-teaching on England Semester and Europe Semester with colleagues from other departments (history, math, theatre, religious studies, art, kinesiology, etc.) has fostered fruitful syntheses of perspectives and methods.

Departmental faculty who lead Europe Semesters have excellent opportunities to demonstrate their personal interest in a broad variety of the sights and facts that are encountered spontaneously in visits to a dozen or more major cultural centers, besides the broadly interdisciplinary range of the curriculum, which includes courses in Western civilization, religious studies, and other subjects. England Semesters provide comparable advantages, notwithstanding the somewhat less diverse subjects and locales.

Any literature course invades the spheres of other disciplines, and we try to give them their due: respect for their exponents, and for the differences; critical evaluation of the differences; and especially initiative about benefitting literary study through the differences—e.g., looking to philosophers to help avoid "third-rate philosophy" (Richard Levin's verdict on the bulk of thematic criticism of Elizabethan drama); drawing on music and the visual arts, both substance and methods, to illuminate literature; pointing out the respects in which biblical studies have created a more orderly, and sometimes more effectual, discipline of reading and philosophizing than we have.

Some professors call adopting another discipline's perspectives "changing the lens"; we invite students to think of the various disciplines as different sets of questions, or as different languages, or as different emphases in articulating what matters most among all the elements of our shared ultimate issues.

We are all concerned to help students discern legitimate approaches to their subject. How to insist that a question may have more than one good answer, without conceding that any answer is as good as any other? One professor's analogy points out the difference between the diverse tangents that may be added to an amoeboid figure, and the endless possibilities for lines that fail to qualify as tangents. How to show the complementarity of some diverse
answers to a question, and the ultimate elusiveness of part of the reality, even
to the combination of all useful answers? In sufficient numbers, those tangents
tend to represent the whole amoeboid figure—but without ever filling all the
interstices (the latter point being relative to 5. below).

More team-teaching would help reinforce the best of these methods and
address this concern directly.

5. Limits of Critical Thinking: Current Strategies

To help students avoid hasty and simplistic judgments we ask students
to "honor the complexities." One professor quotes Ellen Goodman: "The bottom
line is always It's not that simple!"

To help students harness all their mental faculties, we recommend
"sleeping on it," intuitive leaps, etc. as potentially fruitful adjuncts to focused,
discursive ratiocination.

The characteristic epistemological orientation of our field is to
acknowledge literature, especially poetry and narrative of all kinds, as an
irreducible way of knowing. To help students see how literature enables one to
think about what's "unknowable" to discursive reasoning, faculty demonstrate
the role of fiction in augmenting truth-telling—sometimes by pairing fiction-
and non-fiction-texts. Some professors encourage students to convey the results
of their research projects in other media than a paper, such as website, lesson-
plan, painting, and slideshow. Ways of knowing that may be characteristic of
women are presented as available and profitable also to men.

We encourage students to beware of the ways in which the idealized
"search for truth" can be perverted by the effects of human depravity:
sabotaging one's exercise of reason (as in instances of evil genius, of intelligence
without wisdom or integrity); or usurping the preeminence of the human quest
for goodness; or diverging from the One who is Truth. Flannery O'Connor's
"Good Country People" is one notable exemplar.

To enhance these aims, we would like to see more team-taught seminars
across disciplines.
6. Attitudes: Current Strategies

Students' written self-evaluations of major projects have promoted good attitudes, such as honesty about themselves. Peer-critiquing has similar benefits; so do semester-long group projects; so does requiring students to argue both sides of a controversy "with equal vigor."

In writing courses one professor stresses "empathetic imagination," i.e., walking in another's shoes—a "warm version of Keats' Negative Capability."

We encourage students to recognize that their own writing is a political act.

In assigning cross-disciplinary activities we aim to promote students' awareness of how another discipline's perspective can help locate and remedy their own blind spots.

Diversity Standard

Introduction

The study of literature provides an opportunity to introduce students to people different from themselves and to cultures unlike our own. In addition to helping our students consider the dimensions of social class, gender, and ethnicity, the English department requires its majors and minors to examine the relationship between cross-generational and cross-cultural differences. Historical diversity is a crucial component of literary study in that it enables readers to evaluate questions of difference which are analogous to those they encounter today in California yet which are removed from the current politics that surround such questions (e.g. in Irish lit. students are asked to compare/contrast the historical oppression of Irish language with California's "Spanish-only" movement). In our department's discussion, we discussed how we teach writers from other places and times, as well as a representative selection of contemporary American writers from diverse cultural backgrounds and ethnicities.

Background

In 1997 the department revised its curriculum in order to gain approval from the State of California for its Program of Subject Matter Preparation for the
Single Subject Teaching Credential. The diversity and equity standard for that program states that each student in the program acquires knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the perspectives and contributions of diverse cultural, ethnic and gender groups to literature, language and writing. The program promotes educational equity by utilizing instructional, advisement and curricular practices that offer equal access to program content and career options for all students.

At that time we implemented a variety of new course components, agreeing to include formally underrepresented writers in most of our literature courses. In addition, every student who completes the program must also write a narrative account of their exposure to literature representing a variety of typically marginalized groups, and submit the field journal they prepare for Ed 101 on racism, sexism and handicapping conditions in the schools.

Current Strategies

1) In our discussions we agreed that we currently include a wide variety of discussion questions, essay topics and exam questions designed to promote dialogue and critical thinking about issues of class, gender, ethnicity and culture. Every piece of literature provides an opportunity to discuss one or more of these, either by the presence of diversity or through its absence (e.g. why are there no women in Moby Dick? Why do African-Americans so often appear as criminals, idiots or “the ghost in the machine”(Toni Morrison’s term for the invisible hands which help the business, the country or the household run smoothly) in pre-1945 American novels? How are the working class characters portrayed in Wordsworth?)

2) Some of us will typically juxtapose poems written by men and women (e.g. sonnets, elegies, love poems) to explore questions of gender difference among writers. Many of us assign several critical essays on a single work which provide a variety of theoretical perspectives, including feminist, Marxist and Christian. We have devised a variety of handouts to help students to ask questions pertinent to a particular critical approach.
3) We have a number of courses that focus on literature written by a specific group or groups, such as Women Writers; Ethnicity and Race in American Literature; Jewish Literature and Irish Literature (each regularly offered as a seminar); and Holocaust and Israeli Literature (offered in England).

4) Many of us assign readers in Composition and Advanced Composition which provide an anthology of diverse voices and raise relevant questions as topics for students to write about.

5) As we believe that learning to read empathetically is an important step towards dismantling prejudice, we agree that we should include considerations of homoeroticism in our discussion of literature (such as Shakespeare) in our upper-division courses.

6) Another form of diversity we discussed which is not listed in the Diversity Standard is religious diversity. To the extent that they can successfully avoid “vilifying, romanticizing, or victimizing” the other, our students will be more effective workers for God’s Kingdom. We want our students to encounter and enjoy literature from a variety of cultural and religious perspectives, to learn that a more important question to ask about any text than “was this author a Christian?” is “to what extent does this work resonate with my Christianity?” or “in what way does this work lead me to reflect on my own perspectives as a Christian?”

7) As a follow-up to #6 above, we also agreed that we seek to teach what “the face of God’s Kingdom” looks like, to help them to gain “an understanding of the Christian church cross-culturally, distinguishing between what is essential to Christianity” and what is peculiar to the American evangelical subculture. While we attempt to do some of this in our courses on campus, we agreed that our Off-Campus Programs provide the best opportunity for discussions designed to promote such learning.
8) We bring speakers to enrich our classes (e.g. a Holocaust survivor, a Native American poet), and require our students to attend plays and poetry readings.

Evidence of Student Learning
1) First year students, whom every member of our department confronts in either English 2 or English 6, are typically black-and-white thinkers. Their compositions and essays often betray a dogmatic and inflexible approach to difference. By the time students are juniors or seniors, their writing reflects the impact of the college experience upon their thinking, which will be more critical and less judgmental, more carefully nuanced and supported with evidence from the text. As a department, we agree that it is impossible to distinguish what happens as a result of our teaching and what happens as a natural developmental process, but we do see conversations about these issues that open in one classroom emerging in another.

2) Students are required to "demonstrate their ability to bring the dimensions of social class, gender, ethnicity and culture to the discussion and analysis of issues" in a variety of ways: e.g. to lead a 20-40 minute class discussion of one or more of these aspects of a text; to write an integrative essay on one’s own prejudices; to contribute an editorial to the student newspaper, to write a series of response papers on a range of topics including these, etc.

3) Students write reviews of plays by diverse authors or with a diverse cast and poetry readings given by writers who represent one or more diverse points of view.

4) Students keep a journal of reflective and integrative responses to the authors they read and to relevant questions which arise in class discussions.

Proposals
1) We recommend that a two-year foreign language requirement for English majors be instituted gradually over time.
2) We recommend that a course in literature of the Classic Greek and Roman cultures be included in our curriculum.

3)

**Written and Oral Communication Standard**

**General Observations**

The "outcomes" listed under this standard assume that good educations in speaking and writing have both a common goal, i.e., effective communication, and a common foundation: rhetoric. As a department we accept this assumption, understanding "rhetoric" not as a specific field of study but as an entire range of interests in the way speakers and writers influence others in language.

Given its customary interests in literary criticism, grammar, composition, stylistics, theory and creative writing, the English Department sees itself, along with Communication Studies, as a frontrunner in training students to write and speak well. Clearly, however, this task is an important concern for all fields of study, not just a single department, as the standard rightly implies.

We find ourselves serving a double function within the college. On one hand, we prepare our own majors for careers as literate scholars, teachers, editors, journalists, poets, and the like. On the other hand, we provide essential services for all departments: all students pass through our beginning composition courses and many through advanced composition; many students combine English with another major to prepare for professions such as law, medicine, business, counseling, or pastoring; we train future teachers in the Liberal Studies major; all students have access to the Department’s "Writers’ Corner" and the student publications we supervise; our literature and writing courses are crossgrained with the work of historians, theologians, psychologists, philosophers, social scientists, and artists; and we are sometimes looked to for leadership in writing-across-the-curriculum projects.

Since the department has a college-wide service function as well as a proper academic function, we need to assess that as a state of affairs, then to assess our performance in both functions. The whole faculty ultimately has to decide whether it will share responsibility for training student writers and
speakers; we can complete our assessment of our own performance only in light of the faculty’s position on that point.

In our department’s discussions, we agreed either tacitly or explicitly on many general points:

• that the Department’s speaking and writing standards for its own majors are higher than the college’s standards for the graduating student in general.
• that we influence students not only by what we teach but also by how we model speaking and writing
• that oral and written language test and reinforce one another, in the classroom and beyond
• that students need to learn to speak and write, but also need to speak and write in order to learn
• that writing and speaking need to be practiced and maintained; first-year composition can’t be expected to “take” permanently or to cover all modes and genres of writing required by all majors
• that our goals for all students as speakers and writers are that they 1) be competent across the whole range of thinking skills required for effective communication, 2) be well-informed, 3) be rhetorically effective, 4) exhibit particular virtues, including creativity, judiciousness, openmindedness, parsimony, circumspection, and commitment, 5) show true cultural and historical awareness, 6) be free from reliance on popular clichés, especially in their communication about matters of Christian faith, and 7) be equipped to evaluate writing and speaking, their own and others’
• that we are battling a tide of cultural influences which have caused declines in vocabulary, grammar, articulateness, economy, formal consciousness, and conversational skill; have privileged imagery over words; have promoted narcissism and passivity; have undercut traditional standards of excellence; and have led some to view precision, power, or artistry in language as symptoms of elitism.
Methods

As a Department, we cherish our tradition of pedagogical freedom and diversity at all levels. However, all of us offer hands-on instruction in writing, all of us favor individual out-of-class conferences, and many of us work oral presentation into our courses in a variety of ways.

Basic Requirements

Some of our students need remedial work in grammar, vocabulary, reading, and research, as evidenced by their frustration and poor performance in English 2, "Composition," and other English courses, but we don’t offer a course comparable to the Math Department’s Math 00. Instead, we provide as much of the necessary remediation as possible in the flow of non-remedial courses. We tend to incorporate grammar instruction at the point of need and in the context of a student’s own writing or reading. Even in “Modern Grammar and Advanced Composition,” grammar tends to be taught as a function of syntax, syntax as a function of style, style as a function of voice, and voice as a function of outlook and purpose in relation to audience.

Thinking Skills

A wide range of thinking skills is covered in English 2, where students typically write in a variety of modes (description, narrative, summary, process analysis, definition, comparison, argumentation, reflection, evaluation, etc.) and with a variety of aims (to explore, to explain, to clarify, to entertain, to persuade, etc.). In English 2, students are taught library and internet research and documentation skills in longer, multi-phased research paper projects. In English 6, Introduction to Literature, we are agreed that students should produce at least three specimens of critical writing, and some of us assign as many as eight critical papers.

In more advanced English courses, both writing and literature, we place more emphasis on criticism, evaluation, interpretation, synthesis, sustained reflection, formal argument, and meditation. Many of our assignments draw upon personal journaling, small-group discussion, class discussion, and private conferences. Some issue in oral class presentations by individuals or groups,
sometimes in multi-media presentations (video, website, theatrical performances, etc.). Students can scarcely get through an English major without writing papers both teacher-assigned and self-assigned, short and long, researched and unresearched, creative and critical, process and product. Most of us in the department, if not all, require and evaluate extensive revisions; some of us require revisions of revisions, followed by self-evaluations.

The crowning achievement for an English major, in terms of higher order thinking skill, is the Major Honors project, completed under committee supervision over three semesters, and resulting in a paper sometimes rivalling an M.A. thesis in length and complexity. One or two students complete such projects in an average year.

Rhetorical Effectiveness

Though none of us teaches strictly from classic or neo-Aristotelian models of rhetoric, we consistently across the department teach students to analyze voice in relation to purpose, audience, cultural context, and genre conventions. In addition, we consistently teach students to understand language within the conditions of historical change and against the cultural background of its use. We are unusually united in approaching language out of a primary concern for literature.

In both writing and literature classes, students are quite commonly asked to read aloud, either their own papers or passages of literature. Several classes require memorization and recitation of literature, followed sometimes by evaluation. Students are asked with some frequency to prepare and then lead class discussions, usually alone, sometimes in pairs. Some of us coach or debrief students on matters of presentation, not encouraging slickness but focussing on engaging an academic audience. Typically, student presenters have to face spontaneous questions from the class, as they might be expected to do in professional settings outside of school. In our department discussion, we surprised each other with the variety of creative methods we individually use to incorporate speaking into class activities.
Intellectual Virtues

- **Creativity** Besides fostering creativity in creative writing classes, many of us let students fulfill essay requirements by choosing creative options, such as imitations, scripts, web pages, performances, satires, videos, poems, short stories, role-playing, etc. Even in critical writing, all of us place a high premium on originality of thesis.

- **Fairmindedness** The presence of this virtue is hard to assess in students apart from their participation in the arduous process of revision, where prejudices are ground away, or their participation in class discussion, where they are forced to encounter opposition from others, or their participation in the research process, where they are forced to make fair use of published sources.

- **Openness to Ideas** We work quite frequently to promote this virtue by asking students to brainstorm in small groups, to discuss in pairs or threesomes, or to interview each other or others off campus. Several of us use the selection of course reading material to “afflict the comfortable” and open the margins of classroom discourse beyond the students’ ordinary channels of thought.

- **Openness to Criticism** In writing courses, it is customary for students to critique one another’s work, following the instructor’s lead. Students receive extensive feedback on papers; all of us are agreed on the importance of offering substantive, constructive guidance to students, as opposed to simply congratulating or disapproving. Major Honors candidates have to defend their work publicly in front of a panel of critics, much as they could expect to do in graduate school.

- **Judicious Reasoning** This is probably the area we all work hardest on in both writing and literature courses: pressing for evidence, asking the “Why?” and the “So... what?” questions,
testing their intellectual presuppositions, probing consequences and conclusions, exposing patterns of clichéd thinking, pressing for insightful connections, engaging in formal or informal argument. Several of us report having students outline their reasoning at the black(or white)board or jousting with others via e-mail.

- **Historical and Cultural Awareness**  Our methods and evidences of success in this area are better indicated in our reports on “Christian Orientation,” “Diversity” and “Critical-Interdisciplinary Thinking” standards. Much of our teaching of literature has been influenced by the whole profession’s shift toward investigation of historical and cultural contexts for literature. Nowhere are our students more powerfully moved in these directions than by the highly popular England Semester, Europe Semester, and other off-campus programs we have participated in leading. Students, especially in theatre courses and sometimes in other historical period courses, are also given broader cultural exposure by their frequent field trips to plays, museums, galleries, and other regional attractions

- **Freedom from Reliance on Popular Cliché**  This is a point especially hammered on in English 2, 104, and 90, but modeled, as well, and taught in all English courses where there is discussion or writing or critical reading—that is, in all English courses.

- **Self- and Peer-Assessment**  Self assessment and peer assessment are standard operating procedure in most of our composition courses and in many of our literature courses. Often, for example, students are asked to pick out “best” and “worst” sentences from their own essays. More than one member of the department has students write self-assessments of individual essay drafts. Most of us rely on combinations of small-group and whole-class feedback to help students revise. Some report
having the whole class evaluate oral presentations. Those who assign end-of-semester portfolios report that self-assessments are usually standard procedure.

Evidence of Success

How do we know our students are progressing as we wish? Briefly, we grade a great number of papers, thoroughly, measuring students’ progress against more or less explicit criteria, criteria drawn from years of experience, from textbooks, from teachers and professional writers we have known, from college-wide standards, and from literature and other published writings. We also interact with student writers in classroom and conference; we observe them interacting with one another; we see their papers rewarded with publication on campus or earning admission to graduate schools and professions. We observe their speeches and panel discussions and dramatic presentations and recitations. We see some of them going on to be writers, editors, public speakers, etc. All of the above gives us a certain empirical “proof” of our students’ progress.

More important, possibly, but, in any case, inevitably, the evidence we gather is sometimes of a more intangible sort: we see faces light up, we see barriers let down, we watch groups begin to gel, we hear reports of growing excitement, we sense a student’s growing confidence, we admire a student’s courage even in failure, we note a loosening of inhibitions, we sense a stirring in the room. None of us characteristically catalog these effects, nor could we, nor would we necessarily want to if we could, nor would we be terribly interested in someone else’s quantification of such “evidences.” They belong to the domain of the “art” of teaching and the “relationship” between teacher and learner for which there are no substitutes or equivalents. We all need, to a certain extent, to trust our own and one another’s instincts.

Conclusions, Suggestions and Proposals

From our self-study, we stand with reasonable confidence behind the following conclusions:
9) We gratefully acknowledge one another's strengths in writing, the teaching of writing, and speaking. We struggle more in the area of teaching the whole range of speaking skills. As a department, we make a department-wide good-faith effort to build oral communication skills; we integrate speaking and writing in a great variety of ways, although we agree that we probably do too little in the way of formal oral presentations of the sort that many are required to do in the professional world. We share some resistance to requiring extensive oral reports because of the class time they take and the mediocrity that results without more extensive training.

10) Our teaching of both oral and written communication prepares people on the skill-level, the knowledge level, and the attitude level for success in the workplace, though we do not in many ways gear our teaching precisely to the work world. We could attend to the practical demands of life in the work world more than we do; at the same time, we see our non-utilitarian vision as healthy for a liberal arts college.

11) We currently use baseline competence in grammar, as measured by the TSWE, as a requirement for "passing out" of composition; we agree that a writing test, such as the SAT-II, may be a more fitting tool for that purpose and that baseline competence in grammar should be required for admission to English 2. In that connection, we ought to consider offering a non-credit, two-unit course in remedial grammar and writing for those who are not adequately prepared for English 2.

12) We share an enthusiasm for the general idea of a capstone course for seniors in the major, a course in which, among other things, students would prove the progress they have made as both speakers and writers.

13) At present we do not enjoy an especially active, open, or economical arrangement with the Communication Studies Dept. The two departments duplicate some efforts and emphases, such as the teaching of argument; they may even work at cross-purposes to an extent. This area of concern may need some tending. We presently do not have excellent ways to assess oral communication skills.

14) The approach to "writing and speaking across the curriculum" that we support is not something like a new but something more like a culture
which we could help to grow on-campus. In that effort we would need the help of many others.

15) Toward improvement in written and oral communication, we see many good arguments for encouraging foreign language training: language instruction builds grammar consciousness, listening skills, speaking skills, conversation skills, confidence in oral presentation, vocabulary, wider social and historical vision, and much more.

16) We would enjoy having a somewhat closer collaboration with the history department so that our students would exhibit a keener and better-informed historical consciousness in their speaking and writing.

17)

**Technology Standard**

**Prolegomena**

As English faculty have come to rely on computers daily for our own correspondence, research, writing and preparation of class materials, we have likewise come to expect students to rely on computer technology for the work they prepare and submit in our classes. At the same time, we are concerned—to varying degrees—about the way in which technology can become an end in itself. We worry that certain students may find virtual reality so all-engrossing that it causes interpersonal reality and the natural world to pale by comparison. Of course, Chaim Potok says that as a boy he found *Brideshead Revisited* to be so all-engrossing that while he was reading it the created world of the novel seemed more real than his own Brooklyn Hasidic childhood. And we have all found that a transfixing production of *Hamlet*, the genial allure of Jane Austen’s created world or the powerful sway of a Faulkner novel can be all-engrossing—and we are happy for our students to be thus engrossed. Among our number are those who fancy themselves, in their rich fantasy life, as Luddites. But in reality none of us yearn for the purpled prose of ditto machines or for hefty sandwiches of vellum and carbon paper, for well-thumbed call numbers in card catalogs or even for the days of manually searching 25 separate volumes of the *MLA Bibliography*. We are grateful to have
tools available that enable us to revise the structure of an essay without retyping 30 pages, to search 37 years of the MLA Bibliography or consult Books in Print or access the immense resources of the Oxford English Dictionary all from our homes or offices. And we want our students to benefit from and become adept at using those tools.

Goals

Our goals are for students to be able to

18) employ the resources of word processing programs to prepare papers in accordance with professional standards
19) use on-line databases skillfully as part of their bibliographic research
20) participate in lively literary discussions via e-mail as well as in face-to-face exchanges in the classroom
21) engage in editing of text—both their own and that of their fellow students—using computer technology
22) distinguish between solid and insubstantial sources when using material from Internet sources
23) clearly document material from Internet sources in accordance with accepted standards
24) employ computer-assisted instruction for such purposes as grammar review
25) use computer technology in moderation, and learn respect for those who choose on principle to abstain.

In order to achieve these goals, the English faculty at Westmont have established some department-wide expectations, while simultaneously availing themselves of a variety of strategies.

Department-wide Expectations

All students in English classes at Westmont are required to write their papers on a computer and submit their work in double-spaced format with headers that automatically number pages. All students are expected to use
word wrap (rather than hitting return at the end of each line) both for normal text and for blocked quotations.

When they take a required major author course (Shakespeare, Milton, or Chaucer), all students complete a research paper, bibliographic essay or annotated bibliography that relies on at least 8–10 bibliographic sources. In the preparation of this paper all students are expected to employ the on-line MLA Bibliography and at least one other on-line database in addition to any print bibliographies. In addition to providing proper documentation for both print and on-line material, students must indicate the bibliographic tool they used to identify each source. Students who access previously published material in an online database are expected to document both the original print publication and the online version (including the URL) where they actually saw the material. Throughout, students must demonstrate the capacity to make ethical use of sources, including Internet sources, distinguishing properly between direct quotation and paraphrase with appropriate documentation for both.

By the end of the first semester of their senior year (i.e., one full semester prior to their expected graduation), all majors are expected to submit a portfolio electronically to a departmentally monitored drop box. This electronic portfolio consisting of one paper from each of three English classes (including the research paper, bibliographic essay or annotated bibliography completed in the required major author course) must demonstrate each of the learning outcomes articulated above.

In all of our courses, we expect students to evaluate critically any Internet sources they may use. Toward that end, from time to time we show students various items from Internet sites that range in quality from lousy to superlative and discuss how to distinguish between them. In some courses we gladly invite librarians to offer instruction to our students both on researching in the given subject area and on evaluating sources.

**Other Strategies**

The installation of a data projector in Reynolds 109 will enable an expansion of computer-assisted in-class text editing that has already been in use in some writing courses. In some classes, students have been required to
submit their papers electronically (to a drop box accessible from the Macintosh lab in the library) in the morning prior to the class session. That enables the professor to select particular papers for in-class editing on the same day that they are submitted—or to do a cut-and-paste from a variety of papers of particular sentences that demonstrate similar grammatical or stylistic problems. Other professors require students to submit drafts of their papers by attaching them to an e-mail message.

Some classes engage students in participating in literary discussion via e-mail by using a listserv that posts messages to all members of the class. Although the professor receives a copy of all messages and can intervene (usually by speaking to an individual in private if posts become inappropriately personal or hostile), usually such e-mail discussions are self-correcting and enable students to respond to one another’s insights and errors about the literature. In other classes, students are assigned to find a particular passage to discuss with the rest of the class via e-mail. In some situations the professor chooses not to be a detached observer and becomes an active participant in the e-mail discussion.

Some courses have employed computer-assisted instruction in such areas as journalism and grammar. Students have been required to purchase such programs on disk or on CD-ROM in order to complete required exercises in the relevant topic.

Some courses have involved students in designing websites on such topics as modernism and art in American literature. In an expansion of that approach, one professor is planning to put all resources for a given course on a web site.

One course has engaged students in a “recovery project” by asking them to identify and gather materials on some 19th Century woman poet who does not appear in any of the course anthologies. Such a project inherently raises questions about canon formation while giving students the opportunity to hone their Internet research skills.

At the same time that we are honing students’ skills to access electronic materials, we recognize that we need to avoid conveying the impression (or reinforcing some students’ misapprehension) that all research materials can be
accessed online. Therefore when professors offer library instruction they frequently balance discussion of electronic search techniques with physically walking students through the stacks to point out the arrangement of resources or by requiring students to access some articles in hard copy (rather than online forms).

**Future Plans**

In our departmental self-study discussion we came to acknowledge that whatever lofty goals we have for our students' use of technology, we need to recognize that some students come to us without even the ability to determine from an electronic citation whether Westmont owns a particular item. We need to do more to ensure that all students are able to read such "road signs."

We also need to do more to help students know how to cope when a given search results in, say, 420 citations so that they will know how to winnow the more useful from the less useful.

In some of our Composition classes it has become painfully clear that an increasing number of students have never outgrown the practice condoned by some elementary schoolteachers of preparing a "report" by doing a cut-and-paste from other sources. As students have transferred such a practice from encyclopedias to Internet sources, they have engrained patterns of academic dishonesty that must be confronted.

Although Westmont's librarians have established a page (variously designated as the "Library Resources" or the "Online Resources" page) with links to sites offering different models for how to cite electronic sources, we discussed the possibility of preparing a handout that would demonstrate a departmentally preferred standard for citing such material.

The availability of a data projector in Reynolds 109 will enable the film class and other classes to take fuller advantage of video resources becoming available on DVD. By having DVD clips available on computer we hope to be able, for example, to compare scenes from multiple versions of Shakespeare productions more easily.
The department is considering expanded use of computer-assisted instruction in the area of grammar. Such instruction could be part of

- a "grammar boot camp" for students whose test scores indicate a lack of grammatical fitness for college life
- all courses in Composition
- the training of prospective teachers (either for the single-subject credential in English or for the multiple-subject credential) through inclusion in English 104: Modern Grammar and Advanced Composition.