

Eight-Year Program Review IBHE Report Summary: see attached Resources page and the EIU report archive: <https://www.eiu.edu/assess/archivepr.php>

PROGRAM REVIEW REPORT SUMMARY

1. Reporting Institution: Eastern Illinois University

2. Program Reviewed B.A. in English

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5. OVERVIEW

Mission and distinctiveness: The English Department of Eastern Illinois University offers undergraduate and graduate programs that assure intellectual and academic excellence among English majors and minors. In promoting awareness of cultural diversity in the study of language and literature, encouraging creativity, fostering proficient student writing in an age of digital communications, and making appropriate contributions to general education and to other University programs, the Department serves a function central to the University's mission. English majors exist in nearly all colleges and universities in Illinois; among the public universities, we stand out in terms of the number of distinct concentrations (5) we offer to undergraduates (only two publics, ISU and UIC, offer more). Students come to our program with the traditional wide variety of English major post-graduation goals: about 40% begin college with the goal of becoming secondary ELA teachers; among the rest, career goals include becoming professionals in writing, editing, marketing, or social media for businesses and non-profits as well as careers that require graduate study, most commonly librarians, attorneys, and college instructors; authorship is also a vocational goal for many.

Student learning objectives for the BA in English: Majors will (1) think and read attentively and critically; (2) write clearly, analytically, and expressively; (3) interpret texts using appropriate critical vocabularies; (4) understand and be able to situate texts in diverse cultural and historical contexts; (5) become skilled in using multiple technologies and research methods; (6) speak clearly, analytically, and expressively, and use active and critical listening skills to understand and evaluate ideas.

Student learning objectives for the BATC in English: Majors will (1) demonstrate the ability to think and write critically about clinical experiences; (2) demonstrate the ability to use English language arts to help students become familiar with their own and others' cultures, thereby promoting global citizenship; (3) demonstrate knowledge of writing processes; (4) demonstrate knowledge of the range and influences of print and nonprint media and technology in contemporary cultures. All learning objectives for the BATC in English align with the NCTE and NCATE standards, the new Illinois Professional Teaching Standards (IPTs), and the Common Core Standards.

6. MAJOR FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Description and assessment of major changes in the program. After a significant dip in interest in the humanities in the first 15 years or so of the 21st century, we may have reached a new normal in terms of student demand for degrees in English and English education. A 2024 report on career preparation and outcomes for English majors by the Modern Language Association aggregated data from reliable sources and concluded that the median employment rates and median salaries for English majors are only slightly below the median for all majors. Perhaps the greatest change since our last review is the rise of generative AI, which both appears to threaten the careers in knowledge work that English majors have traditionally gone on to do, and yet also offers an opportunity for English Departments to redouble our efforts to ensure that humans continue to be able to adequately assess the knowledge and writing produced by AI trained on LLMs. Our faculty are convinced that we must nurture and hone the human capacities for ethics, empathy, creativity, and critical thinking that will allow knowledge workers to make responsible use of AI, but we recognize that public perception of AI's potential will be a challenge for us, as for all English departments, in coming years.

It is too soon to be certain, but these concerns about AI might be related to recent drops in enrollment. Since our last review, the English major retained relatively stable enrollment between 2018 (118 students in the combined majors) and 2022 (124), but we have experienced two notable drops in enrollment in 2023 and again this year, when combined undergraduate English enrollment fell to 83.

In relationship to the English teaching certification major, with minor fluctuations, a statewide and national teachers' shortage has been a major force in driving students into the major, while increasingly challenging (and well-publicized) conditions for educators in K-12 schools have been an opposing force. In March 2025, [ISBE reported](#) that while the teacher shortage has eased, many Illinois districts still have difficulty filling positions, so we anticipate that the current trend will continue for some time to come. For other career fields that English majors often pursue, the Illinois Department of Employment Security's long-range forecasts indicate either relatively stable or slightly growing demand in Illinois for technical writers, public relations specialists, librarians, lawyers and legal assistants, and English college instructors and a slight decrease in demand for editors.

A decade ago, we changed our major dramatically, introducing 5 separate concentrations (in line with the MLA's recommendations for dealing with the decline in English majors). Since our last IBHE review, we have been refining that revised major, as described below. Perhaps our most major curricular change during this period has been that in response to a request from our Provost, we have reduced the credits required in the English major from 49-52 (depending on concentration) in 2018 to a current level of 41-44.

Major findings and recommendations: To assess our student learning outcomes for English majors, the department surveys graduating students every semester; collects and reviews samples of student writing in the core curriculum and across the concentrations up to senior-level courses; evaluate randomized samples of student presentations at our annual student conference; cross-reference with University mandated speaking and listening assessment conducted in English 4300/4390; periodically conducts focus groups facilitated by trained graduate assistants; and supplements with anecdotal reports of student perception of learning from our senior-level career development course, where students explicitly reflect on their learning. For the BATC in English, additional assessment tools include the ELA Content Exam, Student Teaching Approval Portfolios, unit plans collected from English teaching methods courses, student teaching evaluations, clinical experience essays, and department-wide faculty evaluations of student readiness for student teaching.

For all majors, we find that there is marked improvement from the sophomore to the senior level as reflected in the core courses, on all learning objectives, but for four of our learning objectives (think and read attentively and critically; write clearly, analytically, and expressively; interpret texts using appropriate critical vocabularies; and understand and be able to situate texts in diverse contexts), only 50% of students achieve the highest levels, and only 46% of students achieve the highest levels in speaking and listening.

For BATC in English majors, our assessment goes beyond department SLOs and focuses on accreditor-defined learning objectives (which, of course, map in various ways to the department SLOs). Our most recent assessment analysis finds strong mastery of the student learning objectives related to writing, including the accreditor-identified objective of writing with digital technology. While students are meeting standards for content knowledge related to grammar, their performance is not as strong in this area as in others. SLO 2 is also an area of strength, with most students demonstrating the highest ability in using their content knowledge to

"plan and implement . . . instruction that promotes social justice and critical engagement with complex issues related to maintaining a diverse, inclusive, equitable society."

Feedback from graduating students consistently demonstrates a high level of satisfaction with our programs. On the most recent exit survey, when asked how well the department prepared them on each of the SLOs, the average response was 4.5 or above for SLOs 1-3, and between 4.1 and 4.49 for SLOs 4-6 (with the lowest rating going to SLO 5, regarding technologies and research methods, at 4.11). When asked to rate numerically how well the English major had prepared them to apply their skills in a career setting, the average response was 4.5.

Our efforts to prepare students for careers have been favorably noted by the Modern Language Association's [2024 report on English Majors' Career Preparation and Outcomes](#), and our proactive student advising approach has been recognized by the acceptance of an article on those practices co-authored by our faculty members Terri Fredrick and Melissa Caldwell, which will appear in the next issue of the *ADE Bulletin* (the professional publication of the Association of Departments of English).

Actions taken since the last review: As noted earlier, our focus since the last review has been refinement of the essentially new major introduced shortly before that 2018 review. Actions taken include:

- Significant (and still on-going) revision to our formal assessment process. Immediately after adding 4 new concentrations, we were still conducting assessment focusing on the common core courses of the major. We realized the inadequacy of such an approach for informing us about the success of the concentrations, and so over the last four years, we have been working to develop parallel assessment practices for all concentrations.
- In response to assessment data, we have refined the core of our curriculum by removing a pair of experimental literary history courses (Transatlantic Literary History I and II). Student focus groups indicated that the courses were not appreciated by students, and assessment demonstrated the knowledge from these courses was not being appropriately transferred to student success on the related SLOs in senior-level assessments.
- In response to feedback from student reflection in the career learning course, we are broadening our for-credit internship program to make it applicable to all concentrations (rather than, as previously, primarily focused on students in professional writing).
- Our BATC program has revised its sequence of teaching methods courses in response to direct and indirect feedback loops, to better sequence the courses and assist students in integrating content knowledge to address SLOs where scores are lower.
- A pilot group of instructors has made targeted efforts to collaborate with EIU's Career Services on integrating into their courses activities and information about employability traits and how they relate to course learning objectives.

Actions to be taken because of this review:

- Our drop in enrollment is concerning. Further investigation of the causes is called for, but so is collection and promotion of relevant data. While we believe that concerns about the employability of English majors is likely part of the reason for recent declines, research for this report demonstrates that the career outlook is in fact relatively stable. In order to collect information to share as part of recruitment practices, as well as to gather additional data from alumni and employers, the following actions are planned:
 - Renew our research on career outcomes of recent graduates.
 - Form an alumni advisory board.
 - Conduct interviews with targeted employers and preserve these interviews for current and prospective students.
- Clearly, it is incumbent on us to address generative AI in a systematic way. In the last few years, we have been reading and discussing informally as a faculty, but this review prompts a more systematic approach. We will initiate a review of how we might inject attention to this technology and its responsible use into core courses in the major as well as selected courses in each concentration.

Comments from the College Dean:

The BA in English continues to be flexible and responsive to challenges in and to the field, particularly the rise of generative AI. Continuous fine-tuning of the curriculum (notably, an overall hours reduction and a refinement of the core) has made the major more transfer- and 2nd major-friendly than ever. With a robust, reflective assessment program in place, all curricular actions are informed by the data generated, as well as by student feedback. Furthermore, with market data attesting to continued strength and viability of the discipline and the principles it espouses, the program's faculty actively engages with the university's career services, alumni in the field, and targeted employers in order to ensure high percentages of career success for its graduates. While state enrollment declines affecting all fields have of course impacted the program, enrollment for the BA nevertheless remains well above IBHE targets, and the planned responsive actions by the Department align with best practices— so we are confident they will have a positive effect in the years to come. The program is a key element in both EIU's and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences' missions, so we anticipate continued strength.

We recommend a decision of **Program in Good Standing**.

VPAA Decision:

- ☒ Program in good standing
- ☐ Program flagged for priority review
- ☐ Program enrollment suspended

VPAA Explanation:

English BA (230101)

The summary above describes the concerted and diligent efforts of faculty to refine assessment of student learning across the four concentrations in the English B.A. program. Utilizing feedback from several constituents, the program has changed the core courses, focused heavily on career preparation, streamlined course requirements, and reduced the number of credit hours in the curriculum. The program has experienced a decline in enrollment but is actively pursuing ways of countering this decline and disputing narratives antithetical to the value of a liberal arts education. These measures include rolling out a more proactive approach to the inexorable integration of artificial generative intelligence into everyday intellectual and social life.

Resources for Completing the Eight-Year IBHE Program Review Report

Section 5. Overview

This section will focus the review for your reader.

In **no more than half a page**, please explain your program's mission and its relationship to Eastern's mission (and, if applicable, to the mission of graduate education). Identify similar programs in the state; distinguish your program from others. You also should identify your program's student learning objectives and career/further education objectives, and summarize significant changes, achievements (by faculty and students and the program itself), and plans.

Section 6. Major Findings and Recommendations

These are the standard IBHE questions.

a. Description and assessment of any major changes in the program:

- changes in the overall discipline or field
- student demand
- societal needs
- institutional context for offering the degree
- other elements appropriate to the discipline in question

What, if any, internal or external events have affected your program since the last review? Have enrollments, degree production, costs, student satisfaction, job placement, etc. changed significantly? Has the discipline's governing body approved a new name for the programs it represents; updated or revised curricular requirements; identified new markets; developed new emphases? Have nationwide demographic changes or social policies affected enrollments or requirements for good or for ill?

The resources listed below may help you respond to item 6.a:

1. **EIU Institutional Research** houses all EIU common data sets, program enrollment and graduation data; see the "Facts & Figures" tab; staff members in IR are also available to help you assemble and analyze different program data: <https://www.eiu.edu/ir/>
2. **IBHE Data Points** track public university enrollment data across Illinois: <https://www.ibhe.org/datapoints.html>
3. **IBHE Enrollment and Degrees Conferred Data Tool**: <https://enrollmentsdegrees.ibhe.org>
4. **CIP Code** (classification of instructional programs) for each academic program, something you need for using the IBHE tool above: <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/cipcode/Default.aspx?y=56>
5. **EIU Career Services Annual Report**: <https://www.eiu.edu/careers/annualreport.php>

6. **Occupational projections** are available from many professional journals and organizations, including:
- a. Bureau of Labor Statistics: <http://stats.bls.gov/>
 - b. BLS Occupational Outlook Handbook: <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/>
 - c. ISBE's Educator Supply and Demand Report: <https://www.isbe.net/edsupplydemand>
 - d. Illinois Workforce Information Center:
http://www.ides.illinois.gov/Pages/Workforce_Information_Center.aspx
 - e. O*Net Online: <https://www.onetonline.org>

a. Description of major findings and recommendations, including evidence of learning outcomes and identification of opportunities for program improvement

While 6.b also asks you to discuss other significant findings, it is basically the assessment section of the program review. As such, the responses here are crucial to your review's success. Departments unable to demonstrate that their assessment programs meet the established guidelines will be expected to revise those programs within six months of the final review deadline. The IBHE's assessment guidelines are appended to this document.

Since your overview already identifies your student learning objectives, focus here on the assessment program and its results. What measures are you using to assess learning? How well are students achieving the objectives identified for them? What are their specific strengths and weaknesses? What changes have you made and will you be making because of your findings from assessment? Emphasize direct assessment but mention the indirect measures you are using as well. Support your generalizations with specific data/evidence. And be sure to include feedback from key stakeholders—students, alums, employers, peer reviewers, etc.—since the IBHE requires it.

b. Description of actions taken since the last review, including instructional resources and practices, and curricular changes

c. Description of actions to be taken because of this review, including instructional resources and practices, and curricular changes

6.c and 6.d are straightforward. However, by this point, you already may have mentioned the most significant actions your department has taken/is planning to take. **Do not repeat yourself.** Merely refer the reader to a previous section or sections.

Section 7. Outcome

After consultation with the College Dean, the Provost's Office will indicate whether the program will be deemed "in good standing" or "flagged for priority review." The latter category is used to identify programs experiencing serious concerns—significantly low enrollments, high costs, negative accreditation findings, below-average pass rates on statewide exams, below-average employment placement rates, a continuing lack of satisfaction among students or employers, etc. Departments will be asked to examine and address the identified concern(s) and report the results in an interim review, due in 1-3 years. Typically, however, the IBHE program review results in a positive decision, and the next review is due in eight years.