

INTERPRETATION OF LITERATURE ASSESSMENT

In 2024-25, CLAS undertook the assessment of the Interpretation of Literature area of the CLAS Core general education curriculum. A committee of faculty and staff gathered data, consulted with key stakeholders, and analyzed the information they gathered. This led to a report of findings and recommendations. The details of the assessment process and key findings and recommendations of the report are summarized here.

The Assessment Process

The assessment committee included faculty from the English, Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies, and French & Italian Departments and two CLAS academic advisers. They were assisted by the CLAS Academic Assessment Coordinator.

The topics considered by the committee included:

- Student learning in Interpretation of Literature courses (ENGL:1200 and courses in other language/literature departments)
- Challenges faced by students and instructors in Interpretation of Literature courses
- Interpretation of Literature's place in the broader CLAS Core and in students' entire undergraduate education
- The balance between the common structure and requirements for Interpretation of Literature courses and the variety of course sections
- The place of courses offered outside the English Department in the Interpretation of Literature area



The committee's report was reviewed and approved by the GECC and UEPC in Spring 2025.

EVIDENCE USED IN ASSESSMENT REPORT

- Feedback from Interpretation of Literature instructors
- Interviews with current and past Directors of General Education Literature
- Quantitative data on student learning and student comments from SPOT surveys
- Discussions with instructors from Classics, French & Italian, and Asian & Slavic Languages Departments who offer Interpretation of Literature courses
- Feedback from Directors of Undergraduate Studies in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
- Conversations with representatives from other colleges that require Interpretation of Literature as part of their general education requirements
- Comparison of literature requirements at peer institutions

Findings and Recommendations

The assessment process identified several strengths of the University of Iowa’s Interpretation of Literature courses, as well as several challenges, including:

Area Strengths

- Students enjoy being exposed to interesting literary works in a variety of genres and appreciate being exposed to different points of view through literature.
- Students develop their interpretation, analysis, and critical thinking skills through class discussions and writing assignments.
- Students improve their writing and communication skills and receive helpful feedback from instructors and peers.

“Going over the books we read in class helped me see different perspectives and notice new details in the book I may not have gotten the first time around.”
 – ENGL:1200 Student

Area Challenges

- Declining student reading skills as a result of digital technologies and other factors.
- Student use of artificial intelligence (AI) in place of reading and to assist with writing.
- Inconsistencies in learning experience and course difficulty across course sections.

Recommendations

- Prioritize the area learning outcomes when designing new course sections and in pedagogical training for instructors to promote student learning and ensure a common experience across sections.
- Maintain and highlight the portfolio assignment to encourage students to reflect on their development as interpretive readers and writers.
- Create the option of a creative writing assignment (either fiction or nonfiction) that can be incorporated into course sections.
- Strengthen the pedagogical training available to “General Education Literature” instructors in the English Department and encourage the GEL Director to offer feedback on course syllabi and pedagogical practices.
- Foster greater coordination between the GEL Director and instructors of Interpretation of Literature courses in departments other than English.
- Update the name of the CLAS Core area and course title for ENGL:1200 to *Interpreting Literature*.
- Revise the learning outcomes for the CLAS Core area.

REVISED LEARNING OUTCOMES	
1. Students demonstrate improved comprehension and interpretive skills by applying strategies or “ways of reading” appropriate for different texts.	3. Students demonstrate that they can foster and participate in a reciprocal community, engaging others’ ideas and conveying their own.
2. Students can effectively express their interpretation of literary texts through analytical writing.	4. By connecting text and context, students are able to discern how personal experiences shape interpretation and how literature both reflects and influences culture.

The Value of Interpretation of Literature Courses

Interpretation of Literature courses prepare students for success in their subsequent academic studies, including courses in their majors across all disciplines. Interpretation of Literature courses also provide students with skills they will need in whatever career path they choose.

Interpreting and Analyzing Texts

- Interpretation of Literature students learn the skills of close reading texts in a variety of genres.
- Students are introduced to the practices of interpreting and critically analyzing texts.
- Students grow in their critical thinking skills and deepen their ability to engage with complex ideas and diverse perspectives.
- Students in Interpretation of Literature foster imagination and empathy by exploring texts that reflect experiences and backgrounds different from their own.
- In Interpretation of Literature, students learn to identify the social, cultural and political context of texts and the impact of that context on the text's meaning.
- Students also reflect on how their personal experience and their own social context shapes how they read and respond to texts.

"I can confidently walk away feeling as if I grew as both a reader and a writer." – ENGL:1200 Student

Effective Communication and Fostering Learning Communities

- Students who have completed an Interpretation of Literature course should be able to effectively express their critical analysis of a text through clear, organized writing.
- Students learn to receive feedback from their instructors and peers and use it to foster learning and improve their work.
- Students should be able to create communities in which members respectfully share ideas, learning from different perspectives.
- Students benefit from, and learn how to foster, supportive and inclusive communities that offer a basis for forming friendships and a sense of belonging on a large campus.

CORE SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE IN CLAS'S GENERAL EDUCATION LITERATURE PROGRAM

Faculty from all disciplines can expect students to have:

- Strengthened their evidence-based comprehension and attuned analysis of texts across genre and context;
- Sharpened their ability to compellingly discuss and write about the meaning of texts;
- Learned how personal experience and social context shape texts and their interpretation;
- Practiced purposefully building and sustaining a learning community, enhancing their capacities for imaginative, civic, and ethical engagement in the classroom and additional settings.