

Three-year evaluation of ENG350 Linguistics

General

The English linguistics part of ENG350 is a work-in-progress (WiP) seminar. The primary target group is master's students in their second year, i.e., students who are currently working on their MA thesis. Students in the first MA year are also encouraged to attend, though few do so. The seminar is chaired by a member of academic staff and most other staff attend as many sessions as they can. Attendance, though not obligatory for either group, is usually quite high among staff and students in the second year, so that the WiP seminars offer a forum where these two groups can meet and interact, get an overview of the kinds of research in English linguistics that the department is actively engaged in, or enjoy academic input from outside the Department.

Seminars are usually focused on the work of one or more students in fulfilment of the requirements of the master's degree. A library-run course in literature searching is also a regular feature of ENG350. From time to time, academic staff and guest lecturers have also held research talks as part of the WiP series. Also, depending on (a) the number of students writing theses in English linguistics, (b) the staff member chairing the seminars, and (c) the perceived and/or expressed needs of students, seminars have sometimes been offered in a range of additional topics. Such sessions have in recent years included topics like statistics, referencing and formatting, abstract-writing, etc.

Obligatory tasks

Students must complete three obligatory exercises to be allowed to take the master's exam:

- Autumn semester: presentation of master's project proposal
- Spring semester: draft chapter of thesis
- Spring semester: oral feedback to a fellow student's draft chapter

Learning outcomes

The WiP seminar provides students with an important forum for feedback on their own projects at two important stages of the thesis-writing process. It exposes students to a range of linguistic approaches and types of data types beyond those they are using in their own projects. It also gives opportunities to hone important transferable skills: presentation skills as well as practice in assessing the application of linguistic theories and methods, interpreting results and offering constructive criticism.

Student evaluations

At the end of the spring semester 2021 two separate evaluation forms were distributed, one by the WiP chair (Kevin McCafferty) and one by the student advisor (Hanne Svanholm Misje). The respondents were two apparently non-overlapping sub-groups, with different perspectives on ENG350, so it is useful to present the results of both evaluations here.

McCafferty evaluation

The form distributed by McCafferty (see Appendix 1) was returned by four students and can be summed up fairly quickly. These students were very satisfied with ENG350, scoring almost all the questions as 4 or 5 (the latter indicating the most positive rating). They felt they had been given adequate information on the course; the WiP seminars were well organised and helped them learn; presentations and feedback worked well. The one point on which one respondent gave a score of 3 was on the question of how well the Zoom format worked.

As regards supervision, these students were well satisfied: they all scored the quality, frequency and usefulness of supervision as solid 4s on all questions asked. Their comments praise their supervisors (Dagmar Haumann, Kevin McCafferty and Jerzy Nykiel), mentioning factors like supportiveness, good and rapid feedback, accessibility, regularity of meetings, etc.

One of these students is delayed in submitting their thesis due to the pandemic situation.

Misje evaluation

The form distributed by student advisor Hanne Misje was also returned by four students taking linguistics (and one writing in didactics). It is not possible to distinguish the didactics student from the others, so the following assumes that the answers are all relevant to linguistics.

These students were also very happy with the supervision but less pleased with the WiP seminar. The free comments to the question of whether the WiP had helped or not are listed here, with negative/critical comments in blue:

- It has not really helped me that much, as the focus is mainly on those who present and it is a bit too shallow to be of any meaningful help, especially in the second semester. I also found the presentation session to not be constructive and overly negative and it resulted in a loss of motivation.
- It has been useful to hear about the other MA students' projects, and to have certain deadlines during the year. The feedback to our presentations, from peers and faculty members, has also been useful. However, the seminars would have been even more helpful if they included more information about the thesis itself, which formalities need to be included, what to expect at the oral defense etc.
- Mostly the feedback, questions, and discussions surrounding my own chapter draft. The short topic presentation was not as useful although of course putting together a short description of the project helped me "boil down" and structure my thoughts a bit. Of those couple of wip seminars i attended beyond those with my own presentations, none of the students had a project similar to mine so that didn't noticeably help me.

- Nei. Fikk ikke noe særlig tilbakemelding som var til hjelp på verken første eller andre presentasjonen (annet enn fra medelev - som var bra). Syns vi kunne snakket mer om hva det er å skrive master og hva vi har gjort/ikkje fått til og fått hjelp av hverandre og andre professorer ut over de timene vi har med veileder. Særlig i stedet for foredrag fra andre professorer og de gangene vi ikke har brukt hele tiden på presentasjoner etc.
- Det er nyttig å ta del i seminarene hvor andre presenterer, ettersom man gjerne har de samme utfordringene. Det har derimot være lite informasjon utover tilbakemeldingen på kapitler. Jeg savner informasjon om formelle krav til oppgaven, for eksempel en gjennomgang av skrifttype, side oppsett, referanser etc. Vi har heller ikke hatt gjennomgang av det muntlige forsvaret av oppgaven, og hvordan dette foregår.

The students had related suggestions as to how the seminars might be improved:

- The WIP seminars are too shallow and the presentations are mostly not relevant for the thesis although it is interesting to follow the other student's work. I would recommend that the feedback sessions focus on being a bit less intimidating.
- It would have been interesting to get more input from the faculty members about writing an MA thesis and what to expect at the oral defense. Just a bit more from the staff in general, not only our own presentations.
- I honestly don't know - i think the setup and structure is nice, and my main (only?) issue was that my topic/methodology (qualitative discourse analysis, focused on metaphors) was perhaps a bit of an outlier, thus limiting the use i got out of the seminars.
- Snakke mer om våre oppgaver. Ikke flere obligatoriske krav eller presentasjoner, men samtaler i gruppen om hva vi har fått til eller ikke slik at man kan ta inspirasjon fra hverandre eller hjelpe hverandre. Det er ikke alle som har plass på lesesal og kan snakke om det der + at salen har ikke vært åpen hele tiden pga. corona.
- Mer informasjon utover tilbakemeldingene på kapitlene.

In the present format, how well presentations work is dependent on the students presenting and responding, including the quality of their work and type of presentation. Since students in our system are fairly free to suggest and even change topics along the way, most will inevitably be working on topics and areas that are unique to them and, strictly speaking, most presentations will necessarily not be directly relevant to their project.

One theme here is a wish for more of a writing seminar, with advice on the technical aspects of thesis-writing, which is surprising from a teacher's/supervisor's perspective. However, these are students who have been in the university system for at least four years. It is reasonable to expect them to have mastered the technical side of academic writing by the time they embark on a master's thesis.

Another theme is the wish for more information in general, and more specifically more information on thesis-writing, and a seminar on what an MA oral exam is like. To take the issue of what is expected of thesis-writers first, we might easily integrate a session on this at the beginning of the autumn semester that would be useful for all students. As for the need for more general information, students' needs vary a great deal, so this is something best dealt with individually in supervision. As regards, the oral exam, all students have taken oral exams before they start the MA course, and oral exams at the MA level are much like they are at the BA level – with the important exception that at the MA oral the student is likely to be more of an expert on the topic under discussion than either examiner. This is something that in my view (KMCC) is best taken up as part of normal supervision sessions.

The suggestion that students might have group discussions of their projects is an interesting and constructive one, but also one that students might implement themselves, without the need for academic staff involvement.

Another constructive suggestion is the one that comes in response to a later question:

- Mer fokus på at vi ikke vet hva vi gjør. Vi har aldri skrevet en større forskingsoppgave før og mange av oss har aldri hatt metodefag innen det vi skriver i. Kanskje det er et problem på større nivå. Men det er mye som kan diskuteres i WiP seminarene som hadde hjulpet med det.

Yes, we could offer more help with method, but this really would make sense only when a number of students are using similar methods; otherwise, we end up giving seminars in topics that very few are interested in, and these are better incorporated into supervision.

In conclusion, the WiP seminar in English linguistics might be tweaked to include:

- a general info session on thesis-writing early in the autumn semester
- a possible methods seminar or two when several students are working on similar topics and using similar methods
- encouragement for students to create a colloquium group (or groups) where they can discuss one another's work

Kevin McCafferty

Bergen, 09.09.2021

English Program, Department of Foreign Languages

3-year evaluation ENG350

Filled out by course instructor

Course code	ENG 350, Literature and Culture
Year	Spring 2021
Course instructor	Nahum Welang, Lene Johannessen
Structure and progression of the course	<p>ENG 350 has a component called the Work in Progress seminar. https://www.uib.no/en/course/ENG350 described as follows:</p> <p><i>“Work-in-progress seminar As part of the Master's thesis, students hold three approved presentations at the Department's work-in-progress seminars for Master students:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><i>1. a project presentation</i><i>2. a draft of a chapter of the Master's thesis,</i><i>3. a discussion of another student's chapter draft.</i> <p><i>Students are expected to participate actively in their discipline's work-in-progress seminars by presenting their own work and by taking part in discussions about others' presentations. It is especially important that students take part in these seminars the two semesters they spend writing their Master's thesis, but it is also advantageous that they participate in their first and second semester.”</i></p> <p>The WiP seminar typically meets every week throughout each semester, depending a little on how many students there are in the different disciplines. In the fall semester the two first seminars are devoted to obligatory presentations of project description, with all faculty and students present for commenting. This functions as a kind of “vetting” session, where potential methodological and thematic snags can be corrected at an early point in the MA thesis process.</p>

	<p>For fall 2020 and spring 2021 the Literature and Culture seminars following the project descriptions were focused on on general issues connected to thesis writing, such as Developing Arguments, Healthy working habits and time management, Assessment Guidelines for MA theses, MA thesis structure, to mention some themes.</p> <p>Once these topics were completed, the seminar focuses on MA students’ draft presentation and peer responses, with one or two presentations per seminar, depending on number of students. For each presentation there is also one faculty member who comments on assigned presentations. The chair of the WiP provides additional comments as needed.</p> <p>At least once a year, Flattun over at UBB provides the MA students in ENG350 with a specialized library course.</p>
<p>Correspondence between learning outcome description and teaching, learning and assessment methods.</p>	<p>In WiP Literature and Culture there is consistent correspondence between learning outcome descriptions and the instruction. All students fulfill their obligatory assignments before they submit their MA thesis in May.</p>
<p>Did the course have a student evaluation? If so, what did it say?</p>	<p>2020:</p> <p>The majority of students (9) attended seminars well beyond their own obligatory presentations; the majority find the feedback they get from faculty and peers very valuable and motivating to their own work. Some point out that feedback vary a bit too much from respondent to respondent, some would like more focus on writing skills.</p> <p>2021:</p> <p>Among the respondents (8) the score for satisfaction with the WiP is very high both for classroom and digital seminars. Among the possible improvements listed are mandatory commenting from peer students, a special seminar on the format of the MA thesis, more academic writing. Satisfaction with supervision is also for the most part very high.</p>
<p>Possible improvements</p>	<p>As per student evaluations, the idea of making commenting compulsory is sound, and we might want to go back to this practice. Similarly, a fixed schedule for the more general components might be helpful, as well as adding the formatting seminar. Here, specific lessons/exercises in the <i>first</i> seminars in the fall on constructing a concise argument is key; so too is emphasis on narration vs analysis.</p>

	<p>Re feedback:</p> <p>Faculty need to be mindful about their commenting: in the first semester of MA thesis writing comments must be geared to the level at which the students are, and in the second focused on helping them along, ie. not provide the kind of criticism that make students feel they have to begin all over again. The same way there are guidelines for commenting for students, there should be some for faculty, especially since we regularly have short-term hires who are not familiar with the WiP format.</p> <p>Faculty need to encourage their students to attend.</p>
<p>Other comments and suggestions</p>	<p>The WiP has existed for as long as I can remember and is a valued part of ENG350. As far as I know we are the only English program to run this every semester, and we will continue to do so despite the occasional grumbling from admin that it uses up resources. English has a consistently good progression rate, and the MA program’s reputation elsewhere is in no small part due to the WiP. It would be very bad business, literally, to cut in this offer. I would in fact suggest that we consider <i>expanding</i> the commenting function by faculty: it used to be all faculty showed up, which did take up a lot of time, but how about two every time? The satisfaction and progression rate make the WiP a profitable practice, and should only be strengthened.</p> <p>As the report for ENG340 will show, we are currently also discussing extending ENG350 and the WiP to include a second semester component consisting in three obligatory seminars for <i>all</i> MA students (including L-students) where they focus on finding a topic, searching for secondary sources, reading sample thesis, and practicing thesis statement. This would level the playing field for “regular” and L-students somewhat, and create a better starting point for all once June comes. It would also mean having the project “vetting” seminars by mid-June rather than in August.</p>

3-year Cycle Course Evaluation

ENG350 – Work in Progress (WiP) Didactics

1. General Description of the Course

The ENG350 – WiP Didactics course is composed of six to eight 90-minute seminars each semester. This is a joint seminar for ENG350 students at the 5-year *lektor* education and ENG650. All members of staff in English didactics usually attend the seminars.

Large parts of the seminars consist of discussing MA project designs, chapter drafts and any problems during the MA writing process that the students want to raise. In addition, short lectures on the initial writing stage, abstracts (summaries), and how to create research gaps rhetorically have been given. The students have been invited to suggest more topics that they would like short lectures on. A library course has also been offered. The students say, however, that this course is mostly repetition of a previous course.

2. Obligatory tasks and attendance

Attendance is not obligatory, but there are three obligatory tasks for ENG350 students:

1. A presentation of the MA project design
2. A draft of a chapter of the MA thesis
3. Giving oral feedback of a fellow student's chapter draft.

The course description specifies the following:

Students are expected to participate actively in their discipline's work-in-progress seminars by presenting their own work and by taking part in discussions about others' presentations. It is especially important that students take part in these seminars the two semesters they spend writing their Master's thesis, but it is also advantageous that they participate in their first and second semester.

In practice, students in their first and second semesters have not attended. Because most students enrolled in ENG650 work as full time teachers, this group of students do not attend the seminars on a regular basis. Students at ENG350 do attend on a regular basis in their two final terms.

3. Learning Outcomes

No specific learning outcomes are specified for the WiP didactics course, but many of the same learning outcomes that are specified for the MA will apply:

Knowledge

The graduate

- will have further developed the knowledge s/he has gained previously via specialised courses in English linguistics and/or English literature or/and culture and/or didactics.
- will have gained broad knowledge of the field in general and detailed knowledge of a limited subfield.
- will have gained basic knowledge of central problems and methodologies in the selected discipline.

Skills

The graduate

- is able to work independently and in the long term on solving problems based on his/her knowledge of the discipline.
- is able to engage with and critically assess theories, methods and interpretations within the discipline.
- is capable of acquiring and applying knowledge of new subfields within the discipline.
- is capable of carrying out a limited supervised research project in accordance with the relevant research-ethical norms.
- is familiar with the norms of academic writing.
- is capable of using the ICT tools which are necessary in order to carry out independent work within the discipline.

General competence

The graduate

- is capable of continuing to develop his/her competence and specialisation in an independent manner.
- can express problems, analyses and conclusions within the student's selected discipline in English.
- is familiar with relevant communicative genres.
- can contribute to discourse in the public arena in areas relevant to the discipline.

Except for the obligatory tasks, the learning outcome is only tested in the MA thesis.

4. Student evaluation

The ENG350 WiP didactics course has not been evaluated every year, and there is room for improvement on this point. The course was evaluated in the spring of 2021, but only one student responded. This student wrote that he or she wanted more information about expectations in relation to an MA and how to get started writing. A short lecture on the initial stage of writing was given, but more time will be spent on this aspect in addition to expectations on the student and supervisor's part.