

MOREHEAD STATE UNIVERSITY

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The Role of  
Fiction Courses  
in  
College Curricula

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FICTION COURSES  
IN  
COLLEGE CURRICULA

	Page
I. The Questionnaire .....	3
II. Catalogue Information .....	4
III. Enrollment .....	6
IV. Number of Novels Read .....	9
V. Supplementary Texts .....	10
VI. National of Geographical and Chronological Limitations .....	17
VII. Place in General Education Programs, Majors, and Minors .....	21
VIII. Conclusions .....	29
IX. Further Research .....	31

2

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LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
A. Frequency of Course Offering.....	7
B. Enrollment Per Offering.....	8
C. Annual Enrollment.....	9
D. Number of Novels Read.....	11
E. Supplementary Texts.....	12
F. National or Geographical Distribution.....	17
G. Annual Enrollment: National or Geographical Distribution.....	18
H. Chronological Distribution.....	20
I. Annual Enrollment: Chronological Distribution.....	21
J. National or Geographic and Chronological Distribution.....	22
K. Distribution of Courses in Programs.....	24
L. Required, Sequence, and Elective Courses.....	27
M. Enrollment: Required, Sequence, and Elective Courses.....	28

THE ROLE OF  
FICTION COURSES  
IN  
COLLEGE CURRICULA

This document is a report on a research project sponsored through a faculty research grant at Morehead State University. The purpose of the proposed study was to survey the extent to which fiction courses are included in the curricula of colleges and universities, the scope of the courses, the place of the courses in the departmental and general education curricula, and the textual and supplemental materials available and in use.

The information that provides the basis of this survey was derived from three sources. First, questionnaires were sent to the chairmen of English departments at one hundred colleges and universities, ranging from the small private college to the large state university, for those courses in their departments that are devoted primarily to the study of fiction, according to the most recent edition of their college catalogues in the Johnson Camden Library at Morehead State University. Second, the catalogues themselves were studied for information not included in the questionnaire. Third, the card catalogue of the Johnson Camden Library and other

standard bibliographical resources were examined to develop the bibliography at the end of the report.

A search of educational research bulletins and periodical literature in English and in education did not uncover any similar research, either into the role of fiction courses or into the role of any other kind of course in college English curricula. Studies have been made of the total departmental offerings and of the degree programs, especially at the graduate level, but none has been found that concerned itself with one type of course.

No attempt was made in this survey to discover the rationale for the inclusion of the course in the offerings of the institutions or the rationale for the scope or contents of the course. Although the results of the survey might lead to valid conclusions as to the reasons for the inclusion of the course in the curriculum in many cases, the problems involved in collecting such information and in evaluating it were too extensive for this preliminary survey.

It was originally hoped that the project would include an evaluation of the adequacy of the library holdings in several institutions for the courses offered by those institutions, but the limitations in budget and time imposed by the conditions of the faculty research program at Morehead State University made any survey of the library holdings of other institutions impossible. The bibliography is included, however, for the use of any institution that wishes to

evaluate its own holdings. Approximately half of the volumes listed in the bibliography are available in the Johnson Camden Library. The bibliography does not include articles in magazines or scholarly journals; it also does not include study guides or casebooks to any great extent. The works listed in the bibliography are books and reference works devoted primarily to the study of fiction.

#### I. The Questionnaire

In order to encourage a high percentage of returns of the questionnaires, the form was kept as brief as possible. The name of the institution and the number and title of the individual course was written on the top of each questionnaire, which was sent to the department chairman with a cover letter requesting that he pass it on to the faculty member teaching the course. Questionnaires were sent to 100 institutions for 326 courses. Of this number, 195 replies were received. This represents a return of about sixty per cent of the questionnaires.

The questionnaire asked for the following information.

1. How often is the course offered?
2. How many students enroll each time the course is offered?
3. How many novels are included in the syllabus?
4. Are both short stories and novels included?
5. Are study guides, casebooks, or critical anthologies used? If so, what?
6. Is any textbook other than novels, short story

anthologies, casebooks, critical anthologies, or study guides used? If so, what?

In a few cases the information supplied by the instructor was not that which the question was designed to elicit. For instance, two instructors indicated the number of times per week that the class meets rather than the number of times per year the course is offered. For the most part, however, the answers provided the information desired. Many of the instructors sent back a copy of the course syllabus or provided supplementary information about the course, such as a list of the novels included in the course.

## II. Catalogue Information

Additional information about 266 courses was derived from the catalogues of the schools in which the courses were taught. In the case of sixty courses, catalogue information was not available, either because the catalogue did nothing more than list the course, or because the course had been changed between the time the catalogue was issued and the time the questionnaire was returned, or because the catalogue itself was not available in the Johnson Camden Library at the time the catalogue information was being gathered, several months after the mailing of the first questionnaires.

The following information was taken from the catalogues.

1. Scope of course.
  - a. Is the content of the course restricted to any national or geographical literature?
  - b. Is the content of the course restricted to any chronological period?
2. Place in general education curriculum.
  - a. Is the course required of all students?
  - b. Is the course one of a sequence of courses, one or more of which is required of all students?
  - c. Is the course an elective?
3. Place in the departmental major and/or area of specialization.
  - a. Is the course required of all majors?
  - b. Is the course one of a sequence of courses, one or more of which is required of all majors?
  - c. Is the course an elective in the major?
4. Place in the departmental minor.
  - a. Is the course required of all minors?
  - b. Is the course one of a sequence of courses, one or more of which is required of all minors?
  - c. Is the course an elective in the minor?
5. Does the course include short stories only, novels only, or both?

Question five asks for the same information that the fourth question on the questionnaire asked for. In most cases the answers agreed with each other, except that several



courses in the short story include one or more novels, according to the information provided by the instructor.

The statistics in this survey, then, are based on questionnaires returned from the instructors of 195 courses and catalogue information about 266 courses. Information both from questionnaires and from catalogues was available for 152 courses; the total number of courses about which information is included is 309.

### III. Enrollment

The first two questions on the questionnaire were designed to reveal the enrollment data for each course. Although the questionnaire did not ask for the number of sections of each course and the number of students per section, this information was also furnished by some instructors. In most cases, one section of the course is offered once each year. In Table A, a course offered once every two years is indicated by  $\frac{1}{2}$ . Unless the response indicated that the course is offered in summer school, it was assumed that "every semester" means twice a year and "every quarter" means three times a year.

In Table B the number of students enrolling in the course each time it is offered is tabulated. Most of the courses had enrollments of less than 65, but the existence of several very large enrollments made necessary the use of larger groupings for those courses with enrollments above one hundred. In table B some of the groups have a range of 10, some 30, and some 100.

TABLE A

## FREQUENCY OF COURSE OFFERING

Times per year	Number of courses
$\frac{1}{2}$	19
1	115
2	43
3	13
4	3
no answer	2

By multiplying the frequency of offering for each course by its average enrollment, the annual enrollment was derived. The annual enrollment in most cases is less than 100, but again the existence of several large classes made necessary the use of various size groupings in Table C.

Based on the information in Table C, the total annual enrollment for the 192 courses for which numbers were provided is slightly more than 16,000. If the enrollment in the other courses for which replies were not received is comparable for that in the courses for which information is available, the total annual enrollment in fiction courses in the one hundred institutions surveyed is slightly more than 27,200, an average or 272 per institution. However, two courses account for nearly 3,000 of the 16,000 students enrolled in the 192 courses tabulated, so the number enrolled in the 100 institutions may not be as high as 27,200.

TABLE B  
ENROLLMENT PER OFFERING

Enrollment	Number of courses
0-5	1
6-15	19
16-25	51
26-35	41
36-45	32
46-55	10
56-65	6
66-75	5
76-85	3
86-95	2
96-105	9
106-135	6
136-165	2
166-195	0
196-225	2
226-325	0
326-425	1
426-525	1
526-625	1
no answer	3

TABLE C  
ANNUAL ENROLLMENT

Enrollment	Number of courses
0-25	61
26-55	66
56-85	20
86-115	15
116-145	10
146-175	3
176-205	4
206-245	3
246-345	3
346-445	3
446-545	0
546-645	0
646-745	0
746-845	2
846-945	0
946-1045	1
1046-1745	0
1746-1845	1

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IV. Number of Novels Read

In answer to question 5, the instructors of 18 courses

indicated that they used short stories only in the course, the instructors of 128 courses indicated that they used novels only, and the instructors of 49 courses indicated that they used both novels and short stories. Although one might assume that the number of novels would be smaller for those courses in which both novels and short stories are studied, many of the combination short story and novel courses include eight or more novels, and one includes sixteen novels. In one case the instructor gave the number of novels included in the syllabus, including those read individually by students; in most cases, however, the instructor apparently correctly judged that the intent of question 4 was to elicit the number of novels to be studied by all the students in the class.

#### V. Supplementary Texts

Questions 5 and 6 were designed to discover whether any texts were used in the course other than the short stories and novels themselves. The possible supplementary texts were divided into those that deal with specific works (question 5; study guides, casebooks, or critical anthologies) and those that deal with fiction on a broader basis (question 6).

Table E lists the answers to questions 5 and 6.

Apparently some confusion resulted from the wording of the question, for some instructors listed in one category texts that should have been listed in the other. The number of courses for which no supplementary texts of either kind are

TABLE D

## NUMBER OF NOVELS READ

Number of novels	Number of courses
0	10
1	3
2	1
3	3
4	3
5	4
6	7
7	12
8	28
9	31
10	32
11	14
12	19
13	7
14	7
15	3
16	1
"varies"	2
"twice the enrollment"	1

TABLE E

## SUPPLEMENTARY TEXTS

	<u>Question Five</u>	<u>Question Six</u>
Yes	49	53
No	142	140
Sometimes	2	2
No Answer	2	0

used is 108; 87 courses use some kind of text other than short stories and novels. The following list of texts includes those named in answer to both questions.

Allen, Walter, The English Novel.

Allen, Walter, History of the Novel.

Allen, Walter, The Modern Novel in England and America.

Baker, History of the Novel.

Dooth, Jayne, Rhetoric of Fiction.

Brooks & Warren, The Scope of Fiction.

Brooks & Warren, Understanding Fiction.

Buckley, Minor Classics of Nineteenth Century Fiction.

Buckner, Novels in the Making.

Calderwood and Tolliver, Perspectives of Fiction.

Chase, The American Novel and Its Tradition (Norton Critical Edition).

Cowie, Rise of the American Novel.

Davis, The Novel: Modern Essays in Criticism.

- Donovan, The Shaping Vision.
- Eastman, A Guide to the Novel.
- Elman, R., & Feldelson, C., The Modern Tradition.
- Forster, E. M., Aspects of the Novel.
- Frankes & Braschen, Short Fiction: A Critical Collection.
- Frye, Anatomy of Criticism.
- Huxley, Reluctant Pilgrim.
- James, Henry, The Art of the Novel.
- Joyce, James, Portrait of the Artist.
- Kari, Guide to the Contemporary English Novel.
- Kari and Magalaner, A Reader's Guide to Great Twentieth Century Novels.
- Kettle, Arthur, Introduction to the English Novel.
- Langbaum, The Victorian Age.
- Leavis, The Great Tradition.
- Litz, Modern American Fiction.
- Lubbock, The Craft of Fiction.
- McSuglough, The English Novel.
- Meserole, Sytton, & Ieler, American Literature.
- Minot, Stephen, Three Genres.
- Nich, Short Fiction of the Seventeenth Century.
- Rizengr, Modern Short Story.
- Rizer, Donald, Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth Century American Literature.
- Scholer, Robert, Approaches to the Novel.
- Scholer and Kellogg, The Nature of Narrative.



Schorer, Mark, The Story.

Stanton, Robert, An Introduction to Fiction.

Stevenson, The English Novel History.

Stevic, Theory of the Novel.

Stonum, Marc, History of the Russian Novel.

Tillbotsen, K., Novels 1840's.

Van Ghent, D. Form and Function in the English Novel.

Warren and Ershire, Short Story Masterpieces.

Watt, Ian, Rise of the Novel.

Weimon, Recent American Fiction.

West, The Modern Novel.

Westbrook, The Modern American Novel: Essays in Criticism.

Young, G. M., Portrait of an Age.

Young, G. M., Victorian England.

Anthology: Howe's Classics of Modern Fiction.

Cavalcade of the American Novel.

Norton Critical Editions.

Postwar Guide to British Fiction.

Since these authors and titles are listed as they were given on the questionnaires, the reader who wishes to consult one of these texts is advised to consult a reliable bibliographical resource for complete and correct information.

When the information from the questionnaires about the use of collateral texts was compared with the kind of course according to the information derived from the catalogues,

it was discovered that the courses in which additional texts were required are, for the most part, courses designed for English majors, either as required courses or elective courses. A few graduate courses also require collateral texts.

Several questionnaires contained additional comments about the use of collateral texts. Many instructors apparently believe that the study of fiction can be accomplished without the aid of critical material other than that provided by the instructor in class, although several indicated that readings in the library were assigned or encouraged. Some of the comments follow.

"Students sometimes referred to outside casebooks, but not required."

"This course is taught by several people. Most use novels only, but 1 man sometimes uses Cavalcade of the American Novel in addition to the novels."

"The course is centered around the content of the books studied rather than around the work of critics."

"No. I interpret 'used' to mean specifically required reading. Individual research of various kinds of criticism is, or course, essential."

"Standard critical works on the novel are recommended."

"Several critical studies and books about the modern novel are recommended but not required."

"I hand out a variety of auxiliary material."

"No study guides except for term papers."

"No guides, Even Norton Critical would be a sin."

"Considering one volume history of the novel, but so far we have made no such adoption."

"Each instructor chooses his own and develops his own course. The courses vary widely."

"We use numerous critical texts placed on reserve."

"In-class discussion encourages independent criticism."

One answer to question 6 was "college-level dictionary."

From the temper of the comments added to the answers to questions 5 and 6 and from the preponderance of courses for which no collateral texts are required, it is apparent that most instructors of fiction courses feel that for the purposes the courses are to fill no texts other than short stories and novels are needed or desirable. Since most of the courses are general education courses or elective courses, the instructors may feel that the course is designed to develop an interest in the reading of fiction rather than a critical study of it. It may also be that reading of critical material in connection with papers or library assignments is required of students or that the instructor presents critical material through lectures or mimeographed material. In some cases the student may have studied critical methods in other courses prerequisite to the courses under consideration. Nevertheless, the syllabi of most fiction courses do not include textbooks other than short story anthologies and novels.

## VI. National or Geographical and Chronological Limitations

Aside from the distinction between short stories and novels, the most frequent kinds of limitation of the subject matter for fiction courses is based on either national or geographical origins or chronological periods. Very few courses limited themselves to schools of literature or to methods of literary criticism, for instance. Of the 266 courses for which catalogue information was available, 192 were limited with respect to national or geographical literature and 162 were limited with respect to chronological period.

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TABLE F  
NATIONAL OR GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

English	99
American	58
English and American	18
European	15
Russian	2
No Restriction	74

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The frequency of courses in English fiction is perhaps surprising. Had the courses been selected on the basis of their probable popularity with students whose interest in literature is limited, one might have expected the largest number of courses

to be in American literature. The distribution indicated in Table F, however, might reflect the predilections of professors rather than those of students. This interpretation is borne out to a slight degree by the statistics in Table G, in that those courses devoted to American literature and those unrestricted geographically have slightly larger enrollments on the average than those devoted to English fiction alone. The figures in Table G are based on the total annual enrollment for the course.

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TABLE G  
ANNUAL ENROLLMENT:  
NATIONAL OR GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

	<u>0-10</u>	<u>11-25</u>	<u>26-40</u>	<u>41-60</u>	<u>61-80</u>	<u>81-100</u>	<u>100+</u>
English	5	18	10	9	3	2	3
American	2	13	6	7	5	2	3
English & American		1					2
European	1	1	5	1			2
Russian			1				
No Restr.	2	13	4	2		3	9

Note: The statistics in Table G are based on 150 of the 152 courses for which replies were received from instructors.

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Of the 150 courses included in Table G, 17 dealing with American fiction or without any national or geographical distribution have annual enrollments over 100; only 3 dealing with English

fiction have enrollments over 100.

The chronological distribution of the courses was more difficult to classify because many different overlapping periods are covered by the individual courses. Several courses trace the development of fiction back to Chaucer or the Greek Romances; others describe the period as "from the beginning to . . ." The limits of the period covered by the course are often defined by authors' names, such as "Defoe to Austen," "Conrad to Golding," or "Cooper to Dreiser." Other courses use century designations or the designation "Modern" than any other, however, so in order to keep the classification manageable, all the designations have been made to fit (sometimes with difficulty) into six classifications: 18th Century, 19th Century, 18th and 19th Centuries, 20th Century, Modern, and No Restriction.

In order to fit the course descriptions into this classification, all works prior to 1800 have been grouped arbitrarily into the 18th Century and those courses dealing with both 19th and 20th Century fiction have been arbitrarily included with Modern fiction. If the course description of a course labeled "Modern Fiction" indicated that only 20th Century fiction is included, that course was listed under the 20th Century instead of under Modern fiction. Nevertheless, Tables H, I, and J provide only a general impression of the chronological distribution of fiction courses.

TABLE I  
CHRONOLOGICAL DISTRIBUTION

18th Century	16
19th Century	33
18th and 19th Centuries	20
20th Century	61
Modern	24
No Restriction	104

Slightly more of the 236 courses included in the statistics for tables I and II have no chronological limitation than have no geographical or national limitation. In this case, however, the distribution is closer to what one might expect if the courses were designed to fit the preferences of students, with many more courses covering 20th Century and Modern Fiction than those devoted to earlier fiction. When the chronological distribution is broken down according to annual enrollment, the figures are even more decisively in favor of 20th Century and Modern Fiction. Only courses in 20th Century or Modern Fiction, or those with no chronological limitation, have enrollments of more than 100. The appearance of a larger number of courses with enrollments of less than ten in Tables G and H is the result of calculating the annual enrollment of courses that are offered in alternate years.

It might be expected that most of the courses would be

TABLE J  
 NATIONAL OR GEOGRAPHIC  
 AND CHRONOLOGICAL DISTRIBUTION

	<u>18th</u>	<u>19th</u>	<u>18th &amp; 19th</u>	<u>20th</u>	<u>Modern</u>	<u>Unrestr.</u>
English	16	23	15	15	9	21
American		8	3	18	6	23
Eng. & Amer.			1	2	5	4
European		1		1	3	10
Russian		1				1
Unrestricted	1	5	1	19	1	45

Table J is based on the information from 266 catalogues.

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research resulted from the study of the catalogues to determine how the course fits into the general education requirements of the college and the major and minor programs and areas of specialization in the departmental offerings. These statistics were the most difficult to gather, especially the general education program statistics, because the researcher first had to study the entire college catalogue to find the information. College catalogues are not all organized according to the same principles, and not all courses are designated as elective, sequence courses, or required courses in the general education curriculum. Therefore the statistics in this report most liable to error, and the least reliable, are those relating to the general education requirements of the various colleges.



An attempt was made for each course to determine from the college catalogue its status in the general education program, the departmental graduate program, the departmental major (and/or area), and the departmental minor. A course might be available in any of the four curricula as a required course, as one course in a sequence or group of courses or which the student is required to take one or more courses, or as an elective. Within any one curriculum a given course might not be available, so that only 185 of a total of 266 courses studied are listed for the general education curriculum in Table K. A number of the courses not listed, however, are doubtless available as electives in the general education curriculum, but the study of the catalogue did not uncover the information. Similarly, most of the catalogues describe only the undergraduate program of the institution, and many of the courses can probably be taken as graduate electives, although only three courses were specifically designated as graduate courses in the catalogues.

A given course might be listed both as a sequence course and as an elective in the same program. The program might allow the student to choose one course from the sequence to satisfy the sequence requirement and another course from the sequence to satisfy an elective requirement. On the other hand, some programs do not allow students to choose sequence courses as electives. The double listing of courses as both sequence and elective accounts for the fact that 266 courses appear

313 times in the major program and 314 times in the minor program in Table K.

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TABLE K  
DISTRIBUTION OF COURSES  
IN PROGRAMS

	<u>Required</u>	<u>Sequence</u>	<u>Elective</u>
General Education		31	154
Graduate	2		1
Major	25	53	235
Minor	14	52	248

-----

Since most institutions allow a rather broad choice of courses in literature in the general education requirements in their degree programs, the absence of any required fiction course in general education curricula is not surprising. The surprising and perhaps disturbing information revealed in Tables K, L, and M is the small number of required courses in the major and minor and the relatively large number of elective courses in the major and minor. The number of required courses and sequence courses in departmental majors in English is usually more than half, and frequently the student is allowed to choose no electives or only one or two electives. But less than thirty per cent of the courses studied in this survey are either required or sequence courses in the departmental major or minor.

In the majority of cases the courses in fiction are classified as elective courses. Presumably, the subject matter of an elective course is not as significant or basic to the discipline as the subject matter of a required course. When the statistics in Table K are combined with the statistics for the use of texts other than short stories and novels, one cannot help drawing the conclusion that fiction courses are not considered as academically demanding or important as other literature courses. One wonders, then, why the one hundred institutions included in the survey offer an average of three courses devoted to the study of fiction, and enroll an average of 272 students per year in them.

One also wonders why so many students enroll in courses in which the total reading assignment averages three or four thousand pages (based on an average of ten novels averaging three or four hundred pages each). One of the current issues in education is the decline in the ability to read among young people, and another is the decrease in the amount of time available to students for preparation. Even though much fiction is relatively easy reading, the novels included in the syllabi are not the easiest of fiction. An average reading assignment of a hundred pages or more, which the student is not only supposed to read but, hopefully, to study critically, is not an easy assignment. Nevertheless, many students choose these elective courses with long reading assignments in preference to other elective courses.

294039

The picture is not clarified when the distribution of the individual courses among the curricula is considered. In Table L the courses are classified according to the total use of each course. While over seventy per cent of the courses are listed only as electives, other courses are used in bewildering combinations of electives in one program and requirements in others. Apparently, if the course is not listed simply as an elective, no agreement exists as to its place in the program. This might result from several causes. The departmental and general education programs might have been built up over a number of years, with many changes taking place and courses being shifted back and forth from required to elective, or the courses might have been included in individual programs at different places because of the various perspectives from which the departmental program is organized. Since many departmental programs are organized around a historical-geographical perspective, genre courses do not fit easily into the system. General education courses, on the other hand, are more frequently organized on a genre basis, so that the inclusion of genre courses in the departmental curricula is reasonable. But over seventy per cent of the courses included in this survey are available to majors and minors as electives, and over thirty per cent are available only to majors and minors and only as electives.

The breakdown of the courses according to annual enrollment in Table M does not illuminate the problem. It does point out the occurrence of classes enrolling a hundred or more in elective

TABLE L  
REQUIRED, SEQUENCE, AND ELECTIVE COURSES

128	Elective for General Education, Major and Minor
68	Elective for Major and Minor
20	Both Sequence and Elective for General Education, Major and Minor
8	Required for Major and Minor
7	Both Sequence and Elective for Major and Minor
7	Both Sequence and Elective for Major and Minor; Elective for General and Major
5	Required for Major; Elective for Minor
4	Required for Major; both Sequence and Elective for Minor and General Education
4	Required for Major and Minor; Sequence for General Education
3	Sequence for Major and Minor
2	Required for Major and Minor; Elective for General Education
2	Sequence for Major, Minor, and General Education
2	Required for Graduate Students
1	Elective for Graduate Students
1	Elective for Major
1	Elective for Minor
1	Both Sequence and Elective for Major; Elective for Minor
1	Sequence for Minor; Elective for General Education
1	Elective for Minor and General Education
1	Both Sequence and Elective for Major and Minor; Sequence for General Education

TABLE II

## ENROLLMENT: REQUIRED, SEQUENCE, AND ELECTIVE COURSES

	0-10	11-25	26-40	41-60	61-80	81-100	100+
E-GE, Mj, Mn		25	25	12	2	2	5
E-Mj, Mn		9	11	7			2
SE-GE, Mj, Mn	1	6	3	3	1	1	3
R-Mj, Mn			1				1
SE-Mj, Mn		1	1	2	2		
SE-Mj, Mn & E-GE		3	1	1			
R-Mj & E-Mn		4					
R-Mj & SE-GE, Mn			1				
S-Mj, Mn		1			1		1
R-Mj, Mn & E-GE							2
S-Mj, Mn, GE		1				1	
R-Gr		2					
E-Gr		1					
E-Mn			1				
E-Mn			1				
SE-Mj & E-Mn		1					
SE-Mj, Mn, S-GE		1					

Key: E--Elective; S--Sequence; R--Required; Gr--Graduate;  
Mj--Major; Mn--Minor; GE--General Education

Note: The statistics in Table II are based on 150 of the 152  
courses for which replies were received from instructors.

courses, but the statistics are not significant in view of the fact that a large majority of the fiction courses considered in the survey are electives. So many different patterns of required-sequence-elective courses are used that on the basis of the number of courses studied in this survey no significant statistics result.

#### VIII. Conclusions

The survey established the fact that significant numbers of courses devoted to the study of fiction are offered in colleges and universities and that relatively large numbers of students are enrolled in them. In the absence of similar statistics for other kinds of genre courses and courses organized on the basis of other perspectives, the relative importance of fiction courses in the total English department offerings cannot be determined.

The definition of the scope of the course is in most cases not great. Many courses are not restricted either to one chronological period or to one national or regional literature, and many more are limited in one dimension but not in another. This lack of definition allows for a great latitude in the choice of readings for the course, although the readings may be specified by departmental curricula. Since few courses use any textbook materials other than short story anthologies and novels, the instructor has even more latitude in his choice of emphasis and critical methodology. Perhaps this latitude is

desirable; however, estimating the value of the course to the student is difficult and determining the specific content is almost impossible.

Most of the courses are apparently designed to be elective courses in which an unstructured approach is adopted. Many of the courses seem to be designed primarily for non-majors or minors, but can be taken by majors and minors as electives. Most of the departments apparently do not consider fiction a genre that must be studied as a genre by those specializing in English. On the other hand, courses organized on a historical or geographical basis undoubtedly include readings in all genres, including fiction. The fiction courses are included, perhaps, for those who have little interest in other genres or for those non-majors whose interest in literature is limited and whose ability to understand "more difficult" genres is questionable.

The implication that fiction is easy compared to other genre might be valid if it were not for the amount of reading required. The average number of novels included in the syllabi of the courses is 10. Many courses, according to the syllabi returned with the questionnaire and the supplemental information supplied by many of the instructors, require also reading of one or more novels outside of class, preparation of term papers, or study of assigned readings in the library. It might be that some instructors attempt to justify the course academically by requiring an unrealistic amount of reading as a substitute for critical study beyond the reading and comprehension of the



works of fiction included in the syllabus. When non-majors take courses in which four or five thousand pages or more are assigned in addition to one or more papers, one can legitimately question how thoroughly the student can complete the assignment, or whether he is capable of completing the assignment at all. With the number of plot outlines and study guides now available, it is a relatively easy matter for the student to give the impression that he has read and understood a novel when in fact he has only used a study guide. Since many instructors shy away from the use of study guides or critical texts in class, they may not have an extensive knowledge of them and may not realize the extent to which students are using them.

#### IX. Further Research

Probably one of the most valuable results of this survey is that it points out a number of directions in which further research into the role of fiction courses in college curricula should be conducted. Many of the conclusions in Section VII are tentative and speculative, since they move into areas not covered by the specific questions used in the questionnaire or in the study of the catalogues.

Further research should be based on a larger sampling. The number of courses and institutions surveyed in this report is adequate for a preliminary study, but a wider representation of American colleges and universities would perhaps allow more

specific patterns to emerge, especially in studying the structure of the general education requirements and the majors and minors in English. The size of the institution and its affiliation with state or other sponsoring agency should be included. More specific data on enrollment, course requirements, texts, novels included, outside readings, papers, class size as well as total enrollment, etc., need to be answered.

Even though they would be more difficult to determine, the critical approach used in the course, if any, and the structuring of the material by the professor needs to be studied. An even more difficult problem is the justification or rationale for the course and its function in the college and departmental curricula. This survey did make a beginning in determining how the course fits into the major, minor, and general education programs, but the basis for the inclusion or non-inclusion in various curricula remains undetermined. The speculations of a critical nature in Section VII might prove to be valid or they might prove to be hypercritical. It might be that most of the courses have been developed on the basis of a sound consideration of the educational needs of the students and the values of the course. In many cases the departmental offerings have undoubtedly been studied carefully and organized according to valid principles. If so, this survey has not uncovered those principles; it has, however, pointed up the need for them.

In order to discover sound principles for the organization or departmental offerings, it may be necessary not only to study

the role of fiction courses in college curricula, but to study the role of other kinds of course, those based on genre and those based on other organizational criteria. The study of literature can be approached from a number of directions, and literature can be classified in more than one way. It is doubtful that any one kind of organization of departmental offerings can be proven superior to all others, although geographical/national and historical approaches are used most frequently. But the existence of a large number of courses, enrolling large numbers of students, floating more or less freely in the departmental offerings but not related to the basic structural classifications that serve as criteria for the organization of the major and minor programs of the departments, is at least open to question.

Many specialists in literature apparently feel that, no matter how the departmental offerings are organized, the department ought to offer courses in the study of fiction. The unanswered question is, "Why?"

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