Why study literature? Is there something to the contention that, as one recent headline puts it, `reading literature makes us smarter and nicer'? The English Department fosters a capacity for reading that goes against the grain of the ubiquitous modes of scrolling and clicking central to the digital era. Our students learn to inhabit complex storyworlds and to immerse themselves in rich narrative environments and, through the use of the sustained attention demanded by slow and careful reading, acquire the ability to analyze elaborate details and weigh questions laden with difficult moral nuances. In intensive and discussion-based seminars, our undergraduate and master's-level students interpret poetry, novels, essays, and plays as refractions of cultural and historical contexts. Practices of reading, then, extend beyond literary texts and enable students to become adept analysts of political rhetoric, popular culture, and the narratives that structure everyday life. Our learning practices rely on close reading, critical thinking, and other pertinent themes or activities. Many students choose a specialization that complements a double major in another discipline in the arts or sciences.

Communities of Effective Practice
The inviting physical environment of the English Department encourages students to gather in informal and formal communities of learning. Student study groups formed within courses and co-curricular events meet within our Department. Throughout the year, the Department also hosts social events that highlight student achievement as well as information concerning the field, such as our Chowder Fest, in which alumni of our Department speak on their employment experiences. The English Department is also creating a series of experiential workshops for students involved in our creative writing concentration.

Next Steps
We look forward to bringing our discoveries back to the English Department for further discussion and review. Drawing on our conversations, we will offer proposals in three main areas:

• The need for curricular cohesiveness as to promote the cumulative development of skills for both reading and collaboration;
• The formation of a working group that tests high-impact learning activities in the classroom and then meets regularly to discuss outcomes;
• The assessment of Moodle and other electronic environments as a tool to foster collaborative learning.