

Response to English Department Program Review Evaluation Team Report

October 14, 2011

Program Review Evaluation Team Members:

Team Leader: Dr. Liahna Armstrong, Central Washington University

Team Members: Prof. Erika Daines, Weber State University

Dr. Adam Johnston, Weber State University

Program Review Conducted: April 8, 2011

Program Strengths:

1. Diversity and versatility in faculty expertise and program offerings.
2. English programs are supported by affiliation with University and community programs:
 - a. Service Learning
 - b. Digital Instruction
 - c. Continuing Education
 - d. Office for Undergraduate Research
 - e. Venture Project
 - f. Professional and Technical Writing
 - g. *Metaphor*
 - h. *Weber: The Contemporary West*
 - I. Majors with Emphases
 - j. Bachelor of Integrated Studies
3. Growth of programs such as Master of Arts in English with TESOL and licensure options
4. Reorganization of Developmental English curriculum
5. Administrative decision to develop rotation schedules for courses
6. Development of specific pedagogy courses for English Teaching Majors and Minors offered in a block
7. Adjunct faculty with a wide range of interests
8. Mentoring programs for adjunct faculty
9. New building with state-of-the-art classrooms and a wider range of meeting spaces
10. Student pride in their work

Program Challenges:

1. Lack of thorough assessment data
2. Department seems to see itself as a collection of programs rather than a cohesive unit
3. Master of Arts in English
 - a. Unpredictable schedule of courses
 - b. Currency of faculty scholarship
 - c. Difficulty in attracting faculty
 - d. Paying faculty to teach in the program
4. Support staff is overloaded
5. Advisement is not required
6. Lacks a system of prerequisites for courses
7. Budget is difficult to manage

Recommendations:

1. Although funds for new faculty are limited, when new faculty positions are approved the department is encouraged to think outside the standard paradigms.
2. Re-write the mission statement to reflect the goals of the department and its programs.
3. Develop strong learning objectives and assessment plans. Focus attention on assessment of the Master of Arts.
4. Conduct a focused self-examination about what the department wants to make its academic mainstays. What are the best reasons for existing programs. Incorporate these areas into a cohesive program rather than a set of individual interests.

Response to Recommendations:

The Program Review Team was generous in its praise for English Department strengths and thoughtful in its assessment of weaknesses. The recommendations focus on areas that need improvement. Department members are aware of many of the weaknesses.

English Department faculty received a copy of the Program Review Team Report in August, 2011. They were asked to read the report in preparation for a discussion of the recommendations scheduled for the English Department Retreat on August 7, 2011. This response is written with that discussion in mind and with initiatives that have since been put in place.

Program Assessment:

The English Department Assessment Committee is currently working collaboratively with the English Department Curriculum Committee to develop an assessment process that will prepare for NW accreditation and provide data regarding the performance of students in both General

Education courses and courses in the majors and minors. One goal of this process is to develop an assessment which will target the knowledge and skills an English student should have mastered at the time of graduation. A proposal to develop a capstone course for all English majors is under consideration at this time. This would serve as a reliable assessment of the knowledge and skills acquired by English majors at the completion of their program. The Department Curriculum Committee is developing a system of course pre-requisites that will insure that students move through their program in a manner that will prepare them for each level of course work. The prerequisite proposal will be presented to the English Department for approval in October, 2011. These initiatives are currently in progress and completion is anticipated by the end of the 2011-2012 academic year.

It has been suggested that a workshop on assessment be scheduled so that faculty can acquire a greater understanding of assessment processes and procedures. No action has been taken on this suggestion at this time.

Department Identity: Cohesive Program or Collection of Programs:

The English Department offers several programs, majors, minors, participation in interdisciplinary programs and participation in the Bachelor of Integrated Studies. Composition, Developmental English, Professional and Technical Writing, Creative Writing, and the interdisciplinary Linguistics Minor all have directors. Their duties range from mentoring and training adjuncts, developing courses, advising students, and suggesting course schedules. Because these individuals take on this responsibility with a minimum of re-assigned time (3-6 hours per year) they find themselves working as administrators, advisors and faculty at the same time. A suggestion has been made to create a Directorship for Literature. No decision has been made at this time. If that position is created it will be necessary to create a Director of English Teaching. This could lead to a greater identification with individual programs rather than the department as a whole.

The Program Review Committee made note of the high enrollments for writing intensive courses. ENGL 1010 and 2010 are capped at 24. This has been in place for several years and will likely not change. Some Creative Writing courses have been capped at 20. A proposal from the Curriculum Committee to reduce enrollments in all Creative Writing classes to 17 will be presented by Vicki Ramirez, Director of Creative Writing to the Department at the October 19, 2011 department meeting.

It was noted that tenure-track faculty teach many composition courses (ENGL 1010 and 2010). Actually the bulk of composition courses are taught by adjunct and contract hire faculty. The following statistics provide information to the contrary:

Tenure-Track Composition Teaching Loads

Spring, 2008: 25 out of 132 sections, (18.9%)
 Fall, 2008: 23 out of 127 sections, (18%)

Spring, 2009: 22 out of 119 sections, (18.4%)
Fall, 2009: 19 out of 128 sections, (14.8%)

Spring, 2010: 25 out of 133 sections, (18.7%)
Fall, 2010: 19 out of 142 sections, (13.3%)

Spring, 2011: 19 out of 125 sections, (15.2%)

The bulk of tenure track faculty teaching composition is done by 10 people.

It is true that recently programs have been promoted in such a way as to make some more prominent than others, thus creating a less-cohesive public image. This is a matter of great concern to many English faculty. Efforts have been put into place to counteract this impression. Dean Madonne Miner allocated \$4000 to each department in the College of Arts and Humanities to be spent on recruitment of student. Early in 2011 the Department Chair worked with University Communications to develop a brochure which advertises all department programs. In addition, bookmarks were produced and are distributed to students who attend new student orientation programs. Remaining funds will be distributed to each program for the purpose of recruitment and advertising.

The department participated in the Annual Block Party which is held on the first Friday of Fall semester. The department had a table which was staffed by faculty members from all areas of specialization. Students who participated in literature quizzes were awarded a variety of prizes ranging from gift certificates to local restaurants to t-shirts displaying covers of famous books.

In February, 2012 the department will participate in the Major Fest which provides information for incoming students and parents about programs, majors, and services. All English Department programs will be represented at the event at a single table.

There are plans to begin visiting local high schools to share English Department programs with juniors and seniors. These visits will present information about all English programs.

Master of Arts, English:

Merlin Cheney, Director, Master of Arts, is working with the Master of Arts Steering Committee and his assistant, Genevieve Bates to design an assessment process for all MA courses. This project will include the assessment of individual courses each semester. A pre-assessment tool will be developed for use in the admissions process. Students who have graduated from Weber State University with an English major within the last two years will not be required to complete the pre-assessment. Weber State University students who have graduated with a bachelors degree older two years, students from other institutions, and students who have not completed a bachelors degree in English will be required to complete the pre-assessment as part of the admissions process. Completion of these initiatives is anticipated by the end of the 2011-2012 academic year.

The Master of Arts course schedule is designed to offer classes in each category so that students are able to meet graduation requirements. Very few courses have been cancelled due to low enrollments since the program began in Fall, 2006. Unlike undergraduate courses which have an enrollment minimum of 10 students, MA courses have a minimum enrollment of 5 students.

The funding structure for the Master of Arts program is different than that of the undergraduate program. The Board of Regents requires all masters programs to be self supporting. This is a requirement that the department cannot change.

In the last year two new options have been developed and approved for inclusion in the Master of Arts: TESOL and Teacher Licensure. These originated from department faculty with expertise in each area. These additions will provide additional options for our students.

When the Master of Arts was approved and began operation faculty were excited about this new teaching opportunity. Initially there were more faculty willing to teach than there were openings in the schedule. Over time the desire to teach has leveled off but has not diminished. Many faculty members are committed to long-term projects and University level assignments that prevent them from teaching and developing MA courses. Sufficient courses are offered and student progress is not at risk.

When the Master of Arts was approved, the then Dean, Dr. June Phillips, made the decision that no MA courses would be taught as overload. Some of the other masters programs at Weber State are designed to assign courses on an overload basis only. Dr. Phillips's rationale was that if MA courses were taught as overload there would be no possibility of convincing the Board of Regents or the Utah State Legislature to reduce teaching loads for second tier institutions in the state, i.e. Weber State University, Utah Valley University, Southern Utah University. It was with this in mind that additional pay for developing and teaching a MA course was instituted as a reward for faculty who were required to teach 12 hours per semester.

Support Staff is Overloaded:

The English Department is a multi-faceted and busy unit. It is true that the workload is demanding. At the present time the staff includes two full-time staff: Kim Webb, Office Specialist and Robin Scott, Secretary II. In addition we employ Aubree Gleed: Student Aide. A recent University-wide offer to encourage programs to hire current students has allowed the Department to begin a search for another Student Aide at reduced cost to the Department. This individual will replace the current Student Aide who will student teach in spring, 2012.

The Department has also been authorized to hire an additional staff member in a 3/4 assignment. The development of a job description and posting of the position will take place during Spring, 2012.

Lack of Mandatory Advisement:

The English Department is aware of this problem. There are plans to propose that all majors and minors will be required to receive advisement. This is a recommendation from the Department Curriculum and Assessment Committees. This matter will be brought to the English Department In November, 2011 for approval. When this is approved the Department will develop a strategy to inform students of the new requirement.

Lack of a System of Prerequisites:

This concern is addressed in the section on Assessment.

Budget is Difficult to Manage:

This is a continual challenge for the English Department. The Staff and Department Chair continually seek advice and assistance from the Assistant to the Provost. The budget process is difficult to understand and there is no indication that it will change.

Need for an Assistant Department Chair:

The discussion of the Program Review Report raised many issues that have been addressed in this response. One suggestion that has since been shared with Dean Madonne Miner is the need for an Assistant Chair to take responsibility for specific issues, i.e. budget and schedule of classes. Dean Miner agreed that creating such a position would allow the Chair to work on long-range projects such as instructional initiatives, recruitment, and possibly development. This matter has not been brought to the Department for discussion at this time. It will be included in the agenda for the Department meeting on January 18, 2012.

Plans for New Tenure Track Hires:

The English Department has been authorized to hire a new tenure track faculty member in the 2011-2012 academic year. This position will reflect new trends in English Studies and specifies experience and expertise in rhetoric, new media and digital humanities.

A second position has been authorized to fill a vacancy created by the retirement of Dr. Diane Krantz, a Medieval specialist. This position requests expertise in Medieval and Renaissance Literature, including Shakespeare.

Prepared by Kathleen M. Herndon, Ed.D., Chair, English Department

Kathleen M. Herndon, October 14, 2011