

Dean's Response: English Department Program Review *and* the department's response to that Review: November 2011

I want to thank all members of the English Department—faculty and staff—who participated so fully and helpfully in the review process. I also want to thank the review committee (Liahna Armstrong of Central Washington University and Erika Daines and Adam Johnston from Weber State) for their careful analysis of the department.

Reviewers complimented the department on its many different offerings, its outreach to other areas, its development of MA programs, as well as other accomplishments. They expressed concern about the lack of assessment procedures and data, especially in the MA program. They worried over the amount of work required of staff, the lack of required advisement of majors and of a prerequisite system, and wondered about departmental cohesion. The reviewers' report offered four specific recommendations and the department generally agrees with those recommendations—as I do.

Assessment: The department is discussing the possibility of developing a capstone course for English majors. I support this development and encourage the department to consider a course that would allow students to look backward (at what they have accomplished in previous courses) and forward (toward the many career possibilities available to students whose skills set included analysis, critical reading, and writing).

I also support the department's suggestion that they might participate in a workshop on assessment. Earlier this fall, the Foreign Languages Department invited Louise Moulding from Teacher Education to lead them in a workshop on learning outcomes and assessment. The English Department might want to do the same.

Department Identity: The department notes that most of its many programs benefit from a faculty director. The exceptions are Literature and English Teaching, which perhaps merit specific faculty leadership. My fear is that if a single individual is assigned to direct Literature, the department may suffer more fragmentation rather than less. Currently, most faculty members feel some allegiance to literature, regardless of their particular specialization. If literature becomes a discreet area, some of that general affiliative goodwill may dissipate.

If the department determines that because of its size and complexity the department would be well-served with an Assistant Chair, I suggest that either the Chair or the Chair's Assistant should provide leadership in literature. If the department decides an Assistant Chair is needed, I recommend that this person's primary discipline area differ from that of the Chair.

Writing Intensive Courses: Reviewers and the department comment on high enrollments in writing intensive courses. I agree that a cap of 24 is high for ENGL 1010 and 2010—but at least in my experience at WSU, I’ve found that final enrollments in these classes pretty consistently are in the high teens or very low twenties. The “post-drop” enrollment figures are manageable as writing-intensive courses.

I have told the director of Creative Writing that I would support her request for a lower enrollment cap in Creative Writing courses. But here too, I will want to pay attention to enrollments after the third week to determine how many students remain in the courses for the duration of a semester.

Master of Arts, English: External reviewers expressed concern that the MA program is identified primarily with its original director, Dr. Merlin Cheney. Further, they worried about a lack of assessment, both in individual courses and of the program overall.

Dr. Cheney’s second three-year term as Director of the MA program comes to an end on June 30, 2012. Before the end of fall 2011 I will survey the department to determine who might be interested in assuming the directorship position. Dr. Cheney has asked that he be allowed to continue in his post for a year after his term ends; I have suggested he continue as a mentor to and co-director with whoever comes on board as the new director. I believe a one-year period of co-direction will be beneficial to both individuals and to the department.

The incoming director, in collaboration with the Steering Committee, probably will need to review the program’s budget and priorities. Currently, much of the budget goes toward incentive pay for faculty who develop and teach MA-level classes, direct theses, or serve on committees. At present, the program has no funds for tuition waivers or TA lines for students. The dean’s office funded two TAships this past year, but this model is not sustainable.

The department’s response to the outside review indicates the Dr. Cheney, the MA Steering Committee, and the program assistant, Genevieve Bates, will design an assessment process for all courses. I am still concerned about assessment of the program *overall*. What do entering students bring to the program? How does work toward the degree change the way they think, read, and write?

I also note in the department’s response to the review that although the assessment working group plans to develop a pre-assessment tool for use in the admissions process, “students who have graduated from WSU with an English major within the last two years will not be required to complete the pre-assessment” (p.4). I encourage the working group to re-consider this exemption. A pre-program assessment taken by all entering students could be very helpful in comparison to whatever programmatic assessment is performed at conclusion of the program. In

addition, a pre-program assessment of WSU's own majors will help us evaluate how successful our own undergraduate program is.

Support Staff Overload

As noted in the department's response document, I have provided funding for ENGL to hire a $\frac{3}{4}$ time staff person in spring, 2012. I also have asked the department to participate in the University's PREP process for staff members. After completing PREPs on current employees, the department chair will have a better idea about how responsibilities may be re-allocated and how the new staff member can contribute most effectively to the department.

I also have told the department that I am willing to grant some release time to an **Assistant Chair**, who should be able to help the chair in various ways. The department recognizes that as responsibilities currently are allocated, the chair cannot engage in long-term planning, but must devote her energies to keeping the department running on a day-to-day basis. An assistant chair may allow for more work in assessment, recruiting, goal-setting, web-page development, and so on.

Advisement and Prerequisites

I am very pleased that the department already is at work on a system of pre-requisites and on a plan for mandatory advisement of majors. Both initiatives will improve students' experiences in class and in the major overall.

Again, I very much appreciate the department's collaboration with reviewers and the thoughtfulness with which the department has responded to the reviewers' suggestions.

Madonne Miner
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