



WEBER STATE UNIVERSITY
Lindquist College of Arts & Humanities

**Board of Regents Program Review
Department of English
Weber State University**

Dean's Response

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The following is the Dean's Response to 2015-16 Board of Regents Program Review of the English Department at Weber State University. I have reviewed all of the available materials, including the English Department Self-Study, the Evaluation Team Report and the Department Response. I want to thank Hal Crimmel and his colleagues for their thorough Self-Study as well as the Evaluation Team for their valuable report. In my response, I concur with most of points made in the Department Response to the Evaluation Team Report, but I also raise a few new questions and areas of concern.

Standard A – Mission Statement

I appreciate the concision and clarity of the department's mission statement, especially as it is embodied later in two, extremely succinct learning outcomes.

Standard B: Curriculum

I agree with the faculty comments that there should be some (but not too much) flexibility in the writing course curriculum, especially at the 2010 level. There are many ways to build that in. One could imagine, for example, developing 3 or 4 different course models, inflected by a writing-in-the-disciplines approach and which would accomplish two things: it would better serve students across campus who need and want to learn to write in their chosen fields and it would provide potential variety for faculty members. The concern for unity and common standards across sections could be achieved via common learning outcomes and rigorous assessment of learning. The work done over the last few years, led by former WSU Composition Director Dr. Scott Rogers, to develop the TICE 2010 curriculum in collaboration with other state-supported schools, has provided one such model for a 2010 class now being used both at WSU and in area high schools where WSU supervises concurrent enrollment classes.

I agree with the review team that placement below 1010 can sometimes become demoralizing for students, and that a stretch or jumbo solution might be tested on a limited basis. I am curious to learn more about this.

Two questions related to the 22% decline in English majors: 1) Is it possible that recruitment for the English major is tied to an overuse of adjunct faculty in lower division

courses? 2) Are there other curricular issues that might be discouraging students to complete a major?

Standard C: Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment

The phrase: "Evidence exists that the faculty are being apprised of the outcomes" is somewhat surprising. Does this mean that faculty are not required to use learning outcomes in the syllabus and/or the assessment of writing?

As I mentioned above: the departmental outcomes are clear and elegant. I think, however, that there are too many outcomes (up to 10?) in the program areas. Assessing 10 outcomes is an onerous and unnecessary task. These could be rethought and condensed.

One of the evaluators expressed concern over a lack of uniformity in teaching evaluations. Is this true? Going forward I think it would be very helpful to design and develop common evaluations based on learning outcomes so that assessment is built into an existing process.

Standard D: Academic Advising

I commend the department and advising office for strong academic advising and agree wholeheartedly with the idea of developing career advising at the college level. This is action-item as at the top of my to-do list.

Standard E: Faculty

As a newcomer to Weber State University, I instinctively share some of the external evaluators' concerns about faculty teaching loads. I feel that Hal Crimmel addresses these concerns convincingly. I also think that over the longer term we will need to find solutions that relieve teaching pressures in order to reward scholarly activity and to ensure retention of our young faculty members.

As for the mention of a "mismatch" between service assignments and faculty status or rank (e.g., the idea that contract faculty should not be doing major service assignments), I also agree with Hal Crimmel: we need to do our best to share service assignments with qualified and willing contract faculty. Reserving such service only for tenure-line faculty does two things: it creates a feeling of a caste system and it puts a heavy burden on tenure-line faculty who at the same time are seeking relief for research. One of my goals as dean is to create more reassigned time for research and faculty development.

Standard F: Program Support

I too fully support professional development, including staff attendance at professional conferences.

Standard H: Program Summary

Although the data show a decline in overall English majors over the past five years, that fact is stated late in the document, and in the context of a pre-requisite issue. Given the

contiguity, am I to conclude that the reviewers and/or department members feel that pre-requisites are driving students away from the English major? It's not clear. I am happy to see that Chair Crimmel has put an inquiry into retention issues on the agenda for the coming year.

General recommendations:

I agree with the evaluators that there are too many faculty reviews and that these could be streamlined. As an example: perhaps the normal annual faculty review in the second year could stand in for a formal second-year review?

I agree that assessment should be used more strategically to figure out why we are losing students.

I agree that we need to amplify the career component of advising at the departmental and college levels.

I share the concern (if true) over the lack of uniformity in teaching evaluations. I think that these would be most effective if "assessment-based."

I would like to work with the Chair to find a better way to design longer contracts for instructors.

Sincerely,

Scott Sprenger

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