

Department of English Five-Year Program Review
Program Review Evaluation Team Report



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After reviewing the Self Study and Executive Summary, the Review Team visited the English Department on March 16-17, 2016, and met with the department chair, program directors, staff, advisors and a number of faculty and students. What follows is a report of the department's strengths and challenges respecting the university's standards for program review. Recommendations have been numbered consecutively throughout the report.

STANDARD A - MISSION STATEMENT

Strengths

The mission statement is clear and concise. It articulates the department's emphasis on the study of language and literature. It also supports the University-wide need for students with strong reading and writing skills. The curriculum not only supports the program's mission, but provides rigorous and necessary pathways for student success.

The statement might be revised to include the various programs within the department and how they contribute to the skills mentioned in the mission statement.

STANDARD B – CURRICULUM

Strengths

Although some changes are in progress, the department's curriculum is the result of a careful planning process at program and departmental levels. It is a sizable undertaking to offer departmental emphases in literature and language study, pedagogy and creative writing. While some intramural divides are inevitable, the department has done a fine job of

maintaining unity. In spite of some disagreements among faculty members, the department has for a long while produced majors and minors in each area of study, a sign that it is functioning as it should. It is impressive that the English Teaching major faculty have, for many years, cooperated with the College of Education.

Major courses are offered in regular rotation and service courses are consistently available in all areas. In addition, courses are offered on multiple campuses, online and through concurrent enrollment; this scheduling flexibility enables the department to respond to enrollment pressures.

The Composition Program, until recently, had a long-term director who instituted a successful and uniform approach (TICE) to ENGL 1010 when taught by adjunct faculty, graduate TA's and teachers in concurrent enrollment.

We were impressed by the dedication, pedagogical understanding and excellent completion rates shown in the Developmental English program.

Concerns

Students and faculty expressed concern over the Composition Program's curriculum; two issues emerged: 1) the extent of curricular flexibility for individual courses and 2) the new TICE protocol, its implementations and goals. With the increased use of adjuncts and TA's, the department deploys fewer full-time instructors (tenure-track, tenured and instructors) in composition—with potentially negative effects on recruiting students into the major. The TICE format is not necessarily embraced by full-time faculty who would like the opportunity to teach different genres, including literature, as part of composition.

We note that educational research has shown that removing the stigma of special labeling and numbering for students having low placement scores increases their chances of advancing to graduation—without compromising academic integrity. This would be a change from the current situation at WSU.

Recommendations

1. **a.** Rethink the structure of the Composition Program, using a more inclusive decision-making process that helps the department recruit majors and at the same time fulfills the general education mission. Though all sections of ENGL 1010 and ENGL 2010 needn't be identical in terms of materials, readings or assignments, the general curriculum should be comparable on campus and in concurrent enrollment whether taught by tenure-track, full time or adjunct faculty.
- b.** Consider combining the developmental curriculum and ENGL 1010 into a single 1000-level "stretch" course allowing enthusiastic students to take a sequence of two classes with the same classmates and the same instructor for two semesters (or perhaps two blocks).

STANDARD C - STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES AND ASSESSMENT

Strengths

Substantial efforts have been initiated to address previous review recommendations (in 2011). An outcomes assessment was completed in 2015 with plans in place to collect additional data and with efforts to disseminate the findings. Learning outcomes are explicitly

geared to curricular offerings and to the incremental level of building skills. Evidence exists that the faculty are being apprised of the outcomes and are making adjustments.

An example of the response to outcomes and to curricular needs is seen in the proposal to streamline the survey courses in literature in order to offer focused courses at the third year level. This change responds to national trends away from historical coverage and toward focused courses—special topics, major authors, periods, etc. Such courses attract new students to the major and enable rigorous study in a confined disciplinary area.

Concerns

There is currently no uniformity in administering Student Course Evaluations. Some discussions have begun at the college level—we hope these will continue.

Given the number of programs, their differing outcomes, the size of the department and its many constituencies, establishing and communicating goals and processes presents a challenge. Some faculty express concern about the way outcomes assessments are collected and the value of this assessment.

Recommendations

2. Conversation with department faculty and within programs may help define the purpose of program and course assessment and increase participation.

STANDARD D - ACADEMIC ADVISING

Strengths

The department's advising model is multi-tiered, with college advisors channeling students to the department's excellent advisor (a tenured full professor) who describes the major and the various programs/emphases and then refers students to other faculty within the department as needed. There is good collaboration between the college advisors and the department advisor. The English department advisor not only charts an academic pathway for the students' major option, but apprises them of university-wide opportunities. Advising in this way introduces students to the department's literary journal publications, for example, to open a role for those interested in writing and in publishing. At the same time, the advisor invites students to participate in activities outside of their major area of study in order to discover their own interests, track their activities and begin their CVs.

This process of advising establishes a rapport that can be duplicated in few other ways, cultivating student success and future donors.

Recommendation

3. The next step for the program is to connect with career advising at the college level. Frequently, English majors do not realize their own significance in the job market and they need assistance in order to promote themselves and realize their opportunities.

STANDARD E – FACULTY

Strengths

The department has qualified faculty who teach interesting and engaging classes. The faculty are obviously engaged and in many cases clearly delighted with their vocational work at Weber State and they seem quite free to speak up. Faculty demonstrate respect for their students and their colleagues and an often enthusiastic involvement with their subject matter.

Highly engaged full-time instructors take on responsibilities within the department and the university. Many of these full-time instructors and adjunct faculty have served the university for many years; their length of tenure speaks to a consistency of the instruction not always possible at other universities.

The department has started several initiatives that have the potential to improve morale; notably a more transparent decision making process that relies exclusively on full department votes on virtually every major decision. (There were no faculty complaints of bias or backroom dealings by departmental leadership—a truly commendable situation). This model will likely need to be fine-tuned by deciding where full-department votes are necessary and where either a program or chair decision is more likely to achieve departmental goals.

Concerns

Racial and gender diversity within the faculty and staff is lacking but consistent with other English departments.

Some faculty worried about the retention of junior faculty; however, the department has only three assistant professors compared to 21 tenured faculty. This small number of junior faculty makes any generalization about retention difficult.

There appears to be some mismatch in appropriately aligning service activities (committee work, program coordination, advising, etc.) with respect to faculty rank; that is, some full-time instructors are directing programs or serving on university committees while some tenured faculty seem less engaged. This is complicated given the high teaching load for faculty at all ranks. The quality of the faculty indicates that they could perhaps accomplish significantly more with some relief in teaching loads.

Release time or reassigned time, reducing the teaching load for some faculty, is used almost exclusively to provide service to the department or college; only occasionally is it used to support scholarship and to improve teaching. These priorities should be realigned given the requirement of scholarship for tenure, promotion, and the Post Tenure Performance Compensation Plan (PCP). In addition, the course releases seem incommensurate with some service/administration requirements. For example, the department chair is given the same release from teaching as some directors within the department (MA Director, *Weber: The Contemporary West*) and the same as other department chairs across the University, yet the administrative load for performance reviews, budget oversight and scheduling in such a large department is considerably higher. Still, release time is common enough (14 out of 24 tenure track faculty plus 2 full-time instructors) that some faculty feel it has become a perk and is not always in line with the additional tasks performed.

During the review visit, faculty salaries were mentioned a number of times: transparency could be improved, equity and compression are issues, and there is a lack of any policy regarding spousal hires.

Recommendations

4. The 4/4 teaching load needs to be reduced if research is to be valued and if the department is to develop. A goal of a 3/3 for the department (and the College of Arts and Humanities) would be appropriate. This may involve a "teaching track" of 4/4 or 4/3 for faculty who prefer not to do more than minimal scholarly work and who do not wish to work with the MA program.

In the meantime, policies should be created to award release time for research and not just administration. Faculty should not shy away from showing the concrete results of these kinds of reassignments; the most productive researchers could be given reassignments first in order to demonstrate their value.

5. Consider the job security of instructors, hopefully with a move to longer term contracts.
6. Continue to develop effective practices to mentor junior faculty. Mentoring groups may be more effective than one-on-one assigned mentors.
7. Rethink the "Teaching College Writing" course for new instructors and graduate teaching assistants. It might be more practically oriented, both in terms of pedagogical suggestions and of classroom management (e.g., interactions with persons with disabilities, behavioral problems, etc.). At some institutions this course is divided into one-credit modules, each having a different emphasis—for example, one for new instructors of business/ technical writing, one for new instructors of rhetoric and composition, one for new instructors of introductory creative writing, etc.

STANDARD F - PROGRAM SUPPORT

Strengths

The department has good long-term staff support; the administrative assistants have been with the department for a long time and "know the ropes." There is strong support from the college with respect to marketing.

Staff has asked for development opportunities external to those provided by the university, such as attendance at a professional conference.

The university and college have provided superb facilities, especially the department office.

STANDARD G - RELATIONSHIPS WITH EXTERNAL COMMUNITIES

Strengths

The department interacts with the community in a wide variety of ways; among these are:

- A robust concurrent enrollment program in area high schools
- Coordination with the College of Education for practicum and student teaching
- The National Undergraduate Literature Conference
- The Wasatch Range Writing Project
- *Weber: The Contemporary West*
- *Metaphor*
- *Alerus*

Mention was made of the possible establishment of an external advisory committee. Given the history of the department and activities the new chair is undertaking; this lack is not a concern. The many connections within the community now in place may already provide adequate feedback.

STANDARD H - PROGRAM SUMMARY

Strengths

The undergraduate English programs at Weber State University are healthy and thriving. The faculty are committed, appropriately educated, and hard-working. The department is also responsive to national changes in the discipline; the faculty has demonstrated creativity and flexibility in meeting them.

The change in leadership over the past two years presents challenges. The current chair is committed to developing processes and procedures to ensure the department's effectiveness and efficiency. This will take time and cooperation among the entire faculty as things stabilize.

The report indicates that substantial efforts have been made to address previous review recommendations (from 2011). An outcomes assessment was completed in 2015 and plans are in place to collect additional data and disseminate assessment results.

The department offers a substantial number of service courses as well as courses in a wide-ranging discipline at the baccalaureate and the master's level. A coherent, broad mission statement instills cohesion, and efforts are underway to streamline some program offerings in order to meet student needs and increase course enrollments.

A process for mandatory student advising is in place at the college and department levels.

Concerns

The issue of pre-requisites has been addressed and valiant efforts have been made to modify the pathways for students. Pre-requisites are double-edged sword; they may disallow some working students from enrolling in required courses with resulting enrollment decreases. How students progress through the curricula is probably best left with advisors rather than with a blanket institutional or computerized enrollment policy. Offering required courses online may better serve the students.

There has been a dramatic decline in enrollments, particularly within some programs, over the past several years.

Recommendations

8. We strongly recommend the adoption of a set of departmental bylaws. This will remove considerable pressure from the department chair and aid in the efforts at transparency. The process of writing and adopting bylaws or policies should be a departmental-wide effort.
9. Gather the CVs of all department faculty (not just MENG faculty). Make these available in future outside reviews of the department. It would be a good idea to put highlights of all CVs on the department website as well, so that prospective or current students (and others) can see faculty members' interests and accomplishments. This will boost the advocacy of the department at many levels.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

College and University Recommendations

These recommendations are not numbered, since they do not purport to describe changes that the Department of English can accomplish on its own.

- There is need for a career services advisor at the college level to inform students of career opportunities and help them prepare for the job market or graduate school.
- Faculty in the MENG program and others who are required to engage in regular scholarship should be allowed a reduced teaching load. If contract faculty teach 4/4, the college should consider reducing assignments for tenure and tenure-track faculty.
- Consider limiting the amount of service performed by contract faculty. Lacking tenure, contract instructors and adjuncts tend to be vulnerable to service requests and are easily exploited. Any service commitment from untenured faculty needs to be explicitly rewarded and appropriate to their non-tenured status, education and experience.
- Provide a budget for the Composition Program that serves over 6000 students annually.
- The frequency of faculty reviews (second year, third year, tenure, promotion, post tenure and/or PCP) seems duplicative. Since most of these are accompanied by peer reviews and formal feedback from the department chair, they likely constitute an inefficient use of faculty time and department resources.
- Given the number full time contract faculty who have stayed with the department for a number of years, consider staggering their personnel reviews or alternating between brief statement and/or form and a more thorough review.
- Review adjunct faculty on a more regular and consistent basis.