

**Master of Arts in English
Weber State University
Program Review**

Review Dates: September 11 & 14, 2020

Review Team:

External Reviewer:

Dr. Tyson Hausdoerffer, Director of Graduate Program in Creative Writing, Western Colorado University

Internal Reviewers:

Dr. Valerie Herzog, Prof. and Chair of Athletic Training and Director of Graduate Studies, Weber State University

Dr. Electra Fielding, Assoc. Prof. of Spanish, Weber State University

Overview:

The original program review was scheduled for the Spring 2020 semester. Due to the pandemic, all parties agreed to postpone the review until the Fall 2020 semester and also agreed to conduct it virtually via Zoom, rather than in person. The Review Team met virtually with the Program Director, the program's Administrative Specialist, the Department Chair, the Dean, a group of faculty, and a group of students/recent alumni over a two-day period. The Review Team's feedback regarding each standard is included below.

Standard A-- Mission Statement:

1. Are outcomes of the program well defined?
2. Are student accomplishments assessed by stakeholders?
3. Is the educational program clearly defined so graduates can meet goals?
4. Does the mission statement align with the college's mission statement?

Strengths:

The mission statement summarizes some of the most attractive aspects of the MENG program: close collaboration between faculty and students, engaging environment, and student opportunities. It also includes references to the four tracks currently available to students of this program.

Areas for Improvement/Growth:

The mission statement remarks that the program serves a "local community of scholars." With the program reaching out to students out of the state and from other areas in Utah, and growing a stronger online component, it may be the moment to rephrase/rethink this aspect of the mission statement.

The program also mentions the value of diversity as part of the class environment. See below our recommendations about faculty and student recruitment.

Recommendations:

As the program transitions to including more online course offerings, we recommend that the Steering Committee develop best practices for intention and planned student engagement including orientation, advising, and professional socialization with faculty and other MEng students. We also recommend that the mission statement be rephrased to reflect its intention to recruit and train students from beyond the local community. Finally, if, as we suggest below, the program converts its “tracks” to three concentrations, the mission statement could be altered to reflect this, and where the statement mentions providing advanced preparation in “writing,” this could be rephrased along the lines of “both creative and scholarly writing” to reflect the distinctness of the training provided in the concentrations.

Standard B Curriculum:

1. Is there evidence of thoughtful curriculum planning and review?
2. Is the curriculum consistent with mission?
3. Are there resources to support the program?
4. Are courses offered in a timely manner?

Strengths:

MEng students are able to choose from several tracks (literature, creative writing, TESOL, and secondary licensure) to focus their degree on. Moreover, students can choose among various electives to meet requirements. This ability for students to tailor their degrees is a strength of the curriculum. The students noted that there are almost always enough courses offered to allow them to progress through the program in a timely manner and that faculty are willing to offer independent studies on occasion when needed.

Areas for Improvement/Growth:

The “track” students choose does not appear on their diploma, leading to confusion and a disadvantage on the job market, especially for students who complete the TESOL track. Students are not always able to register for MENG 6010 during their first semester due to the limited capacity of the course, which they view as a disadvantage to becoming oriented to the program and connecting with the other students.

Recommendations:

Formalize the tracks within the MEng program into official concentrations and/or graduate certificates (for some of the tracks) that will appear on the students’ diplomas. We recommend that the MEng program require all new students to take MENG 6010 in their first semester to orient them to the program and connect them with other students (also noted in the academic advising section). We also recommend that if more than one section of MENG 6010 is offered, that the

course learning outcomes and objectives are the same in both sections. We also recommend that MENG 6010 should better reflect with equal weight all four of the different program concentrations rather than be primarily focused on the Literature concentration.

As was noted in the previous program review, we recommend eliminating the remaining dual-designations courses (5000-level courses) from the MEng program.

Standard C. Student Learning Outcomes & Assessments

- a. Learning outcomes should reflect expected skills and behaviors achieved by graduation
- b. Learning outcomes support goals of program
- c. Learning outcomes linked to curriculum (with matrix)

Assessment

- a. Programs has clearly defined assessment plan
- b. Each learning outcome has a direct measure that is public
- c. Evidence of learning is collected and reported regularly
- d. Program faculty meet regularly to discuss results
- e. Assessment results are being used to improve teaching & learning (i.e., close the loop)

Strengths:

MEng students produce high-quality scholarly products that are presented at regional and national conferences. Several of these products have also been published in reputable outlets. The current MEng team has sought to address problems with learning outcomes by increasing norming sessions and by reviewing how well the learning outcomes's relate to the different tracks.

Areas for Improvement/Growth:

Learning outcomes do not apply equally well to all tracks. Feedback to students based on assessment of Learning Outcomes is delivered too late for it to be of use to the students (although we note that they do receive feedback as a regular part of each course). Student accomplishments are not being used in marketing as rigorously as they perhaps might.

Recommendations:

The Review Team recommends that, as the MEng faculty work on developing formalized concentrations for each emphasis area, the assessment of each concentration should be considered as well. We also recommend that the MEng faculty revise its current assessment program to provide more immediate feedback to the students and to better reflect the learning outcomes of the program. We also recommend that the program use the outstanding accomplishments of the students to market the program to prospective students and to continue to build the program's scholarly reputation in the community.

Standard D. Academic Advising

- a. Clearly defined strategy of advising
- b. Students receive appropriate assistance in planning course of study
- c. Students receive appropriate assistance in planning career

Strengths:

The MEng makes various advising resources available to its students. New students in their first semester meet with Kate Johnson, the MEng Administrative Specialist to declare a track within the program and review the list of required and optional courses. Students are encouraged to meet with the program director, Dr. David Hartwig, for more specific career advising during their second year in the program, although some students seek his advice during their first year. Many students seek advice from faculty in their specialty areas, and the overall impression is that the faculty teaching in MEng take an interest in giving professional advice to their students, if in an informal way.

Areas for Improvement/Growth:

Expanded and more formalized academic advising for MEng Students. Better clarity in advising requirements.

Recommendations:

In the interest of better retention and student success after graduation, the Review Team recommends that the college consider hiring an academic advisor who could devote some or all of their time to advising graduate students in the college (MEng and MPC). Until that is financially feasible, we recommend providing Kate Johnson, the Administrative Specialist, with additional opportunities for training in advising, within and outside of the university as available and applicable. We recommend that the requirement of first-year students to meet with the Administrative Specialist be clarified in order to eliminate confusion on the part of students regarding the program requirements and the course sequences. Furthermore, we recommend that, at the start of their second year, students be required, rather than only encouraged, to meet with the Program Director or supporting faculty designated by the Director. That second-year meeting should involve direct discussion of student career goals and perhaps some form of action plan for each student. We also recommend that the MEng program require all new students to take MENG 6010 in their first semester to orient them to the program and connect them with other students.

Standard E. Faculty

- a. Faculty size, expertise, professional development are aligned with mission
- b. Programs has core faculty required to maintain quality program
- c. Adjunct faculty are qualified
- d. Program strives to achieve diversity among faculty
- e. Plan in place for mentoring new faculty
- f. Plan in place to assignment teaching and service loads
- g. Teaching is monitored to assess effectiveness
- h. Have formal periodic review process for faculty

Strengths:

Many noted that Dr. David Hartwig's leadership as the Program Director was a strength of the MEng program. They spoke of his energy/enthusiasm as well as his organizational skills. He has increased the number of applicants each semester and increased enrollment overall. He has worked hard to stabilize the program in many other ways and to address issues brought up in the previous 5-year review.

Students noted the faculty as a strength of the program and praised their close mentoring. There are a large number of faculty who teach in the MEng program, each bringing their areas of expertise to bear on the offered courses. Faculty members have also had the opportunity to connect their teaching with their specialized areas of scholarship through teaching in the MEng program, which is of benefit to both faculty and students.

Every group that was interviewed noted the teaching assistantship program as a strength. TAs are trained and mentored by the faculty and the TAs course evaluations indicate that they are effective instructors. In addition, this provides an opportunity for MEng students to gain college-level teaching experience and provides financial assistance for their tuition costs.

Several faculty specifically mentioned that having such a supportive department chair (Dr. Hal Crimmel) was also a strength of the program. Dr. Crimmel has worked to increase funding for the program through scholarships, additional funding for those who teach and develop MEng courses, and for marketing. Relations between the department and the MEng program seem very collegial and collaborative.

The MEng Steering Committee provides thoughtful feedback to faculty who submit syllabi for MEng courses, which improves the quality and consistency of each course.

Areas for Improvement/Growth:

All but one of the current MEng faculty members are Caucasian.

Recommendations:

The Review Team recommends that the program director, in partnership with the WSU Diversity Office, develop strategies to recruit diverse faculty when openings occur. The easiest opportunity for diversifying the faculty would come from developing a stronger online component to the program, as this would allow for hiring diverse faculty from outside the local community.

While the program has been able to secure more funding recently for scholarships, the enrollment growth will result in additional financial need for graduate students. The Review Team recommends that the college seek out donors who are interested in endowing scholarships for graduate students.

Dr. Hartwig's strong leadership and Kate Johnson's role as administrator and advisor have helped solidify the program and have strengthened enrollment. We recommend that the program implements processes to ensure continuity when transitioning to new leadership and/or administration.

Standard F. Program Support

- a. Number and capabilities of staff adequate to support mission and objective
- b. Administrative support available to assist staff
- c. Facilities, equipment and library capable of supporting program mission

Strengths:

Several individuals noted that Kate Johnson, the MEng Administrative Specialist, is a strength of the program. She has caught up with the backlog due to issues outside of her control. She has also created and managed a well-planned social media marketing campaign that has helped to grow the enrollment of the program. She also participates regularly in other recruiting activities such as graduate fairs. The subject-area librarian has been an asset and has acquired the resources necessary for the success of the program.

Areas for Improvement/Growth:

While the Program Director and Administrative Specialist have been able to make minor edits to the website, they are unable to completely update it to meet the needs of the program and prospective students.

Recommendations:

Rework the MEng website to focus it more on prospective students only and consider creating a Canvas course geared to provide pertinent information for current graduate students. This would essentially function like an internal website and could also be used for announcements.

We also recommend that old versions/iterations of the MEng website be removed from weber.edu (such as https://www.weber.edu/portfolio/engl_mstr_ms.html) to avoid confusion and to improve web searching by current and potential students.

We recommend the creation of a newsletter to share information about student achievements, highlight program events, maybe even introduce new students. This newsletter (or a shorter version of it) could also be shared with MEng alumni. Highlighting alumni achievements to current students would help with retention and also make alumni continue to feel connected to the program, which would make it easier for MENG to collect data on alumni success.

Standard G. Relationships with External Communities

- a. Formal external relationships exist
- b. Role and contribution are clearly defined
- c. External advisory board exists and communicates regularly

Strengths:

The Wasatch Range Writing Project (WRWP) provides a free, intensive 3-week writing workshop facilitated by WSU Faculty who mentor local teachers and writers. In addition, the MEng program has quite a few students and alumni who teach in the local schools.

Areas for Improvement/Growth:

The MEng has a very dedicated Steering Committee within WSU that assists with admissions, assessment, curriculum development, etc., but does not have an external advisory board. The program has struggled to connect with alumni and to track their success.

Recommendations:

We recommend that MEng develop an external advisory board that can provide feedback to the faculty on the development of the concentration areas and seek advice to help recruit additional students, and more diverse students, to the program to further grow the enrollment. An external advisory board would also help provide continuity and stability during future transitions. We also recommend that MEng devise a plan for better tracking of MEng alumni and career placement, and continue to reach out to MEng alumni to track their career paths as well as to invite them to remain engaged in the program through mentoring, guest lectures, and/or participation in the external advisory board.

Standard H. Program Summary

- a. The recommendations from the previous review were implemented where it was feasible to do so. However, as mentioned previously, we agree with the recommendation from this prior review to eliminate the 5000-level courses from the MEng program's curriculum. These have already been reduced, but a few still remain in the TESOL track.

Conclusions:

The Master of Arts in English program at Weber State University is an excellent program with dedicated faculty, strong leadership, and a solidly built curriculum that accommodates different areas of interest. It is a student-centered program with plenty of opportunities for students to excel and to participate in research projects and scholarship opportunities that will benefit their professional career and help them build a solid portfolio. The faculty of the program are well-versed and experienced in the fields they teach, offer a diversity of classes, and stay current in their respective fields. They are committed to the success of their students, regularly steer students towards professional opportunities, and create a welcoming environment for them. One of the biggest strengths of the program is the opportunities for interaction between faculty and students in

and out of the classroom. We would also like to commend the MEng faculty for their efforts in transitioning to the online format during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Master of Arts in English program at Weber State University has great potential for growth. The inclusion of online teaching, and the recruitment efforts outside of the Ogden/Northern Utah community can be valuable assets in growing the program, in creating a diverse group of students in the classroom, and overall, making it a vibrant learning experience for students. Formalizing the tracks of the program into concentrations and/or graduate certificates will likely attract additional students to the program and improve the satisfaction of their graduates. Increasing the diversity of the faculty will add to the richness of the educational experience and the ability to attract and retain diverse students. The program can further be strengthened through improved academic advising and a revised assessment plan. The creation of an external advisory board will allow the program to stay in tune with the needs of area professionals and receive feedback on various aspects of the program. Overall, the Master of Arts in English is a significant asset to the college and university as well as the community.