

Draft External Consultant Program Review Report, April, 2007

Compiled by Dr. Jim Kohn, San Francisco State University

In this report, the reviewer has followed the "Guidelines for program reviews by external consultants", furnished by CSUS. The reviewer has attempted to respond to the issues and questions enclosed in those guidelines, and has added recommendations and a personal statement at the end. Attached to this document please find Appendix A, Comparison of APR recommendations to English Department responses, and Appendix B, the English Department Self Study, April 2006. This reviewer is responsible for any mistakes or misapprehensions contain herein, and here wishes to thank the other members of the Program Review team for their excellent cooperation in conducting this review, and in preparing this report.

RESPONSE TO PROGRAM REVIEW GUIDELINES

- I. Program Introduction and History
 - A. Has the department made reasonable responses to the curricular recommendations from the last program review?
 - B. Has the department responded to any major state or national trends in the discipline?
 - C. Is the structure of the curriculum and course offerings in line with similar programs in this discipline?

Commentary:

As the chart in Appendix A demonstrates, the Department has made reasonable responses to several of the recommendations which were part of the previous program review. In general, the Department has responded well to recent national and state-wide trends, by virtue of redesigning the major, and by hiring new faculty whose expertise matches these new trends. In the Self-study, the Department alludes to these new changes and additions:

Revision of the undergraduate major came about in response to several factors. Primarily, the department sought to reach out beyond English and American literature as a way of incorporating the other strands of the department into the major other than through electives and as a way of interacting with changes in the profession and the department brought about by changes in the field and by the additions of new hires and potential new hires. The 12-unit "area of interest" that is central to the new major, thus, allows undergraduate students the option to focus on areas outside of literary study such as "English Language [Linguistics]" and "Creative and Professional Writing" or to focus on areas of literary study such as "English Literature," "American Literature," "Poetry," "Fiction," or "Drama." In addition, three "areas of interest" reflect recent critical trends in English Studies such as "Race, Nation, and Ethnicity," "Gender and Sexuality," and "Literary Theory and Cultural Studies." (Undergraduate Programs Committee Report)

In addition to the options provided by "Areas of Interest," students also have 12 units of English electives. These electives provide students with a "no-fault" opportunity to explore the full range of courses offered by the English Department before selecting their "area of interest." Furthermore, the lower division survey requirement "venture[s] beyond the traditional focus on English and American Literature" by adding a course in World Literature (primarily focused on Asian and African literature) and allowing students to choose four of the five survey courses. Interest in English 65 "World Literature" has been evident in its recent enrollment patterns; we offer one section each semester, and this year both sections filled quickly to near capacity (40 students). In our recent hiring cycle, candidates for a position in Creative Writing (Fiction) and Contemporary/Modern Literature and a position in Multi-Ethnic Literature spoke positively about the opportunities they perceived available to them in our new major. (Self-study, p.3)

The course offerings are in line with these recent additions and changes, although the availability of these courses to students is a question with which this report will turn at a later point.

II. Academic Programs and Assessment

- A. Are the program learning outcomes clearly integrated into courses throughout the major?
- B. Are the direct assessment measures aligned with the program learning outcomes?
- C. Does the department use assessment data to reflect on student learning and to initiate programmatic change?

Commentary:

As stated in the Department Self-study, program learning outcomes are represented by a series of goals. These goals are presumably reflected in the content of courses offered for the major, even if a regular and sustained measurement of the attainment of these goals is not yet in clear evidence:

Writing and Reading in the Major: Goal #4: The CSUS English major will be expected to read literature critically with appropriate interpretive skills. **Goal #5:** The CSUS English major is expected to produce advanced level expository prose. **Goal #7:** The CSUS English major is expected to use critical thinking and problem-solving in reading and writing. We should note, furthermore, that many courses in the major require "Writing-to-Learn" activities that create an effective dialectic between reading and writing. The Writing Standards and Criteria are distributed each semester throughout our curriculum and are available on-line. (Self-study, p. 12)

- D. Does the department evaluate student writing in a systematic way?
- E. Does the department evaluate information competence in a systematic way?

F. Does the department have at least two indirect and one direct measure of student learning?

Commentary:

As noted above, the goals of writing and of mastery of information competence are imbedded in the curricular goals of courses in the Department. Students demonstrate their mastery of both writing and of content through satisfactory completion of the course goals, which always include writing assignments and the use of information systems:

Computer/Information Competence: Goal #6—CSUS English majors are expected to learn competence in computer skills related to research technology. While all five of the learning goals for the “Information Competence Graduation Requirement” are infused throughout our curriculum—primarily as they contribute to our primary mission which “is to promote learning in composition, creative writing, English Education, linguistics, literature, and the teaching of English as a second language”—these specific competencies are taught in the required course, English 120A, Advanced Composition, and are further reinforced and assessed in another required course, English 198T, Senior Seminar. Indeed, these two courses are the foundation for the English Department’s Assessment Plan. (Self-study, p. 14)

Commentary:

In the Self-study materials that are available to the Review Committee, there are several memos that reflect the Department’s attempts at assessment of its Senior Seminars. In a memo from the English Department Undergraduate Program Committee dated October 15, 2004, the UPC reports on the assessment of 24 student papers from the senior seminar in fall, 2004. This assessment shows that 12 of the papers were rated as “generally successful,” or “thorough fulfillment of goals,” while 11 of the papers were rated as “only partial success,” and one paper “indicated failure to meet expatiations.” In a similar memo from the English Department Writing Assessment Committee dated April 3, 2006, there is a report on the quantitative results of 198T Scoring for Fall 2005/ Spring 2006. In this assessment, of the eighteen papers rated, nine were rated as generally successful or thorough fulfillment, while none were rated below those levels.

In the Spring, 2006 memo, the Writing Assessment Committee has several recommendations, including the formation of a meeting to discuss learning outcomes for English 198T, the creation of a portfolio exit assessment to include 198T and English 120A, the portal course to the major, and several follow-up measures in which portfolio assessment for these courses could be evaluated.

It was this reviewer’s impression that such efforts are on-going, but that there is no report as yet about the success of the development of such portfolio assessment. The Self-study document contains the following relevant passage on assessment of writing in the major:

With the establishment of the new major and the 198T senior seminar, the undergraduate programs committee approached the department about the establishing an ad hoc committee to take on the assessment of the department and its senior seminar papers. Between fall 2001 and spring 2004, assessment of the English department and the senior seminar papers originated in the undergraduate

programs committee. At annual or biannual meetings, committee members met to discuss a selection of seminar papers the committee members had previously read and ranked on a 1-to-4 point scale, looking for student strengths and weaknesses in terms of argument, organization, textual citation, ease of interaction with theoretical/critical texts, grammar, etc. After three years and with the implementation of the new major and the new senior seminar 198T, the department ad hoc committee on assessment assumed the responsibilities of assessing student work and departmental success and the drafting of the department's annual assessment report. The ad hoc committee also suggested the assessment of two courses instead of one, offer the possibility of tracking change or improvement in students' writing during their careers in the English Major. Beginning with fall 2004, English 120A (Advanced Composition) courses in the fall semester and 198T courses in the spring semester became the sample subjects for assessment; 120A gives a sense of where students are in their junior year or after they transfer while 198T presents student writing from graduating seniors. The UPC recommends that the ad hoc committee on assessment become a standing committee to engage annually in the assessment of student writing and the self-assessment of department achievement. (Self-study, p. 14)

The committee report goes on to explain that while the two courses, 120A and 198T are capped at enrollments of 25 and 20, the other courses have much higher caps, resulting in the need for fewer writing assignments apart from these two courses.

It is important to note that within the Writing Program, which is housed in the English Department, but not integral to the major, writing assessment has long been a regular part of the curriculum. The Basic Writing (BW) program has recently revised its assessment procedures for student writing:

Basic Writing Program

Overview: The Basic Writing Program (BWP) serves students who have scored between 142-146 on the EPT (cut score lowered from 142-150 effective Fall 2004) and provides remediation via English 1 courses currently capped at 20 students, up from the traditional cap of 16 students. The course is scored "Credit" or "No Credit."

Assessment Style: Historically, students wrote a midterm exam which did not affect their grades and a final exam on a Saturday at the end of the semester. After both exams, instructors would meet on a weekend to evaluate the student writing. If students passed the final exam, they earned a "Credit" in the course. If students failed the final exam, a portfolio of their essay writing was read by the evaluation team to determine whether a student passed or failed the course. After years of proceeding in this manner, the BW Committee began to rethink our assessment tools, realizing we were teaching students the importance of careful thought, thorough development, and extensive revision but grading them on quick timed-writing. This realization led to the development of the portfolio-only evaluation system, which was unanimously approved by the Writing Programs Committee in Spring 2001 and began to be used in the fall of that year. Students now write and thoroughly revise three essays and a cover letter during the semester, placing them in a portfolio which is scored by a team of readers on a weekend. This improved system evaluates students based on what they are actually learning in the classroom.

Assessment Procedure: Because the program has grown in size, we no longer meet to evaluate students by teachers all convening in the same room. English 1 portfolios are now evaluated by instructors in several different rooms, and student assistants move the portfolios between the rooms. Each portfolio gets a score from a minimum of two readers in separate rooms. If the scores match, the portfolio either passes or fails. If the scores are split, the portfolio gets a third reading by instructors at the Review Board who resolve the split. In addition, we have successfully developed an Appeals Committee to look at portfolios that instructors-of-record believe may have been misread.

This procedure for assessing basic writing is fully in-line with current practice at most large writing programs. In fact, the Basic Writing program is to be commended for their skillful use of portfolio assessment. Such a procedure gives a more accurate assessment of the student's actual writing proficiency, compared with the traditional method of high-stakes essay writing.

- G. How does the department conceptualize teaching effectiveness, and in what ways does the department realize that concept?

Commentary:

The Department continues to experience a rapid turnover in its population of tenure-track faculty, as more and more long-time faculty members retire, while some new faculty are hired on to replace them. (See Self Study, pp. 33, 34) In spite of this rate of turnover, the faculty continue to receive high ratings from their students, both in numerical terms in the teaching effectiveness questionnaires, and as in evidence in student comments. This reviewer noted in discussions with graduate students that they uniformly praised the quality of the instruction that they were receiving from instructors in the Department.

- H. Is there an appropriate balance between service courses and major courses relative to the department's role in the college?

Commentary:

As is the case in many English Departments throughout the CSU system, the Department serves the needs of the University as a whole as well as the needs of its own majors. So long as the Department continues to supply classes and instructors for required university writing courses and at the same time must assign courses for its major courses, there will always be a tension between budgetary allowance for service courses and also for major courses.

- I. How does the department maintain consistency in multiple section courses?

Commentary:

In a situation of limited budgetary support, the question of maintaining consistency across sections is an important one, particularly in multi-section composition courses. In

the Self Study (p. 22), the Department addresses the need for more support to provide such consistency:

Various department curriculum committees oversee multiple section courses. The British, American, World Literature, and Shakespeare courses fall under the purview of the Undergraduate Program Committee. Many of the 110 and 116 courses are supervised by either the TESOL Committee and/or the English Education Committee. Course Description booklets and the collection of syllabi also contribute to the consistency of multiple section courses. It should be noted that supervision, faculty development, and coordination of multiple section programs has been limited by the elimination of assigned time units for some of these positions.

With increasing pressure on tenure-track teachers to supervise multi-section courses, the workload beyond the teaching load begins to be a critical factor in the Department's success at achieving all of its goals. The tendency to assign more and more work to tenure-track faculty will ultimately challenge the department's capabilities.

- J. To what extent does the department respond to the baccalaureate learning goals (attached) in its General Education courses?
- K. If the department offers a minor, concentrations, or a certificate, how do these programs fit the mission of the department, college, or university? Are the guidelines and requirements for these programs clear?
- L. Does the department have healthy enrollment in majors, minors, concentrations, and credentials?

Commentary:

As noted in the Self-study (pp. 23 – 26), the Department has substantial course offerings in the General Education program, a range of minor programs and concentrations which fit will the CSUS goals of community service, and healthy enrollments in this variety of concentrations within the major.

- M. Analyze the department retention and graduation rates. How do these compare with university averages?

Commentary:

As noted in the Self-study, graduation rates among undergraduates have recently increased:

The English Department's 6 yr. Graduation rate (BA) has improved from a low of 36% in 2002 to 50% and 52% in 2004 and 2003 respectively. One year continuation rates have ranged from a low of 59% in 2000 to a high of 81% in 2001 and 2004. We are hopeful that improved advising and the new major will contribute positively to increasing both retention and graduation rates. (p. 28)
The same pattern of improved graduation rates applies to the graduate programs as well.

- N. Has the department articulated agreements with community colleges where appropriate?

Commentary:

At present there seems to be a minimal correlation between courses offered at nearby community colleges and those offered at CSUS, apart from the overall pattern of transfers in use for the CSU. The Department seeks to improve its connections with community colleges, as noted in the Self study (p. 29):

We hope to increase our transfer numbers in the following ways: 1) outreach to the community colleges; 2) Learning Communities for Transfer Students—this was attempted in Spring 2006 with a new course in English but did not receive sufficient enrollment; 3) improved lower division transfer patterns in response to statewide initiatives.

- O. Does the department provide support for work on graduate theses and projects?
- P. What percentage of the faculty participates in teaching graduate courses (where relevant)?

Commentary:

There are several options available to graduate students as culminating experiences, of which thesis writing is one. The usual problem of the loss of senior faculty to retirement has complicated the problem of workload distribution, so that currently junior faculty must bear the additional burden of thesis advising as well as the other duties they are assigned.

III. Students

- A. Do students have the sense that their courses fulfill the learning objectives of the department?
- B. Do students have sufficient access to enter courses?

Commentary:

As noted in the recommendations from the previous program review, the availability of courses scheduled at times convenient to working students was seen as a problem area six years ago:

“The program review team recommends that the English Department establish and implement within the next three years a course rotation that regularly rotates graduate classes both across days (T/TH) and M/W) and across times of day (morning, afternoon, evening). Such a rotation should ensure that at least once every three semesters, single section classes are offered in the evening after 6:00 p.m. The program review team further recommends that the department post this course rotation outside the English Department office, outside the Graduate Coordinator’s office, and in the department’s website (Program Review, 2001, p. 50).