

## **ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW REPORT**

Department of English  
College of Arts and Letters

Spring 2007

### **Review Team Members:**

Alyson Buckman, Humanities and Religious Studies  
Jackie R. Donath, Humanities and Religious Studies (team chair)  
Brett Holland, Biology  
Francis Yuen, Social Work

## **I/Overview**

### **Documents Consulted**

- *Department of English Self-Study*, Spring 2006
- *California State University 2006-2008 Catalog*
- Vitae of Department of English faculty
- Department of English course syllabi
- Department of English Staff Position Description Forms
- *Department of English ARTP Policies and Procedures*
- *External Consultant Report for the Department of English*, April 2007

### **Individuals Interviewed**

- Dr. Sheree Meyer, Chair, Department of English
- Tenured Faculty Members, Department of English
- Part-time Faculty Members, Department of English
- Support Staff, Department of English
- Department of English students, both undergraduate and graduate
- Dr. Jeffrey Mason, Dean, College of Arts and Letters, CSUS
- Dr. Jim Kohn, San Francisco State University, External Consultant

The Department of English is one of eleven departments in the College of Arts and Letters. The Department also participates in the School of the Arts, an organizational framework which was constructed to facilitate collaboration among the departments of Art, Design, English and Theater and Dance.

The Department describes itself as a "community of teachers, scholars, writers, and support staff whose primary mission is to promote learning in composition, creative writing, English education, linguistics, literature, and the teaching of English as a second language."<sup>1</sup> The undergraduate curriculum has been developed to support a major baccalaureate focus—the study of literature in English and in translation. The BA major requires 45 units, of which 27 must be upper division. The major is organized into upper and lower division courses, requirements for one of eleven areas of interest and twelve units of electives. The Department also offers several minors—a general minor, a minor in creative writing, a TESOL minor—each of which require 21 units. The Department of English also offers an English Single Subject Matter Program for students preparing to teach English in secondary schools and advises students seeking preparation for a teaching credential in English with a secondary focus in the humanities. In addition to the major and minors, the Department of English has two certificate programs for undergraduate students—a Teaching Composition certificate and an Advanced Study in TESOL certificate are noted in the catalog.

The Department of English also houses a graduate program which offers Master of Arts degrees intended to provide students with advanced study in one of several fields—literature, composition, creative writing and TESOL.

In addition to its degrees, the Department of English is the administrative home of several University support activities, including acting as the campus' sole provider of GE requirement A2 (freshman composition) and the graduation requirement for a second semester of English composition; the Writing Proficiency Exam administration; the office of the Writing Across the Curriculum coordinator; and the Writing Center, a tutoring facility.

The Department also coordinates student and graduate assistants and internships, and produces the *Calaveras Station Literary Journal*, published each spring.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Department of English Self-Study* (California State University, Sacramento, Spring 2006), 1.

The Self-Study report identifies the Department's primary focus as helping "students to acquire knowledge, develop skills, and realize their own intellectual and creative goals."<sup>2</sup>

## **II/Commendations**

- The Department has hired a number of superior tenure-track faculty since the last Program Review;
- The English Department is clearly made up of individuals who are talented teachers and artists, well-known in their fields;
- The faculty of the English Department demonstrates consistent commitment to their students;
- Despite ongoing and distinct problems with its office and classroom facilities, the English Department has continued to offer high quality teaching and learning opportunities to the campus and the community-at-large;
- The English Department faculty's outreach to the greater Sacramento area is admirable;
- The *Calaveras Station Literary Journal* as organized and presented by the English Department is to be commended;
- The English Department has created a solid and comprehensive major for their students;
- The English Department has taken significant first steps in articulating its expectations for majors;
- The Department has taken important first steps toward assessing the effectiveness of its programs and student learning;
- The English Department has developed and disseminated a set of writing standards which provide an excellent and accessible model for other departments;
- The English Department has organized its major concentrations to ensure that students are qualified to do more advanced work or move into the workforce;
- The individual attention given to each student by the faculty in the English major is exemplary;
- Students demonstrate a strong sense of overall admiration and respect for the English Department faculty and staff;
- The English Department faculty is highly productive;
- The English Department is actively engaged with system-wide and national organizations which are concerned with major issues in the discipline;
- The English Department staff demonstrate genuine concern for students and faculty;

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

- English Department staff provide efficient and effective service across a variety of departmental programs.

### **III/Program Mission and Response to Previous Review Undergraduate Program Mission and Goals**

The Department responded positively to a recommendation from the previous program review team to create a mission statement. But a potential difficulty in the Department's self-conceptualization appears in its current Self-Study description of its primary mission as the *promotion* of "learning in composition, creative writing, English education, linguistics, literature and the teaching of English as a second language." The Department describes itself as *presenting* a "broad and balanced curriculum designed to develop the reading and writing skills, the interpretative abilities and the cultural awareness of its students. . . ." Presentation and promotion are worthy beginnings to the process of education, but they seem to be primitive goals for teaching and learning at the university level.

The Department also delineates a two-pronged secondary mission in its support of non-English majors. Through its contributions to General Education and Liberal Studies, the faculty of the Department of English expands students' awareness of and sensitivity to the meaning of English to educated people.

While all of these activities are important and certainly appear to be worthy departmental goals, the variety of components in the Department's mission suggests that the faculty may be stretching themselves, their staff and their resources rather thinly in the service of being comprehensive and attempting to be all things to all students. A side effect of this "thinness" is that the Department's mission statements do not include any sort of value-based language that might provide a platform for assessment, improvement and planning, nor does the current set of mission statements facilitate reflection on the Department's goals.

Since a mission statement is the logical foundation of the long-range planning process, it should reflect the department's "big picture," defining why a department exists. It is clear to the Review Team that the Department of English exists to make a difference in the lives of our students. Discussing the Department's reason for being and why faculty and staff do what they do could be a first step toward the refinement and narrowing of the Department of English's mission.

An effective mission statement will provide a short, clear statement summarizing the Department's purpose. One measure of an effective mission statement is that each member of the Department will "understand, support, and be able to articulate that mission."<sup>3</sup> A concise and to-the-point mission statement can serve as the Department's touchstone, guiding decision-making and planning. Such a mission statement should clearly define the Department's services, doing so in a general, rather than in a reactive way; it should include the results the department intends to accomplish in the community it has decided to serve, and would focus on what is unique about the Sac State English Department. In addition, a meaningful mission statement would be narrowed down in ways that would keep faculty and staff focused, while also being flexible enough to allow for creativity and variety in the ways the Department fulfills its mission.

Particularly in an atmosphere of decreasing expectations for support, the Department of English, like all units of the University, must manage and focus its limited resources of people and money for maximum effectiveness. Revisiting its mission statement could permit the Department to review and strengthen its commitment to a connected group of teaching and learning goals which allow it to demonstrate its importance to students in its programs.

---

<sup>3</sup> Peter F. Drucker, *The Five Most Important Questions You Will Ever Ask About Your Nonprofit Organization* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., 1993), 12.

Just as the Self-Study description of the mission is diffuse, the language the Department uses to describe itself in the *2006-2008 California State University Catalog* is really just a general list of the subject areas which constitute the discipline:

English as an academic discipline includes the study of literature of the English language and of literature in translation as it bears upon British or American literature. It also embraces the study of literary theory, genres (fiction, poetry, drama, film) and modes (comedy, tragedy, satire, romance), English and American language and linguistics, expository and creative writing, and critical and analytical reading. A major in English equips the student with a wide variety of intellectual skills and correlated career opportunities.<sup>4</sup>

Both the Self-Study's diffuse mission statement and the Department's laundry list of subject areas in its catalog description fall short of providing a strong sense of the specific sorts of knowledge and skills undergraduates will attain as a result of their studies. A significant issue the Department needs to address in an explicit fashion arises from these statements—how/when will the Department know if students have met "their own intellectual and creative goals?" For that reason, the Program Review Team recommends that, in consultation with the Faculty Assessment Coordinator:

- **The English Department should revisit and revise its undergraduate program's mission statement to identify and align its strengths, values, priorities, activities and resources with a specific, explicit set of measurable teaching and learning goals.**

The Department might consider ways in which it can strengthen the sense of interconnectedness among the various "threads" of its subjects and activities. An alternative worth exploring might be the development of mission statements/learning goals for "specialized" undergraduate programs, such as creative writing and English education. The Department's strength is also something of a weakness:

- **The Program Review Team urges the Department to consider ways it might "unbundle" its programs and service activities to provide the College, University and service community with a meaningful sense of the scale at which it operates.**

As part of this endeavor, the Department should consult the Office of Institutional Research in order to ensure that meaningful data is collected in service of the Department's self-construction and self-evaluation.

### **Graduate Mission and Goals**

According to the Self-Study, "despite limited resources, the English Department's graduate programs have grown since the last program review."<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, this growth seems to have taken place in the absence of well-defined missions for two of the graduate programs. The problems discussed in the preceding section on the undergraduate mission and goals are also reflected in the absence of specific graduate program missions. Only the TESOL program has learning expectations for its M.A. students.

- **The English Department should revisit and revise its graduate programs' mission statements to align its strengths, values, priorities and resources with its desired teaching and learning goals.**

### **General Education/Service Mission and Goals**

The English Department is responsible for a core segment of the University's lower division GE program with its control over GE Area A2 (freshman composition) and the graduation requirement for a second

---

<sup>4</sup> *California State University Sacramento 2006-2008 Catalog*, 355.

<sup>5</sup> *Department of English Self-Study*, Spring 2006, 4.

semester of composition. The investment of departmental resources (both human and fiscal) in University-level support is significant and in addition to the GE and graduation requirements referenced above, the Department offers ENGL 1: Basic Skills, ENGL 1X and 2X (multilingual), College Composition Bridge for slightly underprepared freshmen, ENGL 2 (a multilingual version of ENGL 1A), and ENGL 109 classes for both native and second language writers who fail the WPE.

Certainly, the Department's contributions to Area C are fundamental to the learning goals of the General Education Program. Identifying the value of service to these students would elevate the meaningfulness of the Department's activities in this arena above the "mere" generation of necessary FTEs. The Department might consider the value of its contribution in a more discipline-specific and mission-driven way, producing a more explicit tie between the classes it offers to General Education students and departmental goals.

The Program Review Team urges the Department to consider whether the proliferation of GE course offerings is in its best interest, given the size, complexity and needs of its major and other essential University-level services. Might some courses be "retired" or removed from GE? Alternatively, could the major be configured in a way to support the maximum overlap of classes between GE and the major?

- **The English Department should describe and align its desired goals in service to the General Education Program, Liberal Studies and teacher credentialing to a revised mission statement that clarifies the relationship between these activities and the Department's strengths, values and priorities.**

#### **Evidence of Changes Made Since Last Review**

The 2006 Self-Study comments on the last review by asserting that the Department reviewed the Program Review Team's recommendations in Spring 2002 and revisited them again in 2005.

The Department made good faith efforts to address a number of the issues raised by the previous Program Review, responding in a careful, strategic and thoughtful way to the recommendations from the Program Review Team. The Self-Study makes clear that a number of the areas of improvement suggested in the previous program review have not been addressed because of funding issues.

In particular, Program Review Team notes with dismay, the following unresolved and important concerns which require support from entities outside the Department:

- The Writing Center continues to operate without a source of stable funds to address increasing demand;
  - The Department's ongoing and minimal request for the replacement of a 10-month appointment with a 12-month staff appointment has not been supported;
  - Assigned time has not been restored for several key program support functions, including ENGL 20 Coordinator, Basic Writing Coordinator, and the ESL Coordinator;
  - The Department has received no space or equipment upgrades since the last Program Review;
  - The Department provides significant support to a variety of University-mandated courses and services without supplemental funds or personnel
- **The Program Review Team recommends that the Dean of the College of Arts and Letters collaborate with the Chair of the Department to revisit a number of significant resource issues.**

### **Program Changes in Response to Disciplinary Changes**

The Self-Study ties recent changes in the structure of the major to changes in the discipline and summarizes a number of disciplinary and structural changes which have become significant in English Studies during this review cycle. The implication of this section of the Self-Study seems to be that even as institutional conditions have changed over the past several years, the methods and theories of English education have also evolved and the Sac State Department of English has attempted programmatic responses in order to serve our students more effectively.

The Program Review Team wonders if the Department would be well-served to situate itself more clearly in the context of other CSU system English Departments and their programs. How is the Sac State English Department (and its programs) unique? How is the Department like those on other CSU campuses? It seems to the Review Team that some program changes are less a matter of changing approaches and subjects in the field than they are reflections of institutional demands for new levels of "efficiency" and "productivity."

### **IV/Academic Programs**

A context for this section comes from team's understanding that a significant element of the English Department's mission is the centrality of what the Association of American Colleges has identified as "integrity" in the curriculum. According the AAC report, *The Challenge of Connecting Learning*, disciplinary study should offer a sense of "both the possibilities and limits" of study in a particular area. For the AAC, college majors should "include sequential learning, building on blocks of knowledge that lead to more sophisticated understanding and encourage leaps of imagination and synthesis."<sup>6</sup>

### **Learning Expectations for Undergraduates**

As part of the Assessment Plan process, the Department delineated 14 learning goals and associated learning expectations. In doing so, the Department intended to "convey a full account of our expectations for our students and ourselves."<sup>7</sup>

While the program goals are laudable, they do not always tie in as directly to student learning as they might and instead seem to emphasize the delivery of a specific curriculum rather than what students will learn and how they will demonstrate that learning. Although the goals list does an admirable job of delineating expectations, in the some specific areas, the goals and expectations seem unattached to particular, demonstrable learning. From the Team's perspective, these expectations focus more on teaching than on learning. For example:

- GOAL #1: The CSUS English literature major will be expected to have a knowledge of literature, theory, grammar/language
- GOAL #2: The CSUS English literature major will be expected to understand cultural diversity as it relates to the study of literature
- GOAL #3: The CSUS English literature major will be expected to have a knowledge of the methodology and conventions of discourse/inquiry
- GOAL #4: The CSUS English literature major will be expected to read literature critically with appropriate interpretive skills

---

<sup>6</sup> Association of American Colleges, *The Challenge of Connecting Learning*. Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges, 1991. 4.

<sup>7</sup> *Department of English Self-study*, Spring 2006, appendix F.

- GOAL #9: The CSUS literature major is expected to demonstrate interpersonal/collaborative/group and teamwork skills
- GOAL #10: CSUS literature majors are expected to adhere to standards of academic and professional integrity
- GOAL #11: CSUS literature majors should develop a lifelong appreciation for reading and literature
- GOAL #12: CSUS literature majors expected to develop skill in self-reflection/self understanding and informed judgment

- **The Department should develop a set of undergraduate learning goals and competencies that explicitly describe active learning in the discipline.**

The Program Review Team found some of the learning goals for the major rather nebulous and recommends that the Department revisit their learning goals in light of a reconsideration of the parameters of desired (and measurable/identifiable) levels of "knowledge," "understanding," "appreciation," "skills," and "competence."

- **The Department might profit from revisiting their learning goals in light of the most recent revisions of the major.**

The Program Review Team applauds the English Department's first steps toward developing meaningful learning goals. However, in their current form, there is not a clear alignment between the goals and the major program. Neither the Self-Study nor the most recent incarnation of the Department's Assessment Plan contains any sort of matrix tying specific curricular elements and courses to program expectations. This would be a logical first step in any review.

It might also be helpful for the Department to develop a roadmap of a preferred sequence of courses in each program that parallels and highlights the program's learning goals.

While the Department's assessment plan is, in many ways, a model for the campus, the language of both the Self-Study and Assessment Plan focus on program requirements and procedures and in the absence of well-defined learning expectations, these activities can drift toward the mechanical rather than meaningful.

#### **Learning Expectations for Graduates**

The Self-Study does not include specific learning goals for graduate students in this section. Nor are there matrices in the assessment plan that focus on Master's level learning.

- **The Department of English should prepare a set of learning goals and specific competencies for its graduate programs.**

The Self-Study does not really indicate how students are informed about learning expectations in a programmatic way at either the undergraduate or graduate levels.

As a department, the faculty should come to consensus about what skills and competencies they want their graduate students to demonstrate, and at what levels, or in what context. The M.A. in English varies by concentration, allowing for the "fullest range of preparation." The Program Review Team would like to see each concentration develop learning goals ties to concentration-specific mission statements, similar to those of the M.A. degree in TESOL. The Team also encourages the Department to develop articulated lists of expectations beyond simply "a thesis."