



University of Nevada, Reno

Office of
Executive Vice President & Provost

MEMORANDUM

DATE: September 30, 2016

TO: Eric Rasmussen, Chair, English
Debra Modellmog, Dean, College of Liberal Arts

FROM: Kevin R. Carman, Executive Vice President & Provost
Joseph I. Cline, Vice Provost, Undergraduate Education

SUBJECT: English Program Review



Joseph I. Cline

We write to set forth the conclusions and our recommendations regarding the English Department external program review in 2016.

The reviewers were impressed with the many strengths of the English Department, including its enthusiastic undergraduate and graduate students, collegiality of the faculty, and strong profile and visibility of the department faculty in terms of publications, research programs, and service to professional organizations. We commend the department for the positive way it approached the review, using the process as it is intended—as an opportunity for self-analysis, collegial discussion, and planning for the future. In particular, we are impressed that various committees and task forces have already begun working on the issues raised in the review. As stated by the reviewers, the department provides a critical service to the university in terms of the Core Writing program, serving students in all majors of the university. It is evident that the department faculty take this role seriously and remain committed.

After reviewing the external reviewers' report and the department chair's and dean's responses, a closing meeting was held on May 26, 2016, to discuss the outcomes of the review and come to an understanding on the directions that the department should take in the coming months. After identifying the strengths noted by the reviewers, there was a discussion of the various opportunities for improvement that the department, with the support and guidance of the college, can take in the future to begin to address them.

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We offer the following recommendations for action in the coming months:

- Undergraduate Enrollments. The department had concluded in its self-study that enrollment in the undergraduate program needs to be raised. Certain modifications in the curriculum and improvements to the website may help some, but since there were no major curriculum concerns, the department concluded, and we agree, that focusing on some targeted recruitment strategies (identified in the department response) should be the focus. The department reports that it has already begun exploring and implementing them, and this work should continue. Although it was not discussed at the closing meeting, freshman retention of incoming English majors averaged 77.3% over the last four years, below the University-wide average of 81%. The department should make use of new EAB-SSC tools to identify and provide special support to at-risk undergraduates.
- Curriculum Modifications. The department chair indicated in the closing meeting that several task forces were working through the relatively minor curriculum issues identified during the review process. Some modifications are already at various stages in the curriculum approval process. The department faculty are also exploring several longer-term curriculum improvements including an emphasis in ecological scholarship and advocacy, developing and promoting a Public Engagement MA emphasis, and exploring with other departments an interdisciplinary program in Environmental Humanities, and this work should certainly continue.
- CCID Program. Resources for the implementation of this program have up to this point been given to English. However, it is not clear how much collaboration with other departments has taken place. We have encouraged the Communications Studies Department and its faculty to more aggressively pursue opportunities to become engaged and partner with the CCID program faculty. We would expect additional faculty, programs, or departments could also engage in this collaboration, and note that the president's vision for CCID expects this collaboration.
- Term Lecturers. The reviewers questioned the continued use of 3-year term lecturers and stated they believed that though this practice had been recommended by AAUP many years ago, it was no longer advantageous. While we understand that the department may have good reasons for hiring limited term lecturers, we direct that it examine the issue carefully. The chair reported that a task force was working on this, and the interim dean advised obtaining insight from Dean Modellmog in the fall. We recommend that the task force and faculty examine the positives and negatives of this practice and explore and discuss the current practices at other institutions for these types of hires, particularly at our aspirant peer institutions. Once this examination has been completed, we ask the chair to bring the department's findings and recommendation on this topic to the dean, who will then share it with the administration.
- Graduate Program Seminar Availability. It appears the department misunderstood the requirements concerning necessary enrollment to offer graduate seminars. Therefore, we are confident that the concerns expressed by the reviewers regarding seminar availability can be addressed reasonably quickly.

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- Advising; Career Counseling. The department chair reported many things already being planned and implemented to address concerns about advising and career counseling. These include using the Student Success Collaborative tools, instituting a more comprehensive tracking system for graduate students, offering additional career exploration related events and workshops, and providing training workshops for faculty on graduate student mentoring. Additional resources for students, both from the improved website and in print, are good steps as well. The chair reported on several career advising related activities that are currently offered or being expanded. Student clubs and organizations could also have a role in these.
- Faculty. The department was praised for the collegiality and respect that exists among the faculty. The department appears to mentor the junior faculty well, and there is a good system for involving many if not all of its faculty members in the work and decision making of the department regarding its curriculum, students, and plans for the future. The department recognizes that the diversity of the faculty needs to be increased. As searches begin in this new academic year, we ask the department chair and dean to work with the department search committees to ensure the committees are doing all they can to attract diverse candidates, invite qualified diverse candidates to campus, and convince them to accept positions here.
- Promotion & Tenure of Faculty. The department should keep in mind that it is the expectation at the university that tenured faculty in all departments continue to build a portfolio of scholarly work following achievement of tenure so as to move successfully through the promotional ranks to full professor.