

External Reviewers' Report
for the Department of English, Comparative Literature, and Linguistics
California State University, Fullerton
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I. Overall Impressions

The Department of English, Comparative Literature, and Linguistics of California State University, Fullerton, is a very well-managed department with excellent leadership; with dedicated and collaborative faculty and staff; and with the willingness to reflect on its mission, curriculum, and procedures in order to best serve its students and the university. The department's excellences were clearly evident to the external reviewers through their direct interactions on March 3, 2011 with various faculty, staff, students, and administrative leaders. Clearly, this is a department central to the success of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, and to the overall success of the university. It is, moreover, a department that assumes this mantle of importance in an effective and responsible manner.

The external reviewers wish to thank the members of the department for their hospitality and information-sharing. This report utilizes a relatively conventional external review template of commendations and recommendations. The reviewers acknowledge that a number of the recommendations listed below already are alluded to in the department's Three-year and Seven-year Plans (PPR 11-12) and in various other places within the PPR.

II. Overview of Recommendations

This section, while not completely inclusive, provides a narrative summary of recommendations explored in greater detail in subsequent sections of this report. It refers to matters of faculty and staff hiring; curriculum and assessment; student support and development through the Writing Center and the GA and TA programs; and the status and potential roles of part-time faculty.

As the department rebuilds its pool of tenure-track faculty, which is a goal strongly supported by the external reviewers, it should consider hiring as many as two specialists in rhetoric and composition, including one to alleviate the apparent work overload of the department chair (who currently also serves as Director of Composition) and one to serve as Director of Writing. The Director of Writing specifically might be charged with duties associated with the interface of writing studies and the Writing Center; with the monitoring of the GE writing requirement; with the further development of a writing (and critical thinking) initiative across the curriculum, and with participation in the university-wide task of undergraduate writing assessment. Consider as well the possibility of a tenure-track hire in creative

writing, particularly in view of the recent graduate program revision. At the staff level, continue efforts to regain a (third) permanent full-time staff position, and hire at least one additional student assistant.

The department has engaged in a careful revision of its graduate curriculum, and it has developed electives and/or GE courses that should prove to be appealing to students. The reviewers agree that the department should consider requiring a dedicated theory course at both the undergraduate and graduate levels for all majors. The department also may wish to consider either the development of a capstone senior seminar or else the use of senior portfolios to aid in its undergraduate assessment practices. A development of assessment protocols in accordance with such restructuring likely would be needed.

Consider also expanding the excellences of the Writing Center and of the TA program by promoting growth in both areas. Also, find ways to generate greater inclusiveness among part-time faculty members in the life of the department not only to generate an expanded sense of community but also to recognize part-time faculty as vital professional contributors.

III. Mission, Goals, and Planning

Commendation: The department's overall mission and goals remain clearly in harmony with those of the university as a whole. At the same time, the department has continued to move forward since its last program review. In moving beyond the traditional "field-coverage model" (PPR 3) toward a more contemporary paradigm that combines traditional "rigorous scholarly inquiry with practical career preparation," along with necessary attention to learning outcomes (PPR 3), the department has strategized its tenure-track hiring; thoughtfully revised its graduate program while also inaugurating a new graduate professional certificate; and reviewed and revised elements of its undergraduate program, with special attention to its writing courses and electives.

IV. Governance and Leadership

Commendation: Associate Dean Claire Palmerino and faculty interviewed during the external review uniformly attest to the expertise, experience, and effective leadership provided by its department chair. Additionally, the department's vice chair and the faculty members charged with various administrative responsibilities pertaining to the undergraduate and graduate program clearly undertake their responsibilities attentively and effectively.

V. Faculty

Commendation: Observations of three classes (an advanced writing class; an introductory literature class; and an upper division course on Shakespeare on film) yielded the same highly impressive results: all external reviewers praised the quality of instruction and the intellectual sophistication of the attending students. Assuming that these three classroom encounters are reasonably representative of the department's quality of instruction, the reviewers unanimously agree that a general and enthusiastic commendation is well-deserved. No recommendations are warranted in regard to teaching effectiveness.

The department maintains a balance of professors in various ranks and at various stages of their careers. It is a testimony to effective strategic planning and to the appropriate levels of institutional support that the department can maintain this balance.

Recommendation: Despite the balance of professors in different ranks, the department has experienced an overall loss of tenure-track faculty members from 27 to 20 over the course of several years. Given the department's ability to maintain a longitudinal consistency in the relative numbers of its undergraduate and graduate majors, additional tenure-track hires—to fill needs as identified by the department—seem to be a priority. These hires also will help prevent scheduling bottlenecks that impede students' progress toward graduation, as well as help balance out the overall faculty workload distribution.

Recommendation: Given the department's serious commitment to writing studies and enhanced writing instruction, and given the fact that the current chair must serve as the de facto Director of Composition, consider pursuing a tenure-track hire with a PhD in Rhetoric and Composition. While the current chair has a long and demonstrated expertise in composition studies, her current assignment would seem to constitute a decided work overload. At the very least, it would seem to preclude the possibility of expanding the current TA program. It is conceivable that this recommended tenure track position may require hiring a senior professor with tenure, since the position will almost certainly involve a considerable amount of administrative duties and faculty oversight. This Director of Composition could be charged with the responsibility of training and supervising TAs (and, as mentioned, of expanding the TA program) and with the possible development and monitoring of a portfolio system for students in freshman composition.

Recommendation: The university through its Office of Undergraduate Studies should support an additional tenure-track hire of a university Director of Writing (locus of tenure presumably to be kept in English). This Director of Writing might be charged with the tasks of maintaining, evaluating, and expanding the current practices in writing across the disciplines; of monitoring the GE writing requirement; of supervising and running the university's EWP; and of serving either as the head of the Writing Center or as an English Department liaison with the Writing Center. The Director of Writing would be particularly useful in directing discussions and establishing consensus about critical thinking and writing standards throughout the university, thereby fostering a culture of shared institutional assessment that might forcefully demonstrate student outcomes to outside constituencies. The Director could also help in the process of establishing online repositories (e.g., electronic portfolios) for showcasing student work.

Recommendation: When tenure-track faculty members receive assigned time, consider the possibility of hiring a part-time faculty member with a PhD in the requisite area(s) to teach a given upper division course in the major. This recommendation is based on concerns raised by both faculty and students that assigned time often results in the cancellation of upper-division courses, some of which are already (apparently) offered infrequently.

Recommendation: Explore ways to integrate part-time faculty more fully into the professional life of the department, while continuing to respect the non-service provisions of the CBA. These ways could include voluntary activities for part-time lecturers, such as semi-annual information meetings (wherein lecturers play the primary role in setting the agenda); opportunities to be elected by fellow lecturers for service on

the department's standing committees (other than ones prohibited by university regulations, such as personnel or search and screen); informal receptions to which both full-time and part-time faculty are encouraged to attend; and even such seemingly small gestures as posting photos of all department faculty (with all instructors simply being identified as "faculty") in a place where all students can immediately recognize their faculty members as part of a professional community, as well as easily locate their offices.

Recommendation: As suggested by the department chair, a handbook for lecturers which explains not only their entitlements and issues like "careful consideration" but also the organizational structure of the department, along with its various programs and resources, would be ideal, especially if the handbook is one to which the lecturers themselves may voluntarily contribute.

Recommendation: At the graduate level, given the department's programmatic commitment to creative writing, the proposal for a Writer-in-Residence, a position which would be tied to fundraising, offers the distinct possibility of attracting students, while developing a self-sustaining endowment. However, the department also may wish to investigate the possibility of hiring a tenure-track PhD in Creative Writing. A PhD may prove preferable to an MFA in this instance, since the new hire will still have to be capable of meeting the individual faculty member's semesterly SFR, and a PhD likely can teach a wide range of both creative writing and non-creative writing courses. This person likely would be especially alert to the latest developments in creative writing as a disciplinary field and would be well situated to develop new courses. If the department chooses "to make revisions [in the undergraduate curriculum] parallel to those in the graduate program" (PPR 3), then the need for a tenure-track hire in creative writing may become a matter of urgency.

VI. Curriculum: Undergraduate

Commendation: The department clearly has enhanced its writing curriculum. The development and subsequent phase in of English 307 and of 302 serve to address the specific needs of students in the English major. English 301 is usefully retained as a writing course for non-majors.

Commendation: The piloting of English 100/100W as a summer version of Stretch Composition is praiseworthy, since it may help students quickly advance through basic skills pre-requisites and also help reduce student attrition. At the same time, the department may wish to consider developing year-long Stretch Composition sequences for students who have tested into "developmental" writing.

Commendation: The department has been proactive and energetic in developing and revising various GE courses and in developing new electives. This successful effort provides additional evidence of strong strategic planning and faculty collaboration.

Commendation: A notable department achievement is the pilot program that reduces annual faculty workloads from 4-4 to 3-3, without a resulting budget deficit or significant loss of FTES. Since the continued success of this program—as well as the possibility of other departments emulating it—depends in part on classroom availability, it seems likely that the department has undertaken this change at the appropriate moment.

Recommendation: Monitor the effects of the 3-3 system on students, since on the whole it would appear that they may face a reduced amount of selection regarding days and times of needed/desired courses. Also, continue to study the impact of increased class sizes (particularly the 60-student sections) on student performance in terms of both writing and thinking outcomes. In general, faculty interviewed by the external reviewers had positive reactions to the 3-3 system, but some expressed thoughtful concerns about the classroom dynamics in larger sections.

Recommendation: Consider re-investigating the possibility of developing senior seminars as capstone courses in the major. The resulting FTES squeeze in conjunction with the recent conversion to a 3-3 course load may make this recommendation impractical at present, but the department's numbers in terms of majors have remained strong, and its expansion of electives and GE courses may in time offset some of the loss of FTES resulting from the creation of senior seminars. Such seminars also would be valuable for assessment purposes. The department may even wish to consider the use of a hybrid 4-3 or 3-4 course load rather than 3-3 for all faculty. However, if the creation of such seminars is not feasible, continue to investigate the implementation of a capstone requirement involving student e-portfolios (PPR 15).

Recommendation: Consider requiring an upper division course in critical theory (or in the history of criticism, etc.) for all English majors. This issue was discussed a number of times during the external review. The external reviewers felt that a critical theory course is an essential part of an English department's curriculum, and that the place of critical theory in the current curriculum does not quite suffice. Members of the department held a range of opinions about the matter; most of those spoken to by the external reviewers expressed confidence that critical theory made up a sufficiently large part of ENGL 307 and was covered with sufficient frequency in other upper division courses that a required course devoted specifically to theory was not necessary. If theory does play a sufficiently large part of ENGL 307, the department may wish to give the course a name that reflects this coverage, as well as add critical theory to its learning goals.

Recommendation: To build the student cohort concentrating on comparative literature, which currently stands at approximately 10 students (PPR 4), start by clearly defining the department's concept of comparative literature. Since, traditionally, departments of comparative literature have involved the study of literatures not only in different cultures but also in multiple languages, first-year and transfer students may hesitate to concentrate in comparative literature because of self-perceived weaknesses in second languages. Conversely, they may be surprised to learn that their existing fluency in a second language may not pertain to their actual course of study. Since a world literature in English requirement constitutes a core element in many English Studies programs today, clarify the difference between the now-common world literature (or diversity) in English requirement and the one in CSUF's English Department. If the department wishes to move in the direction of comparatist studies rather than comparative literature, consider mapping out a cross-disciplinary course of study for students entering the major. This procedure may have the additional salutary effect of eliminating the irregularities in the six-year graduation rate (PPR 10).

Recommendation: Clarify the differences between the Linguistics Program (also housed in HSS) and the programmatic role of linguistics in the Department of English, Comparative Literature, and Linguistics. The statement that "we intend to find better ways of combining English literary and linguistics studies

within the Department” (PPR 4) may imply that the department wishes for linguistics to play a more prominent role in the curriculum beyond its current one-course (English 303 or 305) requirement.

VII. Curriculum: Graduate

Commendation: The department’s Professional Certificate in Writing and Teaching contributes materially to the professional development of its graduate students and helps prepare them for immediate career placement, as well as for further advanced study. It is a certificate program that is indeed “‘adaptable’ and ‘situated’” (PPR 16). Coterminous with the current M.A. program, the certificate program marks a development that many CSU Departments of English would be well-advised to pay attention to.

Commendation: The renewed commitment to the graduate program seems clearly to be a departmental strength. The department has attracted highly qualified students and has utilized the expertise and dedication of current faculty in re-conceptualizing the program, so that it foregrounds disciplinary coverage rather than limits itself to traditional ideas of literary coverage.

Recommendation: Consider requiring M.A. students to take all four of the core courses in the graduate program rather than allow them to select three out of four. Although the new graduate curriculum will not be fully instituted until F’11, the argument for reconsidering the core requirements is that each of these dedicated courses holds value for graduate students and that, in addition, many students will enter into the workforce in a variety of professional capacities, any number of which may utilize multiple areas of expertise. Moreover, it seems vitally important that graduate students be required to take at least one graduate-level seminar in Cultural Studies/Theory. A second but not necessarily preferred option might be to require all graduate students to take the core course in Cultural Studies/Theory and to select two out of the remaining three core courses.

VIII. Writing Center; Tutor and TA Programs

Commendation: The Writing Center is very well designed and effectively administered. Current tutors appear to benefit from strong training and preparation, and they evince a positive sense of community. They are especially sensitive to language issues involving ELL students and international students.

Recommendation: Understandably, the tutors would like to be able to receive more weekly hours, especially in light of the recent fee hikes, and without question the students being tutored would be the ultimate beneficiaries. Just as at other CSUs, TAs seek additional financial support in the form of an increased number of fee waivers, as well as parking waivers. Certain elements of financial support may lie outside the possibility of department action. However, the department may wish to explore the possibility of increasing the weekly tutoring hours for Writing Center tutors.

Recommendation: As currently constituted, the TA program is relatively small (8-9 students/year), and TAs are limited to one year of direct teaching. Given what appears to be the high quality and significant number of graduate students in the department, consider expanding the TA program and allowing TAs to teach for up to four semesters. The possible added time to graduation in many cases may be more

apparent than real, and in any case would be offset by the fact that students would gain additional teaching experience and be more apt to view the graduate program as financially feasible.

IX. Student Advisement

Commendation: The current advisement system, which works on a rotational basis, depends first on the willingness of faculty members to dedicate the very considerable time and labor involving 80-100 students each, and often requiring multiple meetings (PPR 18), as part of their normal service requirement; and second on the curricular and scheduling knowledge, as well as sensitivities to student issues, of the department's advisors. Based on the current graduation rate and retention data (PPR 9), as well as on the external reviewers' meetings with department advisors, vice chair, and chair, it seems clear that both of these conditions are being met.

Recommendation: While the bulk of the duties of the English Education Coordinator lie outside the department, the coordinator is expected to advise undergraduate students, as well as to conduct multiple site visits to the post-baccalaureate students in the College of Education. At the very least, the coordinator would seem to need a .5 dedicated staff position to help set up undergraduate advisement meetings and to handle the routine processing of forms.

X. Staff

Commendation: With the resignation of a long-time staff member, the department now has only 2.0 full-time staff positions and a 1.0 temporary staff position. In addition, the department employs one student assistant. It is clear that these staff members are loyal, dedicated, and effective employees and that they take on additional workloads with remarkable grace and generosity.

Recommendation: Given the size of the department, the temporary staff position needs to be restored to its permanent position as soon as possible. The department has submitted its job description to the dean's office. Additionally, however, given the increased workload currently being imposed on staff members (PPR 10) and the inevitable effects this workload will have on their ability to interact with students and the general public, it would appear that the department would benefit from hiring at least one additional student assistant.

XI. Resource Management

Commendation: In the wake of budget cuts and the AY 2009-10 furloughs, the department has managed its resources efficiently and creatively. Particular note is made of the fact that the department is successfully navigating its 3-3 course load, without detriment to its instructional budget or any substantial loss of FTES.

XII. Program Assessment

Recommendation: If it is not feasible to identify the appropriate lower division gateway course and to create capstone senior seminars, as start and end points for undergraduate assessment, pursue the

possibility of assessing undergraduates at the point at which they declare their English major and again in their final semester of study—whether through a senior-level course or through a portfolio—in such a way that the department has faith in the assessment process.

Recommendation: Establish clear learning goals and direct assessment procedures for the graduate program.

XIII. Final Thoughts

From all available accounts, this is a superior department whose faculty and staff work together collaboratively and selflessly. As mentioned previously in this report, the department's strengths were clearly evident to the reviewers in terms of both the documents received and the interviews conducted, and various of the recommendations throughout this report reflect matters already under consideration at the departmental level.

Once again, the reviewers wish to thank participants from the department and the university for their hospitality and genuine intellectual engagement throughout the external review process.