



College of Humanities and Social Sciences
Office of the Dean
P.O. Box 6850
Fullerton, CA 92834-6850
T (657) 278-3528 / F (657) 657-278-5898

To: Su Swarat, Assistant Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness

From: Sheryl Fontaine, Dean, College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Date: April 14, 2020

Subject: Dean's Summary and Evaluation of the English BA and MA, and Comparative Literature BA, Program Performance Review

The Department of English is a large department that is home to three undergraduate degree programs (English, Comparative Literature, and Linguistics), two MA programs (English and Linguistics) and three minors (English, Creative Writing, and Linguistics). This summary and evaluation focus on the English and Comparative Literature programs. As of today, there are 550 English majors, 10 Comparative Literature majors, 27 English minors, 17 Creative Writing minors, and 74 English MA students. In addition to serving a large number of majors, the English department is a workhorse for the entire University. Students who enter CSUF without fulfilling their Written Communication requirement, which is part of the Golden Four, gain this critical skill by taking a course in English. In addition, an ever-growing number of majors across the university further refine their composition skills by taking their Upper-Division Writing Requirement course in the English department as well. Furthermore, the Department is responsible for the Single Subject Matter Preparation Program in English and operating the Writing Center that is open to all students. A dedicated group of 20 tenure/tenure-track faculty, 1 full-time lecturer, and 38 part-time faculty serve these students, which requires meeting a yearly target of close to 1000.

The English and Comparative Literature programs are easy to admire. As the external review team noted, at a time in which majors in English programs have shrunk, these programs have maintained a steady number of students. Those students are enthusiastic about their course of study. As one external reviewer marveled, these students are chomping at the bit to fulfill their "Major Author" requirement by taking a class in Chaucer or Milton. The faculty's commitment to students spreads outside of the classroom walls. English and Comparative Literature faculty regularly lead Study Abroad and Study Away programs, and are eager to participate in Student Success initiatives. The bonds they develop with their students sustain beyond graduation, as evidenced by the pool of alumni that are eager to participate in the alumni career panel hosted yearly by the Department.



Of particular note is how gracefully the English department weathers mandates beyond their control. When EO 1110 determined that non-unit-baring remedial courses must be discontinued, the Department created a couple of different unit-baring courses that students could take to prepare them for ENGL 101. They have navigated the uncertainty as the University has worked to better determine the demand for these courses and ensure students enroll in the course that is correct for them. And when changes to the Unit 11 Collective Bargaining Agreement governing TA employment and ISAs challenged how the Writing Center and TA Program were run, they rolled up their sleeves to come up with alternative solutions, solutions that they continue to evaluate and refine.

Since the last Program Performance Review, the CSU system has invested in increasing the four-year graduation rate for freshmen and the two-year graduation rate for transfer students. At CSUF, the goal is to remove roadblocks to help students graduate in the number of years that they choose to graduate, acknowledging that some of our students will choose to graduate in five, six, or seven years instead of four. Remarkably, recent surveys completed by entering freshmen show that the vast majority of them want to graduate in four years. In terms of the graduation rates, the English department has regularly excelled. As their Self Study makes clear, they take their commitment to help undergraduate and graduate students graduate in a timely manner seriously, and have structured their BA degree requirements to allow students great flexibility when sequencing requirements and have made changes to their MA program to facilitate timely graduation, such as creating a cohort course, discontinuing the Portfolio requirement, and giving more chances to pass the proposal stage of their project.

For the 2011-2014 cohorts, the 4-year rate for freshmen majoring in English has exceeded the College's, staying largely consistent in the mid-30 range. The 2-year transfer rate has improved significantly, from a low of 37.7% in 2014 to 55.4 in the 2017 cohort. Their commitment to serving our student population positions them well to continue to improve their retention and graduation rates, but it will require that they continue to identify and implement promising practices and not simply maintain their present course. It may be an aberration, and the margin is small, but for the first time in years the 4-year graduation rate of English majors of the most recent cohort who has reached the four-year mark (the 2015 freshman cohort) fell below the College's grad rate for the same cohort (32.6 versus 35.3). Retention rates for English majors are also falling behind. The Fall 2018 cohort of English freshmen saw the lowest retention rate (81.8%) of any of the previous ten years. This contrasts with the 88.8% College average for the F18 cohort. The English program's common book initiative, rolled out with the Fall 2019 cohort, was an excellent idea which shows promise to improve retention rates. I encourage the Department to study the impact of this common book program and other programs they design to engage their students. This research can also be informed by information the Dean's Office is gathering on the impact of other initiatives undertaken by Departments.



In the last few years, narrowing the equity gap (identified by comparing the graduation rates and GPAs of students who are under-represented, Pell-eligible, and first generation to those who are not) has also become a priority. Unfortunately, the English BA program has seen a significant widening of the equity gap in six-year graduation rates by UR status from 2.9 in the 2011 cohort, to 12.3 in the 2012 cohort, all the way up to 21.9 in the 2013 cohort, which is troubling, and is not a trend that is seen at the University or College level. Why is it that underrepresented minorities who are majoring in English are graduating at increasingly-slower rates than non-underrepresented populations? Various working groups in the University are identifying promising practices to narrow the gap. I encourage the Department to follow these discussions and to consider adopting/adapting the practices most relevant to their curriculum that have been shown to narrow the gap. For example, the Faculty Community on Equity is studying the impact of such practices as taking attendance regularly, making sure at least half of the assignments are low-stakes assignments, and introducing a growth mindset module.

The College, the CSUF Institutional Research office, and the Chancellors Office has many dashboards available for tracking the equity gap across different classes. With these data, the Department could identify classes that are successfully narrowing the equity gap and have department-wide discussions about the attributes of those courses that may be leading to the closing of the equity gap. There is also research that suggests that diversifying the curriculum, as the external review team suggested and as the department embraced in their response, can narrow the equity gap. I applaud the department on recent hires of faculty who specialize in areas such as African diaspora literatures and queer theory. The courses that these scholars serve seem to be placed in the elective category. I encourage the programs to pursue integrating more diverse offerings into their core curriculum by taking seriously the different options provided by the external review team. I look forward to seeing these curricular changes take shape.

I am pleased that the Department will be doing a faculty search next year, and am committed to starting discussion with other departments who are hiring about how a cluster hire might work in our College. I hear your and the external review team's argument that even after that hire more hires are merited, and I am dedicated to figuring out how to afford more tenure-track lines. For example, looking at your part-time faculty/tenure-track faculty ratio suggests that if tenure-track faculty were to teach an additional six sections of writing a year (101, 101P, 301, 360) the Department could justify another tenure-track faculty position. Giving tenure-track faculty the flexibility to step away from their major courses and into writing courses may require the Department to rethink the structure of the majors, which is yet another reason to consider the changes proposed by the external review team and perhaps others as well.

Another topic that is raised by the external reviewers is class size. I am very sympathetic to the argument that teaching writing is more appropriately done in smaller classes. With that in mind, I have adjusted the English SFR to be one of the lowest in the College. In the context of the budget and target received by the College and the departments' shared interest to maintain a



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3/3 course load while meeting their own targets within their budgets, all T/TT faculty teach an average of 100 students per semester. All departments (and even individual faculty) in the College could lower individual class size by distributing the 100 students across four classes instead of three.

Regarding classroom space, I am not seeing the same need that the self-study identifies. To be sure I am looking at the same data, together, I could review the two use studies that the College has conducted over the past five years. What these seem to show is that the department has classrooms that go unused and could be released to other departments much earlier in the scheduling cycle than they choose to do.

I applaud the Chair and faculty of the English and Comparative Literature programs for the improvements they have made since their last Program Performance Review and look forward to seeing what the next few years bring.