

Approved by Senate on April 13, 2011

Final Assessment Report Academic Review

English Language and Literature

A. Introduction

The review of the Department of English Language and Literature was conducted during the 2009-2010 academic year. The Department's Self Study was considered and approved by the Governance Committee of Senate on February 11, 2009. The Review Committee consisted of two external reviewers: Kevin McGuirk (University of Waterloo) and Keith Wilson (University of Ottawa) and an internal reviewer, Francine McCarthy (Earth Sciences). The site visit occurred on March 26 and 27 and the Reviewers' Report was received on May 13, 2009. The Department's response was provided on December 9, 2010 and a decanal response, from Dean Douglas Kneale, on October 1, 2010.

The academic programs offered by the Department of English Language and Literature, which were examined as part of the review include:

- English Literature
- English and Contemporary Culture
- English and Writing, Rhetoric and Discourse Studies
- Applied Linguistics and English Language and Literature
- Certificate in Rhetoric and Professional Writing

It should be noted that the review commenced under the terms and conditions of Section III: 20 of the Faculty Handbook which pertained in 2009-10 and concluded under the revised terms, which were approved by Senate on May 16th.

B. Strengths of the Program

The Department of English is one of the oldest and largest departments in the University, never mind the Faculty of Humanities. With 556 majors and xx full-time faculty, the department offers some 40 full-course equivalents with 2,200 course enrolments.

Moreover, as the reviewers noted:

The Brock Department of English now compares favourably with Departments of similar size anywhere in the world, and despite the various areas for possible improvement mentioned in this report; its undergraduate program and its graduates are known to be well up to the qualitative norms expected across the discipline anywhere in Canada. As the message of developments here spreads, with the possible result of making it a more competitive place nationally for attracting students, and with continued strong and collegial leadership of the kind that it has recently enjoyed (both internally and in its relationships with the Faculty of Humanities and senior University Administration), the Department's continued reputation for quality seems assured.

C. Opportunities for Improvement and Enhancement

The recommendations contained in the reviewers' report are addressed below.

1. **RECOMMENDATION 1 (positions)** *It is important that the position in 19th-century American Literature, a key area for any serious English program and most particularly a North American one, be advertised and filled as soon as possible.*

As Dean Kneale notes: "This recommendation has been followed. The Department was able to make a replacement appointment for the 19thC American position as recommended by the reviewers, with the help of bridging funding from the Killam Fellowship money granted to Professor Elizabeth Sauer."

Thus, this recommendation has been implemented.

2. RECOMMENDATION 1 (program) *The logically indefensible, ethically questionable, and pedagogically unsound policy of requiring full-time faculty to be responsible for marking the work of only 20 students in any given class should be ended immediately, in time for next academic year. This should be done in conjunction with examining the use of TAs with a view to eliminating these positions where they are not really necessary. Should it prove sufficient for the purpose, the money saved by this should not be clawed back by the Administration but granted to the Department to fund another full-time faculty position.*

Dean Kneale's response points out that "grading loads are set under the Collective Agreement in the Department's Normal Department Workload Standards, in this case signed off by former Dean Hale. Instructors in the Department do have considerable supervisory responsibilities, as the seminar system and large class sizes necessitate the extensive use of Teaching Assistants. These loads are subject to annual review and approval by the Dean." In addition, he notes that "members of the Department take exception to the reviewers' suggestion that their practice is 'pedagogically unsound.' The reviewers' position appears to be that students gain from having their work graded by faculty; the Department holds that the lower grading load allows for more time to be spent on pedagogy, and that the student evaluations corroborate the excellence of their teaching."

ARC supports the Dean's recommendation that "the Department's Normal Department Workload Standards should be revisited in the light of the reviewers' recommendation when it is contractually possible to do so."

3. RECOMMENDATION 2 (program) *Maintain the Department's much valued seminar tradition but with reliance on M.A. students and experienced non-students as TAs, eliminating entirely the use of undergraduate TAs.*

In its response to the reviewers' report the Department states that "it has always been rare for the Department to use undergraduate TAs and only as a last resort; a minimum of an Honours BA with a 78% average is the advertised requirement for Year 1 TAs; that plus experience as a TA or an MA for Year 2 courses; and an MA for Year 3 courses. With the arrival of the MA in English more TAs have been available. There were no

undergraduate TAs hired in 2009-2010. The Department is committed to maintaining seminars in the large majority of its courses.”

Therefore, this recommendation has been implemented.

- 4. RECOMMENDATION 3 (program)** *Review further the nature and extent of the Department’s commitment to the Writing and Rhetoric program and plan decisively in accordance with that determination. This will include engaging a number of difficult questions:*
- a) is the Department willing to sacrifice future positions in the Literature program in order to strengthen the Writing program?*
 - b) Are existing faculty in the Literature program prepared to contribute in their own teaching and course development to the operations of the Writing program?*
 - c) What is the perceived relationship between the delivery of service/composition/remedial courses, primarily in first year, to the University at large and the disciplinary mandate of the Writing program?*
 - d) Does the Department wish to retain responsibility for delivering service courses to the University at large?*
 - e) If it does, what financial commitments is the University prepared to make to the delivery of these courses in a pedagogically sound format (i. e. small course sections, with a maximum of 30 students).*

In its response, the Department reports that it “has taken this list of questions under advisement, has struck a sub-committee, and is including that sub-committee’s report in its ongoing curriculum review” (see below).

Thus, this recommendation is in the process of being implemented.

- 5. RECOMMENDATION 4 (program)** *Undertake a full curriculum review within the next two years with a view to rationalizing current course offerings, addressing the problem of course “glut,” and clarifying for the benefit of students the relationship between List and Non-List courses. This will provide the opportunity to organize courses into clearly conceived groupings that correct the current impression that course offerings have developed by a process of piecemeal accretion related simply to the interests of new faculty who happen to join the Department, rather than as a result of a thought-through disciplinary logic.*

The Department reports that it has “undertaken an extensive review of its program. For this year’s UPC submission the Department has revised its List courses, adding two more Lists, Studies in Genre and Studies in Theory and Criticism, with the attendant change in Program Requirements; it has asked that four never- or rarely-offered literature courses be deleted from the course bank; and it has made some additional modifications to

courses. The Department will proceed with a more detailed examination and rationalization of its program in the coming year.”

Thus, this recommendation is in the process of being implemented.

6. RECOMMENDATION regarding Relationships to the Wider Community

The Department should consult with the Development and Alumni Offices at Brock to facilitate the building of relationships with alumni. These are a potentially extremely valuable resource in relation to both public relations and offering of advice to students on the transition from university to the workplace.

Dean Kneale argues that “This is one initiative which the Department might carry out in terms of relations to the wider community; the direction of the University, with its emphasis on service learning and community engagement, suggests that there are additional initiatives that the Department could take” and the Department reports that it “is considering the relationship with Development and Alumni as part of its review of departmental responsibilities, and will be working with the Faculty's Major Gifts Officer.”

Thus, this recommendation is in the process of being implemented.

7. RECOMMENDATION regarding the Website *The Department should request Faculty funding to hire a professional to design a new website for the Department. A website is the face an organization shows to the world and the Department's website appears to have had little care expended on it. It may not be critically important for undergraduates (although it is becoming more so), but it is one of the main avenues of investigation for senior undergraduates planning to apply for graduate programs. It should be conceived of not just as a place to post information but as a showcase for the Department and its successes, highlighting the exciting work done by faculty members and the honours and awards received by them. It is one of the best resources for attracting good M.A. students, which is fundamental to the health of both the graduate and the undergraduate programs: more and better M.A. students will enrich faculty experience and provide a better pool of TAs for undergraduate classes.*

Dean Kneale points out that “There is currently no Faculty funding to hire a professional designer. Since the review, however, the University has a new website design and staff,

and has offered training.” Also, the Department reports that “particularly through its Administrative Assistant [it] has availed itself of the training and support offered by the University's web team, and is turning over responsibility for web content to a departmental sub-committee.”

Thus, this recommendation is in the process of being implemented

8. RECOMMENDATION 2 (positions) *It is equally important that the empty position in Writing and Rhetoric be advertised and filled as soon as possible. It is impossible for what was already a stretched Writing program to be maintained with any reduction in staff, and the argument could even be made that it can only plausibly be maintained with an actual increase*

The Dean notes that “There are two considerations here: 1) The plans of the Department in regard to the direction of the Writing and Rhetoric program (see Recommendation 3 for programs) are not fully formed; and 2) While the Department is among the Faculty’s under-resourced programs, there are many demands and no resources to support this recommendation at the moment.”

ARC agrees with the Dean’s position

9. RECOMMENDATION 3 (positions) *At least two more positions, one in Postcolonial Literature and another in Writing and Rhetoric, are needed to consolidate the gains, both pedagogically and reputationally, that the Department has made over the last few years.*

The Dean’s response says: “The position of the Dean in terms of these recommended appointments is that the Department is on the list of under-resourced programs, but he can make no commitment in the current financial situation in terms of either new or replacement appointments; he will evaluate needs as resources are available.”

ARC agrees with the Dean’s position.

10. RECOMMENDATION regarding Department Administration *Clarify departmental administrative structures with a view to making genuinely functional the responsibilities of the Undergraduate Officer and the Undergraduate Teaching and Learning Committee. This should result in the assumption by the Undergraduate Officer of some of the responsibilities for administering the Undergraduate program that are currently invested in the Department Chair, possibly in conjunction with the award of a course release for this increased administrative burden. There should also be greater liaison between the Undergraduate Officer and the Academic Advisor.*

The Dean's response includes the following comments:

“The reviewers thought it odd that the Undergraduate Officer had no advisory responsibilities, that the Teaching and Learning Committee of which that person was Chair seemed not to operate, and that the Chair was carrying a burden of responsibilities that the Undergraduate Officer might take on. The reviewers in this recommendation depart from their practice in regard to programs of suggesting reflection on the problem without prescribing an outcome. What they suggest is one model, but there are other examples across the Faculty, and the problems they suggest with student advising and with Chair overload have not come up particularly sharply. There is a problem with faculty members taking on the role of adviser in that they may not have the regular contact with the Associate Dean, the knowledge of the University regulations and the practices of the Registrar's and other offices, or the knowledge of other programs in this and other Faculties, that an adviser ought to have. The course release idea is also pretty much a non-starter, particularly in the current climate.”

ARC agrees with the Dean's position.

D. Recommendations to be Implemented

The IQAP requires that ARC “set out and prioritize the recommendations that are selected for implementation.” Using the specific ARC proposals enunciated above, the following priorities are proposed:

First Priority:

- 1. RECOMMENDATION 1 (positions)**
- 3. RECOMMENDATION 2 (program)**
- 4. RECOMMENDATION 3 (program)**
- 5. RECOMMENDATION 4 (program)**

Second Priority

- 2. RECOMMENDATION 1 (program)**
- 6. RECOMMENDATION regarding Relationships to the Wider Community**
- 7. RECOMMENDATION regarding the Website**

E. Recommendations that Will Not be Implemented

8. RECOMMENDATION 2 (positions)

9. RECOMMENDATION 3 (positions)

10. RECOMMENDATION regarding Department Administration

F. Implementation Plan

The IQAP requires that this report include an implementation plan which will identify:

- a) who is responsible for approving the recommendations set out above;
- b) who will be responsible for providing any needed resources;
- c) who will be responsible for acting on the recommendations; and
- d) the timeline for all of the above.

These are set out as follows:

1. RECOMMENDATION 1 (positions)

As noted above, this recommendation as been implemented.

2. RECOMMENDATION 1 (program)

Responsibility for approving this recommendation lies with Senate. The Dean of Humanities and the Provost and VP, Academic are jointly responsible for implementing the recommendation. It is anticipated that the “revisiting” recommended will be completed, and report submitted to ARC, by the end of the 2011-12 academic year.

3. RECOMMENDATION 2 (program)

As noted above, this recommendation as been implemented.

4. RECOMMENDATION 3 (program)

Responsibility for approving this recommendation lies with Senate. The Department Chair (Professor Neta Gordon) and Dean Kneale are jointly responsible for providing any needed resources and implementing the recommendation. It is expected that the review will be completed by the end of the 2011-12 academic year.

5. RECOMMENDATION 4 (program)

Responsibility for approving this recommendation lies with Senate. The Department Chair (Professor Neta Gordon) and Dean Kneale are jointly responsible for providing any needed resources and implementing the recommendation. It is expected that the review will be completed by the end of the 2011-12 academic year.

6. RECOMMENDATION regarding Relationships to the Wider Community

Responsibility for approving this recommendation lies with Senate. The Department Chair (Professor Neta Gordon) and Dean Kneale are jointly responsible for providing any needed resources and implementing the recommendation. ARC expects that Dean Kneale will report on the implementation of this recommendation by the end of the 2011-12 academic year.

7. RECOMMENDATION regarding the Website

Responsibility for approving this recommendation lies with Senate. The Department Chair (Professor Neta Gordon) and Dean Kneale are jointly responsible for providing any needed resources and implementing the recommendation. ARC expects that Dean Kneale will report on the implementation of this recommendation by the end of the 2011-12 academic year.

April 5, 2011
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