

TO: EPC

FROM: Catherine Burroughs, Chair, Department of English

RE: ANNUAL ASSESSMENT PLAN

Date: May 31, 2017

I. Program Assessment Meetings:

The Department of English met on April 27, 2017 for 1.5 hours and throughout the year to discuss progress on our Assessment Plan and Assessment Report (2016).

Attending: Catherine Burroughs (Chair); Rebecca Myers; Dan Rosenberg.

Topics discussed: Curriculum revisions; plans to update assessment documents; updating our Senior Exit Interview; planning ways to foster greater connections between our more established alumni and seniors/recent graduates; balancing advising and teaching duties across the department; our position requests; our budget request.

II. Closing the Loop: Changes implemented in 2016-2017:

- A. We taught ENGL 401 as a course taken by all students together with one professor (Dan Rosenberg) guiding them in their Senior Thesis project. This course involved a serious focus on both professional development and writing skills, as well as organized deadlines and sustained support for their senior thesis projects. Student evaluations from that course and Senior Exit Interviews both indicate that it was perceived as incredibly useful and a vast improvement over the prior system.
- B. Student needs for a third professor led to us hiring Professor Rebecca Myers to teach four courses, to advise students, and to participate in departmental activities (beginning in Fall 2016). Though she was only part-time this year, she will be a full-time VAP for the next two years, helping to provide the stability, energy, and focus that our seniors were asking for last year in their Senior Exit Interviews.
- C. In response to continuing concerns from students about the complexity and Anglo-American focus of our major requirements, we overhauled our curriculum, deleting a number of courses, combining areas of study, and adding three new courses in International Literature (Poetry, Novel/Essay, and Drama). Our new major requirements are clearer, simpler, better organized, and less limited to British and American writing. Though the requirements are certainly easier to understand, they maintain and in some ways enhance our rigor – for instance, we now require both Shakespeare and a theory course for all majors. Several students have continued to express a desire to simplify and clarify the major requirements, so we anticipate a very positive reaction to these changes once they are implemented.

- D. To enhance the applied nature of our programs, we offered more programming/social gatherings with students; to become members of national organizations in our field; to subscribe to periodicals that specifically offer opportunities to young writers; to purchase books for research to support new courses; and to attend national conferences that keep our offerings current and engaged.
- E. To reflect our movement toward interdisciplinary education, the department communicated closely with the Book Arts Center and the Film and Media Studies Program to lend support for their developing curricula. Two of our members (Professors Burroughs and Rosenberg) served on the Film and Media Studies Program Committee. Professor Rosenberg's Advanced Poetry Workshop is working closely with Rich Kegler at the Book Arts Center on a collaborative chapbook, and Rosenberg and Kegler plan to build on their successful collaboration in future years.
- F. To connect current students with successful alumni who can serve as models for a practical application of the English major, we are organizing a symposium in conjunction with the Alumni Office to showcase our graduates pursuing careers and higher degrees in writing/edition/publishing/journalism/film, law, etc.

III. Examination of the Data collected for this year's targeted learning outcomes:

During this past year (fall 2016-spring 2017), we have been collecting data and assessing our progress. The responses from our first round of Senior Exit Interviews (from spring 2016) were overwhelmingly positive. In response to the question about how much their major has prepared them for their future plans, almost all students last year responded with some variation on "very!" This set of responses matches with our sense of our students' fundamental enthusiasm for our discipline and program.

The responses to the question asking about what we might do better have been more useful for thinking about how to change what we do going forward. Some suggestions that came up:

- A. More professional development, help with resumes, statements of purpose, publishing, etc.
- B. Students bemoan the smallness of the department and the concurrently limited course offerings, but recognize this as an unavoidable feature of Wells. Nevertheless, several specifically requested more idiosyncratic courses and more frequent offering of the required courses. They similarly voiced a strong preference that our retiring full-time faculty not be replaced by part-time faculty.
- C. Some courses seemed "outdated" and could be replaced by more modern courses, more culturally diverse courses, more creative writing courses, or more cross-generic courses.
- D. The department doesn't seem on the same page with expectations regarding student writing, particularly critical writing.

- E. Several students would have liked more support for foundational writing skills
- F. Several students felt unsupported in their senior thesis projects and specifically requested that the senior thesis course be taught as an actual course instead of an advising overload.
- G. Students requested greater predictability regarding what classes will be offered when. We have instituted a two-year rotation that we hope will be sustainable and provide that predictability.
- H. Multiple students requested earlier foundational writing training, which Professor Myers is taking into account as she revises ENGL 104.

IV. Program Changes for the Upcoming Year (2017-18):

- A. We are gratified to learn from current seniors that our efforts to enhance the Senior Seminar have been appreciated. Further, we have taken to heart the main concerns about the curriculum and the major, and our efforts to revise them both have been successful. We will pay close attention to how students react to these new structures to ensure that they are serving their intended function.
- B. For 2017-19, Professor Myers will join our department as a full-time Visiting Assistant Professor of English specializing in American literature and prose creative writing. Professor Myers will also be redesigning ENGL 104 to emphasize fundamental writing skills and include an overview of the major and the career paths of English majors. She hopes to enhance our offerings in journalism as well, rounding out our efforts to provide more (and newer) workshops and applied writing courses, but in lieu of the journalism course next semester she has volunteered to teach SC101 in Fall 2017. Professor Myers also intends to develop a concise departmental grammar and style guide for incoming English majors and other students, in collaboration with Samira in the Writing Center.
- C. We plan to capitalize on our graduates' strong acceptance rate to graduate programs and to first-rate publishing houses (Harper Collins and Random House, for instance) by organizing a symposium connecting current students to alums whose experiences after Wells could inspire or guide them. Professor Burroughs is spearheading this effort.
- D. The Visiting Writers Series has instituted, under Professor Rosenberg's leadership, a series of master classes to allow our students intimate access to national writers who come to campus to share their work and expertise.
- E. We have been trying to integrate our creative writing students with the larger creative writing community, both locally and nationally, through several efforts. Professor Myers has brought students to several readings off-campus, including most recently Anne Lamott and Eula Biss's readings. Professor Rosenberg was granted funding to bring students to the annual Association of Writing Programs

Conference, though no students were ultimately able to attend this year. He also incorporated Book Arts into his Advanced Poetry Writing course.

- F. Professor Rosenberg has adopted a new grading rubric for essays, which he is using in his literature and theory courses. He has shared the rubric with the rest of the department, and we are in discussion about how to balance the desire to seem to be “on the same page” (which several students have mentioned) with our desire to allow each of us to prioritize different aspects of student work.

V. Action Plan for the Upcoming Year:

As we continue to revise our program in light of the dramatic overturn in English department staffing, and in light of student feedback, we anticipate positive feedback from our students. We believe we have addressed several of the most important impediments to our students’ success, but we will closely examine both the senior exit interviews and the course evaluations next year to confirm. We will also continue to have informal discussions with students about their experiences in the classroom, and we will continue to experiment with new offerings and approaches, relying on the foundation of a more predictable and clear curriculum, to try to balance the desire for stability against the desire for innovative material and approaches.

The Learning Outcomes we are most intent to focus on for the coming year are those associated with ENGL 104: Facility with the relevant technologies of our field (section Ca), research skills (Cb), and critical writing (Ba).

We are also going to pay careful attention to how our standardized rubric functions across our course offerings, in hopes that it will provide us with more clear, usable data.