

# The English Department Self-Study

June 2003

## Section One: Purposes and Outcomes

### Department Purpose

The English Department provides students an opportunity for significant intellectual and spiritual growth, career preparation, and personal development. Outcomes are modified according to the two groups of students who take English courses: those filling G.E. requirements and English majors. The department contributes to the General Education program by offering composition and letters courses that develop writing and reading competency and literary appreciation. The department's major programs are comprised of the English Core and one of four emphasis areas.

### English Core Outcomes

The English Core affords an intellectual foundation in three areas and culminates with a capstone experience:

**Critical Writing** courses teach students to manage the composition process, express themselves with clarity and precision, develop critical thinking and reading skills, research and document sources, and understand the varied purposes for communication in relation to audience.

**Literary Analysis** courses introduce students to literary movements, national literatures, traditional literary forms, prominent authors, cultural contexts, and critical theories.

**Rhetorical Theory** courses lead students to an understanding of reading and writing processes that inform skilled and efficient communication.

The **Capstone** course encourages students to integrate the Core experience, to articulate a personal philosophy of ethics, and to create a portfolio reflecting their best writing.

In addition to serving students, the English Department strives to foster teaching excellence and scholarship among department members and assist the larger university community to establish writing as a significant part of all academic curricula.

## Section Two: Department Description

### Programs, Goals, and Outcomes

Approximately 500 students are declared English majors. Seventy-four percent of all majors are women; twenty-six percent men. Students may choose from one of six programs: English, English Education, or English Education Composite, each offered as a B.A. or B.S. degree. Fifty-nine percent of all majors are in the English programs, while forty-one percent are in the English Education programs. Table 1 breaks down the number of majors within each degree.

**Table 1: Breakdown of English Majors by Degree**

	Wo me n	Men	GP A
B.A. English	123	57	3.3
B.S. English	81	28	3.2
B.A. English Education Composite	70	18	3.4
B.S. English Education Composite	19	6	3.2
B.A. English Education	5	3	3.5
B.S. English Education	63	15	3.2

All majors will complete the English Core and then select one of four emphases:

**Teacher Education** (the required emphasis for students majoring in English Education or English Education Composite) focuses on educational theories and methods for teaching literature and composition. Course work also includes the Teacher Education core, which is required of all secondary education majors. This emphasis culminates with a semester-long teaching practicum. Teacher Education prepares students to become professional English teachers for grades 6-12 in Idaho and 42 other states.

**Literary Studies** (an option for English majors) focuses on the interpretation and appreciation of literature from the perspective of several critical theories. Course work includes British and American literary history, genre and author studies, ethnic and world literature, and rhetorical and literary theory. It culminates with a focused exploration of literature within a cultural context, such as myth, philosophy, art, or history. Literary Studies prepares students for graduate study in English or other professional programs.

**Professional Writing** (an option for English majors) focuses on writing, editing, and document production. Course work explores technical communications, business writing, publication design, computer applications, and editing. It culminates with a hands-on experience drafting, editing, and preparing texts for publication (e.g., books, manuals, newsletters, brochures, and reports). Professional Writing prepares students to work as writers or editors in fields such as business or industry.

**Creative Writing** (an option for English majors) focuses on writing original works of poetry, fiction, drama, and non-fiction. Course work includes the study of literary genres and creative writing within a workshop setting. This emphasis culminates with an opportunity to assemble a portfolio, submit works for publication, and edit and publish *Outlet*, an award-winning student literary journal sponsored by the department. Creative Writing provides a springboard into the world of free-lance writing and publishing.

The department also offers two English minors, one focused on English education; the second, on literature and rhetorical studies.

### **General Education Courses and Services to the University**

English Department courses serve the General Education curriculum and other departments in three ways. During a typical semester, the department offers approximately 65 sections of College Writing, a freshman writing course required of all students; 65 sections of advanced writing courses tailored to the student's specific major; and a variety of introductory literature courses, totaling approximately 45 sections.

Department faculty also serve the larger campus community in the following ways:

- **Committee Work.** Serving on 64 intra- and extra-departmental committees, including Academic Council, English Council, Faculty Association, Honors Program, Thomas E. Ricks Foundation, English Scholarships, Academic Advising, Idaho Humanities Council, University Forum.
- **Travel Study Programs.** Organizing and leading the British Literary and Meso-American study tours.

- **Pre-CFS Faculty Training.** Providing a five-session workshop focused on writing across the curriculum.
- **Publications.** Sponsoring *Outlet*, a campus-wide literary journal for student writers and artists.
- **Advising.** Advising majors in 15 other departments.
- **Continuing Education.** Teaching for the College of Continuing Education, typically about ten courses each semester that serve patrons locally and in Idaho Falls.

## **Department Personnel**

### **Faculty**

The department is comprised of 55 full-time and adjunct faculty who teach about 210 classes each semester (44 distinct courses). Of the 36 full-time faculty, eight have doctorates, six are pursuing doctoral degrees; all have completed master's programs.

Nineteen adjunct faculty teach approximately 44 percent of freshman writing courses and 12 percent of the advanced writing courses. Adjunct faculty average eight years teaching experience. Eleven have master's degrees, and seven are engaged in graduate work.

### **Productivity and Efficiency Outcomes**

The English Department taught 31,186 student credit hours during the 2002-2003 academic year. This figure represents approximately 10,400 students and an increase of about 3,200 student credit hours since 1999. The department reached 97 percent of its Fall 2002 student credit hour target; 86 percent of its Winter 2003 target. This decline may be explained by the department's need to offer 28 major courses. In some cases, these courses have not yet reached maximum enrollment.

### **Professional Development**

The department sponsors memberships in the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), the Modern Language Association (MLA), and Writing Program Administrators (WPA).

During the 2002-2003 academic year, thirteen department members presented at ten regional or national conferences. Several faculty published essays, short stories, and poetry in professional journals. One edited a centennial collection of essays about John Steinbeck. As editors and authors, department members also contributed to *Perspective*, the university's faculty journal.

## **Facilities and Other Resources**

### **Department Office**

Located in the Smith Annex, the English Department office furnishes stations for two secretaries. Two adjacent workrooms house the department library, supplies, copy machine, computer, scanner, FAX, printer, and monitor. The department employs one full-time secretary and eight student assistants.

### **Faculty Offices**

Faculty utilize 42 offices, each with a computer, Internet and server connections, and printer. The majority of the full-time faculty offices are located in the Smith Annex and Smith Building. Adjunct faculty offices are located in Rigby Hall.

### **Computer Labs and Multimedia Resources**

The department has two lab classrooms, with a total of 48 computer stations. Labs are used as classrooms daily and are also available to students Tuesdays-Thursdays from 5-10 p.m. Many other classrooms have a multimedia unit, containing a computer with Internet access and projection capabilities.

## **Section Three: Significant Changes**

The transition from a two-year to a four-year program has presented significant challenges. In 1999, Ricks College offered an Associate of Arts in English, with a total of 164 declared majors. With the transition to Brigham Young University-Idaho, the department now offers six distinct bachelor's degrees, with approximately 500 majors currently enrolled.

Course offerings have also increased. As a two-year program, the department taught 16 distinct courses, with 12 courses for majors. Currently faculty teach 44 distinct courses, with 28 of these being 300- or 400-level major courses. Including service courses such as freshman and advanced writing, the department currently reaches approximately 5,000 students during a typical fall or winter semester; 1,950 students during the 2003 summer term.

The increased number of students and variety of courses offered places great demand on the department faculty. Despite a 300% increase in English majors, the department's full-time faculty has only had a net gain of one. Additionally, faculty must teach new, upper-division courses. As result, changes in the department primarily focus on alleviating the increased demands on faculty.

### **Utilizing Adjunct Faculty**

The department is utilizing its adjunct faculty more extensively in order to increase course offerings, primarily in composition. To ensure consistent quality in adjunct

faculty, the department offers training meetings to discuss course objectives, teaching methods, and assessments. Assessment of adjunct faculty occurs through the director of composition's classroom observations, as well as student evaluations.

### **Fostering Specialization While Practicing Generalization**

Upper-division courses require greater specialization, as faculty must develop expertise not required in lower-division, survey courses. The department meets this need through hiring and professional development. Faculty are hired for specific areas of expertise, reflected in both academic and practical experience. For example, new hires in 2003 reflected expertise and experience in British literature, creative writing, and technical writing. Faculty are also required to focus on a particular area of study, such as British or American literature, secondary education, creative writing, and so on. The department encourages faculty to use three-credit leaves and sabbaticals to allow time to develop these more demanding 300- and 400-level courses. Department demands also require faculty to generalize—teaching freshman composition, survey literature courses, and advanced writing. Students benefit from this generalist approach, having the opportunity to take a G.E. Introduction to Literature from a faculty member with a Ph.D.

### **Developing Online Courses**

To accommodate the university's online course requirement, the department is developing online versions of College Writing and Introduction to Literature. By offering these courses online, the department is able to free up classrooms for other courses and allow flexibility in faculty schedules, particularly those assigned to adjunct teachers.

### **Maintaining Course Integrity**

Several English major courses also count toward G.E. Letters credit. The resulting student population, composed of English majors and non-majors, has a great discrepancy in skill level. Faculty struggle to maintain academic rigor for majors, while accommodating G.E. students. Because Academic Council has denied the request to establish separate classes for majors and non-majors, the English Council is working to identify teaching strategies appropriate for both G.E. and English majors enrolled in the same course.

### **Working with Secondary Education Programs**

About one-half of English majors select secondary education as a career emphasis. They will need student teaching opportunities. If one-fifth of these majors complete their senior year, it is likely the department will have as many as 25 student teachers in the field during fall or winter semesters. This raises two questions for English faculty: (1) Who will supervise these students? (2) How will these supervising duties impact faculty load? The department has begun discussing these questions with the Dean of Education.

### **Developing Curriculum Committees and the English Council**

In 2002, committees were created, based on related course goals. For example, the Rhetorical Theory committee outlined course objectives for all courses that fell within this category. Throughout this academic year, committees identified objectives for their assigned courses.

Committee chairs represent their fellow committee members on the English Council (comprised of twelve faculty) where several curriculum issues and policies are debated. During the 2002-2003 academic year, the Council addressed such issues as advanced writing course requirements for specific fields of study, department scholarship qualifications and disbursement, writing requirements in literature courses, and department hiring needs and recommendations.

In short, committees and the English Council have become a vital forum to discuss all facets of the department's programs. Exchanging ideas and reviewing department programs have invigorated the faculty and led to an improved English curriculum.

## **Section Four: Analysis and Appraisal**

Assessment of the department is based on the 1999 Self Study and recommendations from the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges Commission on Colleges. Using these tools, as well as our own observations, we have also identified areas for continued improvement and department strengths.

### **Recommendations from Self Study and Accreditation Report**

#### **Recommendation 1: Assessment and Student Outcomes**

To improve curriculum assessment and evaluating student outcomes, the department has implemented a three-phase evaluation.

**Phase 1:** In 2001, the English Department organized committees to review each segment of the curriculum. Committees clarified objectives for all English courses, outlined effective teaching strategies to achieve these objectives, and determined appropriate assessment methods.

The department's work is reported in Draft #4 of the *Assessment Workbook*, the product of a two-year project involving all full-time and several adjunct faculty. The *Assessment Workbook* is available to department faculty and serves as a standard for all courses.

**Phase 2:** During fall semester 2003, committees will gather course materials in their assigned areas (e.g., syllabi, course assignments, assessment tools, examples of graded work), as well as teacher- and student-self assessments. Using these materials and the standards outlined in the *Assessment Workbook*, committees will answer the following questions:

1. Are established course objectives incorporated into the given course?
2. Are teaching methods meeting course objectives?
3. Do assessments accurately measure a student's progress toward course objectives?
4. Do courses in this area meet established aims?

In addition, all English majors are participating in an exit survey, assessing their major experience.

By January 2004, committees will submit their findings and recommendations to the department chair.

**Phase 3:** By February 2004, the department chair will review committee findings, prepare a written document, and report to the dean and department faculty. Faculty will be encouraged to make necessary course modifications to harmonize course objectives, teaching methods, and assessment strategies.

### **Recommendation 2: Gender Balance**

Of the 55 department faculty, 30 are men; 25 women. Full-time faculty include 25 men and 11 women. The adjunct faculty is comprised of 14 women and 5 men. In the last three years the ratio of new hires has been equal: 50% men and 50% women.

The department is continuing to balance gender, not only in hiring, but in administrative areas as well. The department chair and director of composition represent both genders, and the English Council is balanced equally between men and women. Gender balance has also been achieved in teaching assignments. In 1999, approximately 76% of literature courses were taught by men. Currently, the department has redistributed course assignments to give equal opportunities to teach literature, as well as to give students the opportunity to take courses from both male and female instructors.

### **Recommendation 3: Interaction Between New and Seasoned Faculty**

The English Department presently seeks to integrate faculty in a number of ways. Newer and veteran faculty serve together on the English Council and department committees. Semester retreats at the Teton Leadership Lodge involve very nearly all full-time and many adjunct faculty. Socials and "backroom" luncheons also encourage interaction. New teachers are assigned a mentor, which not only assists them in course development, but also fosters friendship among the faculty.

### **Recommendation 4: Faculty Burnout**



Burnout remains a serious concern. However, department efforts to address burnout include the following:

**Discouraging Overloads:** Inevitably an overload is a composition course, boosting the total number of writing students from 75 to 100 and the resulting paper load from at least 1,500 to over 2,000 pages of student writing. This load is in addition to the teacher's literature students. At present only one teacher has been assigned an overload in response to an emergency scheduling issue.

**Reducing Teaching Load:** CFS faculty may apply for three-credit releases to pursue curriculum development and other projects benefitting students and faculty. Nearly all eligible faculty have sought and been granted project requests for 2003.

**Providing Sabbaticals and Professional Development:** Faculty may pursue sabbatical leaves to work toward advanced degrees or prepare to teach new courses. Four faculty will have received sabbatical leaves during 2003. Faculty may also refresh their teaching through professional development. Funds are available to travel to professional conferences.

**Offering Variety of Teaching Opportunities:** Faculty have the opportunity to teach a variety of courses, in order to reduce monotony with consistently repeated courses.

**Adjusting Course Enrollments:** The department is still seeking administrative support to bring our composition course enrollments into compliance with NCTE guidelines. Currently, composition enrollments are set at 25. NCTE recommends 20 students per section. Other CES institutions, BYU-Hawaii and BYU-Provo, cap composition courses at 20, as mandated by the University Writing Committee.

## **Evaluation of Degree Programs**

During Phase 1 of the student outcomes evaluation, the English Council determined that two emphasis areas within the English program did not have the rigorous course offerings the Council deemed appropriate. While the Teacher Education Emphasis provided a student teaching experience and the Literary Studies Emphasis provided a challenging sequence of critical theory and cultural studies, no such culminating experience was available to the Professional Writing and Creative Writing Emphases. After several lively debates, the Council agreed upon and submitted to Academic Council a proposed curriculum change that provided all emphasis areas a rigorous culminating course which encouraged students to apply practically the skills acquired within their chosen emphasis.

In addition to committee and council work, the department is building its program in other ways. The department (1) has sought the input of all academic areas serviced by the advanced writing program to make certain English courses are relevant to those specific fields of study; (2) is preparing an online database of teaching resources to be

made available to all department members; (3) has coordinated an annual conference among the department chairs and directors of composition at BYU-Idaho, BYU-Provo, and BYU-Hawaii; and (4) has built library collections by reviewing curriculum needs, submitting book requests to acquisition librarians, and using the budget allocated for its program.

## **Evaluation of Teaching Performance**

Because the principal assignment of each department member is classroom teaching, the faculty are experienced and well-honed. Full-time faculty represent an average of 14 years teaching experience; adjunct faculty, eight years. A typical English teacher will spend 225 hours in a classroom with students each semester and respond to hundreds of pages of student writing.

Formal faculty evaluation consists of the following:

- The department follows the university's procedure for evaluating each pre-CFS faculty: mentoring, ongoing classroom observations, peer-committee reviews, portfolio presentations, student evaluations, chair and dean interviews.
- The department follows the university's practice of reviewing post-CFS faculty each third year. Review includes peer, chair, and dean classroom observations, self-appraisals for stewardship reviews, as well as chair and dean interviews.
- The department chair reviews carefully and responds to each teacher's student evaluations. For 2003, the English Department faculty received an overall instructor rating of 5.81 (Very Good) in a 7 point scale; the university's average is 5.71. These statistics suggest that faculty have chosen their occupations because they enjoy association with students and care about student development.

## **Evaluation of Advising**

With the four-year program, the English Department must consider advising from a new perspective: helping students to select an emphasis; plan a four-year program; coordinate student teaching; and learn about and apply for internships, employment, and/or graduate school. After evaluating existing advising methods, the department has implemented several new strategies:

- Preparing an advising packet that describes the English baccalaureate and minor programs, including G.E., English Core, and emphasis requirements.
- Scheduling department advising meetings at least once each semester to clarify the various programs, address questions, and introduce individual advisors to advisees.
- Forming the English Academic Society, a student group organized to plan pre-professional conferences and to arrange for guest speakers, writing groups, and sessions to learn about Praxis exams.

- Developing a department web page, which will make advising information easily accessible.

These newly implemented strategies supplement the university's advising program, which requires all students to meet with advisors prior to registration.

### **Areas Needing Improvement**

- A better way to serve students of diverse academic skill-levels. Often courses mix majors with non-majors or college-level with remedial writers. Students and teachers become frustrated.
- A more effective method of student placement. Very few students needing remedial support take advantage of basic skills services. Consequently, many ill-prepared students are not adequately supported in the G.E. curriculum.
- A standardized curriculum, especially for multiple-section courses. For example, research writing is not taught consistently in English 111. Some students write research papers, while others do exercises involving library resources.
- Additional forums to exchange ideas among English faculty. Some faculty requested more opportunities to share teaching strategies and discuss relevant issues.
- Faculty awareness of advising issues, such as career preparation, graduate school requirements, and exams (e.g., Praxis and GRE).
- A more rigorous methods course sequence for English Education majors. For example, English 430 might better serve students if divided into two courses, one focusing on how to teach writing and a second focusing on how to teach reading and literature.
- Additional strategies to reduce English faculty burnout. For example, an English 111 teacher who assigns 75 students 20 pages of writing per semester will read 1,500 pages of student writing—the minimum course requirement. Teachers also strive to challenge their G.E. students and English majors with rigorous writing assignments. As teachers face these daunting paper loads, they struggle to avoid compromising their courses.

### **Department Strengths**

- A committed, hard-working, and qualified faculty who care about students, improving their teaching, and building their expertise.

- A coherent, rigorous, and flexible major, which blends theory with practical application.
- A revised assessment plan that involves all full-time faculty and that enables the department to monitor and fine-tune its course offerings.
- A department governance model that involves all English faculty by way of the English Council, department meetings, retreats, committee assignments, and chair interviews.
- A generous budget enabling the department to pursue its objectives.
- Excellent technical assistance with computer software and hardware issues.
- Classrooms equipped with computer technologies—computer stations or multimedia units.
- A strategy for involving other university disciplines in writing across the curriculum activities.
- Administrative support.
- A pleasant working environment.