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Jim Farney, Chair

Council Committee on Academic Mission

University of Regina

Re: CCAM Written Response to AUR (English)

Dear Professor Farney:

Thank you for your December 11 letter in response to my October 3rd meeting with CCAM. As you requested, I am now replying so as to offer, in written form, an account of the English Department's own responses to last June's External Reviewers' Report and of the actions it has thus far undertaken, and resolved to undertake, in light of that report's recommendations. As you noted, the external reviewers did indeed have extensive recommendations—fully 27—for the Department. This being the case, I will dispatch with further preamble and do my best, in what follows, to address each of these recommendations in turn.

Mission, Vision, and Departmental Branding:

1. There is support for the potential name change from Department of English to the Department of English and Creative Writing, but it has been decided best to wait upon the results of the curriculum review the external report called for before deciding upon and pursuing such a rebranding.
2. While there is openness to hiring, as the Department has done in the past (most recently, this past Fall, with a tenure-track position in Prison Writing), in non-traditional areas, there is resistance to the language of “literature of marginalized voices,” as homogenizing different cultures and perspectives, and re-inscribing a marginality current literary studies seeks in fact to challenge.
3. The Department was rather at a loss as to how to respond to this recommendation; it is not of the opinion that the face it currently shows to current or prospective students, or to the world at large, is “embattled,” rather than “positive.”

4. This is clearly a matter for the Faculty of Arts and its Deans, more than for the Department per se, but Department members have taken part in recent discussions—at Faculty Council and in last December’s town halls—of the Arts Core Curriculum, striving to offer some such articulation. The Department has also arranged to have the Core Curriculum Committee meet with it on January 29 in order to take these discussions further.

Development, Student Recruitment and Arts@Work:

5. English endorses the recommendation that the Faculty invest in alumni tracking software and make such tools available to departments. We would also like to see the Faculty routinely make available list of graduates to their respective departments for alumni tracking purposes.

6. Members would most certainly like to see a revamping of the Arts website with an eye to making it easier to navigate—for students—and to manage for Departments and their Administrative Assistants. In hopes of advancing this project, the Head of Department will first be participating in January 20th consultations with representatives of Ruffalo Noel Levitz, the firm that will be assisting the U of R with its enrollment and retention planning, and its website re-design.

7. Such monies are forthcoming. Work and discussion should be initiated on how these can support student research. These monies have in the last two years helped maintain the Wascana Royalties Fund, however, which supports English student conference travel.

8. Online offerings are expanding in the creative writing field with the recent design of an on-line ENGL 152. Both 152 and ENGL 252 will be offered as WEB courses in 2020-21. It is our hope that these can become regular offerings.

9. It was decided in September 2019 that departmental work to enhance experiential learning opportunities for our students would most sensibly be undertaken at this time with the Arts Internship Program and its Director. To this end, the Head has been in regular contact this year with Director Lynn Gidluck and has helped arrange two internship placements for the 202010 term.

10. A lack of support and available person-hours to cover various administrative duties within the department has led to faculty suspension of the Pro-Seminar series for the 202010 term. However, the English Students Association intends to take over this work for the Winter term.

11. Changes to the use of TA support have been undertaken this academic year, with TAs being assigned to such traditional duties as office hours for first-year courses and tutorial work in the Writing Centre, but also to supporting upper-year courses, website initiatives, conference planning, and the development of portable teaching modules for TA delivery.

Academic Teaching Staff:

12. Members voiced strong opposition to the renaming of sessional instructors in departmental documents or on the website, on the grounds that this would serve merely to mask the growing ranks of precarious faculty in English and Arts, while doing nothing substantive to alleviate actual concerns. In light of the growing number of precarious teaching faculty at the U of R, the Department would like to see more meaningful change, e.g., in the form of the conversion of

more long-term sessionals into permanent Instructors. We note that the Department was once able to offer security to instructors and greater stability for its first-year programming when it had seven such Instructors, not just the current two (one of whom is slated to retire this June).

13. Though this is again a matter for the Dean's Office, there is strong support for seeking an end to the disruptive ouster of long-term sessionals (with Preference and even Priority) from offices during transitions between teaching semesters.

14. See item 11, above. This work on expanded TA duties is ongoing.

ENGL 100 and Ethical Academic Writing:

15. English notes that the reviewers reported that best practice for the kind of composition instruction undertaken in ENGL 100 would involve capping sections at half the current number, i.e., at 20, not 40, students. This is, in fact, in line with recent discussions of the proposed UNIV 150 in Arts, which, as proposed, would be capped at 25. There is strong departmental interest in the Faculty's and University's willingness to pursue such best practice and to underwrite it with the kinds of resources it would require.

There is, however, some confusion in the Department as to the grounds for the reviewers' call for an "immediate and urgent" review of ENGL 100. Indeed, there is concern that "urgent" calls for review might aim simply at having this required course relax standards it has, in fact, been made a requisite, in part, in order to maintain. Further, in the light of 1) the growing responsibilities increasing student numbers impose on the Department vis-à-vis 100, and 2) the diminishment of permanent faculty over the past decade, English argues that the case for new resources to meet the challenges of this course, review or no, is plain. To this end, it has made requests for two new Tenure-Track positions in Fall 2019, including one in Rhetoric & Composition/Creative Writing.

A review of ENGL 100 has, nonetheless, begun, by way first of a series of consultations undertaken by the Undergraduate Committee with other university stakeholders. Committee members have thus far met with Deans and Associate Deans in Arts, Engineering, and Education; meetings with Science, Business, and Nursing are in the offing. Further, in hopes of canvassing the views of our colleagues in Arts more generally, we are working with the Dean to schedule a special meeting of Arts Council for February. We have thus begun to collect feedback on satisfaction with this course as it stands and suggestions as to how it might perhaps be tweaked to better serve its current student constituencies. That said, the Department, while taking this process forward, views the call for new proposals for 100 and 110 in 2020 to be, at this stage, both under-justified and impracticable.

16. As testimony from a variety of sources across the campus makes plain, academic misconduct, plagiarism in writing assignments in particular, is dramatically on the rise. Needless to say, this is a trend that inevitably, and keenly, impacts a writing-intensive course such as ENGL 100. The Department contests, however, the notion that recent increases in the number of reported plagiarism cases are uniquely the fruit of instructor vigilance in this one class. As data presented to Arts Council and Executive of Council would indicate, the problem of academic misconduct is widespread: across disciplines, faculties, and even levels of study. This recommendation, however, calls for action at a university-wide level. As our ongoing consultations with other Faculties (see item 15) should indicate, English is eager to participate in

such discussions. Additionally, the Head of Department, along with the directors of other units responsible for offering writing tutorial support to U of R students, has been meeting this past year with the Associate Vice-President (Academic) with an eye to better coordinating such services. These consultations have already involved work with the Student Success Centre and UR International on how better, and more consistently, to handle cases of plagiarism that present themselves in the tutorial centre setting.

Review of the Senior Curriculum:

17-18. The Department has, in its discussions of last September, recognized the need for a broad curriculum review. There was some concern, however, that this might prove a more onerous undertaking than the reviewers suggest, certainly if it were to be pursued in parallel with the consultations concerning 100 mentioned above. It was decided, then, lest discussions of the first-year hinder this larger review, that these two processes be de-coupled, the review of 100 to be initiated by the Undergraduate Committee by way of the kinds of consultations outlined in item 15, above, the review of the senior curriculum to be undertaken, in line with the reviewers' suggestions, by the Department as a whole, in a process to be initiated at a half-day retreat in early January and to be pursued further with the help of a Faculty-provided facilitator.

Working with the Office of the Dean, the Head of English vetted two candidates for that support role and finally engaged Gwen Dueck of Saskatoon. Ms. Dueck brings robust experience with academic workplaces and with the process of curriculum review in a variety of settings. Early consultations with her helped structure the half-day retreat held on January 8, and plans are for two further facilitated meetings of the Department this term, the first set for February 5.

The January 8 retreat involved primarily reflection on the current shape of our program, its problems or challenges, ways it might be streamlined or updated, and the level of commitment to the kind of holistic review the external report recommended. This meeting revealed considerable appetite for such a review, a readiness not simply to pare away outdated or superfluous courses, but to rethink our program offerings more comprehensively. It was decided that, as we move on to work toward priorities and learning outcomes for our program at each level of study, we would continue to meet, and to seek consensus, with the help of Ms. Dueck, in committee of the whole, with subsequent implementations (such as approval of new courses or course deletions) potentially becoming delegated matters to be brought forth at future Department meetings. The Department is now preparing for its first follow up meeting with Ms. Dueck, at which it hopes to work on defining the core content and skill-sets-- the "clear learning outcomes" for each level of study the reviewers call for--that will orient curricular change.

18-19. Interdisciplinary cross-fertilization, co-offered courses, and the scheduling of popular culture electives with broad appeal have long been part of the Department's practice. For example, this term's inauguration, with ENGL 368: Prison Writing Exchange, of our prison writing program makes plain the Department's interest in working with students from various other units—Journalism, Social Work, Justice Studies, among them—and in taking our pedagogy to ill-served or never-before-reached populations. The Department's recent tenure-track posting in "Romanticism, broadly defined" also aims at attracting candidates doing the kind of work that will enable the sort of cross-fertilization here mentioned. It is to be expected, then, that such concerns will form part of the discussion as our curriculum review unfolds. It is, however, at this

early point in that process, premature to declare what role such practices will play in the new courses and programming that emerges.

20. Having last year welcomed Canada Research Chair in Truth, Reconciliation, and Indigenous Literatures, Dr. Michelle Coupal, the Department finds its long-standing collaboration with colleagues at FNUUniv bolstered by new in-house expertise in Indigenous writing. This allows for more frequent offerings in this area, but also for the potential repositioning of Indigenous literature and voices in our programs and curricula. Certainly, our January 8 meeting revealed an appetite on the part of Department members not only to move towards foregrounding more diverse literary histories, but also to embark upon the kind of decolonizing work in course design that this recommendation suggests.

21. English has expressed virtually unanimous support for the revival of the joint BA/BEd. No current member could recall the circumstances that led to its original demise, but given the level of cross-over between the units—in the form of ENGL courses required by ED students, the number of ED students who are also ENGL Majors or Honours students, and the recent trend of Education graduates entering the ENGL MA—it seems only reasonable, in future, to facilitate and formalize a route so favoured by our shared students.

Graduate Studies:

23. The project-based MA has been approved by the Department. After some fine-tuning, it is headed towards approval by the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research this month. It should be on the books for the Fall term of 2020.

24. With respect to the recommendation that the Department's next hire "foster connection and cross-fertilization in research and teaching with other units," there was agreement, but the recent resignation of Dr. Chris Bundock, along with the halving of department faculty strength over the past ten years, was seen as grounds for this next hiring being itself deemed an immediate and urgent priority for the Faculty and the university.

Indeed, this and other recommendations (see item 27, below) made by the reviewers were cited this past Fall in requests for two new tenure-track hires for 2020, one to replace Dr. Bundock's expertise in Romanticism, aimed also at recruiting the sort of interdisciplinary capacity for which the reviewers call, and one in Rhetoric and Writing that would help, among other things, build capacity for the resuscitation of the Coordinator of First-Year English (COFYE) position. The first of those two positions was approved by the Dean and the search is currently under way for a candidate who will be able to start as of July 1, 2020. The second proposed hire also won the support of the Dean and has been included as part of his budget request for next year. It is our hope to hire into a permanent position in this area and to work towards reconceiving and reviving the role of COFYE in the near future.

Department Governance:

25. Naturally, English would like to see enhanced participation in the life and governance of the Department from all members, most certainly including members from the federated colleges and our sessional instructors. It is our hope, in particular, that the curriculum review process will engage colleagues from the federated colleges, in particular, but other projects—the review of

ENGL 100 and the first-year program, for example—have sought and will seek out input from sessional colleagues, as well.

26. Our long-time Department Administrator, Danielle Myers, left us for another position early in Fall 2019. The Department is fortunate to have found, in Charity Redding, an extremely able successor, one certainly capable of taking on the kinds of work outlined here. Such developments would, however, need to wait on her settling into her new post and mastering its manifold responsibilities. They would also, in the final analysis, require the approval and support of the Faculty Administrator, who is in fact her supervisor and first reviewer.

27. As regards the re-institution of a COFYE, the Department is, as indicated above, interested in taking this path and is encouraged by the support thus far offered by the Dean of Arts in taking the request for a new colleague with expertise in Rhetoric and Composition to the Provost for funding. Department members emphasized the need for a clear job description for this post, if any future occupant were to have success in the role, and look forward to a new colleague with the expertise to craft such a description. However, given the report's call for an immediate review of first-year English, it was thought prudent that this exercise should precede the drafting of such terms of reference.

Despite its many discrete recommendations, the report's chief priority is that the Department engage in a long overdue process of curriculum review. Much of what is discussed above will hinge upon the results of that process, which we have just launched. This is the work of the rest of this academic year and the next. It is our hope that the fruits of this labour will both address many of the external reviewers' concerns and set the Department up for growth and revitalization in the years ahead.

Thank you for your time and attention. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about this response.

Sincerely,

Marcel DeCoste, Head

cc: Dr. Thomas Chase, Provost and Vice-President (Academic)

Dr. Richard Kleer, Dean, Faculty of Arts